

»» Vocational education and training in a fragile context

No. 12, 08. November 2018



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Fragile statehood and violent conflicts pose a central obstacle to development in many places and are closely related to poverty. Fragile contexts are defined as situations in which the state has only a limited monopoly on the use of force, is unable to provide basic social services and lacks legitimacy.

In 2030, the World Bank estimates that half of all people living in poverty will be exposed to a fragile environment. In contexts like these, vocational education and training can make an important contribution to stabilisation and economic development.

Vocational education and training is more than just teaching skills for the workplace

Vocational education and training should be understood as an integrated process in which both “soft” and “hard” skills, knowledge, competencies and attitudes are taught. It aims to improve livelihoods by facilitating integration into the workforce, promoting opportunities for participation in society and strengthening individual income opportunities and scope for action.

Fragility is a permanent phenomenon and requires structural concepts

In highly fragile contexts, humanitarian and transitional aid approaches have so far dominated the field of vocational education and training. These include short courses in manual skills combined with “livelihoods training” and “life skills training”, which are generally geared to achieving short-term effects. So far, few evaluations of these measures have been undertaken. The available results raise doubts about the long-term effectiveness of these trainings. In addition, unintended effects can also

occur if the training does not directly lead to better employment opportunities for the target group and frustration arises as a result. These findings suggest that selective immediate measures are not sufficient to foster a robust development process in fragile contexts.

Instead, long-term stabilisation and conflict prevention requires not only the restoration of statehood with a range of public services and a reliable framework for action under public law, but also above all economic development, including solid qualifications for people in their professional lives.

Vocational training as an integrated approach

The scientific and practical findings to date suggest some basic recommendations for vocational training and education in fragile contexts:

Increased use of structural approaches to enable more intensive support for young people and offer them adequate training at a quality level relevant to the labour market. This requires an integrated approach that includes psychosocial well-being and qualifications such as literacy, language skills, human rights, etc., in addition to the actual vocational education and training.

In addition, it would be useful to link vocational education and training with projects to rebuild and revive the economy in order to create jobs. Integrated funding enables practically relevant vocational education and training to be offered in line with demand. This also gives rise to opportunities for formalising or recognising vocational qualifications and improving the quality of work processes.

In countries with a high level of informal economic activity, employment promotion and vocational training inevitably have to address the informal sector. That can mean different things: on the one hand, the separation between formal and non-formal vocational education and training must be eliminated. This requires recognition of existing knowledge and skills and permeability of school and companies. On the other hand, it may mean that a vocational school is used as a “technology centre”, where the people active in the local informal sector can either attend training courses and take advantage of workshops, or find a forum for presenting and networking its services.

Conclusion

In view of the lasting nature of crises and fragile conditions, it is becoming increasingly important to resolve the dichotomy between emergency aid and development cooperation and to work with long-term structural approaches to vocational education and training. In fragile contexts, sustainable vocational education and training should be seen as part of a broad strategy of stabilisation, peace-building and resilience. It can help people to acquire technical skills and expand their capacity for action in a professional sense and to reintroduce peaceful “normality”. A combination of employment promotion and economic development can create prospects for a better future, provided that productive employment is created in the long term. This in turn requires the sustainable development of the labour market in the country affected. Otherwise, even with integrated approaches, there is the danger that no lasting effect will be achieved. ■