

PRIVATE TVET IN AFRICA: UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT AND MANAGING ALTERNATIVE FORMS CREATIVELY!

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ABSTRACT

Since the 1990s, there has been a growing sense from both national policymakers and international agencies of the importance of private Technical and Vocational Education and Training and skills provision in all regions. This pri-VET sector both through traditional apprenticeship forms and more formal sector oriented approaches have become an essential feature of the contemporary landscape. It is, however, a sector that is largely undocumented and its regulation is thus based on a less than nuanced understanding of its contribution to both the education and training system in general and as a complement to public TVET provisioning. The paper will seek to identify key features of the key trends of what is known about private TVET provision in Africa with a view to understanding the complexity of provision forms and its current importance in the region. It is argued that for this 'unconventional education and training' form to take its place in national systems, there is a need for more rigorous research of the sector to ensure that it is able to take its rightful place in national systems. It is expected that this will enable a more thorough examination of regulatory mechanisms used by governments.

Keywords: *private education, technical and vocational education and training, African education and training.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 1990s, there has been a growing sense from both national policymakers and international agencies of the importance of private skills provision as a complement to public provisioning forms (Atchoarena & Esquieu, 2002; Bennel, 2000). It is clear that while much of this information is derived from anecdotal evidence, the available information provided in this paper suggests that the sector is robust. However, much more will need to be understood about the sector before rigorous regulatory systems can be affected which will enable the sector to serve as an effective complementary skills development component. The current evidential basis is often still far too thin to meaningfully enable effective regulation which will serve national developmental objectives. This paper provides some insights into current private TVET systems with a view to establishing a more effective regulatory systems with a much more clearly defined evidential base.

While it is clear that the paper's objectives are considerably expansive, it is expected that the trend analysis offered here will enable individual countries to re-examine their current systems. 'Private' is distinguished from the 'public' by virtue of a funding regime that requires fees to be obtained largely from users – which may either be students or other private funders largely outside of the remit of public systems (Tomlinson, 2011). In this regard, while semi-private forms exist, the distinctiveness of public and private forms remain intact in many contexts. The alternative forms referred to in this paper provide insight into the various 'non-state provisioning forms (conventionally referred to as the private sector), which includes 'for-profit' private entities, 'in-house' industry training centres and non-governmental entities that provide Technical and Vocational Education and Training (Johanson & Adams, 2004).

It is argued that the contribution of this sector has not been adequately understood or realised because of the data gaps present. While it is equally possible that this is so because it has not been taken seriously as an alternative education and training form, I argue that much more needs to be done to enable the sector to be understood more effectively to ensure that it is able to respond meaningfully to national development imperatives. Without decrying the essential importance of public provisioning forms as a primary responsibility of government in association with private economic sectors nationally, it is contended that the private sector needs to be realistically evaluated on the basis of its potential contribution as a meaningful complement to public provisioning forms in support of national development objectives. It is also contended that an effective, credible and co-ordinated national regulatory system will provide the necessary recognition and acceptance of the sector as a legitimate component of the national education and training system.

The paper will seek to identify key features of what is known about pre-VET provisioning in Africa with a view to understanding the complexity of provision forms and its current importance in the region and implications for its regulation and management. It is argued that for this 'unconventional education and training' form to take its place in national systems, there is a need for more rigorous research and understanding in the sector to ensure that it is able to take its rightful place in national systems.

Using current information from national and international sources, the paper reviews what is known about the sector, identifying key trends regarding size, shape and key

regulatory features utilised in different African contexts. The paper begins with a brief methodology section identifying key features of the literature utilised and the methodology employed to source relevant information. This is followed by an overview of the key features of pri-VET systems in Africa, followed by the implications of this work to its management and regulation.

2. METHODOLOGY

In private Technical and Vocational Education and Training (pri-VET) studies, definitional challenges represent an important component of any attempt to understand the complex nature of its provisioning. Conventional notions of TVET represented a starting point for understanding the sector. The *2001 UNESCO and ILO Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education* points out that, “TVET is ...a comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences, and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life” (UNESCO and ILO, 2002). The ‘Revised Recommendation’ understands Technical and Vocational education as:

- (a) an integral part of general education;
- (b) a means of preparing for occupational fields and for effective participation in the world of work;
- (c) an aspect of lifelong learning and a preparation for responsible citizenship;
- (d) an instrument for promoting environmentally-sound sustainable development;
- (e) a method of facilitating poverty alleviation.

It includes “aspects of education that are technical and vocational in nature, provided either in educational institutions or under their authority, by public authorities, the private sector or through other forms of organized education, formal or non-formal, aiming to ensure that all members of the community have access to the pathways of lifelong learning” (*ibid*).

Such a comprehensive vision makes TVET qualitatively different from general education systems, which mainly consist of the brick and mortar reality of institutional contexts associated as they are with conventional schools, colleges and universities, in which age and educational level provide the determining feature of provisioning. In addition, the distinctions between private and public TVET forms are quite tenuous in light of the very different perspectives and premises upon which each of them operates. They differ quite substantially in terms of learners, *modus operandi* and provisioning structures. In addition to the absence of an institutional base, in the case of private TVET in particular, there is often a more determined link with skills-level provisioning which surpasses age or formal educational qualifications. Access is based on experience or aptitude which serve as a primary mechanism for initial or further training.

The methodology employed in understanding this quite complex sector was underpinned by considerations of what individual countries considered constituted private versus public forms. In general, the search for information, which began with an overview of the UNESCO UNEVOC website, was followed by a search of keywords in major academic databases which included, ‘private’, ‘Non-formal’ and ‘informal’ TVET. All of these terms incorporated the reality that these essentially ‘non-state’ private forms need to be

conceptualized outside of the ‘brick and mortar’ reality of most public provision forms, as they occur in spaces that are necessarily outside of the ‘classroom’.

2.1 An Overview of the Private-Public TVET Agenda: Literature Contextualised

Managing the relationship between state and private provision forms has been characterised by the need of the state in ensuring that it is a complementary actor in achieving wider national development goals. This is of course complicated by the roles and responsibilities of private provision forms which have to rely on a profit motive to ensure its sustainability. Ensuring the right mix of national development, together with profitability (and sustainability) must serve as the key to an effective and vibrant private education and training sector.

Clearly, the key element of an effective system is ensuring that the strengths of each of the sectors are emphasised. The domination of supply-side publicly funded TVET forms has been identified (Atchoarena & Esquieu, 2002; Middleton, Ziderman, & Adams, 1993) as has the profit motive of private skills development initiatives. Clearly, the key element of the shortcomings of both needs to be managed in a way that benefits those desperately in need of skills. For the public sector, the need to ensure a balance between supply and demand side elements can be realised by effective engagement with the private sector without compromising the profit-driven (and sustainability) imperatives. While for the private sector, the need to ensure that vulnerable students are not duped into ineffective marketing that does nothing to improve their livelihoods is clearly important and necessary.

Historically the private sector has occupied a significant place in the provision of TVET skills. Indeed, private and public vocational providers arrived relatively late in the industrial era, often as the result of concerns about the (in) effectiveness of national systems to cater for the needs of industries (see for instance (Atchoarena & Delluc, 2001). Governments were, and are still, wary about how much to invest in the private sector in light of the benefits accrued to the individuals involved in it. Concerns related to access and equity of those least likely to afford the costs of private provision forms meant that governments were forced into state provisioning forms that left institutions less likely to be responsive to labour markets. However, issues related to national competitiveness, which required a ready and capable workforce at hand for attracting investment from abroad, were less likely to have been realised by a moribund state-inspired education and training systems. Thus, even where confidence was placed into exclusive and extensive national public vocational education and training systems, the role of private employers, of religious (and other not-for-profit providers) organisations, and of private-for-profit skills providers often remained important. Yet, in many countries, such private access to skills development was not only not recognised by the state but they were even expressly discouraged.

The move to advancing the cause of private TVET forms had been espoused in the latter part of the 20th Century. In their landmark treatise on ‘Skills with productivity’, more than two decades ago, Middleton, Ziderman & Van Adams have forcefully contended that,

...the challenge is to move from policies dominated by social and supply objectives and programs funded and provided by governments to policies and programs that respond to market forces and promote employer and private training and establish appropriate complementary and supportive roles for the state ((Middleton, Ziderman, & Adams, 1993, p. 253)

The path for legitimating a sector for what was considered a ‘for-profit’ imperative in light of the quite expansive national training needs was clearly not easy to justify. In addition, muted acceptance led to the emergence of a very diverse sector as the following suggests:

...private providers have emerged in an uncoordinated and unmonitored fashion. In the absence of proper regulation in most countries, very little is known about the nature and operation of these entities. (Atchoarena, 2002, p. 20)

This extensive upsurge made it difficult for the state to regulate the new sector, which still makes it difficult for the sector to take its place as a legitimate complement to public provision. The third UNESCO TVET Congress held in Shanghai, PRC on ‘Transforming TVET’, reinforces this lack of attention to the sector and calls forcefully for a new policy orientation with the following justification:

...(TVET) requires a new policy orientation. It implies changes in the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. It also involves a paradigm shift that includes the active involvement of relevant actors, such as industry. Indeed, there is a trend towards enlarged stakeholder involvement that brings ministries of education, workers’ associations, civil society and private industry together in the planning, design, delivery and governance of TVET. In such a context, the role of government is changing. While it used to be seen as a provider of TVET, it is now acting as a regulator, setting standards for training and employment. (UNESCO, 2012)

The call for some considered re-orientation identified by this report from the role of government as a provider to a regulator therefore requires considerable understanding of the way in which the sector is organised and currently established. Something that is still somehow lacking. The evidence base for understanding is ‘patchy’ at the least. If one accepts the management adage that ‘...what gets measured gets managed’ suggests that if less is known about the sector, the likelihood of understanding its true contribution is likely to be muted. A clearly defined understating of the sector is called for with a clearer understanding of its key premises and promises called for.

Data gaps regarding private TVET provision forms have to be a starting for ensuring that the private and public TVET system works in sync and before an effective regulatory system is introduced. It requires understanding the diversity in the sector much more coherently. In addition, evidence that suggests that with education already comprising almost 4.25 percent of GDP (around USD 2.7 trillion), the share of private education in areas underserved by public providers are likely to increase significantly (McKinsey & Co., 2012). The importance of understanding the sector is, therefore, vital to establishing a framework that tries to make sense of it.

2.2 Pri-VET Provisioning in Africa: An Overview of Key Features

The private sector is clearly a substantial component of the overall education and training in Africa as this cursory assessment of its size and shape based on current evidence. Thus the various forms that make up private provision are quite diverse in both structure and functioning, and thus stands outside of the conventional wisdom of the theoretical teacher-student relationship in a ‘classroom setting’. It is clear that comparisons between public and private and even between private forms themselves is quite difficult, and renders cross

national considerations very complex. It is clear that what can be discerned are trends based on the best empirical evidence available. This is not to say that the one cannot learn from the other, or that they cannot work together and forge sustainable partnership bonds. It does mean, however, that there is a need for caution when making simplistic comparisons based on enrolment, programme costs or programmes types.

An overview of the size and extent of the sector is undertaken after initial definitional clarity, followed up by some key Pri-VET provisioning forms. The implications for how the sector is to be understood, and perhaps more importantly, to be responded to is then discussed.

2.3 Definitional Considerations: Understanding Pri-VET in Africa

TVET systems in Africa differ from country to country, delivered as they are at different levels in different types of institutions, including technical and vocational schools (both public and private), polytechnics and enterprises (Kirchberger, 2008). As a result of this definitional imprecision, pri-VET exists precariously between schooling and traditionally higher (or university) education, with apprenticeships a key feature of provisioning. As a result, uniform data on TVET in the region has been problematic. A UNESCO Report on statistical information on TVET has noted that, “Whilst a holistic vision of TVET is welcome, and it is consistent with the lifelong learning agenda, this vision presents both conceptual and administrative challenges to education planners, and statisticians in particular (especially), when it comes to monitoring progress” (UNESCO, 2006, p. 1). The same report also notes the reality of the ‘complex and multifaceted nature of TVET’ which is regarded as having been “...not organised as a ‘system’ per se”, perhaps, because it includes state, non-governmental and private providers, each with differing interests, administrative structures and traditions. Perhaps more importantly, it would be true to say of pri-VET provisioning that, like its public counterpart, it often overlaps awkwardly with school and tertiary education systems. In this sector particularly, Ministries of Education often share (and contest) responsibility for TVET policy and practise with Ministries of Labour and/or Employment among others (Holmes, 2003, p. 2).

2.4 Size and Shape

Current evidence suggests a robust pri-VET sector in considerable parts of Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa. It is likely that as countries grapple with the sector, they move up the value chain of higher data transparency which enables a complete understanding of their private sectors. There is evidence that the private sector is becoming increasingly robust in most of Africa.

Some have considerable incidences of private provision. In Uganda, for instance, the 144 public institutions are complemented by over 600 private training service providers and an unknown number of apprenticeships and enterprise based training providers (Schroeter, 2008). The sector comprises more than 80 percent of trainees (World Bank, 2010). Similarly, data from the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) suggests that most (84%) vocational training centres are non-public in Tanzania, where public institutions account for only 8 percent of the total number (VETA, 2010). The non-state sector is made up of enterprise-based training (22 percent), for-profit institutions (35 percent) and the church/NGO providers (31 percent). In the same vein, the Malawian pri-VET sector has more

than three times the number of learners enrolled in the public sector, with many programmes offered by these providers comprising short courses.

The differential size is also characterised by quite different institutional structures. While enrolment in some countries is characterised by a few providers with large numbers, there are also cases with a large number of smaller institutions. In Swaziland, there were 2 501 students for the 26 private training institutions in 2008 (World Bank, 2010, p. 66). Importantly, in this case the seven of the providers that had total enrolments exceeding 200 learners, even exceeded those of some public institutions. Indeed, one private provider, with 324 learners, was comparable to the largest public institution (*ibid*). On the other hand, Zimbabwe had over 300 private training institutions in 2010. An earlier report estimated more than 100 000 students were ‘enrolled on courses at registered PSTIs (Private Skills Training Institutions), when the entire public system comprised an enrolment of 35 000- a feature which leads to the conclusion that, “In short, therefore, private sector training provision has become a mass phenomenon (*ibid*.)”

Different provision forms are evident throughout the length and breadth of the continent. In West Africa, traditional apprenticeship offers the largest opportunity for the acquisition of employable skills in the non-state informal sector. In Ghana, the same informal sector accounts for more than 90 percent of all skills training in the country. Palmer (2005) suggests that more than 80% of basic skills training take place through traditional apprenticeships, with only 5–10% taking place in public training institutions and 10–15% takes place in private training institutions, with the Catholic Church being the single largest private provider. In this instance, there are an estimated 500 private establishments¹ of diverse quality that enrol over 100 000 students (Kirchberger, 2008). In 2006, the Church launched a comprehensive policy for technical and vocational training in its 58 institutions that at the time enrolled about 10 000 students. Non-formal training in Ghana, defined as training which takes place outside the education system, is provided principally by community organisations and NGOs (Botchie & Ahadzie, 2004, p. 18).

In some cases, the size and shape of the sector have been affected by the introduction of regulatory mechanism. In Botswana, for instance it was reported that 121 institutions were identified by the task team, of which 85 were registered with the Ministry and another 53 of these were known to be operating in 2009. A report into the size of the sector was to conclude that the sector was “...very dynamic, full of uncertainties and fragile due to the vagaries of the market” (Mudariki, Malikongwa, Kgosi, & Weeks, 1997, p. 15). Similarly, in South Africa, earlier estimates which cited a total enrolment in private FET of 706 884 learners for the 864 FET providers registered with the national Department of Education (DoE) at 4178 delivery sites (Akoojee, 2003; Akoojee, 2005; McGrath & Akoojee, 2010), was later moderated down. Estimates by the registering authority recorded that there were 36 private institutions with around 58 737 registered students for formal and non-formal qualifications including short and full time courses, with a further 326 registrations currently being processed (UMALUSI, 2010).

Registration provides an important mechanism for estimating the size and shape of the sector. In Mauritius, there were 554 private training providers registered with the Mauritius Qualifications Authority (MQA), with less than one-tenth (50) estimated to be in the

¹ Government TVET institutions include 23 technical institutes under the Ministry of Education with enrolment of about 19000 students and 38 National Vocational Training Institutes run by the Ministry of Manpower Development and Employment

company in-house training centres with the remainder primarily focused on information studies and management training². Little information is available for Mozambique as a result of the lack of a regulatory framework, while there 14 registered private providers in the Seychelles. While in Zambia, public TVET provision is at 18 percent, while Church/NGO and for-profit providers take up 36 percent. In this case, an estimated 60% of junior secondary school leavers (i.e. those not continuing in school) enter apprenticeships (OECD, 2008), while 19% of the working age population has previously undertaken an apprenticeship, with a further 7% in apprenticeships (Monk, Sandefur, & Teal, 2008).

In some countries, while there is a distinct lack of national data, there is awareness of a growing private sector provision. Thus, while there is little data of private provisioning in Lesotho, there are reports of a significant presence of faith-based institutions. In Malawi and Namibia, amidst reports of the paucity of aggregate data, some reports suggest that there is an increasing number of providers offering foreign qualifications, such as City and Guilds and Pittman.

2.5 Programme Characteristics

Programmes are similarly diverse in the continent for different reasons. The lack of regulation, for instance, results in private providers having greater autonomy over programme design. This is likely in some instances to have resulted in considerable links to industry needs. This was particularly pertinent in Botswana, where pri-VET programme provision trends in Africa ‘concentrate on “light” vocational skills in business, commercial and service subjects because of the high capital costs involved in providing more industrial-type skills’ (Johanson & Adams, 2004, p. 55). Evidence from Senegal and Mali (Atchoarena & Esquieu, 2002), Zimbabwe (Bennel, 2000) and Botswana (Mudariki, Malikongwa, Kgosi, & Weeks, 1997) confirm this finding. Several countries in sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland and Zimbabwe) note a predominance of programmes in particular commercial occupations (for example Accounting, Business, Commerce and Information Technology). Most of the 175 courses offered by private providers in Swaziland were, for instance, in the fields of business (45.1 percent) and IT (23.4 percent) (World Bank, 2010, p. 66). Crucially and perhaps understandably programmes that required lower levels of investment and which offered better returns³ were those offered by the private sector. In Botswana, much enterprise-based training takes place in the service industry, e.g., customer services and care (SADC/UNESCO, 2011).

The World Bank’s ‘African strategy to revitalise TVET in Africa’ also reinforces the reality that in some countries, notion of ‘soft skills’ includes ‘in addition to business’, “...service sector skills like secretarial practice, cookery, and dressmaking...” (African Union, 2007, p. 7).

In South Africa, there is a significant ICT sector which reinforces the view that the sector is ideally positioned to serve as the primary delivery mechanism for this area of provisioning (Akoojee, Arends, & Roodt, 2007). Similarly, in the Seychelles, six of the 14 private registered providers, were in occupational skills, mainly in ICT and human resources, while in Mauritius, private providers operate in programmes which reportedly, “...requires limited equipment, for cost reasons.” (ILO, 2010, p. 7). In addition to the National Training

² . The figure quoted in the ILO report is 347, but there is a suggestion in a disclaimer this might not be correct (ILO, 2010, p. 7).

³ It is likely that these definitions of private have not taken account of in-company artisanal training forms.

Certificate, private providers offer ‘non-award courses’ in Agriculture, Beauty Care and Hairdressing, Engineering, Health and Safety, Hotel and Tourism, Information Technology, Management, Office Skills, Textile and Design (*ibid*).

In-company or enterprise-based training is dedicated to the sharpening of specific skills of company employees. Curricula design is specifically linked with the needs of the company, which in South Africa is used for training for technological improvements and ad hoc productivity advances.

Instances of informal training are evident in West and East Africa, where provisioning is associated with being much more diverse, underpinned by a rationale that requires provisioning to be ‘hands on’, with a practical, rather than a theoretical component. More traditional-type apprenticeships in Ghana are centred in the family business or community structure (Botchie & Ahadzie, 2004), which incorporates ‘moral upbringing’ as well as the transfer of practical skills (Haan, 2001, p. 120). The length of training range from one year and eleven (11) months (in fishing/hunting/forestry) to three-and-a-half years (in Mechanics) (Ghana Statistical Services, 2008). Here, textiles, apparel and furnishing apprenticeships are the most popular, representing 36% of the total number; followed by building (15%) and personal/grounds service (14%) (*ibid*). Most apprentices are self-employed or work in small firms, highlighting their importance in the informal sector (Monk, Sandefur, & Teal, 2008).

Like their public counterpart, pri-VET provision patterns are gendered. Information available suggest that traditional gender-based training patterns exist. In South Africa, for instance, female students predominate in dressmaking, hairdressing, and cookery. The uncomfortable link between gender and is evident by the perception that, “...female-dominated programmes are associated with those less-capable...which are associated with girls - very often girls who are less gifted academically (African Union, 2007, p. 8). Similarly in Benin, the gender perspective is evidenced by the view that, “...such (predominantly female dominated) programmes are maligned as those referred to the “c” option of the secondary school curriculum: la serie “c” – couture, coiffure, cuisine!” (*ibid*)

With respect to location, the urban bias of Pri-VET is clearly evident where data exists. In South Africa more around two-thirds of all private providers were located in the three large metropolises (Akoojee, 2003; Akoojee, 2005), while in Swaziland, 17 of the 26 providers were located in the urban areas of Mbabane or Manzini (World Bank, 2010).

2.6 Governance characteristics

Broad Pri-VET governance trends suggest that oversight responsibility is shared between the ministries responsible for education (or technical education) and labour (or employment). Some vocational training programmes fall under specialised Ministries, for instance in agriculture, health or transport (Kirchberger, 2008). Several countries (including South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mauritius, Namibia and Tanzania) require private providers to register with the Ministry or with the relevant TVET agency.

There are two strands of governance evident in the pri-VET sector where they exist, a unified and diversified governance structure. A unitary structure which allows control of the whole TVET system under a central body. In Namibia, Tanzania and Zambia, the established TVET agencies are acknowledged as being responsible for coordination across public and private TVET provision. The National Council for Technical Education (NACTE)

(Tanzania), the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) (Tanzania) and TEVETA (Zambia) are responsible for TVET development and quality assurance of all TVET qualifications. A wider unitary structure is also implemented in some countries where sector-wide coordination agencies have been proposed for Swaziland and Mozambique. In Mauritius, the Industrial and Vocational Training Board (IVTB), established in 1988 was in control of the whole TVET system. The legislative responsibility translates in practice into this structure serving as both a provider and registering authority. As a result, concerns related to it being both a referee and player, with the private sector struggling to compete abound. As a result of a review by the ILO leading to the regulatory functions being transferred outside of the IVTB, when it was left managing the National Trade Certification System through technical and vocational training centres which provided training (ILO, 2010).

Wherever diversified regulation exists, the implementation of a coherent TVET system has been constrained by overlap, duplication and a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities. In these countries, there are separate agencies responsible for the private TVET structure and management of its qualifications. In Malawi and Botswana, the Departments of Labour and Education have maintained responsibility for trade tests and craft qualifications, whilst the newly established TVET agency is focused on developing new unit standard based occupational qualifications and has accrediting their delivery. The Botswana Training Authority (BOTA) is responsible for qualifications offered by private and employer-based providers. In South Africa, governance of private FET providers is split between registration carried out by the Department of Higher Education and Training⁴, and their accreditation to deliver qualifications by the relevant awarding bodies, UMALUSI and the SETAs, under auspices of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), charged with the responsibility of establishing the National Qualifications Framework and especially its quality imperatives. The structure is quite bureaucratically cumbersome for those providing skills to the most vulnerable and serves as a powerful disincentive in this regard (McGrath & Akoojee, 2010).

3. LESSONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The rapid expansion of the pri-VET sector and the international context supporting its legitimisation has, in part, resulted in a need for formal acceptance of the sector. This represents a starting point for engagement with the sector. It reaffirms the reality that a striking theme in TVET reforms across the region for the past twenty years has been a shared commitment to incorporating private providers within a national TVET framework (SADC/UNESCO, 2011). However, we are indeed far from a complete understanding of the sector to enable it to take its rightful place as a complement to public TVET provisioning. Key issues that a more nuanced understanding of the sector will enable relates to the need to ensure quality improvement, diversity of provisioning and its ability to expand labour market opportunities. While this might well be the reason for the way in which some countries have managed and governed the private sector, there is little evidence to explain how these governance mechanisms have been arrived at.

⁴ This was formerly a competence of a single Department of Education, prior to the separation from Department of Basic education (DBE).

There is consensus within and outside the private sector that regulation is necessary for the very survival of the sector⁵. While the need to secure learner protection is clearly acknowledged, it has been challenged on the basis that the state is likely to be the one least able to provide it. The excessive bureaucracy associated with regulation, once it is introduced, suggests that there is a need for some degree of circumspection about the nature of its implementation. Importantly, the reason for the reluctance is that regulation requires considerable expense and governments have not been able to commit adequate attention and/or resources to the sector to enable adequate attention. It is clear that it is necessary to understand the complexities of the sector so as to enable those providers least able to afford the costs that regulation implies, and afford the resources to submit to its rigours. This tends to have negative consequences for the learners of these providers, who could be considered most vulnerable to exploitation. In addition, the warning against ‘over regulation’ is also important. The appropriate balance between protection and over-regulation needs to be established to ensure that appropriate incentives are in place to ensure its sustainability.

Self-regulation by private provider associations represents an important mechanism in the regulatory space. The possibilities of establishing such a national structure provide an important mechanism for the advancement of the sector, while it is able to use the power of sanction for that undermine it within its ranks. Evidenced in Uganda suggests some promising lessons, while the South African example reflects inadequate attention to the possibilities that the structure is capable of, despite its robust official status.

The different regulatory forms evident in the unitary and fractured systems identified above suggest that regulation is a result of formal political legitimation. In many countries, the establishment of a regulatory environment has provided the basis for formally engaging with the sector. However, while it provided the basis for their existence, at the same time, it enabled some degree of control over its direction. While this was not always positive, regulation does represent the first step to accomplishing two important principles, which are mutually supportive of, and yet in contradiction to, the limited ‘free rein’ hitherto enjoyed by private providers. On the one hand, it recognises in principle, the existence of the sector, and on the other, gets the sector to respond to priorities considered appropriate from a national perspective. These twin effects of regulation work for the benefit of the sector but to learners primarily, which is consistent with the needs of providers and the state. While providers are protected from the negative effects of unscrupulous providers, learners are ensured of their ‘consumer’ rights in return for the legitimacy that can be afforded to registered providers.

4. CONCLUSION

The benefits of the pri-VET sector have been lauded on the basis of its responsiveness to a labour market to which it purports to understand, both through traditional apprenticeship forms and more formal sector oriented approaches. Yet, relatively little is known about the complex nature of private skills provisioning and ways it can contribute to wider national skills delivery systems. The challenges still faced by policymakers is related to the unwieldy and unnecessary bureaucracy conventionally associated with it as it tries to wrestle with the prerogatives of regulation, while still ensuring that those most vulnerable are not exploited. In this regard, it is necessary for the sector to be understood outside of the brick and mortar

⁵ It has already been argued that the need to regulate and guarantee market access, while at the same time preventing obstacles to the freedom of capital represents the ‘central contradiction in the neo-liberal doctrine...’ (Jessop, 1999).

reality of public provision forms. For this to happen, much more research needs to be undertaken about the sector as it takes its place in national education and training systems. The paper calls for more research into national systems as it grapples with challenges of expanding its skills development responsibility to enable a sector long referred to as a 'black box' of education and training systems.

Understanding, and using this understanding, to categorise different provision forms represents an important starting point to use the sector as a complement to public TVET provisioning. It therefore represents a starting point for regulation that is both responsive and capable of inserting the national prerogatives of access, redress and equity necessary for its acceptance into national development systems.

It is argued that understanding the different pri-VET and skills provision forms has to be a first step in ensuring that more appropriate national responses are crafted. This paper has provided insight into the broad features of private TVET provisioning in Africa, with some indication of how some governments have sought to regulate it. In an effort to enable learning across contexts, the tentative conclusions drawn need to be understood in the context of the ambitious scope and coverage of this paper. Being continental in focus, and noting that widely differing provision forms exist in different contexts, there is likelihood that national nuances have been glossed over. While it is likely that definitional imprecision, together with, or as a result of, data paucity, suggest that more cross-national work is necessary to arrive at more considered conclusions. The paper, therefore, represents a starting point for a more substantive understanding of the sector in national contexts to refine current regulatory systems to ensure that the sector responds to features that the public sector is currently unable or unwilling to invest.

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