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Back to the Future?
The challenges of reforming Vocational Education and Training (VET) Systems:
a critical analysing of Namibia's current VET reform

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Editor's Foreword

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ABSTRACT

Vocational Education and Training systems are important elements of countries' economic development strategies. Improving the skills and knowledge of the workforce is crucial for achieving or maintaining economic competitiveness, especially in a context of progressing globalisation. As a consequence, governments around the world are engaging in improving their respective VET systems. The role of vocational education and training (VET) is regarded as key to economic development. In the same context, the Namibian government has initiated a comprehensive reform of its VET system. More than 10 years after passing the Vocational Training Act in 1994, the VET system still experiences many weaknesses in terms of high failure rates in trade examinations, high drop-out rates and not fully matching employers' skill needs. Many of the weaknesses have been known for a long time and various reform initiatives have been designed in the past, but the majority of them have not been implemented successfully. In the context of Namibia's Vision 2030 to become a newly industrialised economy by the year 2030, the education and training sector is again subject to comprehensive reform. The aim of reforming the VET sector is to improve its management, introduce competency based training standards to increase access, improve the responsiveness of skills supply to skills demand and increase the financial base through the introduction of a levy. The purpose of the paper is to analyse in greater detail the prospects of the current VET reform initiative and to identify factors that are likely to influence the outcome of the reform. One central question is: why, given past experiences, should the current reform initiative which is much broader and complex than in the past, be successful this time? The paper argues that the current reform looks promising in scope, but many caveats exist that might limit its successful implementation. Among the greatest dangers are a neglect of the micro-level of reform implementation due to an insufficient involvement of trainees and instructors, a low involvement of the private sector and the inappropriateness of introducing a training levy and the resulting lack of required financial resources.

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Acronyms

CBT or CBET	Competency Based Training or Competency Based Education and Training
CIU	CBET Implementation Unit
COSDEC	Community Skills Development Centre
ETSIP	Education and Training Sector Improvement Plan
GTZ	Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (German Technical Cooperation)
ILO	International Labour Organisation
MBESC	Ministry of Basic Education, Sports and Culture
MHETEC	Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIMT	Namibian Institute of Mining and Technology
NQA	Namibia Qualifications Authority
NTA	Namibia Training Authority
NTF	National Training Fund
NTTC	National Trade Testing and Certification Centre
NVTB	National Vocational Training Board
TAC	Trade Advisory Council
UNAM	University of Namibia
VAT	Value Added Tax
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VTC	Vocational Training Centre
WVTC	Windhoek Vocational Training Centre

1. Introduction

'... there is disturbing evidence that in many systems the word and the deed are grossly at variance'
(Hawes. H and Stephens, D. 1990, p. 41)

VET systems are generally complex as they are at the intersection of the education sector and the world of work. Often, policymakers expect them to fulfil a variety of objectives, such as meeting industry's skills demands and integrating the young unemployed. Around the world, governments have embarked upon reform initiatives to make VET responsive to the challenges posed by internal economic transformation and globalisation.

In its Vision 2030, the Namibian government acknowledges the important role of developing Namibia's human resources as a crucial precondition for achieving its ambitious goal of becoming a newly industrialised economy by the year 2030. One key aspect of the vision is society's transformation into a knowledge society. Accordingly, high priority is put onto developing its education and training sector, as expressed in Vision 2030 (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2004b, p. 41):

"Develop a diversified, competent and highly productive human resources and institutions, fully utilising human potential, and achieving efficient and effective delivery of customer-focused services which are competitive not only nationally, but also regionally and internationally."

In 1994, the Namibian government introduced the Vocational Training Act to regulate its vocational education and training (VET) system. Today, more than 10 years later, the ambitious expectations have not been met. Major problems that the Namibian VET system faces include a mismatch between skill supplies and skill demands, low intake and outputs of graduates, high failure rates in national trade tests, high unit costs and inefficient management of the VET system. Despite many reform initiatives in the past, no substantial change has been achieved and the system is still 'under reform.'

It is in this context that Namibia has embarked on an ambitious path to reform its education system, including the vocational education and training sector. The current education and training systems, despite many efforts to improve their

efficiency and effectiveness in the past, still lack the necessary performance to address these future challenges successfully. As a consequence, the government has initiated an Education and Training Sector Improvement Plan (ETSIP) to address the various challenges. The long-term vision for an improved VET system as formulated in the ETSIP is (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2004a, p. 18):

“To achieve an effective, sustainable system of skill formation closely aligned with the labour market that provides equitably the skills needed for accelerated development and the competencies needed by youth and adults for productive work and increased incomes.”

The current reform objectives of the VET system as proposed by the ETSIP include a more efficient management of the VET system, the introduction of competency based training, a better matching of skills to private sector demand, the introduction of a training levy and enhanced access to VET.

The aim of this paper is to take a more analytical look at the current reform measures intended for the Namibian VET sector and to judge its future prospects. The central question that emerges is: what are the major challenges and obstacles for a successful VET reform? The impetus for this research has been the experience with past reform attempts and the difficulties of implementing them. Why, today, should reform initiatives be likely to be more successful than previously? What has changed in the overall set-up of the VET system that makes reform success more likely?

The proposed research aims at analysing the factors that are likely to influence the reform process. In doing so, we will first look at major theoretic propositions that constitute the basis for understanding how various factors influence the reform process. In a first step, we will present a generic systems model that highlights the major components and linkages of a VET system and discuss different variations of VET systems. In a second step, we will provide an overview of empirical evidence on why governments embark on reforming VET systems and what the major challenges, obstacles and experiences with these initiatives are.

The focus of the third section will be on the evolution of the Namibian VET system and its current reform measures. A short overview of the Namibian VET system from pre-colonial times to modern independent Namibia will be presented first. This is useful in order to better understand and place the current reform debate in

its socio-historic context. We will then look at the performance of the Namibian VET system and how this has influenced the current reform debates. In the fourth section we will then analyse the initiated VET reform in greater detail. Are there any factors that suggest a fundamental change in how reforms are going to be implemented?

The reform initiative will be analysed in regard to the theoretic observations presented earlier. The fifth and last section concludes and provides some recommendations on the current reform process.

2. Theoretical and empirical overview of factors influencing VET reform

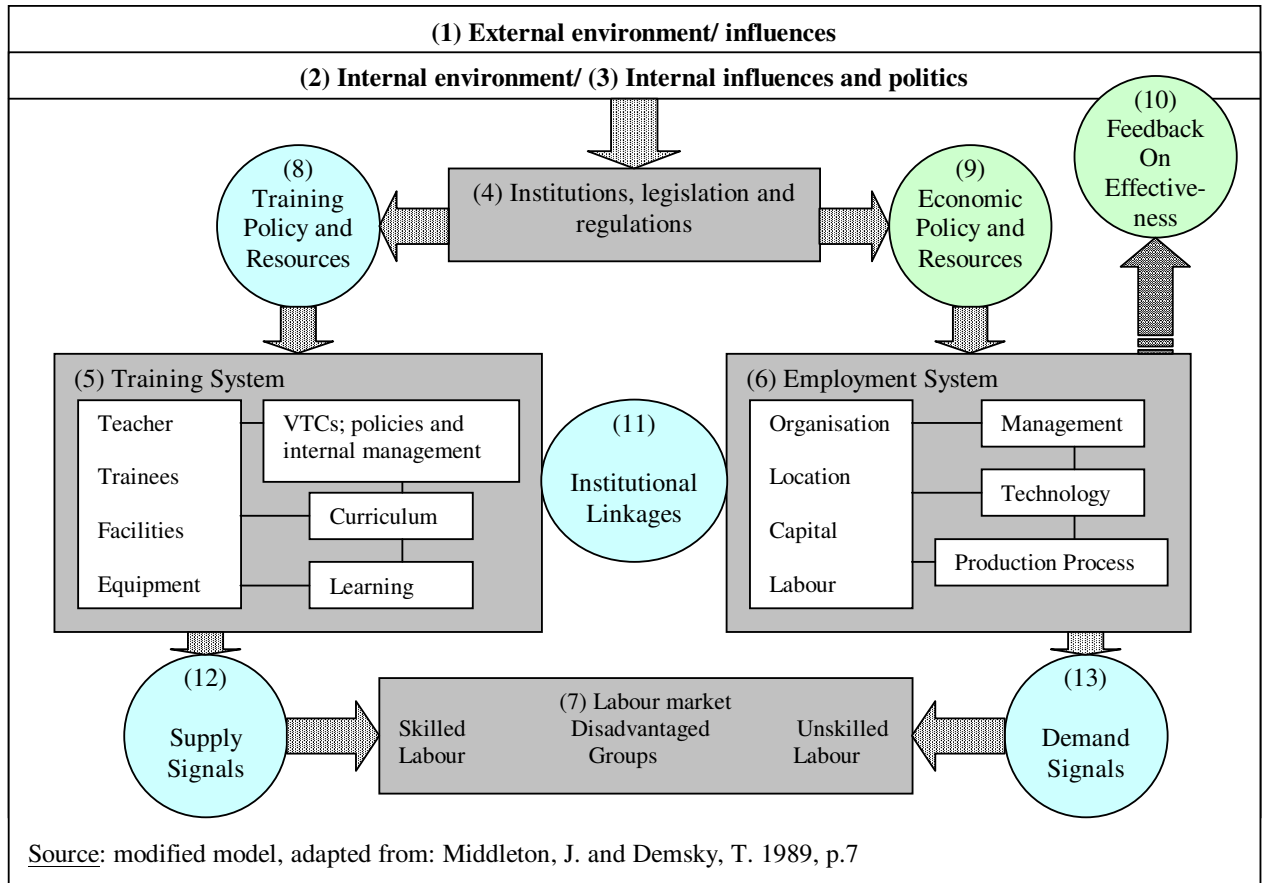
2.1) The institutional set-up of the VET sector: a systems approach

Figure 1 highlights the typical components of a VET system and the linkages between the different elements. It will later be used to relate the current reform initiatives in Namibia to the different components of the VET model. This is a useful approach to highlight the different reform areas and their likely impact on the VET system in general (Middelton, J. and Demsky, T. 1989). In this model, all components are embedded in the political and economic system (2), which is guided by the specific social and economic objectives of a society (for example, democratic and market-oriented system).

The national system itself is embedded in the external environment (1) (for example, in the form of the forces of globalisation, regional co-operation arrangements, donor conditions). Similarly, the internal environment is subject to continuous change through internal political influences (3) (e.g. through elections, interest-groups and policymaking in general). The major components of interest are the specific set-ups of institutions and regulations (4) (e.g. ministries, training authorities), the training system (5) (training providers, trainees and trainers), the employment system (6) and the labour market (7). The training and employment systems are each comprised of various sub-systems. In the training system, for example, training is comprised of teachers, students, facilities and equipment linked through curriculum and learning activities. In the employment system, the production process depends on specific organisational factors, location, capital, labour and technology decisions. The labour market connects the training system to the employment system as it is comprised of all the workers and employees (skilled,

unskilled, disadvantaged etc) who look for employment or who are sought after by companies looking for new employees.

Figure 1: A generic VET systems model



The training and employment systems are linked to a country's policy and institutions through training (8) and economic policies (9). Feedback about the training outcome is provided via feedback mechanisms (evaluation and monitoring), (10), that might influence a variety of other components such as the internal environment or institutions and regulations. The labour market is linked to the training and employment system through supply- (12) and demand (13) signals. For example, skilled workers might look for employment, unskilled young people or the formerly disadvantaged look for training opportunities. Enterprises, on the other hand, demand skilled and unskilled labour. In addition, there are direct institutional linkages (11) between the training and employment system. For example, this can be in the form of joint advisory committees on training and curriculum issues or formal contracts about job-placements or equipment sharing.

The model is generic, as its different components are likely to differ when compared across various countries and socio-economic systems. VET systems can have different types of institutions and linkages. A further classification of VET systems is a distinction between different functions that they are expected to fulfil. The literature generally distinguishes between four types of VET systems that differ according to the objectives and the role of the different actors (for details see Greinert, W. D. 1990, 1995; Heintze, G. and Rychetsky, H. 1991; Stockmann, R. 1999a). Four different basic types of VET systems can be identified: 1) schooling model; 2) co-operative model; 3) market-model and 4) traditional model. The major elements of the different systems are summarised in Table 1.

The main characteristic of the schooling model is that the state plans and controls the VET system. Due to this centralised approach, the preconditions for a successful leverage are high. The state has to assure an efficient administration and has to plan supply and demand on the labour market. The advantage of this system is that the social demand for training (for example, disadvantaged groups demand pressure for more employment) can be taken into account. This model is also better suited in the case of market failures, for example, when the private sector is not offering sufficient training, which can be addressed by the state. The greatest disadvantages, on the other hand, are high costs for the state and qualifications often do not match employers' demand, as trainees often do not have sufficient training experience in enterprises. This type of VET system is generally common in countries with strong central state planning.

The other extreme form is the market model, in which the market regulates training demand. Training by enterprises is guided by cost-benefit considerations. A necessary pre-condition for the successful implementation is a functioning labour market, that is, a market without large distortions. The advantage is that training is offered by enterprises, which reduces the cost-burden for the government and skills closely match employers' changing needs. The disadvantages are that social demands for training are not fully taken into account and training is rather enterprise-specific, which reduces labour mobility and knowledge transfer between enterprises. Moreover, there is the danger of under-investment in training, if enterprises have rather short-term interests (as training costs only pay off over the long-run and

companies are reluctant to pay for a competitor's potential workforce as trained employees might switch).

Table 1: Major characteristics of the different VET models

	Schooling model	Co-operative model	Market model	Traditional model
Regulation	State planning	Market controlled by state	Market	Tradition (social and family relations)
Training provider	State	State/Enterprise	Enterprise	Enterprise
Number of trainees determined by	State planning	Mostly state; dual system: market	Market (enterprise demand)	Enterprise
Financing	State	State and enterprise	Enterprise & trainees	Trainee
Curriculum is determined by	State (emphasis on socio-political interests)	State in co-operation with enterprises and intermediate bodies	Enterprise (specific skills needed)	Enterprise (specific skills needed)
Predominant method of learning	Theoretical training	Variation between theoretic and practical training	Practical training	Practical training
Pre-conditions for successful implementation	-Efficient state bureaucracy; -Ability to plan labour demand and supply (hardly possible in reality)	-Well developed crafts and industry base; -Committed and sufficient number of enterprises; -Strong involvement of stakeholders -State has to cede competencies	-Training must be cost-efficient; -No market distortions (especially on the labour market); -Well developed industry base	-Recognition of traditional training; -Stable social context;
Advantages^a	5) Meets social demand for training places; 7) General socialisation	1) Sharing of costs; 2) High applicability of skills; good adaptation of new skills; 3) High take-over 4) Skills relevant for enterprises; high workforce mobility; 6) High absorption capacity 7) Enterprise and general socialisation 8) Legal protection for trainees provided	1) No costs for state; 2) High applicability of skills; good adaptation of new skills; 3) Takeover of trainees in enterprise; 7) Enterprise socialisation	1) No costs for state; 3) Absorption of youngsters in firm/ self-employment; 4) Transmission of easy qualifications/ skills; 7) Socialisation of trainees in traditional context;
Disadvantages^a	1) High costs for state; 2) Skills often do not meet enterprise demand; 3) Take-over of trainees not always guaranteed 4) Low absorption of new technologies into curricula 6) Low absorption capacity (as high training costs)	9) Co-ordination between enterprise training and school training is difficult and requires high commitment	4) Generally more specific skills training with low general skills acquisition; low transfer between enterprises; 5) Social demand for training is no criteria	2) Practical orientation but low technological innovation; 3) Take-over of trainees not always guaranteed; 4) Low level of skills transfer; little theoretical training; 8) Trainees might be exploited
Country examples	Sweden, Italy and several developing countries	France, Belgium Germany, Austria, Switzerland (dual model); Latin America	USA, Japan, UK	Many developing countries, especially West Africa and South Asia

Note: ^a Advantages and disadvantages according to the following criteria: 1) Costs for the state; 2) Applicability of skills; 3) Probability for employing trainees after their training; 4) Contents of training; 5) Ability to meet social demand for training; 6) Absorptive capacity of training system; 7) Socialisation; 8) Protection/ exploitation of trainees; 9) Co-ordination.

The country examples are classified according to the general orientation of their respective VET systems. Many countries have incorporated elements from neighbouring systems into their proper design. Sources: Compiled from Greinert 1990, pp. 15-20; Greinert 1995, pp.31-36; Heintze and Rychetsky 1991, pp.13-22.

Co-operative models tend to unite the advantages and manage the disadvantages of both approaches. Training is organised and carried out by the state and the enterprise. One crucial pre-condition for a necessary implementation is the willingness of all stakeholders to co-operate. The state, on the one side, needs to cede competencies in the area of planning and standard setting, whereas the enterprises need to accept the state as the policy setting authority. In many cases, intermediate institutions such as the chambers of industry and commerce, unions and employers' representatives are responsible for implementing policies at the regional level. The advantage of this model is that both theoretic skills provided by public vocational schools and enterprise-specific skills are taught, which, from an economist's point of view, may increase the applicability and transferability of skills. Moreover, the costs of training are divided between both partners. The major disadvantage of co-operative models is that they require a high degree of institutional capacity and the commitment of all stakeholders to co-operate. In many cases, this commitment is coupled with a broader social responsibility of enterprises to upgrade the national workforce. Co-operative models historically evolved in countries with a strong crafts and guilds sector, such as Germany, Austria, Switzerland and in a different form in France, Belgium and many Latin American countries.

These approaches represent a shift away from traditional training models. As in the market model, training is delivered by the firm, but the training content follows traditional norms of established trades. The trainee is closely supervised by the master and the major learning principle is through practical application. In addition to specific skills, the trainee is also educated socially and politically. This form of training is widely used by small enterprises in the informal sector, which often only have one trainee. One advantage is that this form of training absorbs a large number of young workers, provides regular income and often the necessary skills for self-employment later. However, although the training is practically oriented, it contributes little to new technology or innovation. Another disadvantage is that trainees are dependent on the master. In addition, this type of training is often not regulated by the state as it predominantly takes place in the informal sector, thus trainees do not have any kind of legal protection. Traditional training is common in many developing countries.

The merits of the systems approach rest in the structuring it provides for the analysis of VET systems and it represents a good starting point for analysing factors that influence its functioning. Looking at the complexity of VET systems already indicates the various caveats that successful reforms might meet.

2.2) Reasons for reforming VET systems

The discussion above has demonstrated that different systems address different objectives. One reason for reforming the VET sector might be changing objectives that the government wants to address. Similarly, it might be the case that the VET system is perceived as not effectively addressing the needs it is expected to fulfil. It is important to note that the model presented above is a generic model and implicitly integrates change. Continuous influences from outside or inside are important drivers of change, to which the VET system needs to adapt accordingly. For example, one increasingly important driver of change is the external pressure of globalisation, which increases the need of governments to upgrade the skills of the workforce if the country wants to maintain or achieve international competitiveness. Especially the education and VET sectors are at the forefront of this adaptation process as it is increasingly recognised that a country's most important source to react to the pressures of globalisation are its human resources (Brown, P., Green, A. and Lauder, H. 2001).

Parallel to these external changes, there are a number of internal factors leading to VET reform. These factors might be linked to the external changes that take place; they might also be the consequence of specific historical and political circumstances that shape a country's economy. A joint ILO/ World Bank study analysing VET reform initiatives in 19 different developed, transition and developing countries has identified different demand-side pressures at the root of reform initiatives (for overview see Gill, I. D., Fluitman, F. and Dar, A. 2000). The study classifies the 19 sample countries into three different groups (Gill, I. D., Dar, A. and Fluitman, F. 1999, p. 408) the first group of countries is characterised by high labour force growth, low employment growth, and high unemployment and underemployment rates. Countries within this group are generally countries with low growth rates in Africa and the Middle East (sample countries in this group are: Tanzania, South Africa, Zambia, Egypt, West Bank and Gaza, Jordan). The second

group is characterised by high labour force and employment growth and low unemployment rates. Countries in this group are mainly emerging markets such as Malaysia, China, Korea, Indonesia, Chile and Mexico. The third group is characterised by low labour force and employment growth but high unemployment rates (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Russia and Kazakhstan).

One response by policymakers in countries of the first group (Namibia falls into this group, too, as will be discussed in greater detail below) was to expand the public education sector in order to absorb or retain the high number of new labour entrants who otherwise could not be absorbed by the economy. This might at the same time lead to increased demand for higher education. As a consequence, many countries have restricted access to higher education. In Egypt, for example, the consequence of such a rationing of higher education to only academic secondary streams has been that more than 70% of the secondary school leavers have been absorbed by the VET system (Gill, I. D., Dar, A. and Fluitman, F. 1999, p. 409). One consequence was that the number of skilled workers exceeded the demand by the private sector. In addition, the bloating of the VET system has led to a considerable reduction in the quality of training, due to the enormous budget constraints of financing a bloated VET system.

Countries in the second group such as Malaysia or Indonesia have been more successful in absorbing the large number of labour market entrants by not only regulating the supply of skilled workers, but by also stimulating the demand for skilled labour in the economy in general. This has been achieved by the combination of quality improvements in the education sector and macro-economic policies that support the expansion of the export sector, as well as improving the overall economic framework (for country example see Ihm, S. C. 1999). This discussion already hints at an important point when looking at factors that influence the outcome of VET reforms: it does not seem to be sufficient to only focus on the VET sector as such. Instead, it is necessary to take into account the broader socio-economic context, which needs to be addressed through policies and interventions as well. The reason is that the VET sector is not an independent entity, but it stands at the intersection of the general education system and the world of work (labour market). This point will become clearer during the discussion on Namibia below: one problem of the Namibian VET system, among others, is the fact that it is expected to remedy the

insufficiencies of the basic/ secondary education sector, which cannot and should not be its task.

Finally, in the optimal case, each VET system has a functioning feedback mechanism, as described in the generic model above. This feedback mechanism should lead to continuous adaptations and adjustments according to external or internal changes. Above all, such a mechanism serves to highlight if the VET system is inefficient and ineffective, that is, if it achieves its set objectives badly or not at all (see Grubb, W. N. and Ryan, P. 1999). One problem underlying many reform initiatives is, however, that the reform is based on perceived mismatches between objectives and actual outcomes, which are often contradictory. As discussed in the section on the various VET systems above, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to achieve both objectives of e.g. social integration of formerly disadvantaged persons and meeting the skill demands of the private sector in a purely school based (i.e. government driven) VET system. As a consequence many governments have tried to adopt the dual system to address a variety of challenges and objectives.

2.3) The nature and obstacles of VET reform initiatives

The focus of most reform initiatives is on the macro-level and relates to the overall structural set-up and management of the VET system. One characteristic of the management of VET systems in many countries is a fragmentation of responsibilities. In the ILO/ World Bank study mentioned above, for example, Egypt represents an extreme case with eight different ministries managing VET schools or centres (Gill, I. D., Fluitman, F. and Dar, A. 2000). Similarly, various ministries are overseeing different VET activities, ranging from vocational education and training in the formal schooling sector, to the overseeing of in-service training activities. Other important actors are private foundations or non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In Hungary, for example, vocational training is offered by more than 90 different private foundations and NGOs.

Efforts to reform the VET sector often relate to increasing the effectiveness of the sector's management. One approach includes a better co-operation between the different stakeholders. Countries like Korea or Malaysia, for example, have strengthened the feedback mechanism by introducing planning units that closely monitor changing labour market demands in order to quickly react to those changes.

Australia is another example of successful institutional reform. In order to overcome the institutional fragmentation of the VET system, the Australian government successfully merged the ministries of education and employment into one single ministry (Abrahart, A. and Tzannatos, Z. 1997). Another important step was the creation of a National Training Authority, which is controlled by employers and workers and where the government has an advising role. The overall idea of such a tripartite institutional set-up is to bring VET policymaking closer to those involved – the private sector and workers. In effect, this represents a shift away from the traditional schooling model towards a more dual system. Other countries such as Thailand and some Latin American countries have opted for the adaptation of the very specific dual model as it evolved in Germany (Stockmann, R. 1999a, 1999b; Utakrit, S. 1999).

As evaluations of the various attempts to introduce external training models demonstrate, however, that this is not as simple as many policymakers might think (for discussion see Powell, M. 2001; Stockmann, R. 1999b; Turbin, J. 2000). One reason is that systems like the German dual system are the result of long historical processes that led to the creation of specific institutional and economic structures, which can not easily be transferred to other countries (Ashton, D. and Greene, F. 1996). Policies and institutions always experience a transformation when adapted in different contexts. The adaptability of institutions and regulations is not only a question of capacity, but especially of diverging cultural interpretations and policy reformulations. This phenomenon is well known and described in the policy implementation literature (Pressman, J. L. and Wildavsky, A. 1974; Sabatier, P., A. and Mazmanian, D., A. 1979; Sabatier, P. A. 1999). One major implementation problem occurs between the formulation of policies/ objectives and their implementation, whereby policy outcomes of a specific initiative often diverge considerably from the initial intentions. One reason behind this divergence is that a reformulation of objectives occurs during the implementation process. The implementation process thus is not a linear process but occurs in various and difficult to predict ways. This reformulation depends on a number of factors, such as diverging interpretations by stakeholders of what they are expected to do, insufficient personal expertise or financial/ institutional capacity to implement the reform, and the costs

and benefits of the reform that influence stakeholders' willingness to support or oppose any reform measure.

Coming back to the example of VET reform, the ILO/ Worldbank study revealed that it is political will rather than institutional capacity that is a key ingredient for successful reform (Gill, I. D., Dar, A. and Fluitman, F. 1999). Thus, the political will of re-distributing/ transferring responsibility for the VET system to VET providers, employers and workers is more important for successful reform than the creation of new government controlled institutions.

A second factor positively influencing VET reform is to clarify (in the form of reducing) the objectives attached to VET reform. This reduces the danger of too broad re-interpretations of the reform policies/ objectives. The clearer the objectives, the less likely it becomes that they are re-interpreted or re-formulated during the phase of implementation. Accordingly, the ILO/ World Bank study indicates that the most effective VET interventions are those that are clearly targeted towards specified groups with specified objectives (Gill, I. S., Dar, A. and Fluitman, F. 1999). For example, VET interventions have been more effective when targeted to meet specific labour market demands instead of also aiming at lifting the unemployed out of their unemployment or keeping the socially disadvantaged out of higher education. These latter objectives should rather be addressed by alternative policies aiming at improving the overall economic environment or improving the basic/ general education sector.

Another important question is how the institutional linkages between the stakeholders (training providers, employers, state) can be improved and how the co-operation between them and within the different institutions can be strengthened. This issue also includes the question how to distribute the burden of financing the relatively expensive VET sector. One reason for a relatively heavy involvement of the government in the provision of VET (as apparent in the schooling model) might be the fact that the private sector is not willing or capable of providing sufficient training itself. One reason might simply be that the private sector is relatively small and incapable of absorbing a large number of trainees. In fact, one observation across countries is that pre-dominantly larger firms offer in-house training. Smaller enterprises often do not participate in formal training schemes. The exceptions are many smallest enterprises in Africa and Asia that offer traditional apprenticeships,

which are not formalised. A theoretic explanation of a low involvement of the private sector can be found within economic theory. Training involves costs for the participating enterprises. With a formal training qualification, however, trainees can later switch jobs, so that the enterprise only bears the costs of training but does not receive the benefits of its training measures. As a consequence of this externality, many firms prefer not to invest in training at all, which is why one finds underinvestment in training in the private sector.

As a consequence, governments often intervene to make up for this lack of private sector involvement. One form of intervention, which has many adherents in developed and developing countries, is the introduction of a training levy. The levy is a form of additional tax (often calculated as a percentage of a firm's wage bill), which firms have to pay when not offering training themselves. Those providing training are exempted or receive rebates. The training levy aims at addressing two separate objectives: a) increasing private sector involvement in offering training and b) creating additional revenue for the VET system.

As empirical evidence demonstrates, such a negative incentive (firms not participating are 'punished' through the tax) has often not led to the expected outcomes. Korea has introduced different versions of the levy already in the 1960s with varying success (Gill, I. S., Dar, A. and Fluitman, F. 1999). The largest problem is non-compliance, as many eligible enterprises did not register. As a consequence, the levy scheme has been phased out. The same experiences were made in Chile, which discontinued the levy scheme in 1980. South Africa is another example. Despite the decentralisation of the levy collection (the different training boards are responsible for collecting it), compliance remains low and no measurable increases in the effectiveness have been achieved (Ziderman, A. and Van Adans, A. 1997).

A more promising avenue of increasing the participation of the private sector has been taken by Chile that introduced positive incentives in the form of subsidies for firms that provided training (Alejandra, C. E. 1997). The disadvantage of such schemes is, of course, that they pose additional budget constraints, as they are not generating incomes but pay additional incentives. This can be problematic for countries that generally experience budget constraints, which is more likely to be the case for developing countries.

Another alternative of increasing the participation of the private sector and the effectiveness of the provision of training is to encourage private firms and providers to take over some of the functions of the government. The Australian government, for example, put out bids for training courses, which also aimed at increasing the efficiency of government's financial contributions to training (Abraham, A. and Tzannatos, Z. 1997).

Finally, the success of any VET reform initiative largely depends on the interactions taking place on the micro-level (i.e. within the training and employment systems). As with the macro level, the micro level is characterised by various organisational actors and individuals. The major groups within the training system are trainees and trainers/ educators. Within the employment system they comprise employers (managers, firm owners, human resource managers, etc.) and workers. The different sub-groups are embedded in various contextual relationships with their immediate environment.

Within the employment system, for example, the question of which skills are needed largely depends on the applied production processes and technology, or the degree of competitiveness with other firms. Initiatives to better match skills supply with skills demand require that the different skill needs of the private sector are known. In an ideal case, these skill requirements of the private sector are translated into effective institutions that are able to influence policy making in a way that takes the industry considerations into account. Where these institutional structures don't exist, it is very unlikely that skills supply will match demand.

Similarly, the question whether an enterprise offers in-service training or sends its workers to training courses depends on a variety of factors. One factor mentioned above is the cost-benefit analysis of training measures. If an enterprise feels that the costs outweigh the benefits, it might not support training. In such a case, positive incentives might help to reduce the costs and increase the economic benefits for the firm. Even if the cost-benefit calculation is negative, some enterprises might still support training as they might feel the social responsibility of supporting training measures. This is more likely to be the case for larger firms where the costs of training are not as important as for smaller firms. Nonetheless, the issue of social responsibility can be addressed through specific awareness creation measures or support schemes initiated by the government.

Finally, the fact whether a firm trains its employees also depends on the educational level of the employees. Tan and Batra (1995) for example, found evidence that firms prefer financing training measures of more qualified workers. This observation relates to the cost-benefit argument made above, but it also indicates that firms do not seem to be willing to take over training responsibilities of the state. That is, the state remains responsible of providing a solid basic and secondary education. Firms cannot be expected to make up for insufficiencies on this level. This indicates that the VET system and any reform of it cannot be regarded as separate from the general education system but needs to be in line with changes that take place on this level. This requirement also increases the complexities of any reform effort, but they are necessary if the reform wants to be successful.

The training system comprises several sub-components. First of all, the training system is at the receiving end of any VET reform, as it has to implement the changes in the provision of training or management. Many factors can thus influence the outcome of the reform on this level. The first factor is the overall management of the training system (i.e. the management of the various training providers, be they public or private). Constraints for public providers might be financial constraints that limit the intake and effectiveness of the training provision. Similarly, the management needs to be flexible enough to respond to the changes and adaptations that take place in the VET sector without going through lengthy organisational procedures. Management practices in VET providers should shift in line with modern management approaches in the private sector instead of reflecting purely bureaucratic procedures. This requires the development of adequate training measures for managers and administrative personnel in the VET sector, which is as important as quality training for trainers and educators. Such measures need to be part of the overall reform policies on the macro level, as the required capacities need to be created (or at least paid for). Managers and administrative personnel are in the same position as individual stakeholders in organisations/ institutions on the macro level. According to the various interests they might either support or oppose reform measures. These different interests thus need to be taken into account and well understood.

Another level where a re-interpretation or reformulation of any reform initiative is likely to take place is with instructors and educators. The interactions

between educators and educational reforms and policies are well researched and documented in the area of educational research (for overview of this discussion see Ball, S. 1998; Ball, S. and Goodson, I. F. 1994; for empirical example see Dyer, C. 1999). O'Sullivan (2002) conducted an interesting study on the failure of the implementation of an educational reform initiative in Namibia. She analysed the implementation of the English Language Teaching initiative by the Ministry of Basic Education, which was aimed at subsequently (starting in 1994) introducing teaching of all subjects in English and introducing English subject syllabuses. O'Sullivan concluded that teachers did not successfully implement this initiative as it was beyond their capacity. The majority of teachers in her sample did not know anything about the reform in general and the English syllabuses in particular. Above all, the standard of English required and used in the teaching materials was beyond the understanding of teachers and students, which was why the initiative was not implemented as required. On the level of policymaking, O'Sullivan notes the failure of taking into account these 'classroom realities', which led to the fact that the policy expectations were not met.

The fact that the gap between policy formulation and implementation might lead to re-interpretations of initial objectives has also been demonstrated by Mulcahy for the case of the implementation of competency-based training (CBT) in Australia (Mulcahy, D. 1998). The author describes two different examples of interpreting and implementing the national policy provisions for reforming the VET curriculum into CBT standards. The major reform vehicles for introducing CBT as provided for in the national VET reform policy, are protocols (like standards, benchmarks, audits, frameworks, packages, competencies, assessments), which should serve as guidelines for training providers and educators to shape the curriculum and conduct of competency-based training. The policy does not directly intervene in the vocational pedagogy of achieving these goals. There is thus a distinct gap between the formulation of the VET policy (in this case the introduction of CBT standards) and its implementation, or the question, how these goals are achieved in the classroom.

One way of interpreting these protocols, as described for a training workshop in a medium sized company for steel products is to take the protocol standards and expected competencies as a starting point around which the training in the workshop is then subsequently organised. Such a classical and 'sequential' interpretation of the policy provisions certainly would be policymakers' expected way of implementing

the policy. A second way of interpreting the policy is through the reverse way of using the policy provision. In a second training workshop, the current and firm-specific (local) working conditions and skill needs are used as a starting point, around which the competency protocols are then interpreted and built. This is thus the opposite way of implementing the policy and might lead to a number of diverging interpretations of CBT standards and thus training interventions, which are very firm specific. This regularly becomes a problem, when only the policy formulation process is taken into account, but not the diverse implementation pathways that might lead to diverging outcomes as well.

3. The Namibian VET system: its evolution and performance

3.1) Education and Training prior to German colonisation (1805 - 1884)

Prior to the “official” German occupation, South West Africa (Namibia) was governed by missionaries (London and Wesleyan Missionary Society, 1805; Rheinisch Missionary Society, 1842; Finnish Missionary Society, 1870) who carried out educational activities in the country (Cohen, C. 1994). Missionary education was largely based on instilling Christian values to the ethnic groups in the country and to convert them into Christians. As stated by the Van Zyl Commission (Van Zyl Commission 1958, p. 32) the purpose of missionary education was “*to teach its pupils to read the Bible History, the New Testament, the Hymn Book and other Church literature in Dutch.*”

Although education was focused on Christianity, skills training also took place in the form of gardening, building of houses, making of roads and the use of basic tools, domestic science and needlework (Cohen, C. 1994). The intention of providing the above skills training to the indigenous population was to enable them to become domestic servants on white owned farms as well as in their household settlements.

3.2) Education and Training during German occupation (1884 - 1915).

South West Africa was declared a German Colony in 1884, with a colonial administration that subsequently took over the administration of the territory. Even though the country was to be administered by a colonial government the education system remained in the hands of the missionaries. In order to succeed with the German establishment in the territory, two education systems namely one for whites

and one for blacks was established with the objective to maintain Christian education for blacks as well as providing technical skills for whites. The increasing need for additional labour in the territory led to an expansion of training technical skills such as carpentry, brick making and domestic science to blacks. However, there was a deliberate attempt by the German settlers to limit the education for blacks (Cohen, C. 1993; Ngondi, A., K. 1981; Zimmerer, J. 2001). During German occupation of the territory, the state did not assume responsibility for the administration of the education of blacks, although the government funded skills development of white learners because of the benefit the state could derive from the supply of white skilled artisans.

3.3) Education and Training during the South African occupation (1915 - 1990)

After the defeat of the German forces during the First World War, South West Africa was placed under the protection of South African to be governed until it became independent. The above set-up resulted in the South African government to assume responsibility over the education and training system in the country (Cohen, C. 1994). The state control over the education sector was extended with the signatory to the Treaty of Peace and the South West Africa Mandate Act (Act No. 49 of 1919), which were followed by the Second Educational Act (Proclamation No. 55 of 1921) and the Education Proclamation, No. 16 of 1926 that brought education under the Department of Education in South Africa (Cohen, C. 1994).

The above proclamations enforced the division of the educational system along racial grounds. Van Wyk (1960) stated that the Educational Acts (Proclamation 55 of 1921 and Proclamation 16 of 1926) prescribed the provision of vocational training and industrial schools for whites only. However, education for blacks remained in the hands of missionaries and received state funding as long as the missionaries complied with the requirements of the state (Cohen 1994).

When the National Party of South Africa came into power in 1948, the economy of South West Africa expanded with a corresponding demand for more unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Due to the above developments and to ensure adequate supply of labour and proper control of the education system the government had to realign its educational activities. This led to the introduction of Bantu Education for blacks in South Africa in 1953, which was later transferred to South West Africa in 1962.

In order to provide the required skills, the Van Zyl Commission suggested the establishment of technical schools in the territory. According to the International Court of Justice (1963, vol II, p.137), industrial courses such as carpentry, tailoring and masonry were introduced at the Augustineum Secondary School in 1956, and the duration of these courses were three years. The number of trained pupils remained very low. Due to continued opposition and uprisings against the Bantu Education system, efforts were made to establish technical schools for blacks thus improving the socio-economic development of the country as well as the status of blacks.

The early 1980s marked the transformation of the education system with the abolishment of Bantu Education. As a consequence, the private sector joined hands in the interest of education for blacks and thus provided some sort of technical training to enable blacks to secure higher managerial positions in the private sector. Companies such as Roessing Uranium, Consolidated Diamond Mines, Tsumeb Corporation Limited and many others started training their own apprentices.

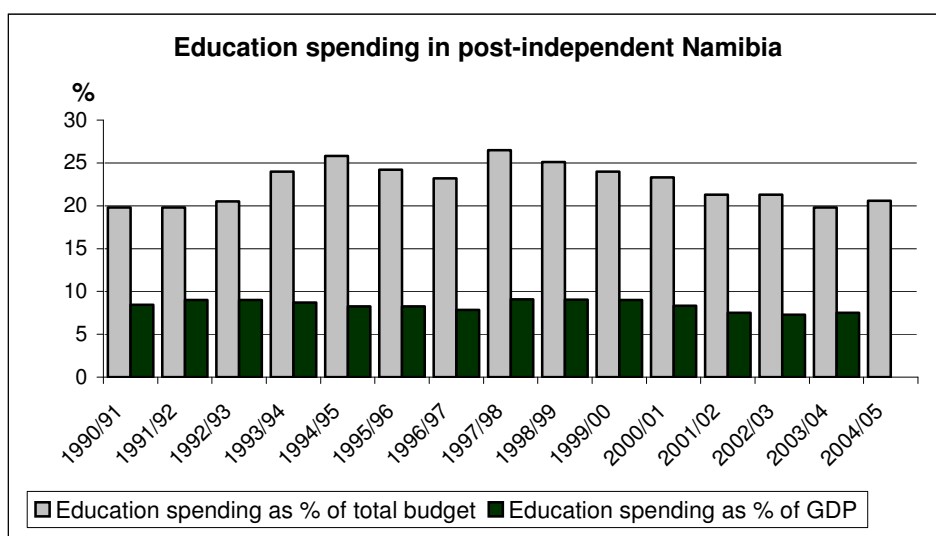
3.4) Education and Training in independent Namibia (1990 –today)

The previous sections revealed that the provision of education and training prior to Namibia's independence was characterised by inequalities and was fragmented along racial and ethnic lines. Also, the curriculum was irrelevant in addressing the needs of the entire population of the country. At independence, one of the government's primary objectives was to reverse the inequalities of the past and to engage in a process of national reconciliation. In this context, universal, compulsory and free general education were regarded as essential for Namibia's development strategy, which was also explicitly written into Namibia's constitution (Republic of Namibia 1990, Article 20, 2). The government first reformed the educational sector by integrating the former eleven education authorities into one single education authority in 1991, transformed its curriculum development and heavily supported school development projects. Since independence, government expenditures on education have remained on a high level as compared to other budget priorities.

Figure 2 reveals that the Namibian government dedicates a high proportion of its budget to education (around 20-25%), which equals between 7-9% of GDP. This places Namibia among the eight countries worldwide with the highest education spending. It needs to be noted that vocational training is among the most expensive

forms of education. Based on figures for 2004, the average public allocation per learner in VET was about N\$ 21,425.¹

Figure 2: Namibia's public education spending



Source: based on IPPR Database on public expenditure

Tuition costs at Windhoek Vocational Training Centre (WVTC) now range between N\$2,000 and N\$5,000, according to the level (year) and trade. Assuming the exaggerated assumption that every trainee would have to pay N\$5,000 in 2004, this would only cover about 20% of the total (public) costs of providing VET. The actual fee cover certainly is much lower as not all trainees have to pay fees and not the maximum amount. In 2000, only about 5% of the costs were actually covered by tuition fees at WVTC, which were much lower then as they are today (Grossmann, M. 2001). The costs per VET learner are about eight times higher than average costs for primary education. Given these high costs, which are mainly due to high equipment and material costs in technical trades, an efficient use of resources seems mandatory. A training levy was proposed already back in 2000, but it has not yet been implemented. There exists, however, a vocational training fund of about 10 million N\$ (2004) administered by the Vocational Training Board, which generates investment revenues (MHETEC 2005, p. 39). In addition, loans are disbursed to

¹ Based on public expenditure and VET enrolment figures for 2004; MHETEC 2005, *Annual Report 2004*, Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation, Windhoek.; Republic of Namibia 2004, *Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Financial Year 1 April 2004 -31 March 2005. State Revenue Fund*, Windhoek.

trainees to fund their training courses. In 2004, 1,183 trainees received assistance, amounting to about N\$5 million (MHETEC 2005, p. 39)

The key documents regulating VET in post-independent Namibia are the National Vocational Training Act No.18 (Republic of Namibia 1994), its amendment to include apprenticeship schemes (Republic of Namibia 1996b), the Namibia Qualifications Act regulating qualifications and standards (Republic of Namibia 1996a) and the National Policy on Vocational Training (MHETEC 2000).

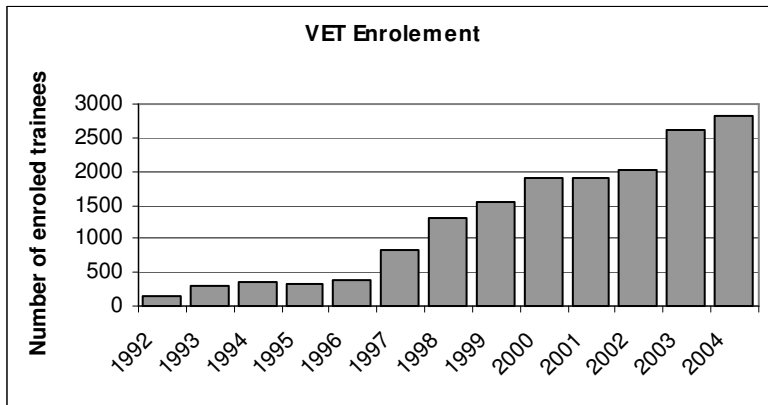
The central body of the current VET system is the National Vocational Training Board (NVTB). On the board are 17 members representing employers, employees, training centres, the government and independent experts, although the final power of decision is with the former Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation (MHETEC). This reflects a relatively strong state influence on the VET system. The overall function is to advise the Minister on all matters regarding the provision of VET, like standards, testing, certification and co-ordination of the different stakeholders (Grossmann, M. 2001). So-called Trade Advisory Councils (TACs) assist NVTB in setting trade-specific standards and they are composed of industry representatives, instructors and government representatives.

The National Trade Testing and Certification Centre (NTTC) is responsible for the conduct of national trade tests and certification issues. The Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA), a legal entity established under the Namibia Qualifications Act, has the task to set up a national qualification framework with the aim to accredit training providers and to develop qualification standards for different trades. For this purpose, subcommittees for different trades, the National Standard Setting Bodies, are expected to assist NQA with the formulation of standards and job profiles.

On the level of training centres, the four public VTCs (Zambezi, Rundu, Valombola, and Okakarara) are directly managed by the Directorate of Vocational Training, a sub-division of the former Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation. The exception is the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre, which is managed by an independent entity and the Namibia Institute for Mining and Technology in Arandis, which is run independently, although with government support. Other public training providers include agricultural colleges and Community Skills Development Centres (COSDECs). No detailed information is available on the

private provision of training, although a number of NGOa and private providers offer training in various areas.

Figure 3: VET Enrolment in Namibia, 1992-2004



Note: enrolment numbers for the following VTCs: Zambezi, Rundu, Volambola, Okakarara, Windhoek, NIMT

Source: MHETEC, *Annual Report*, various years

The enrolment figures for VET show a continuous increase, from only 152 trainees in 1992 to 2,825 in 2004. Still, the number of male trainees is more than double that of female trainees (1,941 versus 884 in 2004). Despite this increase in enrolment, demand by far outstrips available places. An estimated 20,000 to 30,000 school leavers yearly are faced with a limited number of training places, meaning that about only one in ten can obtain a place (assuming that everyone would opt for VET, which of course is not the case. But it demonstrates the proportions of a still limited access to VET). The lack of sufficient opportunities for school leaver – be it employment opportunities or further education is also reflected in the high number of grade 12 school leavers entering VET. A survey conducted on 76 trainees at WVTC in 2001 revealed that the majority of trainees had a Grade 12 qualification, a fact, which was also re-stated in a smaller repetition survey conducted in March 2005 at WVTC. Both surveys revealed that the majority of those trainees (57% in 2001 and 67% in 2005 respectively) would have preferred to study at UNAM or Polytechnic if they had given the chance/ opportunity. This reflects that VET for those trainees might only represent a second choice alternative. In effect, this constitutes a displacement of those learners who are really willing to consider vocational training a ‘vocation.’ Another more subtle issue is the fact that VET is often considered inferior to academic education. On the one hand, this is due to historic reasons and the strong

focus of colonial academic education and thus access to power and well-being. On the other hand, current experiences with well-paid civil servant jobs in the public sector certainly support this perception further. During the 2001 study, stakeholders, especially from the industry sector, have repeatedly mentioned the perception that the overall political discourse focused on academic education rather than vocational training – a fact, which at least seems to change today (Grossmann, M. 2001).

Training still mainly focuses on mechanical and electrical trades and very few courses are offered in service trades such as hospitality, business practice, secretarial, hairdressing, clothing and knitting craft and dressing and tailoring. In 2002, about 19% of trainees in public training centres were enrolled in the afore-mentioned service courses (Marope, M. T. 2005, p. 46).

3.5) The performance of the Namibian VET sector – an overview

The weak performance of the VET sector is a major reason for the many reform attempts to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. Before looking at the major reform initiatives, this section briefly highlights the major weaknesses.

a) High failure rates in trade examinations

One major concern of the VET system is low pass rates in trade examinations. Table 2 highlights failure rates in level 3&4 examinations, after which trainees normally receive their Diploma or Certificate. In total, more than half of all tested trainees fail the final examination, which represents a huge waste of not only financial but also personal resources. This might also leave trainees de-motivated and disappointed. Indeed, a tracer study on students dropped-out of training at the Windhoek VTC revealed that the second major reason for dropping out of training after financial difficulties were failed exams (see Lund, S. 1999). These high failure rates are also observable for other levels and years (for details see Marope, M. T. 2005, p. 51).

There are various reasons for these failure rates (for discussion and examples see Grossmann, M. 2001). Among them are: a mismatch between curricula and training content in the VTCs, insufficient equipment and tools or wrong exam preparations. Above all, the national testing procedures are inefficient and lack the required capacity to conduct examinations properly. In an earlier study, for example,

it has been reported that manual examination tasks were set-up, which were simply impossible to achieve by trainees (Grossmann, M. 2001, p. 84)

Table 2: Failure rates in level 3&4 examinations (as percent of candidates participating at the respective examination)

Trade	2003	2004
Auto Electrical	27	74
Auto Mechanics	35	64
Air-conditioning&Refrigeration	25	56
Boiler Making	39	60
Bricklaying & Plastering	68	79
Carpentry & Joinery	33	64
Diesel Mechanic	37	41
Electrical General	46	68
Fitter	-	100
Fitter Machinery	40	33
Fitter & Turner	78	14
Joinery & Cabinet Making	45	97
Joinery	-	29
Plumbing & Pipe Fitting	42	56
Radio & TV	75	48
Turner Machinist	-	67
Water Trade	-	17
Welding & Fabrication	28	54
Total	52	61

Note: failure rates for 2004 are for level 3&4 together; failure rates for 2003 only level 3
 Source: based on (MHETEC 2004, p. 61; 2005, p. 67)

b) Mismatch between skills demand and supply

A second major concern is that the training provided does not fully meet industry’s skill needs (MHETEC 1999, p. 3). Employers have voiced that trainees often lack the required knowledge, especially in basic education (particularly English language and arithmetic). This problem is of great importance as it relates to the overall education system. One problem that VET faces is that in addition to training skilled workers, it is also expected to remedy weaknesses in basic education. This should normally be addressed by the basic/ secondary education system and it would be a great burden to leave this additional task to the VET system as well.

In an earlier research covering 38 enterprises participating at the Windhoek Vocational Training Centre’s job attachment programme, 47% of them stated that their skill requirements were not met, as compared to 38% stating their requirements were more or less met (Grossmann, M. 2001,pp.66-67). A recent tracer study on 62

trainees from WVTC also covers employers' perceptions (those participating at the job attachment programme) on the quality of training and trainees' skills. Here, 25% of respondents mentioned that trainees' skills competence and performance was below average. Similarly, 28 of the 62 surveyed trainees replied that the practical training received at WVTC was inadequate for their tasks during job attachment (WVTC 2004).

It is important to note that these observations are based on very limited results obtained from very few respondents and at one location only, as more conclusive insights are not available. Even if the overall effects cannot be properly quantified, there is supportive qualitative evidence. Over the course of the current reform process, which also involves close consultations with stakeholders, the private sector repeatedly identified mismatches between skill needs and supply as a major problem, which was another major reason for initiating the CBT approach and an overhauling of training standards (see also Francis, M. and Burger, L. 2003; MHETEC 1999). Another study on 58 Namibian companies confirms the overall difficulty of finding employees who are suitably skilled: 59% of the surveyed companies replied they did not find the technical skills they needed (Westergaard-Nielsen, N., Hansohm, D. and Motinga, D. 2003, p. 35).

c) Inefficient governance structure

The third major issue in regard to performance relates to the overall structural set-up of the current VET system. The current structure is too centralised and co-operation among stakeholders is not efficient. One major issue of concern is the question on how to better involve the private sector in all aspects of the VET system, ranging from planning to providing and financing training (for more information see MHETEC 1999; Naanda, R. N. 2001; West, R. 2003)

As already described for the case of trade testing, one major problem is a lack of capacity for the VET system to be efficient. A high degree of government involvement on the one hand hampers a greater degree of flexibility to address challenges and on the other hand also acts as a deterrent for the private sector to engage more visibly. As one prominent industry representative voiced at a national VET workshop, *'the private sector is willing to contribute and get involved, but we need to see results, we need to see change'* (personal communication). Results and

change is exactly what has been missing despite the many reform initiatives. Already in 1999, it was decided to introduce CBT by the year 2002. The training levy has been in preparation since 1999 and still it remains unclear how much funds it might actually generate.

Weak capacity and a lack of co-ordination are major reasons for this deadlock. One case example of missing flexibility and lacking capacity is the direct control of public VTCs by the Directorate for Vocational Education and Training within the former MHETEC. In the past, expenditures had to be approved by the Directorate, which led to considerable time delays and situations where appropriate training was not possible due to missing materials and equipment (Grossmann, M. 2001). There are also capacity and management problems within training centres, which has made it difficult in the past to adopt and communicate new initiatives to instructors and trainees. Another example of lacking capacity is the Namibian Qualifications Authority. Established under the Namibia Qualifications Act of 1996, the NQA has not yet made much impact on the establishment of training standards. Similarly, the accreditation process has been slow and the process remains unclear (Marope, M. T. 2005).

The overall governance structure represents a typical top-down approach and thus rather represents a typical schooling model approach to VET than a market-led approach. A high degree of centralisation also disfavours VTCs and stakeholders in the regions. Principals and instructors from outside Windhoek often mentioned that they were not properly involved in decision and planning processes. Already when the first discussions on CBT started in 1999, instructors felt insufficiently involved and informed about the concept and the process. Another telling indication of a strong centralised top-down policy approach is the fact that trainee representation on VET policymaking bodies outside VTCs is low or non-existent—and be it only as observers and advisors. Training rather seems to be an imposed product. Involving trainees on different levels of the planning process might bear many benefits: firstly, trainees are those with the best insights into the difficulties ‘on the ground,’ for example in regard to training difficulties and the relevance of their training for their practical work; secondly, involving trainees might be a huge contribution towards increasing trainees perceptions about training as they receive a say in issues effecting their own lives. It

might, in a broader sense contribute towards improving self-awareness and social responsibility.

4. Back to the future? Analysing Namibia's current VET reform process

The aim of this section is to analyse in greater detail the current reform process of the VET sector. The central question to be addressed is: what are the prospects of the current reform, given the approaches taken to implement it? This discussion will also reveal major weaknesses of the approaches taken, which, if not addressed properly, are likely to negatively influence the overall reform process and outcome.

4.1) The current VET reform in Namibia

The major weaknesses of the VET system have repeatedly been reported and various consultancy and policy documents have been created for that purpose. A comprehensive analysis of the VET system has been conducted in 1999 and recommendations involved a streamlining of the VET system to make it more efficient and effective (MHETEC 1999). Similarly, the Presidential Commission on Education reviewed the overall education system (Republic of Namibia 2000). In terms of the VET system, factors such as shortage of skilled labour to meet the needs of industry, inadequately trained technical teachers, lack of cooperation with the industry and lack of articulation with the formal education system were identified as major problems. Reform initiatives have been formulated as a consequence, but they never really took off. The current reform initiative, which also includes a serious restructuring approach of VET, is underway and it seems that this time, it might be more far reaching than previous attempts.

a) Why was the current VET reform initiated?

The initial thrust of the current education reform (with VET being one aspect of it) has to be seen in the context of the Vision 2030 formulation process. Vision 2030 has a strong focus on building a knowledge society, and one of the explicit objectives is “*to accomplish the transformation of Namibia into a knowledge-based, highly competitive, industrialised and eco-friendly nation, with sustainable economic growth and a high quality of life.*” (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2004b, p. 41).

The education sector thus is key to achieving this objective and given the previous experiences with its overall performance, there was renewed interest in systematically reviewing and improving the education and training sector (for overview of reform agenda see also Brewster, D. and Burke, G. 2002; Mabizela, M. 2005).

With the input of the World Bank, an education sector review was initiated under the Prime Minister in 2003. The results are presented in the 2005 Marope Report (Marope, M. T. 2005). In 2004, the government initiated the Education and Training Sector Improvement Plan (ESTIP) to formulate education objectives and strategies in line with Vision 2030 and the 2nd National Development Plan (Government of the Republic of Namibia 2004a). The ESTIP is based on the strategic plans of the then three ministries of Basic Education, Sport and Culture; Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation; and Women's Affairs and Child Welfare. The starting point were the different input papers for the Marope report. Another key document in the reform process is a proposed new training policy –it will be referred to in greater detail in the analytical section (NTA 2004).

b) What are the major elements of the current VET reform?

The ESTIP strategic framework covers the period 2005-2020. In addition, it covers a five-year programme (2005-2009) with concrete steps and tasks to be undertaken in the different sectors. As to the VET reform, the framework identifies five major objectives:

1. Enhance the delivery of vocational skills through better organisation and management
2. Raise the quality of skills delivery
3. Mobilise financial resources for training and use them efficiently
4. Enhance the external responsiveness of vocational training to economic demands
5. Improve equality in skills provision

The different objectives and corresponding strategies and approaches will be summarised next.

1. Enhance the delivery of vocational skills through better organisation and management

Problem addressed: VET structure/ VET management and governance

Sub-objectives	Overview/ description of steps	Target
Establish Namibian Training Authority (NTA) to manage the VET system	Cabinet decision passed in January 2004. Tripartite body with employer majority. NTA's task is to govern any aspect of VET	Operational by 2005
Enable VTCs to operate as semi-autonomous entities	VTCs become autonomous in regard to most operational aspects. Requires developing management capacity within VTCs	Gradual implementation from 2005 to 2010
Develop management systems for VET	Generate and monitor data on training courses offered and labour market trends (skills needs and performance). Necessary to match training with needs. Improve NQA's capacity to accredit training providers	Establish capacity and information systems by 2007

2. Raise the quality of skills delivery

Problem addressed: improve the internal efficiency of the VET system (mainly at the level of VTCs).

Major indicators: Achievements and pass rates in competency examinations

Sub-objectives	Overview/ description of steps	Target
Define required skill outcomes and develop modular training programme	Define occupational training standards in all major fields and convert traditional time-based training into competency based training (CBT)	4 pilot studies completed by mid-2005, rest by 2007
Use non-government training to raise quality by stimulating a training market	Strengthen and encourage private training provision, encourage public/private financing of training; ensure proper registration and accreditation	2008
Use finance to stimulate improvement in quality	Ensure more efficient financial management of funds; introduce performance criteria linked to finance	2006-2007
Reform the testing and certification system	Adapt testing to curriculum changes; introduce competency based testing; ensure monitoring and feedback mechanisms are in place; strong involvement of employers/ industry	2008
Improve instructor programme	Set minimum qualifications (National Instructor Certificate); support staff development programmes; introduce incentive and performance mechanisms; possibility of downgrading non-performing instructors; importance of practical/ work experiences	90% of instructors receive in-house training between 2005-2009; target: 625 instructors

3. Mobilise financial resources for training and use them efficiently

Problem addressed: Financial resources for VET provision

Major indicators: Income and expenditure, unit costs and costs per trainee output

Sub-objectives	Overview/ description of steps	Target
Mobilise additional resources to finance priority developments in VET	In addition to government contribution, introduction of payroll levy, encourage VTCs to generate external funding through e.g. customised training courses	Payroll levy introduced by late 2005; assisting VTC in sourcing external funding by end 2005
Make more efficient use of resources in VET	Create the National Training Fund (NTF) as central funding mechanism to channel levy and government funds; improve general financial efficiency through training in VTCs and normative funding rules	Establish NTF by end 2005 Criteria for allocation of funds adopted by 2006; training for VTC management by 2006

4. Enhance the external responsiveness of vocational training to economic demands

Problem addressed: mismatch between skills demand and supply; quality of instructors

Major indicators: Employment rates; wages/ incomes of graduated

Sub-objectives	Overview/ description of steps	Target
Provide direction for system expansion and contracting by identifying skills demands	Generate regular and updated data on skills needs and employment opportunities through existing sources and the conduct of labour market surveys	Labour market analysis carried out annually (start 2005)
Introduce flexibility and responsiveness to changes in market demands	Introduce modular standards to flexibly address skills needs; introduce short courses for specific market demands; contract out training to private providers; emphasise generic rather than specialised skills	Ongoing, 2006-2008
Expand training outputs in areas of critical shortages	Extent capacity for private training to increase overall training capacity; expand VTCs enrolment capacity of quality VTCs; expand outputs through short courses, CBT training and reduction of drop-outs	Private Training Association by 2006; increase Nr. of public VTCs to 10 and 10,000 trainees intake by 2010
Relieve constraints on recruiting qualified instructors	Planning demand for instructor per area; design pre-service training courses (e.g. Polytech and dedicated VTCs); performance oriented evaluation	Increase trained instructors from 40 to 100 by 2010
Expand training for self-employment to raise the income and productivity and incomes of adults	Expand COSDEC approach if evaluated successfully; introduce entrepreneurship education as integral part of all training programmes	Increase COSDECS from 5 to 15 and trainees from 1,500 to 4,5000 by 2010
Expand programmes for in-house training	Use training levy to increase in-house company; design programmes to promote in-house training (e.g. like transformed apprenticeship programmes)	Programmes and incentives designed by 2007

5. Improve equality in skills provision

Problem addressed: Access to VET, inclusion of disadvantaged groups

Major indicators: Opportunities for equal participation and outcomes for disadvantaged groups and regions

Sub-objectives	Overview/ description of steps	Target
Remove disparities in opportunities for skills development	Increase non-formal skills training approaches; improve access to adult education and special access programmes for disadvantaged groups or regions; increase training in low-income areas; increase part-time training programmes	Establish 10 VTCs for 10,000 trainees and 15 COSDECS for 4,500 trainees by 2010

4.2) Analysing the major element of the VET reform: what are the prospects for successful implementation?

The above-mentioned objectives and strategies provide a broad overview of the different reform elements. One way of synthesising the different reform elements is to link the major elements to their respective market orientation. In section two, we have described the various models, ranging from schooling model to market model. The traditional model is not included as it is outside the formal VET system. Figure 4 matches major elements of the current VET system and future reform initiatives to the different VET models.

Figure 4: Classification of Namibia's current and future VET system

	Schooling Model	Co-operative Model	Market Model
Role of the state/ regulation patterns	■	□	
Provision of training (Role of public and private providers)	■	□	
Regulation of access to VET	■	□	
Determinant of training demand	■	□	
Determinant of training content		□	
Financing of VET system		■	□

Note: ■ describes current VET system
□ describes VET reform objectives

In Figure 4, the black boxes describe the current VET system in regard to its core elements and the white boxes denote the future orientation. Their respective position demonstrate the relative classification in regard to the basic characteristics of the schooling, co-operative and market models. As co-operative models have a large range of characteristics, they can be sub-divided into two major parts, whereby the right part corresponds more to market-oriented co-operative models, like the Latin American model. The left part is closer to state controlled models, like the French model.

It becomes clear that the current VET system in terms of its regulation and provision is very much state centred like in the schooling model. One exception is financing of the VET system. Although the large majority of the system is financed by the state, tuition fees cover a small part. The future orientation of the VET system corresponds much more to a market-oriented co-operative model. This reflects the reform initiatives to decentralise the control of the VET system to a larger extent and to achieve greater responsiveness to market demands. Above all, the role of the private sector is going to be stronger, in terms of involvement in planning, providing (private) training, and also financing through a levy. One special issue is access to the VET system, especially for disadvantaged groups. Here, the aim is to enable formerly disadvantaged groups equal access to the VET system through supporting informal and adult training measures (see objective 5 above). The access objectives will be more state-driven. However, it is also stated that quality and performance measures will be taken into account, which represents a concern to keep training as close to industry demand as possible.

Equally far reaching are attempts to move the VET system towards a more market-oriented system. It is true that the current reform attempt is planned in much greater detail than it was in the past. Nonetheless, there are many caveats that might hamper the implementation. Another approach to critically discuss the different reform elements is to look at what elements of the VET system the provisions target and what positive and negative factors of influence might be. For this purpose, the next section will look at the reform and its targets in terms of the systems model described in section two above.

4.3) Analysing the proposed macro-level management and overall structure of the VET system

The first reform objective - the enhancement of VET delivery through better organisation and management - relates to the overall structural set-up of the VET system. In terms of the systems model presented in section two, these reform elements focus on the macro-level of the VET system. This includes in particular (4) institutions, legislations and regulations; (8) training policy and resources; (5) training system and (11) institutional linkages.

The reform initiatives mainly focus on a shift of responsibility away from several organisations that currently exist to a more centralised but independent organisation, the Namibian Training Authority (NTA). The Namibia Vocational Education and Training Policy drafted by NTA further emphasises the different roles played by the different actors (NTA 2004). The role of the government is expected to change from an active involvement as it is now to a more co-ordinating and facilitating role, having the responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the VET system and to report to parliament. In addition, it should enable effective communication and co-ordination mechanisms with other stakeholders. Similarly, the Directorate for Vocational Training is assumed to co-ordinate VET approaches with basic and higher education. One point that was identified as a major weakness of the current VET system was the lack of communication and co-ordination between the VET directorate and the Ministry of Basic Education. This lack of co-ordination mainly translated into the fact that the VET curricula were not well aligned with general education standards. The fact that VET trainees often started with weak algebra and especially language skills led to the additional burden of the VET system to make up for these weaknesses, which should not be its role and responsibility.

Although the two ministries (basic and higher education) have now been merged into one, this does not necessarily imply a better co-ordination between the various directorates. A deliberate political will and effort for greater co-ordination are crucial pre-requisites for it to be successful. As discussed in the theory section, the will to delegate responsibilities is an important pre-condition for successful reform implementation. One approach to increase co-operation would be to form an inter-ministerial co-ordinating standing committee to inform co-ordinated policy approaches in overlapping education areas (like VET, which is at the intersection of

the basic and higher education systems). It would also be advisable to have representatives from all education areas (basic, VET and higher education) on the NTA board, at least as advisors.

The NTA is supposed to take the lead role in the management of the VET system. One central question is: what makes it different from the currently existing Namibia Vocational Training Board? Firstly, like the NVTB, the NTA represents all sectors with an interest in VET, namely the state, employers and training providers. Unlike the NVTB, where the final power of decision clearly was with the government (through the Ministry of Higher Education, Training and Employment Creation), the NTA board will have an explicit and deliberate bias towards employers' interests (who will have the majority power of decision). However, there are two aspects that might prove to be obstacles for a successful reform. The first issue is the fact that the NTA Board will be appointed by the government, instead of being elected by the sectors' respective representatives (NTA 2004, p. 6). Even if the appointment will be based on sectors' propositions, the process still might lack transparency as opposed to open elections. Moreover, it would be very important to also include trainee representatives on the NTA Board, as they are at the core of the entire VET system. According to the VET policy draft, trainees are recognised to only provide feedback (NTA 2004, p. 12). However, they should be involved more in the decision-making process as well. Otherwise, the NTA would not be different from the typical top-down policy approach that currently is in place. If policymakers were to recognise them as mature and equal stakeholders in the VET system, they would also obtain the same rights as anyone else.

The second issue relates to a fundamental problem that has hindered an effective management of the VET system since its inception – namely the limited involvement of the private sector. The problem is not so much a systemic one, but rather issues from industry's own unwillingness to get involved to a larger extent. Although the new structure of the NTA foresees a dominant role for the private sector, it should also take up its responsibilities. It is difficult, for example, to find a prominent industry representative to chair the NTA Board. It should be made obligatory that only an industry representative can chair this board. The problem of low involvement thus is not so much a structural one – in the past, employers were also represented on the board, but industry representatives often did not attend NTVB

meetings as they perceived it as ‘a waste of time’ (Grossmann, M. 2001). This problem also applies to other areas of industry involvement, namely the design of curricula and testing. These points will be discussed separately below. The central question is how to increase employers’ willingness to get involved on the macro-level, and, above all, drive the VET system. An increased willingness to participate and engage in the VET system might come over time, when it becomes obvious that industry’s demands are taken seriously and that it is not again the government that dominates the agenda. As the role of the private sector is central it will be discussed in greater detail for the other areas of the VET system below.

Another critical issue for successful reform implementation is the overall responsibility of the NTA and especially its capacity to do so. One problematic issue is an apparent overlapping of responsibilities – with the danger of replicating structures that have failed in the past (here, a major problem was the before-mentioned lack of co-ordination between the MBESC and the MHETEC). According to the training policy draft, both, NQA and NTA seem to have a mandate for setting curriculum standards, registering and accrediting training providers (NTA 2004). However, there is not yet a distinct clarification of roles. It is explicitly stated that NQA should recognise NTA’s lead position to develop VET guidelines. Similarly, NQA seems to be responsible for the broader task of generating National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) that also include inputs from the other education levels. Nonetheless, the double responsibilities in standard development and registration might prove inefficient due to co-ordination problems. NQA is supposed to nominate representatives to the NTA board, but this does not automatically mean an efficient division of tasks. Experts in the field have suggested that the reason that NTA opted for an own standard setting and accreditation responsibility might be due to NQA’s low effectiveness over its nearly 10 years of existence (especially in terms of very low registration and accreditation rates). In this sense, thus, this compromise might be rather due to political motives instead of efficiency considerations. In terms of efficiency, it certainly would be better if the entire standard setting and accreditation responsibility would remain within one authority (be it NQA or NTA). As the theoretic discussion has revealed, the more numerous the organisations to manage the VET system, the more difficult it becomes to manage it properly due to co-ordination losses.

A major caveat on all levels is the danger of lacking capacity. Insufficient management capacity on the level of VTCs and within the testing authority was responsible for weak performance. The delegation of responsibility to VTCs is a step into the right direction. It is important that this transfer of power is as broad as possible and not compromised by political prerogatives. In the past, the government's tendency to retain influence has always been a major obstacle. Again, political will to delegate responsibility is crucial to make this happen. Similarly, the overall responsibilities of the NTA are very broad and range from strategic policy planning objectives in the medium-term to practical management and monitoring functions. This requires the building of management capacity on all levels. The reform objectives explicitly emphasise this important point – it is crucial to implement these recommendations into practice as well to make it a success, even if such measures will be costly.

Finally, the establishment of an efficient monitoring and evaluation system is a central element of a well-functioning VET system that is built on learning principles. Only if past experiences lead to learning effects and initiate change, will the system be able to adapt over time to the various challenges it will face without the need to initiate full-fledged reforms every couple of years. Again, the major obstacle to an efficient monitoring system is weak capacity. The current VET system in theory provides for regular monitoring through inspectors. However, in practice, these inspections are not operational, which is mainly due to lacking capacity from the government's side. Effective monitoring must be regular and it should mainly focus on whether employers' needs have been met. In addition, it is not sufficient for a monitoring system to only produce a report to the government, as currently previewed by the training policy. The NTA should have the power to automatically decide measures according to the monitoring feedback it receives. For example, in the case of performance weaknesses within identified areas or VTCs, NTA should have the possibility to automatically decide on financial support for targeted initiatives out of the Training Fund. Otherwise, necessary improvements will just be 'talked dead.'

4.4) Analysing the training system and labour market – addressing the delivery and relevance of VET on the micro-level

The two reform objectives – raising the quality of skills delivery and the responsiveness of the training system to economic demands will be analysed together

as they are intrinsically linked to each other. In regard to the systems model, these reform objectives relate to (5) the training system, (7) the labour market, (12) supply signals; and (13) demand signals

The most ambitious element of the VET reform is the transformation of the current linear and time-based training and curricula into competency based training (CBT) and curricula. And it is here that we also see the greatest danger for a successful implementation of the reform. First, what is the overall idea of CBT?

The current training approach is build around fixed curricula in the different trades, which are linear, i.e. from basic to more complex knowledge. Currently, trainees have to undergo several years of training until they qualify in a specific trade. CBT aims at dissolving this time-based and linear learning approach by allowing the trainee to build on his/her own skills and experiences so that he or she only needs to train in the missing areas of knowledge. For this purpose, the different trades and curricula are transformed into competency-based standards that describe what a trainee needs to know in order to qualify. Central to the working of the CBT approach is a functioning testing system. Each trainee will get the opportunity to be tested and certified for the knowledge and expertise that he/she already has, irrespective of where it has been acquired. The great advantage of this approach is that it will open up the VET system to the workforce in general, as even workers without formal education but with long years of practical experience will be able to get this expertise certified and thus formally acknowledged. This is of special interest to a country where due to the past, many citizens were excluded from the formal education system. Although the approach sounds promising, it has to be noted that its implementation is very demanding and complex and thus bears many obstacles to successful implementation.

In practical terms, the development of competency-based standards is the responsibility of the Industry Skills Councils that report to the Standards and Curriculum Council as part of the NTA. Currently, there exist 12 national standard setting bodies that report to the NQA, whereas so-called Trade Advisory Councils (TACs) report to the National Vocational Training Board. The future structure thus represents a streamlining of the standard setting mechanisms by taking the Standards and Curriculum Council away from the NQA and placing it between the NTA and the (renamed) Industry Skills Councils. On the one hand, this emphasises the above-made

suggestion that NTA attempts to concentrate the standard setting functions within its own responsibility. On the other hand, the renaming of the trade councils into industry councils also reflects the 'symbolic' shift in importance accorded to the role of the private sector in setting standards. However, the central question is how to address the basic problem that has hampered the TACs in the past: the weak involvement of the private sector. The same reluctance of the private sector to get involved in the reform process has been reported. The CBT Implementation Unit, a GTZ sponsored unit at WVTC, was tasked with the implementation of CBT. Several workshops have been conducted and employees from the private sector were invited to participate and provide inputs. Although interest and support from the private sector existed at the beginning, private sector participation weakened considerably over time. Similar experiences were made with the establishment of competency based training standards in the Industry Skills Councils where industry's participation was limited to input from a few representatives. The participation of the private sector is essential to assure that training is meeting industry's skill demands.

The participation of the private sector is also essential to ensure an efficient training and testing system. Competency-based testing requires that a learner's skills and experiences are matched to industry practices and skill levels. In practical terms, this requires that industry representatives need to examine and certify skills in their respective areas. Currently, industry representatives assist with examinations, but there are only a few examiners from the private sector and the system is not efficient. Examiners need to be qualified properly and a functioning system with objective testing procedures is needed (for example, examinations should always be conducted by two independent assessors). Similarly, assessors' performance and qualifications should be monitored regularly. Such an involvement is time consuming and not many companies might be willing to set qualified senior employees free for this purpose. It is questionable why the low motivation of the private sector to engage in VET should change in the future without support measures. Appropriate incentive schemes for compensating companies could be set up for this purpose (e.g. financial compensation, exclusion from the levy or preferential tax treatments).

A similar problem but related to the training sector is the low involvement of instructors and trainees in the CBT reform process. This is actually one of the major dangers for successful implementation. As the discussion and examples in section two

demonstrated, it is at this level that re-interpretations and re-formulations of educational reform policies most often occur. The major reason is lacking knowledge and involvement of and in the reform process. In regard to trainees, there has been very low involvement. The trainee survey conducted at WVTC in March 2005 revealed that the large majority (70% of the 32 trainees that answered this question) had not been consulted on the introduction and concept of CBT. Trainees certainly have been informed of CBT, but only four out of 34 were able to correctly describe what CBT was and what it meant for their own training. This reveals that there is a strong need to make the reform and its implications much clearer than they are now. Trainees have already voiced disappointment with changes that took place within the VET system without them being consulted (namely the reduction from 4 to 3 years, which led to an considerable increase in trainees workload; and the introduction of certificates instead of diplomas, which in trainees' views represents a further degradation of VET as compared to higher education). The danger of not involving trainees is that it further reduces their identification and acceptance of VET and might increase resignation and frustration. It is important to note that trainees - as compared to school children - are adult people who have or should learn to be self-responsible in taking own life decisions. A better involvement of trainees often requires little more than more concerted information and consultation efforts.

Similarly, there is the danger that instructors, who are not properly involved in the reform process might simply boycott it as they do not know how to address the complex changes that are about to take place. Instructors, especially from VTCs outside Windhoek have voiced the concern of not really knowing what CBT's practical implications would mean for their own teaching. There have been workshops for instructors from all VTCs to explain and teach CBT approaches, but external constraints (like time constraints and lack of transport money) have compromised attendance. Moreover, a well-functioning monitoring and assistance system is required to support instructors in the first phases of CBT implementation. Otherwise, there is the great danger of diverging training approaches leading to a fragmentation of CBT. This is a problem that the current VET system experiences through diverging curricula and training approaches, leading to high failure rates. It is important to realise that the changes occurring through the introduction of the CBT approach are enormous – and much larger than a simple revision of curricula standards and

teaching methods. In our view, this area requires the largest attention and support long before actual CBT standards and curricula are introduced. One way of approaching this is through instructor training. It should be obligatory that each trainer undergo an upgrading course (which itself should be competency based) before being allowed to teach CBT approaches. Pilots should be established well before CBT will be introduced to test the practicability of the approach and instructors' adaptability to the new concept.

The quality of training generally is a crucial issue and the reform objectives explicitly state the importance of upgrading and monitoring the performance of instructors. In this regard, we regard it as crucial to have separate legislation for instructors' qualification requirements. Currently, instructors fall under the Public Services Act, which only provides for teachers but not for instructors (Republic of Namibia 1995). According to the Act, the remuneration depends on the academic qualification – the higher it is, the higher the remuneration. This needs to be changed, as practical experiences and industry exposure should be the crucial quality determinants and not academic qualifications.

4.5) Analysing the resources and institutional linkages between the private and the training sector

Another central objective of the VET reform is to mobilise additional financial resources to finance training provision. In addition, the involvement of the private sector through a training levy is also sought as a means to increase the private provision of training. In terms of the VET systems model, this objective relates to (8) Training Policy and Resources, (11) Institutional Linkages, (12) Supply and (13) Demand Signals.

The core of the reform is the introduction of a payroll levy to fund a National Training Fund and thus generate additional resources. Given the low involvement of the private sector in terms of VET inputs and training provision, this might seem an appropriate measure. This is also backed by theory, stating that in the case of an externality an intervention might be efficient (although it is always a second-best option, as it always creates secondary distortions). The major problem with a levy, however, is that it 'punishes' those who do not comply, instead of rewarding those who do. As the empirical examples have demonstrated, levies have hardly achieved

the desired results, whereas incentive schemes proved to be much more efficient. The major problem with such a negative intervention as the levy is that there is always the tendency of evasion, instead of deliberately seeking the support in the case of a positive incentive. It also remains uncertain, how much a levy will generate in the first place, as it is not known which companies will comply and which won't. This adds an additional burden of uncertainty to the whole reform process. Secondly, creating mechanisms for collecting the levy is expensive and might add new inefficiencies. A different approach would be to finance the training fund through indirect taxes (e.g. an increase in VAT) and then to provide tax incentives to companies providing training. This would not only avoid the difficult task of yet another tax collecting mechanism but it would also be more effective in increasing the private sector's involvement in VET.

Tuition fees are another important element of financing the VET system. However, they represent a considerable burden to trainees (and as noted above, they are one of the major reasons for trainees to drop out of training). A much better approach would be to introduce a recurrent training fee system, whereby trainees are required to pay a certain percentage of their post-training job income. This would not compromise access to VET and would nonetheless generate funds. This, of course, requires an efficient monitoring system to minimise evasion once trainees leave VET.

Financial constraints are a major danger for successful reform. A levy as a source of funding might be a good idea on paper, but it is difficult to implement. It is very unlikely that the current far-reaching reform will achieve all its objectives if no additional funds are attributed to the VET sector. Again, this mainly requires political will to do so. Given the difficult budgetary situation, it remains doubtful whether the government is willing to increase its commitment.

4.6) Analysing the objective to improve access to the VET system

One major concern is to increase access to Namibia's VET system. As was described above, although the intake of students has increased over time, it is yet far from satisfying demand. One special focus of the reform initiative is to increase access to marginalised and formerly disadvantaged groups. This reform objective relates to (5) the training system, (7) labour market and (12) supply signals.

The aim of increasing access to the VET system, especially for formerly disadvantaged and marginalised Namibians is understandable given the unequal access to education in the past. However, in order for this objective to be successful, policymakers should be aware of a number of potential dangers that should be avoided. As empirical examples demonstrate, VET systems that have to fulfil several objectives at the same time are generally less efficient and effective than VET systems with a limited and clear objective of delivering training. This is mainly due to the fact that several objectives require several delivery mechanisms, standards and resources.

The Namibian reform objective combines the objectives of delivering 'employable' skills and social inclusion. Nothing is wrong about these multiple objectives, but care should be taken not to overburden the VET system. As the Egyptian example demonstrated, the opening of the VET system to the majority of school leavers who could not get access to higher education led to a huge increase in trainee numbers, which paralysed the VET sector. The VET sector thus served as a reservoir for school leavers to avoid high youth unemployment rates, but it thereby failed on its main objective – delivering quality training and skills.

The Namibian objective previews to increase VET enrolment rates to 10,000 trainees by 2010, which requires more than tripling the current intake during the next five years. This poses great dangers for the quality of training if it is not accompanied by massive up-scaling of investments in VET provision. The critical issue actually is to train sufficient instructors, which is a process that takes time. The financial aspect of this increase has not yet been taken into account in detail.

One means of increasing access to VET that has been discussed among stakeholders was to reduce the access requirements for mathematics and science. This point - rightly so - does not seem to be on the agenda anymore. One of the major problems of the current VET system is that it has to remedy deficiencies in basic education, namely mathematics, sciences and English language skills. Those skills have been identified by employers as major reasons for the low skills matches between supply and demand. Relaxing the entry requirements would mean a much larger strain on the VET system to provide basic education, which is not its task and which compromises its overall efficiency. A different approach would be to completely shift from academic entry requirements to skills requirements with the introduction of CBT. Potential trainees would have an initial competency assessment

in their area of specialisation, which would permit to identify existing skills and potential needs. This would also be an intelligent approach to really open-up the VET system to all those with experience and skills. The current system is dominated by academically experienced trainees (the majority of trainees are Grade 12 leavers due to a lack of alternatives), and it would shift towards a skills dominated system. This would probably lead to limiting access to trainees from a distinctively academic background, but it would considerably enhance the effectiveness of VET. This last point emphasises the discussed dilemma: wanting an efficient and effective VET system requires limitations on another side. In the end, it is a political decision of what the VET system is supposed to fulfil – it will be the most efficient, however, if it focuses on training delivery.

The training of marginalised or formerly disadvantaged groups is an important objective. The ETSIP plan identifies the important role of COSDECs to provide for communal skill needs. One possibility to increase equity of skills provision is to create appropriate training courses or bridging courses for those groups on various levels. This might also include courses to make up for deficiencies in basic education. After specific levels or standards have been achieved, trainees might then proceed to the standard courses provided by VET. However, it should be avoided to enhance access per se and thus to compromise the overall quality if those minimum standards are not met.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The current reform initiative in Namibia is promising, as for the first time the complexity of the VET system has been addressed in the reform process and not only parts of it as in the past. On the macro-level, the tendency is towards decentralising the management of the VET system and of VTCs by giving more power of decision to the private sector. Another major aspect of the reform is the shift from standard training curricula to competency-based training. Similarly, new pathways to increase the financial foundation of the VET systems are sought by the introduction of a training levy. Finally, the VET system should allow equal access for marginalized and formerly disadvantaged Namibians. At the same time, the current reform is quite ambitious and complex and one concern is whether it is not too ambitious given the

disappointing experiences with reform initiatives in the past. There are number of inherent dangers to a successful implementation of the reform objectives.

One of the major dangers is that the reform focus is too much on the macro or structural level at top, without really addressing the particular issues at the micro level. As a consequence, it often happens that intended changes and policies lead to outcomes that have not been anticipated per-se. One major reason certainly is the nature of policymaking, which traditionally is top-down in government-controlled spheres of influence. Issues in the implementation process that are further 'down the implementation line' become more vague and less visible for policymakers at the top.

Potential dangers in the Namibian reform process on the macro-level are a low involvement of the private sector and a fragmentation of responsibilities between organisations (especially NTA and NQA). One of the greatest dangers, however, is the low involvement of the micro-level. Trainees and instructors feel they are not being properly involved in the process. In the worst case, this might lead to a re-interpretation and subsequently fragmentation of the CBT approach, which would considerably affect its effectiveness.

Other reform aspects such as the introduction of a training levy and the broadening of access to VET also pose potential dangers for successful reform. The experiences with a training levy around the world are mediocre and we are doubtful why a levy should be much more successful in Namibia, where already one of the major problems is a low involvement of the private sector. Policymakers shouldn't bet too much on a 'magical' levy that won't occur. The availability of financial resources might then become the major obstacle for successful reform, and it requires political will to contribute more. Otherwise, the prospects for successful reform look bleak.

Similarly, the danger of broadening access to VET is that it adds functions and responsibilities that are not primarily its task (such as remedying the insufficiencies of the basic education system). We acknowledge the importance of providing training and access to education to all Namibians, but it would be more efficient to do so separately, without, however, closing the VET system to all those with the required minimum competencies.

Given these potential dangers, we suggest the following points that should be taken into account if the reform wishes to be successful:

- Increase the involvement of the private sector and make it the leading driver of any VET reform. Possible initiatives to increase private sector involvement could be through tax incentives or other incentives.
- Avoid a fragmentation of responsibility by setting clear objectives and regulations. NTA should be the major authority to manage the VET sector without external interference (other than on an advisory base).
- Establishment of an effective monitoring and evaluation system. NTA should have the power to directly address issues arising from this feedback mechanisms without having to rely on government input.
- Instead of a training levy, positive forms of incentives should be introduced to encourage a greater involvement of the private sector.
- More financial resources are required for successful reform. One approach to financing the VET system is through the tax system and tuition fees
- The overall support focus needs to be on the micro-level, through strongly supporting and involving instructors and trainees. Appropriate pilots and upgrading courses for instructors prior to the introduction of CBT are necessary for a successful implementation of CBT.
- Reform of the instructor training: professional skills and expertise should be the guiding criteria and not academic qualifications. A separate section for regulating instructors roles, responsibilities and remuneration should be introduced in the Public Services Act to differentiate instructors from teachers.
- Broadening access to VET is crucial, but care should be taken not to overburden the VET system through adding other objectives to the system. Upgrading courses (with the input of VTCs, though) should be offered on a separate level.
- In the same context, a close co-ordination between basic, secondary education and VET is necessary to avoid the VET system to remedy insufficiencies from these levels.

Above all, one of the major criteria for success is the willingness to reform, and especially the willingness to hand over responsibilities to those, who are in the best position to manage a VET system. Many of the suggested issues have been explicitly mentioned in the current reform documents – in this regard, the Namibian VET reform seems to be on the right path. It is crucial for policymakers to fully support them in the future and to be aware of the many caveats that such a complex undertaking bears.

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Note:

The exchange rate of the US Dollar to the Namibian Dollar is roughly 1US\$ = 6.3 N\$