



Skills Development as a Means
to Women's Empowerment:

Integrating Gender Equality in TVET

Executive Summary

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Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan) is the national not-for-profit membership association of Canada's publicly-funded colleges, institutes, Cégeps and polytechnics. Known previously as the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC), CICan and its members are committed to driving Canadian prosperity by being global leaders in applied education and partnered innovation.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

OVERVIEW

- Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) systems are an important component of national strategies for economic growth that emphasize the role of knowledge and skills for employment and productivity. By enabling men and women to expand their choices through enhanced capabilities, TVET is also a means for women's empowerment.
- Worldwide, women remain substantially underrepresented in TVET programs, especially in areas related to science, engineering, mathematics and technology. The distribution of male and female learners in TVET programs contributes to horizontal labour market segregation where women are over-represented in jobs with lower productivity, lower pay and lower status.
- Women face numerous types of barriers to accessing and completing TVET. These include:
 - barriers within the education and training system,
 - societal attitudes towards 'male' and 'female' occupations, and
 - perceptions that TVET does not necessarily lead to improved income and livelihood.
- Policy and programs to achieve gender equality in TVET consist of two, related types:
 - measures that specifically seek to improve women's attraction, retention and completion of TVET programs, including successful transition to employment, and;
 - measures that address the specific attitudes of different influential actors, from girls and young women themselves, to parents, teachers and employers.
- Effective TVET capacity building practices that are mindful of women's empowerment and gender equality are characterized by program elements such as:
 - development and delivery of programs that enable women to practice occupations in specializations or sectors in which they are traditionally underrepresented;
 - review of programs and delivery modes to ensure gender equality and development of teaching materials that depict both men and women exercising the profession, use neutral language and eliminate hidden assumptions regarding gender roles;

- development of modules on the gender dimensions of entrepreneurship promotion and environmental protection;
 - gender-sensitive outreach and marketing efforts that are designed to attract both sexes to the curricula on offer;
 - student support services such as child care facilities, referrals to employment opportunities and support classes in science, technology, engineering, and maths, which can help to improve the performance of female learners and reduce their dropout rate;
 - educational supports such as literacy and essential skills training and Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) services that seek to redress inequities in women's access to education and training opportunities.
- Colleges and Institutes Canada's (CICan's) *Education for Employment* partnership-based approach to TVET capacity building in developing countries integrates gender equality across all program areas, including gender-sensitive teacher training and pedagogy, adapting training materials to promote equal participation by men and women, reviewing national policies and integrating gender equality into environment and entrepreneurial modules during training delivery. The partnerships provide a practical standard for gender mainstreaming which can be integrated into the *Education for Employment* approach that focuses on capacity building for local schools and government as well as civil society stakeholders.
 - Canadian colleges and institutes were also the key technical partners in the *Mulheres Mil* (A Thousand Women) project in Brazil. The project built the capacity of Brazilian Federal Institutes to assist marginalized women to access job-specific training and enter the formal workforce, or to strengthen their entrepreneurial activity. The project is a powerful demonstration of the role of Prior Learning and Recognition (PLAR) in recognizing and validating women's informal experience and knowledge. The project was so successful that the Government of Brazil scaled it up to a national-level initiative with the goal of reaching 100,000 women.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Women-focused TVET initiatives should be a part of Global Affairs Canada's development assistance to meet new, ambitious Canadian and international goals for women's economic empowerment and gender equality.
- Development partners should ensure that the human rights perspective, as well as the economic development and human capital perspective, should be a part of any TVET capacity building initiative related to women's empowerment and gender equality.
- CICan's *Education for Employment* projects should be used as entry points to work with local TVET partners to mobilize funding for gender equality and women's empowerment from local, provincial or national state authorities.

- TVET interventions concerned with women's economic empowerment must recognize the existence of persistent barriers to employment and incorporate measures that support women's transition to employment.
- TVET capacity building initiatives should respond to unmet demand for bridging, access, and pre-entry programs that help increase access to TVET for young women who face systemic barriers and older women who require training or retraining for decent work. Literacy and essential skills education and the use of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) are key supports.
- Practical and work-based experience is a key element of most contemporary approaches to TVET. These interventions warrant further implementation in developing countries based on Canada's considerable expertise in this area; evaluation activities should seek to gauge the impacts of such approaches on women.
- This is the right time to attract women into TVET disciplines where they will become skilled in the use of new technologies, especially those related to renewable energies, green technology and agri-business development, since these emerging sectors can still be cast as gender neutral.
- Education related to women's and men's sexual and reproductive health and rights should be integrated into TVET capacity building initiatives. Through CICan's *Education for Employment* approach, Canadian colleges and institutes are well placed to collaborate with local partners to develop appropriate activities and policies, and to pilot innovative approaches integrating sexual and reproductive health and rights into workplace health and safety training.
- CICan's *Education for Employment* project partners require further support to conduct evaluation of the longer-term impacts of programming related to gender equality, as the effects may only be visible after such initiatives end.

THE COLLEGE AND INSTITUTE APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT

Colleges and Institutes Canada (CICan, previously known as ACCC) is the national not-for-profit membership association of Canada's public colleges, institutes, cégeps and polytechnics. It represents its members at the national and international levels and is committed to quality education and skills development opportunities for all Canadians to maximize labour market participation and support Canada's prosperity and nurture global citizenship.

Canada's colleges and institutes are major drivers of human capital development in Canada. They are found in over 3,000 communities across Canada, serving 1.5 million Canadians every year, and they offer more than 8,000 different education and training programs leading to formal qualifications tailored to the needs of individual learners. Internationally, they have shared this knowledge and know-how through strong and sustainable institutional partnerships with counterparts in developing countries to help them strengthen skills development capacity and create pathways to employment or self-employment in key economic sectors, including agriculture, health care, renewable energy, natural resources, construction, food processing, fisheries, logistics and tourism, to name but a few. This network of public institutions has also engaged more and more Canadians from big cities and small communities in international development assistance efforts. "Development Days" and reports back from missions in the context of institutional partnerships are routine now and educate and engage not only students and faculty but also the broader community.

For more than forty years, CICan and its member colleges and institutes have been actively engaged internationally in strengthening access to relevant, quality education and training for employment and self-employment, working in partnership with the Government of Canada to implement more than 700 development assistance projects in over 100 countries. Our ***Education for Employment*** approach contributes to sustainable economic and social development in our partner countries by supporting governments, institutions and the private sector to collaborate in providing learning that is relevant to local skills demand and that leads to employment and self-employment for youth, greater gender equality, green economic growth and poverty reduction.

CICan believes that the **institutional partnership approach** that grounds all our Education for Employment (EFE) programs is an effective strategy for bringing about comprehensive and sustainable change to education and training systems in the development context (see Fig. 3 below). Setting up technical partnerships by twinning education and training institutions in Canada and developing countries has long been our core approach to ensure effective knowledge sharing and adaptation of Canadian expertise. Our EFE programs integrate further partnerships with ministries of labour, education and specific economic sectors, education and training authorities, private sector employers and associations and local community or civil society groups—all in support of the overarching goal of creating pathways to decent employment.

Institutional partnerships deliver good program management results on many fronts. They create a useful mechanism for direct private sector involvement. They allow government partners to ensure an alignment between institution-level change with broad reform policies or strategies. They create strong linkages between individuals and organizations that support effective knowledge exchange, continuous follow-up of activities and the effective coordination of a systems-based approach to education reform. We have seen how they can minimize certain project risks, such as the unexpected departure of key individuals. We have also observed that this approach is effective at mobilizing unforeseen institutional expertise and contributions beyond the planned and funded project outputs. Finally, in several countries, including Brazil, China and Senegal, initial partnerships have developed into decades-long relationships.

Because of the results of these international activities, CICan has also been selected as the **UNESCO-UNEVOC** Pan-Canadian Centre and lead for North America, and as chair of the **World Federation of Colleges and Polytechnics** (WFCP). This is also because the Canadian college and institute system is now viewed by many around the world as one of the two models, along with the German/Swiss apprenticeship system, most relevant to developing countries in the process of reviewing their education and training systems.