

YES Perspectives: A series on Youth Employment and Skills policies

Empowering Women and Girls through Technical and Vocational Education in Africa

POLICY BRIEF

This brief draws on findings from the ACET YES study **Strengthening Secondary Education and learning Systems to deliver a 4IR ready workforce** which mapped progress in strengthening secondary education systems to deliver a workforce prepared for the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). The study focused on the secondary education level, including TVET, in six African countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Ghana, Niger, Rwanda, and Uganda.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is a key driver of economic transformation and social inclusion in Africa. It equips young people with the skills they need to find decent work and improve their livelihoods. But TVET is not reaching its full potential, because half of the population does not have equal access. Girls and women face many challenges to enroll and complete TVET programs, including negative stereotypes, harmful socio-cultural norms, and high costs. This policy brief analyzes the current state of gender inequality in TVET in Africa, and suggests how to overcome it by:

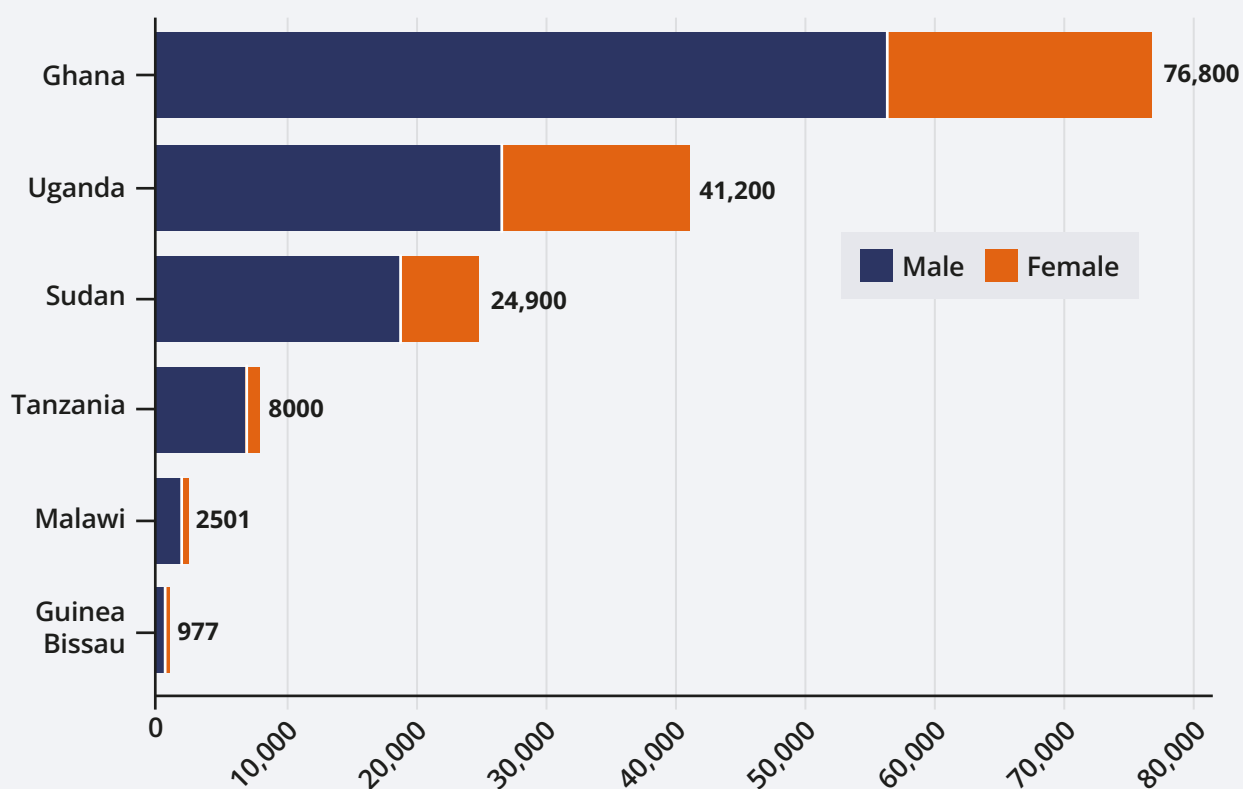
- Raising awareness of the value of TVET for girls and women
- Showcasing female success stories and leaders in TVET
- Providing career advice and support for girls interested in TVET
- Offering financial incentives and assistance for girls enrolled in TVET

The state of female participation in TVET education

In recent years, TVET enrolment has increased significantly in Africa. In Niger, enrollment for formal and informal TVET increased by 385% between 2013 and 2017, and Ethiopia has TVET enrolment at 387,792 in 2017¹. Despite this increase in TVET enrollment, women continue to be left out of TVET education. Data from UNESCO Institute of Statistics on selected African Countries shows that women's participation in TVET is low on the continent. In Ghana, the share of female students in TVET is 39.4% (2019/2020) compared to males². The situation is similar in Kenya and Zambia, with girls making up 39.4% and 26.3% of enrolment in TVET^{3 4}.

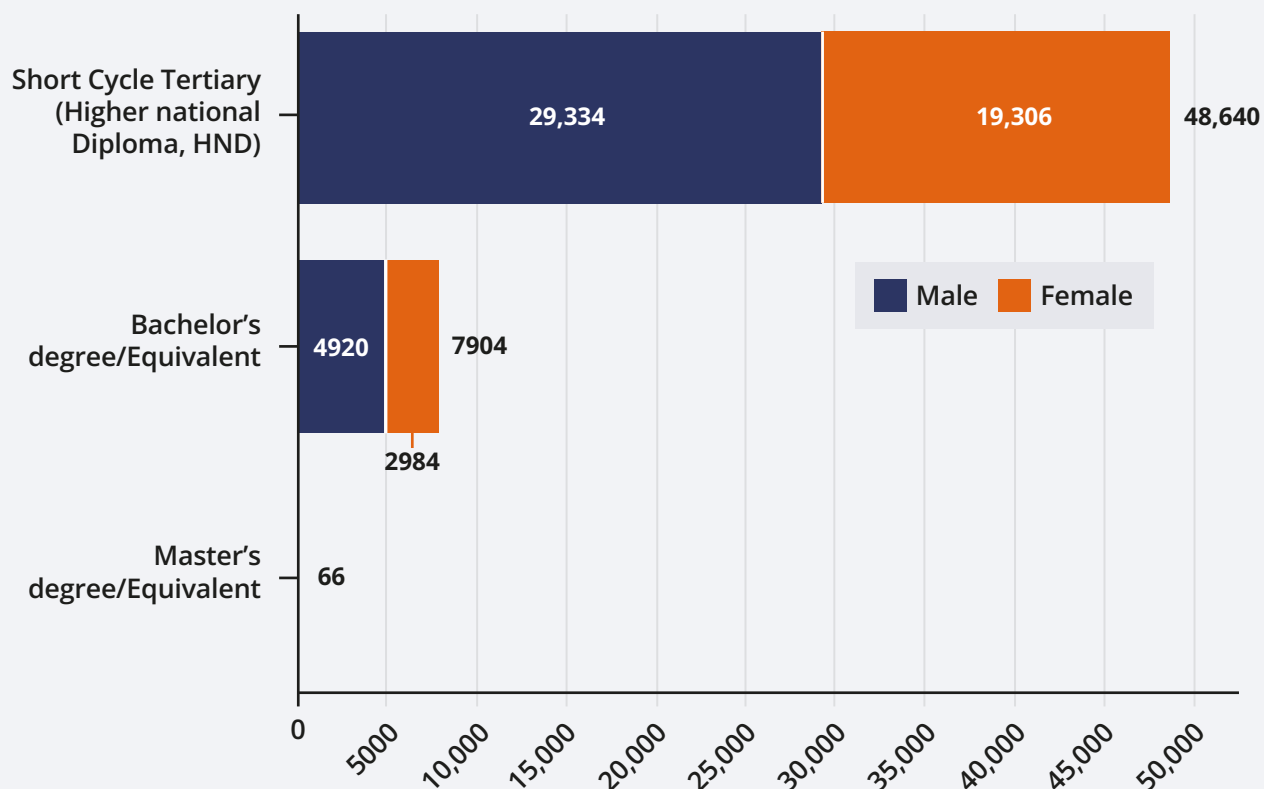
Girls also opt for lower levels of training in TVET Education. This is as a result of the perceived demanding and rigorous nature of TVET programs at advanced levels. A substantial proportion of girls' enrollment is currently limited to foundational and intermediate levels of training. This is evident in the number of girls who enroll and graduate from technical universities/tertiary institutions. In Rwanda Polytechnic, 19.4% of the graduands are females and 80.6% are males which indicate less females' enrolment at the higher level of TVET Education⁵. Ghana follows this trend where less women are enrolled in technical universities as shown in figure 2 below.

Figure 1: TVET Enrolment in selected African Countries



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Figure 2: Enrollment in Ghana Technical Universities in 2019/2020



Source: GTEC data, 2021

Why increase female participation in TVET?

TVET can have positive impacts on the economic and social well-being of girls and women, as well as on gender equality in society. Some of these impacts are:

Economic empowerment

TVET equips girls with practical skills that enable them to access high-demand jobs in various technical sectors, such as construction, manufacturing, telecommunication, and oil & gas. These jobs offer higher salaries than non-technical jobs, providing greater economic independence and stability for women. Studies show that TVET graduates are more likely to be employed and earn more than non-TVET graduates^{6 7}. The earnings potential of TVET graduates are linked to their level of education. In Ethiopia, on average, earnings of TVET graduates are higher and contract terms are longer in the formal than the informal sector because employers in the formal sector are subject to labor regulations⁸. In Tanzania, the TVET graduate earns averagely 436,622 Tanzania Shillings (\$181.57) compared to 316,991 Tanzania Shillings (\$131.82), earned by the average worker⁹.

Employment creation

TVET provides opportunities for young women to find formal employment or start their own businesses. TVET programs often emphasize entrepreneurship and self-employment skills among its graduates. A study conducted on employment status of TVET graduates in Rwanda shows that 53.6% of 12,062 TVET graduates are employed, with 26.1% being self-employed¹⁰. Tracer studies conducted by the EASTRIP allied-colleges have shown that, on average, 65% of their graduates are employed six months after graduation, compared to 47% of non-TVET graduates¹¹.

Poverty reduction and social inclusion

TVET improves the livelihoods of girls and women and their families by providing them with stable and decent work. Access to gainful employment and regular wages are crucial in lifting people out of poverty and providing them with sustainable livelihoods. TVET also promotes social inclusion by equipping girls and women with skills that enable them to participate in society and contribute to its development.

Gender equality

TVET challenges gender roles and stereotypes around technical education and careers. It opens opportunities for women in male-dominated areas and promotes gender equality in these workplaces. TVET also empowers girls and women to make informed choices about their education and career paths.

Challenges to female participation in TVET

Negative perceptions of TVET

There is a negative perception of TVET as a “fallback option” among parents and youth in Africa. TVET is perceived as a pathway for people who are unsuccessful in general education and academically weak. Traditionally, most people feel that more technically intensive TVET programs are meant for males and not for females. This stereotype is further exacerbated by the nature of most technical-dominated TVET programs such as construction, manufacturing, telecommunication, engineering, and auto mechanics, which require physical strength and endurance. Girls who enrolled in technical-dominated TVET programs often face teasing and discouragement, with some suggesting that they may struggle to find employment because employers might favour their male counterparts due to perceived physical strength advantage. This perception makes females opt for less technical-dominated programs in culinary training, tailoring, and others that require gentleness, care, and attention, which are feminine traits. These negative perceptions have hindered most females from participating in the spectrum of TVET.

Socio-cultural factors

Patriarchal beliefs and attitudes towards gender roles limit female participation in TVET in Africa. School-going girls continue to engage in tedious household chores and childcare duties, which makes them too tired to access education, and especially TVET, which can be highly demanding. This is evident as 70% of respondents of the study [Barriers to young women's employment in the future of work in Ghana and Senegal](#) confirmed that tedious household and childcare duties limited their educational outcome. The belief that girls should marry at an early age has also hindered female participation in TVET. There is a belief that it is not worth investing in girls' education, as they would end up in their husbands' homes with children. In Ghana and Senegal, girls can face such discrimination when the family must choose who to send to school due to financial constraint. The bias feeds into girls' expectations in course selection: most girls select traditional programs such as tailoring and hospitality.

Lack of school infrastructure and resources

Proximity is a major barrier affecting female participation in TVET owing to long distances in accessing TVET institutions. TVET institutions in urban areas are more accessible to students. The YES study shows that this situation is worse in rural areas, where students walk an average of 10 kilometers to access a TVET institution and 60% of TVET institutions surveyed in the YES study lack proper sanitary facilities that create discomfort for female students, which leads to absenteeism and poor academic performance. Long distances and limited facilities significantly affect girls' access to TVET Education, particularly in deprived rural communities.

High cost of TVET programs

Females from low-income households are faced with financial constraints in accessing TVET Education. This is because of the high cost of training, learning materials and inputs, lack of scholarships, or lack of financial support from their families. In Uganda, the tuition fee per semester for TVET training is \$135.95 (500,000 Ugandan Shillings) compared to the average salary of \$177.33 (652,200 Ugandan Shillings)¹². This tuition fee is high coupled with the high cost of living poses a significant burden for students and their families. Further, women face cultural barriers that limit their access to financial resources, hindering their ability to pursue TVET.

Attracting and retaining women in TVET

The following recommendations are aimed at attracting and retaining women in TVET to transform Africa's economy.

Sensitize the public on TVET

Governments and institutions in charge of TVET should educate the public on the value of TVET as an answer to youth employability and counteract negative and sexist stereotypes and perceptions. Ghana and Rwanda have “MyTVET” and “Join TVET” campaigns as means of creating awareness among students and parents on the importance of TVET for a brighter future, featuring success stories of people who have pursued careers in TVET. TVET enrollment in these countries has increased, although this is likely not solely due to TVET campaigns but also as a result of other interventions (Free TVET and Fee Subsidies) implemented concurrently.

Promote female TVET role models

The presence of female TVET role models is crucial in attracting and retaining more girls in TVET. Female TVET role models should be identified to inspire young girls to develop a sense of possibility and empowerment. The presence of successful women in TVET will make young girls envision themselves in these roles and begin to see TVET as a viable and desirable career path. Female TVET role models can serve as mentors in providing guidance and support to girls in TVET programs. These mentors can help them navigate male-dominated environments, overcome stereotypes and biases, and achieve TVET success. For instance, in Ghana there is a network of professional women in TVET who share their TVET journey to bring positive transformation in the TVET space for women. Such network should be replicated to expand the reach of female TVET role models and their positive impact on young girls to pursue TVET.

Enhance TVET career guidance and counselling

Career guidance and counselling is instrumental in guiding learners to appreciate the relevance of TVET, reduce the poor image and stereotyping of, and understand career options, their requirements, and possible employment opportunities. Well-qualified guidance and counselling professionals should be equipped with the necessary infrastructure and resources to counsel students. Young girls with identified interests in TVET should be encouraged to enroll into non-traditional areas such as engineering and construction. TVET career guidance and counselling should also be incorporated at all levels of the education system.

Implement supportive policies and regulations

Policymakers should establish supportive policies and regulations that encourage gender equality in TVET. This includes promoting gender mainstreaming in curriculum development, assessment processes, and teacher training as well as workplace policies. Such policies and regulations would get more women enrolled in TVET and an inclusive workforce where women can compete with an equal footing and earn fair wages in traditionally male-dominated workforce.

Introduce pre-technical courses and modules

Governments should introduce pre-technical courses at the basic school level. The use of innovative and practical strategies in teaching these technical courses and modules will stir up the interest of students in TVET. This early exposure in technical courses helps to break down gender stereotypes and encourage girls to consider non-traditional career paths in TVET. Girls who have prior exposure to technical subjects seamlessly transit from basic school to secondary school to pursue TVET programs, as they have a clearer understanding and interest in TVET. Thus, early exposure in technical courses can contribute to a higher retention rate among girls in TVET.

Expand school infrastructure and resources

Governments should target physical infrastructure expansion to ensure that TVET schools are physically accessible to all students, especially those in rural areas. The school environment should be safe and conducive with sanitary facilities to address the needs of girls. Improving accessibility to schools with sanitary facilities for girls, will positively affect their transition and completion rates in TVET Education. The Rwandan government is building 30 TVET Centers of Excellence with ultra-modern facilities to boost TVET Education.

Establish funding and scholarship opportunities

The interest of women can be aroused through funding and scholarship opportunities to participate in TVET. Offering scholarships to girls enrolled in male-dominated TVET programs can attract more females to such areas. Governments in partnership with the private sector should establish funding schemes to support females who pursue TVET Education, especially those from low-income households and rural areas. The Ugandan Government has a scholarship program to boost the participation of females and persons with disabilities in TVET.

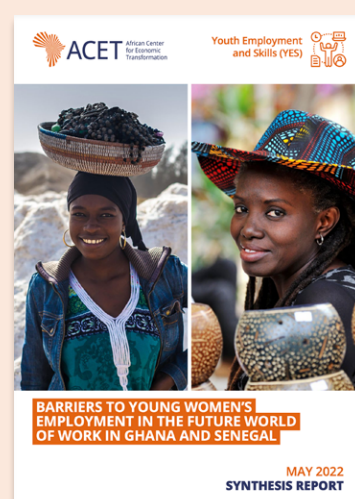
Conduct research on TVET and girls' participation in TVET

Research is an effective approach towards establishing practical policies and strategies for promoting TVET education and girls' participation in TVET. This entails conducting thorough research and collecting accurate data on their experiences within TVET. It is important to periodically assess previously implemented initiatives geared towards encouraging female interest in TVET while remaining open-minded towards necessary changes that may arise following these evaluations.

Learn more about YES

To learn more about TVET and Youth Employment and Skills in Africa, visit acetforafrica.org/YES

Join the Youth Employment and Skills Pan-African Coalition for Transformation (YES-PACT). Learn more at acetforafrica.org/yes-pact



Endnotes

- 1 ACET (2022) Strengthening Education and learning system to deliver a 4IR-ready workforce
- 2 Ghana TVET Report 2021
- 3 https://www.ilo.org/global/programmes-and-projects/prospects/news/WCMS_778068/lang--en/index.htm
- 4 <https://oasis.col.org/items/afb59378-1d66-41b0-9417-c61c3e46dbc0>
- 5 <https://www.rp.ac.rw/news-detail/rwanda-polytechnic-celebrates-its-first-graduation-ceremony-with-1882-graduands-from-eight-colleges>
- 6 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2023/06/20/amid-afe-rapid-changes-in-science-and-technology-a-program-to-empower-teachers-and-students.print>
- 7 <https://sea-vet.net/images/seb/e-library/d>
- 8 Fukunish,T. & Machikita, T.(2017). Vocational Educationa and Employment outcomes in Ethiopia: Displacement Effects in local markets
- 9 Leyaro, V. & Joseph, C. (2019). Employment Mobility and Returns to technical & vocational training: Empirical evidence for Tanzania.
- 10 https://lmis.gov.rw/scripts/publication/reports/TVET_graduates_database_findings_Final.pdf
- 11 EASTRIP :East Africa Skills for Transformation and Regional Integration Project (EASTRIP), whose objective is to increase access to programs at TVETs—Technical and Vocational Colleges—in selected, flagship institutes (RFTIs), improve their quality, and support regional integration in East Africa.
- 12 <https://www.tvet.go.ug/fees-structures>

The Pan-African Coalition for Transformation (PACT) is a platform that seeks to bridge and close gaps between policy design and implementation. The Youth Employment and Skills (YES) PACT has six Chapters in Ghana, Cote d'Ivoire, Uganda, Niger, Ethiopia, and Rwanda. Read more about the YES-PACT at acetforafrica.org/yes-pact

