

OPEN EDUCATION RESOURCES (OER) FOR YOUTH EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS TRAINING IN AFRICA (YESTA) COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE (COP) 2021 Monitoring Evaluation Reflection & Learning (MERL) Report



Acknowledgements

This report is a product of team effort. It has been compiled and written by the M&E Task Team of the OER for Youth Employability Skills Training in Africa (YESTA) Community of Practice (COP) whose members have been involved in designing the monitoring, evaluation reflection and learning (MERL) framework of the COP and who have also been involved in designing the research instruments, doing the fieldwork, analysing the data and compiling the report.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|------------|--|
| ASPYEE | African Skills Portal for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship |
| AU | African Union |
| AUDA-NEPAD | African Union Development Agency |
| CAPA-ATUPA | Commonwealth Association of Polytechnics in Africa- Association of Technical Universities and Polytechnics in Africa |
| COP | Community of Practice |
| DTT | Development Task Team |
| GIZ | Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit |
| LMS | Learning Management System |
| M&E | Monitoring and Evaluation |
| MERL | Monitoring, Evaluation, Reflection and Learning |
| MTT | MERL Task Team |
| OER | Open Education Resources |
| QA | Quality Assurance |
| SARAS | Statement Assessment Resources Activities Support |
| SIFA | Skills Initiative for Africa |
| TVET | Technical and Vocational Education and Training |
| YEST | Youth Employment Skills Training |

1 INTRODUCTION

This document reports on the findings of the Monitoring Evaluation Reflection and Learning (MERL) process that was applied to evaluate the work of the Youth Employability Skills Training (YEST) Community of Practice (COP) during the period November 2020 to July 2021. It is accompanied by a MERL Framework document which outlines the research approach, methodology and has all the research instruments appended at the end.

The report includes the following

- **It reiterates the COP's theory of change and logical framework as outlined also in the MERL Framework;**

- **It provides a brief description of the COP, its structure, and key stakeholders;**
- **It provides an overview of the MERL research design;**
- **It reports on the MERL research findings; and**
- **It makes recommendations about the way forward for the COP.**

2 BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE OER FOR YESTA COP

The OER for YESTA COP was established in November 2020 following the findings of a baseline study on youth employability skills development in Africa conducted by the partnership between the Association of Technical Universities and Polytechnics in Africa (CAPA-ATUPA), and Skills Initiative for Africa (SIFA), a programme of the African Union Commission (AUC) and the African Union Development Agency (AUDA-NEPAD) supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). In addition, a webinar hosted by AUDA-NEPAD in May 2020 also confirmed the need for dedicated skills development programmes targeted at developing employability skills among African youth.

2.1 Problem Statement

The feasibility study and webinar mentioned above illuminated the centrality of tackling youth unemployment and the related youth employability skills crisis in Africa which were exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, according to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), three million formal jobs were created in Africa per annum compared to 10 to 12 million youth job market entrants (ILO, 2021). This situation leaves most of the youth unemployed or under-employed in low paying jobs in the informal economy.

Moreover, the baseline study revealed that employees with whom the study engaged, indicated that graduates of education and training institutions were not work-ready which led many employers to invest in retraining fresh job entrants before deploying them gainfully. This skills mismatch is also

attributable to structural and systemic challenges faced by TVET institutions and the national systems in which they are embedded. These systemic challenge manifest as institutional and systemic capacity constraints, pedagogical challenges linked to limited teacher competencies and inadequate learning, teaching and assessment resources, the lack of appropriate digital infrastructural to support remote practical vocational training. These systemic challenges are accompanied by intrinsic barriers faced by African youth.

A recent review of the literature on vocational education and training in Africa (McGrath et al, 2020) also suggest that prevailing theoretical approaches that inform VET interventions do not prepare systems to adequately address the inequalities and exclusions that have emerged in Africa.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated pre-existing systemic inequalities and vulnerabilities in the TVET systems worldwide and among youth. Hard lockdown restrictions included near-universal TVET institutional closures across Africa, which led to further loss of livelihoods, skills, and learning, accompanied by a host of inter-related health, social, economic and mental health challenges. According to Arias, Evans, and Santos (2019) TVET students come from disadvantaged households. They suggest that in Ghana and Kenya, for example, those who attend TVET, compared with those who enter a general education track, tend to come from families with lower socioeconomic status based on a measure of the education levels of their parents. These conditions

heightened concerns about the vulnerability of many countries to long-term learning, skills, and livelihood losses among Africa’s youth.

2.2 COP Goal, Activities & Stakeholders

In response, a partnership between CAPA ATUPA, and AUDA-NEPAD through SIFA led to the formation of the OER for YESTA COP whose primary goal was to source, curate and develop relevant OER that can support African TVET institutions in their attempts at developing youth employability and livelihood skills. Thus the intervention was focused on the pedagogical constraints faced by TVET institutions by contributing relevant and appropriate learning resources to support their training programmes. In this respect the approach to developing OER

as the intervention to address the challenges, stem from an understanding OER can serve as building blocks in the social construction of learning and of open and flexible education practices. Thus, it associates OER with reuse, redistribution, revision, remixing and retention, referred to as the 5Rs by Huang et al., (2020).

The main activities of the YESTA COP were to develop appropriate frameworks that can guide the development of relevant employability skills OERs and integrate monitoring and evaluation in the design of the COP’s activities at the outset. To implement these activities, the YESTA COP engaged with an ecosystem of stakeholders as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. YESTA COP Stakeholders

| | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| COP Partners | CAPA ATUPA: Jahou Faal, Johannes Muoka Kioko |
| | AUDA-NEPAD: Zipho Tshapela, Tiego Legodi |
| | AUC: Mich-Seth Owusu |
| | GIZ-SIFA: Laura Erfen |
| | BUSINESS AFRICA: Stephen Obiro |
| | ATINGI: Dominic Orr |
| COP Expert Team | COP FACILITATOR: Shafika Isaacs |
| | COP SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS: Rachel Mindra, Funmilayo Doherty, Misheck Kalungulungu, Ozioma Ikonne, Salesio Kiura, Stephen Obiro, Buckman Akuffo, Robert Okinda, Angele Messa |
| Programme Beneficiaries | Lecturers/Trainers & Youth enrolled at CAPA ATUPA member institutions |
| | Lecturers/Trainers & Youth enrolled at non-CAPA ATUPA member institutions |
| | Content Providers, Curriculum Specialists, Content Creators |

A key feature of the COP’s structure to carry out its activities, was that it organised itself into four task teams (TT): Analysis TT, Design TT, Development TT and M&E TT. The M&E TT was

responsible for developing a monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning framework which included the development of a theory of change and logical framework for the COP.

3 COP THEORY OF CHANGE & LOGICAL FRAMEWORK

To guide the monitoring, evaluation, reflection and learning (MERL) process of the YESTA COP, the M&E TT developed a programmatic theory of change which later was consolidated into an if-then map as shown in Figure 1. A related logical framework as shown in Figure 2 accompanies the theory of change.

YESTA COP Change Theory: If-then Map

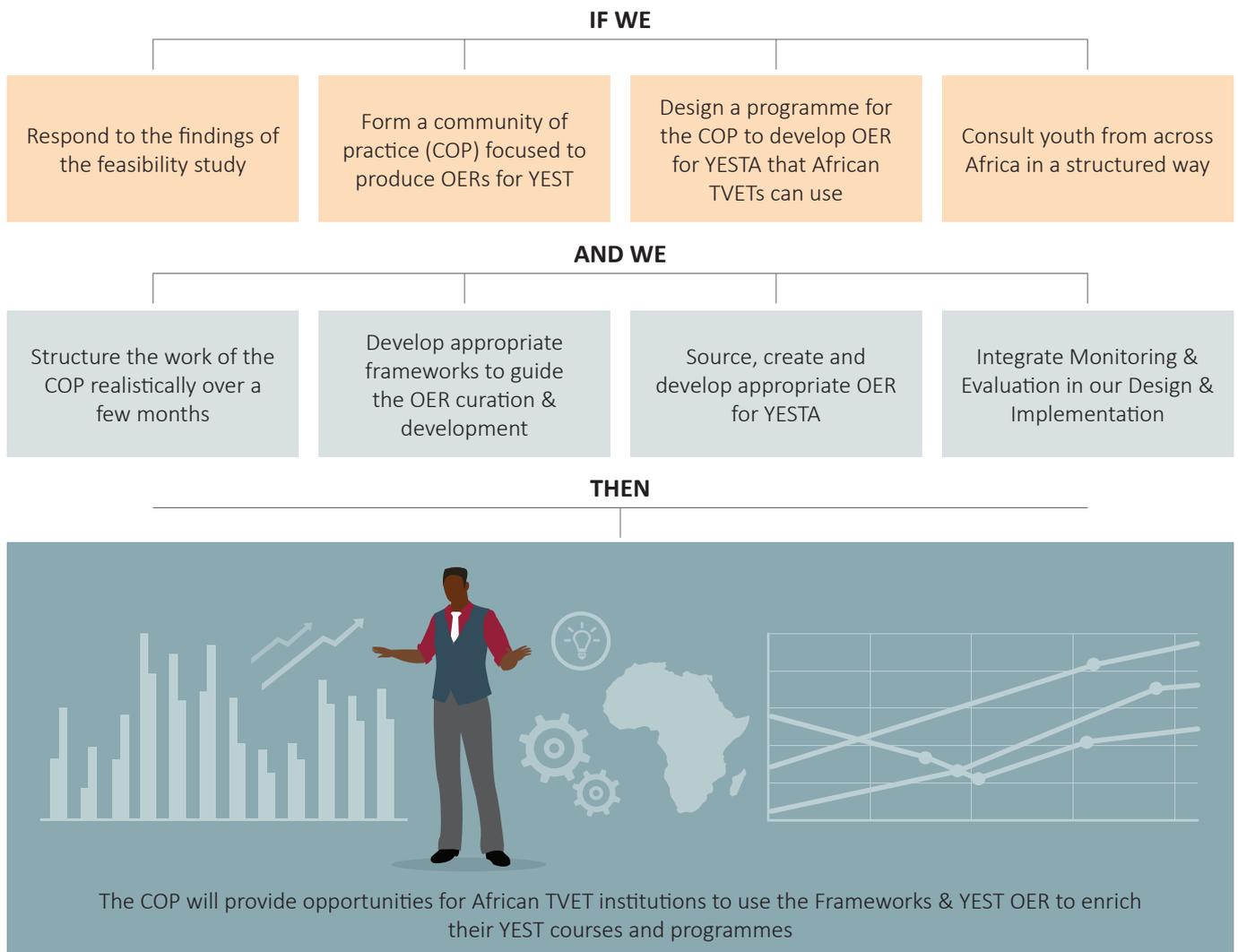


Figure 1. YESTA COP Theory of Change Map

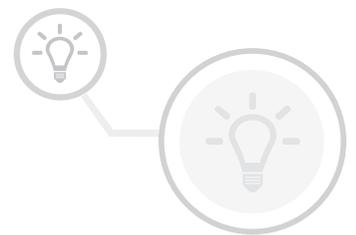
YESTA COP Logical Framework

| INPUTS | ACTIVITIES | OUTPUTS | OUTCOMES |
|---|--|---|--|
| Funding from GIZ Partners CAPA ATUPA AUDA NEPAD GIZ BUSINESS AFRICA ATINGI COP Facilitator COP Experts Co-ordinating Team Task Teams Technology Infrastructure ASPYEE | Develop Frameworks for Youth Employability Skills Training, Course Development & Guidelines for OER Curation Source & Curate OER for YEST Develop OER for YES Monitor, evaluate, reflect & learn on YEST COP as a self-evaluation | Guidelines to source and curate OERs for YEST Youth Employability Skills Framework SARAS Framework MERL Framework 16 YEST OERs available on ATINGI and ASPYEE Knowledge Management Products on ASPYEE & Teams 1 MERL Report & PPT | 20 TVET institutions have access to guidelines on how to source and create OERs and employability skills training curriculum Trainers at 20 TVET institutions have access to guidelines that can support their training on 16 youth employability skills 20 TVET institutions utilize the YEST COP MERL framework and the final report |

Figure 2. Logical Framework

Figures 1 and 2 shows that the intended outcomes were that African TVET institutions would be provided with resources to enable and support their delivery of youth employability skills training programmes and courses. These outcomes will be achieved from the range of outputs that would emerge from

the COP activities. These outputs included the frameworks for youth skills employability training, course development and guidelines for OER sourcing and curation, as well as sourcing and creating 16 OER that would be available as interactive modules on the Atingi portal.



4 MERL RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 Utilization-focused Self Evaluation

To guide its self-evaluation, the COP also agreed to adopt a utilization-focused evaluation (U-FE) based on the work of Patton (2013). U-FE begins with the premise that evaluations should be judged by their utility and actual use; therefore, evaluators should facilitate the evaluation process and design any evaluation with careful consideration of how everything that is done, from beginning to end, will affect use. The focus in utilization-focused evaluation is on the intended use by intended users and is guided by a detailed 17-step checklist from assessing and building readiness for the U-FE through to a meta-evaluation of use.

For Patton (2013), U-FE prioritizes working with intended evaluation users (particularly a project or programme's primary stakeholders) to help them understand the value of reality testing and buy into the process. This consequently reduces the threat to the evaluation and resistance to evaluation use. Utilization focused evaluation is about separating good ideas that work from seemingly good ideas that turn out not to work. Therefore, the potential of the U-FE cannot be realized until it provides the substance of a concrete evaluation problem and situation. During the U-FE evaluation process, evaluators are part of the primary intended users and thus do not operate in isolation from other stakeholders and evaluation users. This implies that the evaluation process is actually owned by the group that negotiated it. Further the focus of negotiations and tradeoffs is driven by the commitment to producing the most useful possible evaluation within the resources and constraints of the situation. In adopting U-FE, the Youth Employability Skills Training (YEST) Community of Practice (COP) has chosen a self-evaluation process that will also be conducted by the primary stakeholders and primary intended users of the evaluation of the COP. This makes the application of U-FE relevant as an approach to guide the utility of the evaluation process and outcomes. Moreover, for the COP the use-value of the evaluation process and outcomes is defined in terms of the way the COP intends to use the evaluation findings and outcomes to improve future YEST designs and future YEST activities of the COP ecosystem partners and experts.

Thus, the COP's MERL design and methodology were planned

and conducted in ways that can ensure that the evaluation process and findings will be useful to its primary stakeholders and that they will also be used by the primary stakeholder to inform decisions and improve the performance of the COP.

4.2 MERL Research Objectives

The objectives of the MERL research were to achieve the following:

1. Describe and analyze the establishment, design and evolution of the Youth Employability Skills Training (YEST) COP;
2. To determine whether the COP has met its goals and objectives;
3. To evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the COP;
4. To describe and analyze the conceptualization, design, and development of the OER for YEST by the COP; and
5. To ascertain the critical lessons that the COP process holds for future COP activities of the CAPA-ATUPA, AUDA-NEPAD and GIZ partnership; and the YEST OER design and development process.

4.3 Research Questions

The overarching anchor questions that guided the MERL research process were

1. How was the COP for YEST in Africa established, and how did it evolve?
2. Has the COP for youth employability skills in Africa met its goals and objectives?
3. What were the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the COP?
4. How were the OER for YEST designed, developed and curated?
5. What were the key lessons of the COP and the OER for YEST?

4.4 Research Methodology

The YESTA COP decided to adopt a qualitative research methodology for the MERL process. Qualitative research allows for studying phenomena in their natural settings and making sense through insights gained from the interpretations of qualitative data gathered through methods such as participant observations, interviews and focus group discussions.

The YESTA COP also established the M& E task (MTT) team

to lead the MERL process as a self-evaluation process. The choice of a self-evaluation process was based on the idea of establishing a collective self-learning culture within the COP. On this basis, the COP also agreed on a participatory approach to conducting a self-evaluation of its work and that the evaluation would assume the form of a formative evaluation. The formative evaluation which is an ongoing process is guided by the theory of change and logical framework of the COP.

Data Collection Methods

The qualitative research methodology included the adoption of a range of data collection methods. These included document reviews, in-depth interviews, focus group discussions with youth beneficiaries, participant observation of COP activities. Document reviews: The MTT established a dedicated team that was responsible for reviewing eight relevant COP-related documents. The documents that were reviewed included COP meeting minutes; concept documents as well as guideline and framework documents that emerged from the COP. The reviews were guided by a document review guideline which is available in Appendix A.

In-depth interviews: Eight in-depth interviews were conducted with the COP members and the project partners. These included four CoP members selected from each task team (Analysis; Design; Development; Evaluation) and all the four development partners (GIZ; CAPA-ATUPA; AUDA- NEPAD ASPYEE portal; ATINGI & HP).

The stakeholders to be interviewed was guided by Greene’s (2006, pp. 397–398) clusters of stakeholders was adopted to select the key stakeholders.

They include

- people who have decision authority over the project funders;
- people who have direct responsibility for COP implementation; and
- beneficiaries of the COP outputs.

With the consent of the respondents, the interviews were conducted virtually and were audio-recorded. An interview schedule was developed that aligned interview questions with the research questions of the MERL Framework. These questions are available in an appendix in the MERL Framework. The beneficiaries were interviewed as a focus group which is explained next.

Focus Group Discussions: Two focus group discussions were held with youth who are registered at CAPA ATUPA member institutions as targeted participants and users of the OER which the COP planned to develop. The questions that guided the focus group discussions are available as an appendix in the accompanying MERL Framework report. The COP has agreed on buying data bundles to allow the youth to participate meaningfully in the focus group discussions. This approach supported by CAPA ATUPA.

Participant Observations: The COP also decided to use participant observation as a research method and strategy to self-learn as a community of practitioners. Three COP members were tasked to develop a set of questions that guided their observation of three COP activities. These include Task Team meetings, meetings of the Co-ordinating Team as well as observing the use of the TEAMS platform by COP members. The questions that guided the participant observations is available in an appendix to the MERL Framework.

The collection of data, data capture, storage and analysis is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Data Sources and Analysis

| RESEARCH METHODS | DATA CAPTURE | DATA STORAGE | DATA ANALYSIS |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Participant Observations | Note Taking, Meeting Minutes and Recordings | All MERL Research Data was stored in the COP TEAMS MERL space | Thematic analysis will be applied manually using Excel, based on coding and categorizing slices of text into themes |
| Interviews & Focus Group Discussions | Virtual meeting recordings | | |
| Document reviews | Note-taking | | |

Data Trustworthiness

The MERL process gathered data from a range of primary and secondary sources as a strategy to enhance the trustworthiness of the data. This triangulation approach served to corroborate data gathered through any one of the methods. It was assumed

that the data sources for the evaluation process are interested in an accurate, high quality, reliable, confirmable and valid evaluation report and will provide relevant information with integrity and sincerity. To counteract any form of bias, evidence was sought for claims made by respondents as far as possible.

5 RESEARCH FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

The data was analysed using thematic analysis mapped against the overarching research questions. The sections below report on the findings and analysis against each of the research questions.

5.1 How was the COP established, and how did it evolve?

The document reviews, interviews and participant observations provided much of the insights to answer this question. The reviewed documents confirmed that the YESTA COP was established by the CAPA-ATUPA and partners GIZ and AUDA-NEPAD through SIFA in November 2020. The COP's establishment was in response to the results of a baseline survey (CAPA-ATUPA, 2020) conducted in technical universities, polytechnics and technical colleges as members of CAPA-ATUPA towards the end of 2019 and in early 2020. The Secretary-General of CAPA-ATUPA stated in an interview that the survey had revealed concerns raised by employers in forums such as Africa Talks Jobs (ATJ) that graduates of education and training institutions were not work-ready. Employers had asserted that oftentimes they had to spend time and resources retraining fresh job entrants before they could deploy them gainfully.

“ *The baseline survey on Employability Skills Training conducted in CAPA-ATUPA member institutions (TVETs) to identify needs and gaps as well as potentials for digital tools in this field, among other things, clearly demonstrates an eagerness to embrace the use of digital tools for Employability Skills Training* ”
- CAPA-ATUPA Secretary General, Ms Jahou Faal

Webinar on Digital & remote learning as a response to COVID-19 and beyond:

A two-part webinar was held in May 2020 on Remote and Digital Learning as a Response to COVID-19 and Beyond, organised by

the ASPYEE team and CAPA-ATUPA. This further revealed major challenges that institutions are battling with at a time when online learning was the only option for continuing education under pandemic restrictions. Among the numerous issues that were mentioned, some stood out such as the constraints by TVET institutions had with the limited availability of relevant digital curriculum content and limited lecture capabilities to teach remotely and via online. Lecturers also lacked skills in content development and were further constrained with being trained remotely on practical vocational skills development (AUDA NEPAD, 2020). It was at the webinar where a consensus emerged that follow-up activities should take shape through the establishment of a Community of Practice (COP). The purpose of the COP was conceived as a facility through which curriculum and relevant digital content would be developed collaboratively to support and enable Youth Employability Skills Training in Africa (YESTA).

Commissioning and operationalization:

The document reviews further revealed that an initial meeting of the COP partners and an expert group of COP members was held on 9 December 2020, when the CoP was duly constituted. At the time COP members were given their first task which involved an initial search for existing OER for youth livelihood and employability skills development in Africa. Members were assigned to conduct their search as a basis for discussion at the subsequent COP meeting on 12 January 2021, thereby ushering the commencement of work and operationalization of the COP.

“ *People who are on board, complement each other nicely. So that's something enabling. And also something exciting. The other side of the coin is that if you work with many people, it takes a bit longer, and it needs a lot of foundation work to create a common understanding of people* ”
Dr Funmilayo Doherty, COP Expert Member

The purpose for forming the COP:

The Concept Note for the YESTA revealed that the COP’s purpose was to deliver a curriculum that can be adapted to the language and respective local conditions by any technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institution in Africa to add value to a course or programme on employability skills. The digitized material will be available as open education resources (OER) in the repository of the AUDA-NEPAD’s African Skills Portal for Youth Employment and Entrepreneurship (ASPYEE) and the atingi portals. The intent is to support TVET institutions in their attempts at developing work-ready individuals who can either join the workforce or become successful entrepreneurs and sustain their livelihoods in ways that are meaningful and inclusive.

Partners agreed to form the COP and to include experts from CAPA-ATUPA and a dedicated facilitator from the partners’ network. To ensure the success of the COP, the expertise mix brought together practitioners in the field of digital and blended learning from the CAPA-ATUPA network, partners and the private sector represented by Business Africa.

“ I was very appreciative of the incredible cooperating open-minded energy in the COP and you know, the fact there is easy communication of individuals and institutions who are familiar with each other having worked together before. ”

Mr Stephen Obiro, Business Africa

The membership included: subject matter experts, instructional designers, system developers, online facilitators, Learning Management System (LMS) administrators and Quality Assurance (QA) and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) experts. TVET students were involved at some point as well. For example, they were involved in moderated webinars, online focus group discussions and interviews during the analysis phase of the work.

The objectives and the key outputs of the CoP were stated in the document reviews and via interviews, as follows:

- Curate OER for Employability Skills Training;
- Developing a Curriculum for Employability Skills Training following the: Analysis-Design-Development-Implementation-Evaluation (ADDIE) approach;
- Developing and/or adapting digital content on Employability Skills Training;
- Delivering a Concept of replication and scaling

and adaptation to local contexts with reference to languages and internet access.

One of the COP experts remarked that:

“ Welcoming remarks from the Chair indicated that the purpose of COP is being followed right from its conceptualization. (i) There was an encouragement to keep on looking to why the COP was formed. There was deliberation on how activities were progressing in various Task Teams. (ii) There was a resolution to remind members to accomplish tasks. (iii) Timelines were discussed and members would be asked to meet deadlines ”

Mr Ozioma Ikonne, COP Expert Member

Organization and distribution of tasks:

The COP formed four Task Teams: Analysis, Design, Development & Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation. These teams met at least once a week and converged as one group every fortnight to monitor progress based on a clearly defined Logical Framework and Theory of Change as spelt out above. A Co-ordinating Team was also established whose role it was to oversee the work of the COP. Co-ordinating Team members were also termed as ‘travellers’ who participated across all four Task Teams and provided guidance with executing and meeting deliverables. Figure 3 illustrates how the COP was structured and the sequencing of its work over time.

| COP Co-ordinating Team | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Weekly Meetings January to July 2021 | | |
| COP | | |
| Fortnightly Meetings January to May 2021. Weekly Meetings May to July | | |
| Analysis Task Team | Design Task Team | Development Task Team |
| Weekly Meetings February to March 2021 | Weekly Meetings March to April 2021 | Weekly Meetings April to July 2021 |
| M&E Task Team | | |
| Weekly Meetings February to July 2021 | | |

Figure 3. YESTA COP Structure

Guidelines, frameworks and theory of change:

A set of guidelines on curating OER was developed based on a shared understanding of the purpose and activities involved in sourcing and curating OERs.

“ *There is a need to support manpower mobility in the continent, there’s a need for a common curriculum to prepare graduates with work-ready skills.* ”

Johannes Muoka Kioko, COP Expert Member

A Theory of Change and the Logical Framework were developed by the Monitoring and Evaluation Team (MTT). This team worked on the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reflection and Learning (MERL) Framework. The main purpose of MERL was to provide a self-evaluation and engaged perspective on the design, implementation and outputs of the OER for YESTA COP.

“ *I think we are on track since we have subject matter experts doing what they are expected to do. I think we will be able to meet the objectives in the timelines.* ”

Rachel Mindra, COP Expert Member

Fortnightly meetings continued to be held providing updates and gathering comments from documents submitted by Task Teams for further inputs and finalization.

All members of the CoP have focused their energies on the one end sourcing appropriate and relevant OER for YESTA and then to integrate the OER as part of a module with clear instructional design guidelines. The Development Task Team (DTT) developed a framework for the integration of OER in the instructional design of dedicated modules related to employability skills development. They developed a Statement Assessment Resources Activities Support (SARAS) framework to guide this process.

The DTT aggregated the work into the storyboard and after guiding smaller task teams to write up the course module descriptions, developing assessment items and writing up the conclusions, they uploaded the final product first on the atingi portal. To date some work is still needed for the OER to be uploaded on ASPYEE.

Integrating Self-Care: A new item on self-care management was introduced to the meetings’ agenda by the Facilitator. This

session brought a new and different dimension to the meetings and the culture of the COP. Self-care was a standing item on the fortnightly COP meeting agenda and specific themes related to self-care management was discussed. The COP members freely shared and exchanged experiences on promoting their own physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing especially within the context of Covid-19.

The above suggests that the COP has been cooperating with its leadership with active participation and a team spirit. Meetings happen on regular basis with quorum was formed early and business transacted in a collegial atmosphere. Threats of poor internet connectivity in some cases have affected some members at times forcing them to migrate from their laptops to mobile phones. Every meeting was recorded for posterity, minutes produced, and action points circulated and observed. The COP evolved into a very cohesive workgroup. Observation of key COP activities revealed very high levels of commitment and discipline by members. Ad hoc meetings called over weekends, sometimes on public holidays and often after office hours (considering team members were in three different time zones) were well attended and quite productive.

“ *My experience so far has been that of learning because it’s the first time I’m working with such a diverse team. And working online also.* ”

Misheck Kalungulungu COP Expert

The experience working with the culture of the COP since its inception has demonstrated an effective and values-driven culture of work from the well-selected COP members fit for tasks allocated. It was an energetic and highly motivated team that demonstrated a readiness to take up challenges and responsibilities as well as a willingness and eagerness to learn.

5.2 Has the COP for youth employability skills in Africa met its goals and objectives?

To answer this question, the COP’s theory of change and logical framework was consulted. The logical framework is shown in Figure 3 above. Here the goals and objectives were translated into specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timebound (SMART) targets and indicators. Output and outcomes indicators were clearly defined. The logical framework provides an indication of the outputs and outcomes that the COP set out to achieve. Respondents were thus asked to answer the following question: In your experience, are outputs being

produced as anticipated and scheduled? If so, why, if not, why not?

The responses to this question were drawn from the key informant interviews and participants' observations. Participants were positive about the timely completion of the outputs, as observations show encouraging reports on tasks given to members. Interviewees noted that the tools and guidelines were useful in keeping the COP on track and there are healthy signs of progression of teams, for example, discussions were lively with members freely sharing their views. Effective task team communication forums, good meeting attendance, and teamwork have helped achieve this. However, on the other hand, delays experienced during the preliminary stages of framework development and understanding of tasks could hinder the timely production of outputs. Finally, it was suggested that determination, sacrifice, and a lot of work are needed for the timely completion of outputs.

Respondents were also asked: In your opinion, do you think the COP will meet its goals and objectives by the end of June 2021?

Participants are optimistic and noted that this is possible and achievable to meet the goal and objectives by end of June 2021, because the timelines and frameworks provided are clear. However, the need to increase the online team working sessions was suggested, in addition, the dedication and commitment of members are required to meet its planned goals by end of June 2021.

observations provided much of the insights to answer this question. The reviewed documents confirmed that the YESTA COP was established by the CAPA-ATUPA and partners GIZ and AUDA-NEPAD through SIFA in November 2020. The COP's establishment was in response to the results of a baseline survey (CAPA-ATUPA, 2020) conducted in technical universities, polytechnics and technical colleges as members of CAPA-ATUPA towards the end of 2019 and in early 2020. The Secretary-General of CAPA-ATUPA stated in an interview that the survey had revealed concerns raised by employers in forums such as Africa Talks Jobs (ATJ) that graduates of education and training institutions were not work-ready. Employers had asserted that oftentimes they had to spend time and resources retraining fresh job entrants before they could deploy them gainfully.

“ By June 2021, the Development Task Team was applied to apply relevant frameworks and guidelines developed by the COP. The application of the SARAS framework gathered momentum over the last few days. We've had success with engaging the young people directly to guide the work of the Development Task Team. The also gave input to the M&E Task Team. The fieldwork for the M&E process has been concluded and M&E Task Team have started the data analysis. In this respect the COP has a strong team spirit and collaborative culture. ”

Prof Shafika Isaacs, COP Facilitator

The responses suggest that there is a shared view that the COP has made good progress in the curation, peer review of OER and related activities due to the frequent working sessions recently initiated by the various teams and using the collaborative platforms. This has helped clarify issues and ensured team members are working on the same page.

5.3 How were the OER for YEST designed, developed and curated?

As explained above, the COP was organised into task teams which included an analysis, design, development and monitoring and evaluation. The analysis task team refined a draft OER guideline for sourcing, curating and later, quality-assuring OERs. The design task team developed an employability skills framework. Employability Skills Framework: The Employability Skills Framework was designed to develop and curate the OERs for youth employability skills. The rationale was based on the following:

- The choice of employability skills training: curricula was developed within the context of Africa youth employability enhancement.
- The learning materials to be deployed as cross-disciplinary and multi-level curriculum supplements in varying TVET specialist areas
- The proposed digital materials would provide the opportunity for the combination of delivery and assessment strategies to interlock the identified employability skills in varying learning contexts.
- The choice was further supported by evidence of emerging knowledge, employment, and industrial development trends in Africa.

In addition, the COP developed frameworks on

Guidelines to source, quality assure and curate relevant youth employability skills OER. This provided clear definitions and guidelines to source relevant OER, how these should be curated and licenced and they need to be quality assured. A dedicated quality assurance framework was included in these guidelines that allowed teams to score along a range of criteria to inform decisions as to whether the OER would be acceptable or not.

The SARAS Framework to guide the instructional design of modules along four agreed themes related to employability skills.

5.3.1 Main Skills Areas

The COP identified four main skills areas namely:



1. **Communication skills:** This skills area encompassed knowledge on listening and understanding; Speaking clearly and directly, writing to the needs of the audience, negotiating responsively, reading independently, empathizing, persuading effectively, Establishing and using networks, Sharing information, global citizenship.



2. **Functional Skills.** This skills area encompassed knowledge in literacy and numeracy, data skills, social and emotional foundations, moral and ethical competence, Health foundations, including physical and mental health, and general well-being).



3. **Initiative and Enterprise skills.** This skills area encompassed knowledge in creative and critical thinking, innovation, initiative, problem solving, adaptability and resilience, opportunity spotting.



4. **ICT Skills.** This skills area encompassed knowledge in effective execution of tasks using ICTs.

5.3.2 Development and Curating of OERs

The COP established a Development Task Team to coordinate sourcing and curation of OER and to develop modules based on OER that were quality assured and agreed upon within each of the four skills areas.

Development Task Team Meeting of 11th May 2021.

It was reported that there was positive progress in the tasks and that the following was discussed:

- The OER spreadsheet was discussed as a tool to guide in the curating of OERs by the Task Teams in four skills areas.
- The SARAS document was discussed as a guide to indicate the learning outcomes expected in the four skills areas
- The storyboard was presented to indicate how the learning process would occur in the four skills area

Development Task Team Meeting of 18th May, 2021.

There was reported good progress and the following was discussed:

- The scoring criteria of OERs was discussed as a basis to peer review curated OERs. This would ensure quality OERs are made accessible to the youth of Africa
- It was reported that OERs were curated in the four main skills area-Positive reports were received from Task Team leaders

Development Task Team Meeting of 25th May, 2021.

There was positive progress reported in the meeting with agreement to:

- Peer review OERs from Task Teams and share for adoption by COP and finally on Atingi Platform
- Continue updating the SARAS document and Storyboard by Development Task Team Lead
- Conduct small meetings by each of the four task team in conjunction with the Development Task Team Lead

Interviews with COP Members. Interviews with COP members revealed that they were engaged to share their experiences in curating the OERs. What they learnt and their opinion as experts and practitioner in the TVET sector was summarized as follows:

- Wonderful learning and knowledge acquisition experience;
- Some initial difficulty understanding and developing OERs;
- Made a difference in my practice- self improvement
- Confirmed the need of OERs for the African continent new perspectives about OERs

COP Members were engaged to indicate what OERs development related activities were undertaken in the task teams that they participated in and what was their experience. The response from the COP Members was summarized as follows:

5.3.3 Engaging Youth in OER Development and Quality Assurance Process

The approach adopted to develop relevant OER was to consult youth who would typically be targeted to participate in employability skills courses at TVET institutions. Two focus group discussions were set up from a range of institutional members of CAPA-ATUPA. During the focus group discussions, they were given a platform to share their views and experiences after interacting with the curated OERs. A sample of ten youths from five different countries (two from each country, one female and one male) was constituted. They provided the following insights:

- Relevant reading materials were provided and easily accessible in the content; and the language used in them was youth-friendly.
- The key areas highlighted by the youth were that they need to know more about conducting feasibility analysis before starting a venture, financial best practices, and leveraging technology to support performance.
- For them, their most acquired skill was record-keeping, while for some the use of information technologies and business management was what they learned most.

The youth participants felt that the content that they interacted with, would support them in earning a living. Here they highlighted the content on communication and marketing and setting up a small business as that which were most useful.

The youth participants felt that they could confidently share the course with their peers due to the positive experience they have themselves had while interacting with the content

“ *As I was reading it kept pushing me to read further. I’ve now read that I should always be brief.*

I love the fact that the content is like one part leads you to another. So it encourages you to read more. ”

Suggestions for improvement from the Youth Focus Group Discussion

During the two youth focus group discussions the participants suggested the following:

- They indicated that there was a limited focus of the content on entrepreneurship, as opposed to do jobs for themselves

“ *Should make the youth more independent in creating their own jobs* ”

Youth Focus Group Participant

- They felt that the content could be further enriched if there was inclusion/more emphasis on negotiation and psychosocial skills.
- They suggested that basic work etiquette should be introduced to make it better.
- They suggested that content on negotiating skills and psychosocial skill also need to be added there, because it’s part of communication.

“ *Could be explaining how one can get employment in the region* ”

Youth Focus Group Participant

5.4 What were the key lessons of the COP and the OER for YESTA?

The insights and analysis for the key lessons of the COP and the OER for YESTA were drawn from analysis of the nuances/perspectives that emerged from the key informant interviews by the COP members and project partners; youth focus group discussions and from observations of randomly selected COP meeting.

The findings from the assimilated thematic analysis of all the data indicated that diversity in learning, knowledge-sharing and task-sharing were key strengths of the COP that contributed towards its team spirit and collaborative energy to get involved and achieve the set goals. Each individual COP member brought unique attributes, cultural orientations, experiences, values systems which contributed to quality varied contributions to the engagements during COP activities. Recognizing individual differences in a team enabled the creation of a sense of ownership of tasks, an attribute that was critical for the COP and its task teams, given the diverse knowledge, perspectives, and expertise needed to achieve the set goals. Most of the respondents interviewed reported that diversity in learning,

knowledge and task sharing as significant enablers in achieving the set goals as seen in some of the responses below;

“ *Learned to work with people across continent, understand new perspectives... appreciate contributions from others...learnt new vocabulary and also learnt what an ideal COP should be.*

COP Expert Member

So I think for me, working with them and hearing the expertise and hearing how they approach challenges was very interesting for me-

Project Partner

I have learnt a lot about what it means to be a facilitator to communicate with so many organizations and people of diverse cultures.

Project Partner

The majority of the respondents interviewed and findings from the observations indicated that the synergies among task team members, flexibility and collaborative working were important attributes in effectively undertaking tasks and achieving success of any team-based assignment like the YESTA project. It was further observed that besides the COP consistent high meeting attendance of up to 87% of COP members, the COP also demonstrated a lot of flexibility and co-operation in undertaking tasks and meeting contributions therein despite the challenges they faced.

The responses from the focus group discussions among the youth are also an indication of co-operation and flexibility as they undertook the evaluation of the OER and providing relevant and open feedback for consequent improvement by the COP's Development Task Team. It is widely known that when individuals work together openly, with clear processes/frameworks in a systematic manner, then the goals become more aligned, leading the group towards a higher success rate of achieving a common goal. These attributes were also reflective of high levels of trust among COP members.

This is further demonstrated in the following quotes;

“ *...Even though we are given different tasks we move collectively, do it together as we communicate through different forums...*

COP Member

“ *People working together co-operatively is a so key...*

COP Member

The purpose of the community is for them to connect and collaborate easily if possible towards a particular goal...

COP Member

...Very appreciative of those incredible cooperating open-minded energy in the COP”

COP Member

.....for me, working with them and hearing the expertise and hearing how they approach challenges was very interesting for me...

Project Partner

Teamwork and its associated collaborative energy is another key attribute of the COP. Results from the interviews, observation of COP meetings and the establishment of focus group discussions, demonstrates the presence of team spirit, with members willing to give every help needed to get tasks done in the most efficient and effective manner. The ability to simultaneously perform together as a team is indeed key to attaining goals effectively. The M&E Task Team observed that the diverse skills of COP to effectively work as a team particularly in developing the various tools, frameworks and curating the OERs for the employability skills for the youth. It was further found that the COP did use every opportunity they had to leverage on each individual's skill and strengths to develop the OERs and other YEST project outputs.

How to curate OERs and the purpose of peer reviewing outputs like the OERs recommendable to the youth across the African continent is another key lesson. Peer reviewing is a critical tool for ensuring the quality and integrity of documents for instance the OERs produced by the COP. This process actually sees to it that the OERs are indeed useful, accurate, referable and robust. This improves the credibility of the OERs and recommendable to the youth and other stakeholders and/or users in the ecosystem. The analysis further revealed that; 1) the materials for learning were indeed very clear, easy to read and understand by the youth; 2) that the need for scoring, tools, peer review of frameworks and tools that guide project activities encourage credibility while ensuring quality of outputs like the OERs produced.

These lessons are further demonstrated in the following quotes:

“ Opening up our minds about a lot of things, lots of engagement, teamwork, supportive

COP Member

Although there was good teamwork, some members delay in the submission of task

COP Member

I have learnt to support teams and teamwork because its key COP Member

..but also in the future, and which hopefully will add value to other people's work as well

Project Partner

...we need very good OERs developed by Africans for Africans.

COP Member

It gave me courage to read about the subject widely

FGD -Youth

I'm now fully armed with resources provided to me

FGD - Youth

“ I'll go out there to share with my friends and other community groups

FGD-Youth

”

In conclusion, as a COP member and individual who voluntarily undertook a role as a convener of the M&E task team, I observed the following:

- The COP has demonstrated that the value of social learning from groups of people from diverse orientations is an effective way of executing tasks if the members with diverse skills have been carefully selected; and
- The COP was perceived as the epitome of diversity, humility and respect that has been able to work/ engage effectively virtually (100%) despite the current challenging global environment yet in a very coordinated manner to achieve the set tasks and goal projects. We have allowed ourselves to learn, relearn and unlearn irrespective of the professional roles and expertise each of us possesses. That said, the COP experienced various challenges that led to delays, confusions and consequent modification of timelines and outputs from time to time. However, these challenges were largely overcome through various timely support systems and effective leadership.

”



6 CONCLUSION

As stated at the outset, the MERL research set out to achieve specific objectives. The evidence provided in this report shows that much of the objectives were met.

1

Describe and analyse the establishment, design, and evolution of the Youth Employability Skills Training (YEST) COP.

A detailed description and analysis were provided drawing on a range of data collection methods. It reveals that the COP evolved since April 2020 and was structured to implement a range of activities by the 9 July 2021. Key to this process was how the COP emerged as a community of practice, imbued within a high-trust collaborative environment and integrating the language of self-care within a challenging COVID-19 context.

2

Describe and analyse the establishment, design, and evolution of the Youth Employability Skills Training (YEST) COP.

A detailed description and analysis were provided drawing on a range of data collection methods. It reveals that the COP evolved since April 2020 and was structured to implement a range of activities by the 9 July 2021. Key to this process was how the COP emerged as a community of practice, imbued within a high-trust collaborative environment and integrating the language of self-care within a challenging COVID-19 context.

3

To evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the COP

The report demonstrates how the COP's collaborative energy, strong leadership and flexibility served as important strengths that allowed for the COP to grow as a community. Its weaknesses related more to the challenges of time management that most COP members had to confront as leading officials in their respective institutions and fulfilling COP responsibilities. The opportunities presented by the work of COP relates to the consolidation of OER on employability skills that have potential for uptake by the TVET institutional partners of CAPA ATUPA and beyond. The threats to the work of the COP is that the project that was started may not be sustained unless the partnerships that we established via the COP can engage further with plans to integrate sustainable approach to the use of the COP's outputs.

5

To ascertain the critical lessons that the COP process holds for future COP activities of the CAPA-ATUPA, AUDA-NEPAD and GIZ partnership; and the YEST OER design and development process.

The report reveals important lessons that were learned from the COP process key of which is that sourcing the right experts to participate in the work that this particular COP set out to do, was an important lesson for future attempts at establishing communities of practice.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The COP made two sets of recommendations for future consideration. They included recommendations related to activities that can be followed up on immediately to ensure that the work done, and outputs achieved are utilised.

The second set of recommendations considers more longer-term systemic interventions that the COP partners could consider.

With reference to the first set of recommendations they included

1

That the outputs produced by the COP be consolidated on the atingi and ASPYEE Portals and once this is completed, a well-publicised launch webinar should be organised by the partners which should include a demonstration on how to access these courses.

2

The partners can design and implement an advocacy and promotional campaign for the adoption of the OER for YESTA by TVET institutions

3

The COP partners can monitor and evaluate the uptake of the OER for YESTA by TVET institutions over a period of time – 12 months to two years.

The second set of recommendations included

1

That the COP partners can promote the ongoing development of OER for YESTA so as to build the base of OER on offer to TVET institutions;

2

That the COP partners can design and implement a programme to build TVET trainer capacity to develop further OER for YESTA thereby growing TVET capacity to grow youth employability and livelihood sustainability skills;

3

That the COP partners can conduct youth tracer studies over a period of three years based on whether the youth have used the OER to grow their skills and then whether they have applied the skills that they have learned over time.

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