



**RESTLESS  
DEVELOPMENT**  
POWERED BY YOUNG PEOPLE

# Learning-To-Work

Youth Insights into Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and the Higher Education landscape in Africa

A Youth-led Research Report | June 2022



# Acknowledgements

This research project was led by eight researchers based in North, and West Africa, with support from Restless Development.

The content of this report builds on the engagements and contributions of 477 young people aged 15 – 30, who are primarily based in Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria, and Tunisia. Their shared lived experiences and realities have immensely informed the findings and recommendations outlined in this report.

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# Foreword.

The potential of education goes beyond the development of individual skills. Education also contributes to the socio-economic development of nations and other positive, equitable outcomes. For a long time, education systems have struggled to fully harness this potential, especially on the African continent, which is home to the world's largest population of young people. International donors, governments, and development agencies have rightly taken a keen interest in understanding Africa's education systems and young people's journeys from education to the working world.

This research, conducted by 8 youth researchers over 3 months, explores youth insights into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Higher Education (HE) institutions to enhance key stakeholders' understanding of the barriers and opportunities facing young people. We used a youth-led research approach to effectively capture the experiences of young people who are either in or have graduated from TVET and HE institutions

We collected insights from different marginalized groups, young people living with disabilities, young women, non-binary young people, and young people from urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. This gives us comparative insights into the realities of each group. Bearing in mind the multiple identities of young people and the lived realities of each individual based on race, social stratification, gender, and sexual orientation, among other identifiers, we applied an intersectional approach to the research.

This report also outlines young people's call to action and recommendations aimed at improving education and employment opportunities through meaningful engagements with different stakeholders both at the local level, and global level. For us as researchers, participation in this project has been enriching, as we get to connect with other young people, hear their stories, and help to amplify their voices.

We hope that the many voices of young people compiled into this report will guide the design of programs and policies by private and public development agencies, multilateral organizations, and civil society across the globe in effectively transforming TVET and HE systems.

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# Foreword (MFA).



Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the  
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# Key Terminology and Acronyms

**COVID-19** : Coronavirus Disease 2019

**Curriculum/ Curricula** : Lessons, academic content, and student experiences in a given program/course

**Decent Work** : Productive work for everyone in conditions of freedom, equity, security, and human dignity

**FGD** : Focus Group Discussions

**Female** : Young people who identify as female regardless of their given sex.

**HE** : Higher Education

**HE Students** : Young people (male, female, and non-binary) between ages 15–35 years, enrolled in informal and formally accredited HE institutions.

**Male** : Young people who identify as male regardless of their given sex.

**Marginalized groups** : Young people who are excluded from social, economic and/or educational opportunities enjoyed by other adolescents in their community due to numerous factors beyond their control.

**MFA** : Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Non-binary**: Young people falling outside the binary genders of male and female.

**Peri-urban area** : Semi-developed communities in the outer limits of urban areas with limited access to essential services and infrastructure.

**PWDs** : Young people living with disabilities

**Rural area** : Less developed remote communities with limited availability of essential services and infrastructures.

**Researchers** : Young leaders from Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Tunisia, and Egypt who led this research.

**SDGs** : Sustainable Development Goals.

**TVET** : Technical and Vocational Education and Training.

**TVET students** : Young people (male, female, and non-binary) between ages 15–35 years, enrolled into informal and formally accredited TVET institutions.

**Urban area** : More developed accessible communities with better access to essential services and infrastructure

**Youth** : Young people between ages 15 – 35 years old.





# Executive Summary

The value of education cannot be underestimated. Education is the most powerful weapon we can use for self-enlightenment and to change the world. This is true for both TVET and HE, because education equips one with the capability to think critically and apply the learned information in real-life. However, education systems have struggled, especially in Africa. Restless Development, in collaboration with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, set out to explore the opinions, ideas, insights, and lived experiences of a diverse group of young people, on the ways in which TVET and HE systems could be improved.

This research draws on insights and experiences of young people from 32 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with a total of 195 respondents and from 282 survey respondents. In addition, the research was conducted by young people using the Restless Development youth-led research methodology where young people take leadership of the process with guidance from staff. Eight young people from 4 countries of focus – Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria and Tunisia – conducted the research.

This research focuses on getting insights on the following areas i.e Equity of access, Education Systems, Learning Experience, Income Generation Opportunities, and School-to-Work Transition. Specifically, we looked at the following areas:



**1. Accessibility of TVET/HE systems and infrastructure to different groups of young people.** From the research, there is an increase in the number of young people who desire to enroll for HE as well as get into TVET institutions. However, this enrollment is inequitable because of the gaps that exist in accessing TVET/HE. The following gaps exist in the enrolment of young people into these institutions;.

**Inclusive systems, infrastructure, and visibility efforts are needed to address widening inequalities between different groups of young people.** Both TVET and HE students reported that their institutions did not have specific enrolment requirements for different types of young people. Rather, the same standards were applied across the board for all types of young people (regardless of their gender or socio-economic background), despite their specific needs. Many young people from marginalised groups and young people with disabilities fail to access TVET and HE owing to the unsuitability of programs, strategies, and infrastructure of institutions.

**Digitalization of enrolment processes into TVET and HE is easing access for some young people, but also risks exclusion of other young people if implemented inequitably.** Online systems introduced sometimes lack features designed to ease accessibility for young people living with disabilities, and may not be accessible by young people with limited internet access in rural areas.

This digital divide is leaving a number of young people behind since they cannot easily be enrolled into these institutions.

**As they transition from high school or secondary education into HE or TVET, young people hold diverse aspirations and expectations of their next big step.** For most of them, the biggest expectation is to gain both theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to access and secure decent work opportunities as well as pursue other livelihood activities in the future.

**2. Youth participation in educational processes.** Most young people highlighted that neither TVET nor HE institutions in their countries adequately engaged young people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of education policies. Limited consultation with the main beneficiaries means policies do not adequately respond to the needs and expectations of young people. At the institutional level, young people have relatively better opportunities to make their voices heard and influence changes in both decisions and processes through representatives of student bodies and associations.

Such opportunities are more present in HE institutions, and less pronounced in TVET institutions. While some young people feel capable of contributing to strengthening policies, the relevant authorities or governing bodies may perceive young people as students who do not have the knowledge and capacity to make meaningful contributions.



Frustrated with the lack of engagement by the authorities, some young people use social media to protest and vent their dissatisfaction with the status quo.

### 3. Young people's learning experiences in TVET/HE.

Young people enrol in TVET/HE institutions with the expectation of gaining the right skills to become more competitive in the labour market. For this to happen, the learning experience in the institutions need to be quality. However, many young people mentioned that curricula need to be reviewed and regularly updated to match emerging trends in both formal and informal employment pathways. In cases where practical sessions are provided, inadequate resources negatively affect students' learning experience. This also applies to internship placements. Where placement opportunities exist, experiences gained are not aligned with their studies. To provide students with a well rounded learning experience, such opportunities should be offered all along the learning journey of students before the end of their studies.

### 4. Access to income generating opportunities for young people in TVET/HE.

Access to opportunities for decent work and income generating activities is a challenge for young people from both TVET and HE institutions. However, the extent of this challenge varies between TVET and HE graduates.

Most respondents pursuing TVET education demonstrated a high level of confidence towards securing formal and informal employment, as well as succeeding in various income generating activities due to the practical skills they acquired during training.

As more recruiters showcase a preference for candidates with practical and professional skills, TVET graduates are able to grasp such opportunities where they exist.

Moreover, TVET institutions commonly have strategies in place that offer students opportunities for job placements and internships. They are then able to build important networks that help them secure employment upon completion of their studies. Unlike TVET students, HE students do not have access to opportunities through which they can get practical and professional skills, or create networks with prospective employers through internships and job placements.

Most young people in HE institutes feel that they are unprepared for the world of work despite spending much more time and resources on education compared to TVET students.

**5. Recruitment systems and opportunities that facilitate a smooth school-to-work transition for young people in TVET/HE institutions.** To successfully transition from school to work, young people have to overcome multiple systemic barriers. For example; access to information about available job opportunities is very limited amongst young people from rural areas while recognition of TVET and HE certifications is a barrier for many young people seeking to secure decent work opportunities locally and across borders. Additionally bias and discrimination against both TVET and HE students, particularly young women, is a major barrier.

## Recommendations.

Young people in the 4 countries are calling on governments, civil society, private and public sector, and bi- and multilateral organisations to channel more support towards TVET and HE education systems to facilitate equitable access, quality learning experiences, access to income generating opportunities, and a smooth school –to– work transition. Specifically, they are calling on them to:

- **Invest** in and support construction of more TVET and HE institutions in rural areas to ensure access to affordable and quality education is attainable for marginalised young people and young women in rural areas.
- **Strengthen** existing scholarship schemes and provide more inclusive and accessible scholarships or education grants for both TVET and HE that target learners from marginalised groups particularly those from peri-urban and rural areas. Collaborations with education institutions providing TVET and HE can support the administration and delivery of the scholarships.
- **Prioritise** inclusive access of infrastructure to cater for young people living with disabilities by advocating for more accessible infrastructure, and supporting the development of new disability-friendly infrastructure in TVET and HE campuses to foster higher enrollment and progression of learners with disabilities .
- **Promote** transparency in TVET and HE enrolment systems. Mandate penalties for discriminatory practices and preferential treatment at institutions to ensure equitable access to TVET/ HE programs for all students.
- **Prioritise** resourcing towards learning equipment and teaching materials for TVET learning centres to enhance the quality of training and skills development of young people. Ensure that they remain on par with job market needs and new & emerging tools and skills
- **Provide** students with opportunities to contribute towards design, formulation, and evaluation of policies related to both TVET and HE. This should happen by strengthening the students unions' role in policy decision-making.
- **Involve** learners in the monitoring and evaluation of their learning experience so that they can effectively contribute to its improvement. Given that student unions are more prominent in higher education institutions, the focus should be on strengthening these and the same would cascade to TVET.
- **Support** more research initiatives by youth-focused organisations that gather young people's insights into education systems to inform initiatives of both local and international stakeholders in the education sector, and provide evidence based recommendations to improve learners' experiences.



- **Emphasise** a focus on more participatory, interactive, and practical teaching methods in HE to ensure young people have hands-on experience that prepares them for the job market.
- **Create** both digital and physical inclusive platforms and leadership spaces to foster collaboration between representatives of students' unions across various TVET institutions. Students can use the spaces to share their opinions and ideas, and influence the formation, implementation, and evaluation of curricula to meet their needs.
- **Prioritise** regular reviews and revisions of curricula used in HE to align them with international best practice for practical and digital learning and respond to job market demands.
- **Partner** with education institutions in both TVET and HE to facilitate exchange programs where learners are offered opportunities to visit, learn, and create useful networks with other institutions.
- Governments should do more to **catalyse** job creation by attracting foreign direct investments into initiatives, companies, and organisations that absorb graduates by offering work opportunities for young people.
- Academic institutions in TVET should **give** young girls and young boys the same opportunities in all available courses. Gender bias in course enrolment makes the playing field uneven when it comes to income generating activities as some companies are not keen on recruiting females for jobs that they consider to be for males.
- **Provide** equal opportunities for access to all available TVET training and programs to young girls and boys to ensure an even playing field that will lead to a gender balanced and equitable workforce.
- **Create** career development centres in both TVET and HE by working with students to refine job search skills, their ability to identify and work toward career goals, find suitable careers for graduate school programs, get referrals to employers, and boost their networking skills.
- **Support** graduates from both TVET and HE with internship opportunities to gain practical experience in the area of specialisation to help them secure jobs.
- **Partner** with academic institutions and potential employers to conduct job fairs after every graduation cycle for both TVET and HE to offer on-the-spot interviews to interested candidates.
- **Prioritise** creation of partnerships with companies and prospective employers to integrate young people after their training by connecting them with students from both TVET and HE and help them transition into the job market smoothly.
- **Include** school-to-work transition plans as part of yearly budgets/plans for both TVET and HE schools to support graduates to obtain gainful employment.



# Introduction

**Education is increasingly gaining importance globally. It can be argued that education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world and for self-enlightenment<sup>1</sup>. Education equips one with the capability to interpret things rightly and apply the gathered information in real-life scenarios. Despite this, both TVET and HE continue to be accessed differently across the globe. To try and better understand why this is the case, and also to harness the opinions, ideas, insights, and lived experiences of a diverse group of young people, regarding the ways in which TVET and HE systems could be improved, Restless Development in partnership with the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted research in 4 African countries – Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria, and Tunisia.**

This research focused on getting insights into 5 thematic areas in relation to TVET and HE including Equity of access, Education Systems, Learning Experience, Income Generation Opportunities, and School-to-Work Transition. The Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) is developing a new programme that aims to contribute to SDG 4 by strengthening local Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Higher Education (TVET/HE) systems in focus countries. The programme will set out to strengthen and promote more inclusive, equitable, and quality TVET/HE, to offer young men and young women viable prospects for their future, and enhance their socio-economic participation through jobs or entrepreneurship.

Bearing in mind that young people are best placed to collect and gather information from their peers, this research was youth-led. Young people led the design of the research (setting the research framework), developed the research questions, collected insights, analysed and validated the data, and finally convened conversations for action, with support from Restless Development staff.

This research has unearthed the key concerns that young people have with regards to TVET and HE such as intersectional challenges and opportunities. The report also offers tangible recommendations for governments, development agencies, private sector and civil society organisations to take action towards making TVET and HE more inclusive, equitable and of high quality.

<sup>1</sup> Thangeda, A., Baratiseng, B., & Mompoti, T. (2016). Education for Sustainability: Quality Education Is A Necessity in Modern Day. How Far do the Educational Institutions Facilitate Quality Education? Journal of Education and Practice, 7, 9–17.

## Methodology

This research was led by 8 young people (5 females and 3 males) from 4 focus countries (Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria, Tunisia), supported by Restless Development, using our participatory youth-led research approach<sup>2</sup>. They used mixed methods – combining focus group discussions, key informant interviews and a survey to gather insights from young people between the ages of 18 – 35 years old.

In order to get a better understanding of how learning experiences differ between young people, we focused on engaging young people in different types of TVET and HE institutions by looking at both private and public institutions, as well as those based in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas<sup>3</sup>. The sample of respondents was fairly balanced across gender, region, and type of education system. However, more voices were collected from Burkina Faso and Tunisia, compared to Egypt and Nigeria, where some limitations were encountered<sup>4</sup>. As part of the analysis, researchers applied a gender lens to thoroughly explore differences in learning experiences between young men and young women.

Through this sample, we ensured that this research reaches young people from marginalised groups. This included young women, young people with disabilities, young people from ethnic minority groups, and young people from peri-urban and rural locations.

Using this approach, we captured insights under 5 key thematic areas of interest, including;



**1. Equity of Access:** How systems and infrastructure are setup in order to be visible and accessible to different groups of young people.



**2. Education Systems:** What youth participation in the key areas of the education system for example policy formulation and curriculum development looks like.



**3. Learning Experience:** A review of teaching methodologies against what young people want from their learning experience.



**4. Income Generation Opportunities:** A review of available income generation opportunities, including paid vs self-employment and availability of employment opportunities.



**5. School-to-work transition:** An assessment of how recruitment from school works, and a review of available opportunities to facilitate a smooth school-to-work transition.

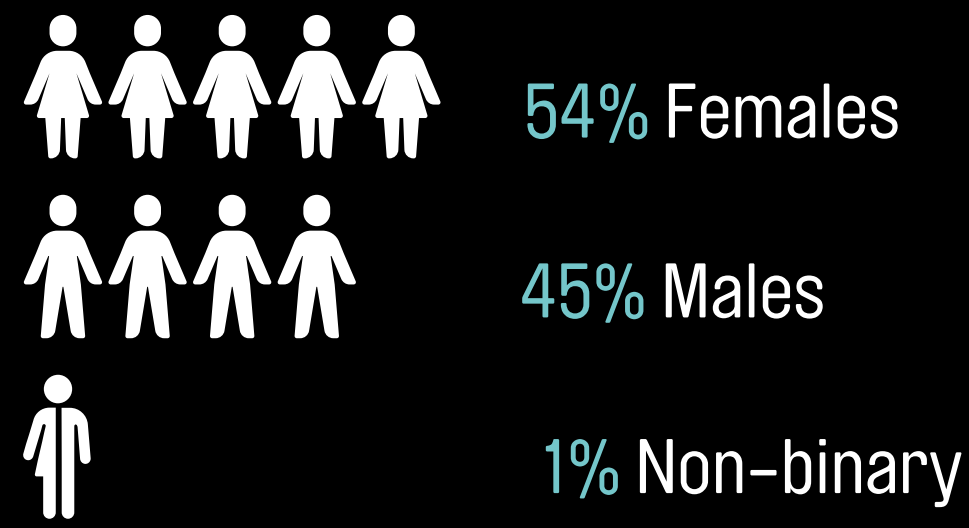
<sup>2</sup> Restless Development (2020). Youth-led research.

<sup>3</sup> Please see Annex 3 for a list of institutions engaged in the research.

<sup>4</sup> For more information about the methodology and data limitations, please see Annex 1.

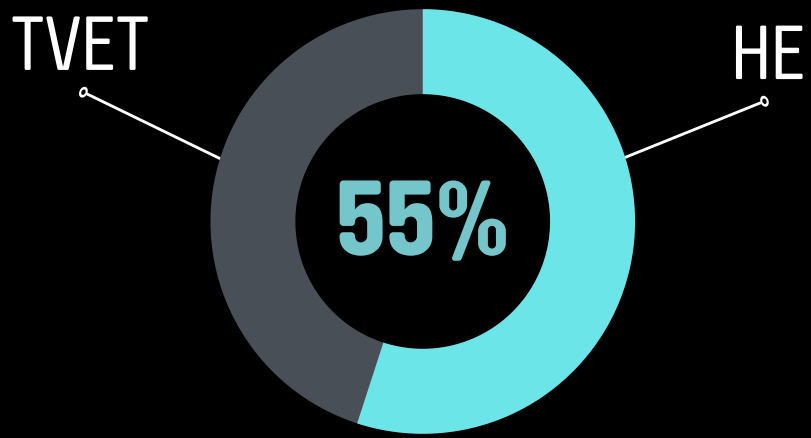


**Gender breakdown of research participants**



Base : Survey (282), FGD & KII (195) participants  
N= 477

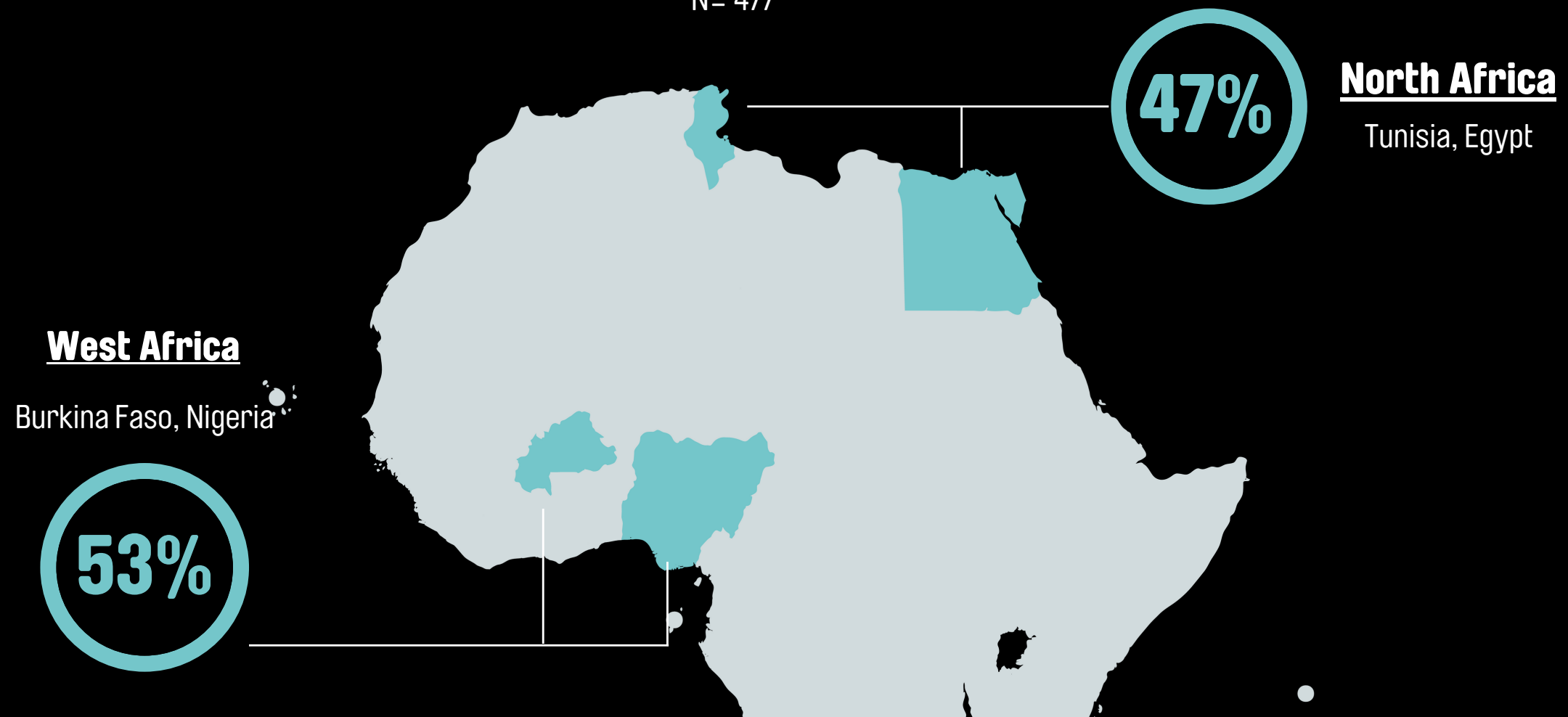
**Breakdown of access to TVET/HE by research participants**



Base : Survey (282), FGD & KII (195) participants  
N= 477

**Regional breakdown of research participants**

Base : Survey (282), FGD & KII (195) participants  
N= 477





# Accessibility of TVET/HE systems and infrastructure for different groups of young people.

**Access to quality education facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and experiences, acting as a reliable pathway to decent work and sustainable livelihoods for young people across the world.<sup>5</sup> In Africa particularly, inaccessible quality educational opportunities have resulted in more than 97.5 million young people being out of school and struggling to find work or running successful small enterprises.<sup>6</sup>**

Many young people who have completed secondary education strive to enrol into HE institutions. HE is predominantly a first choice option for many young people that aspire to find decent employment in the future. However, this pathway is not always available to most students who need it.

For years, TVET has increasingly become an alternative pathway for young people who do not have access to HE, as well as those who would like to gain practical skills that are highly sought after in the job market. As such, TVET has become well suited to addressing the challenges around youth employability, economic transition and digitalisation.<sup>7</sup> Whilst TVET is a relatively more accessible option for young people, especially those in peri-urban and rural areas, growing interest is gradually translating into high student populations and a demand for more learning resources in the institutions.

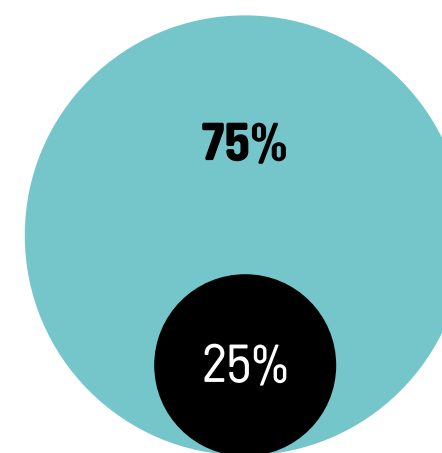
Young focus group participants indicated that this is more pronounced in TVET institutions situated in peri-urban and rural locations because of the large numbers of young people they have to serve as compared to TVET institutions in urban areas where young people have numerous options of learning centres.

**64% of survey respondents who are based in peri-urban and rural areas have access to and are enrolled in a TVET institution.**

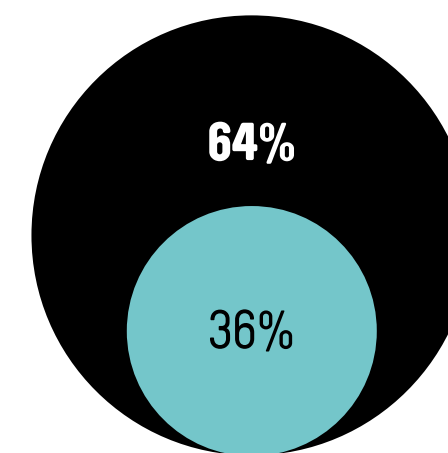
**Only 36% of them have access to HE institutions despite having aspirations to pursue HE after their secondary education.**

Where higher learning centres are available in rural areas, focus group participants pointed out the need for more diverse programs and courses that align with their interests and aspirations.

**Access to TVET/HE in urban areas**  
N= 150



**Access to TVET/HE in peri-urban & rural areas**  
N= 132



● HE ● TVET

Base : Survey participants  
N= 282

Better access and a wider range of programs and courses are part of the experience of urban-based young people. As many as 75% of survey respondents from an urban area mentioned that they have adequate access to HE institutions in their area. On the other hand, only 25% of urban-based young people are enrolled in TVET institutions, despite their widespread availability.

Access to TVET and HE slightly differed between young men and young women, such that more than half (55%) of the survey respondents with access to a TVET or HE institution in their community were young women, and 44% were young men, whereas from the FGDs – 44% of respondents were young women, whilst 56% were young men.

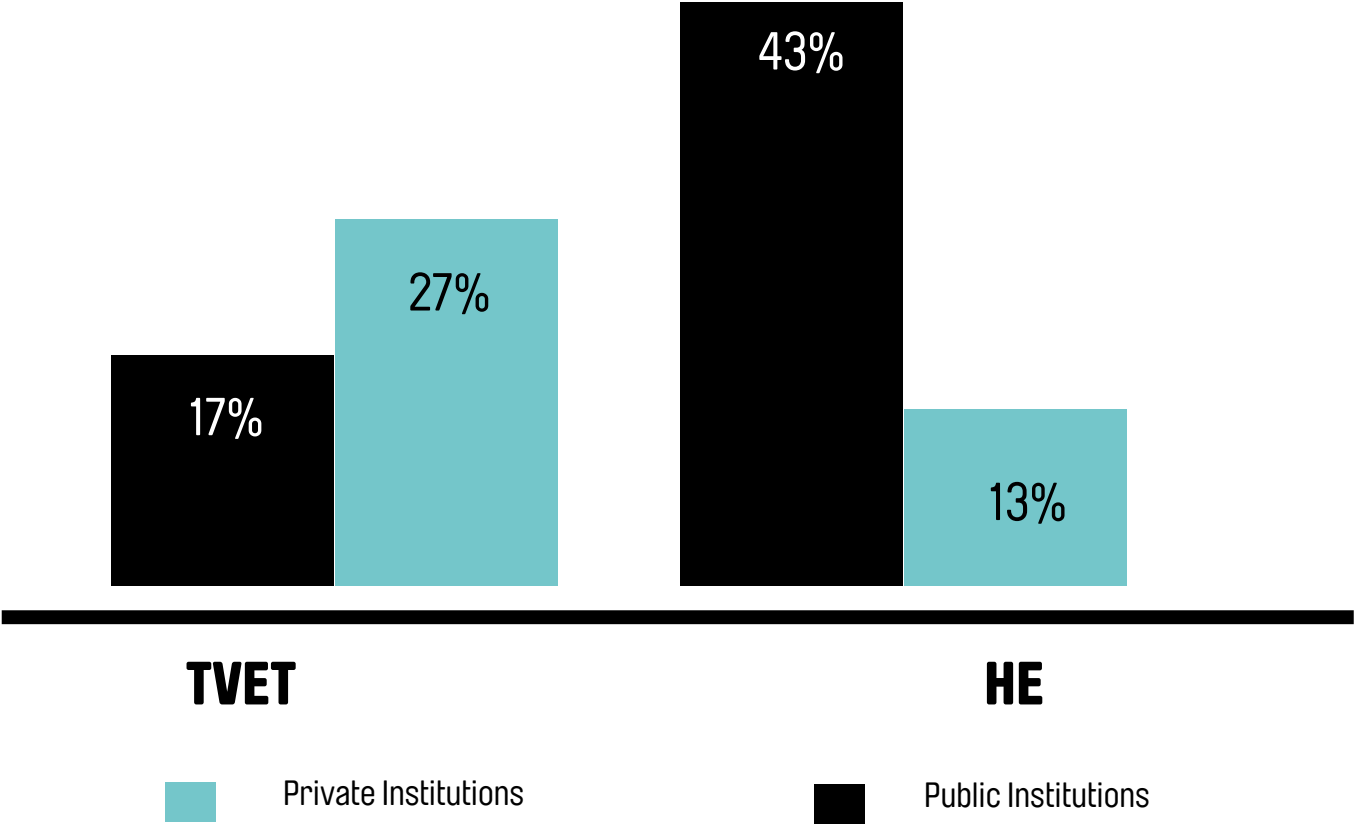
**As peri-urban and rural based young people try to navigate the existing inequalities they face when accessing education, particularly HE, they call for increased investments towards establishing more centres for higher learning, and strengthening existing centres in rural areas to offer a wider range of programs and courses.**

<sup>5</sup> D.N.Sifuna, N. Sawamura (2013): Challenges of Quality Education in Sub-Saharan Africa – Some key issues.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.globalpartnership.org/blog/africa-how-can-technical-and-vocational-education-contribute-response-future-pandemics> (2020)

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO (2015) Unleashing the Potential: Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training UNESCO Publishing  
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, P.T.M. Marope, B. Chakroun and K.P. Holmes

Enrolment into Public vs Private TVET/HE Institutions



Base : Survey participants  
N= 282

The figure above depicts the concentration of our survey respondents who are accessing either TVET or HE. A majority of the survey respondents are from public owned HE institutions, followed by private owned TVET institutions. Forty four percent of HE students attended public owned institutions, compared to 13% who have access to private owned institutions. In TVET, 26% of young learners attended private owned institutions, whilst only 17% were enrolled in a public owned TVET institution.

Research findings indicate that experiences differ with respect to gender, enrollment into private and publicly owned institutions, as well as those based in urban and rural areas. This distinction in accessibility appears in both TVET and HE institutions in the four countries (Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria, and Tunisia) we focused on.

To address the widening inequalities amongst young people, including those from marginalised groups, it is important to understand the existing gaps in access to both TVET and HE in more specific terms. We looked at equity of access to TVET and HE in more depth to better understand young people’s experiences in relation to ease of accessing TVET and HE, from enrollment processes, and quality of training, to inclusive practices, and suitability to specific needs of young people.

1. Digitalization of enrolment processes into TVET and HE is easing access for some young people, but also risks leaving other young people behind if implemented inequitably.

TVET and HE institutions traditionally use a standard enrolment procedure with admission requirements that are publicised to many young people. In most cases, the standard enrolment procedures are set by Ministries of education and enforced by both private and public institutions. Forty one percent of the focus group participants found the enrolment process to be relatively straightforward if they met the entry requirements, such as having a high school/secondary education qualification. On the other hand, more respondents (59%) said the enrolment and admission process was relatively complicated, even if they met the entry requirements.

In Higher Education, more young women (39%) from the survey found the application process to be either difficult or very difficult, compared to fewer young men (27%) who said they found it difficult or very difficult. Notably, more young men (15%), found the process relatively normal or easy, compared to only 4% of young women who said it was normal or easy to successfully complete the process.

For TVET, the ease of access to enrolment process between young women and young men is somewhat different to that of Higher Education. Here, 32% of young women find it easy or relatively normal to successfully enrol in TVET institutions, compared to only (17%) of young men who said they find the process either easy or normal.

Participants from focus group discussions also stated that the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic forced many institutions, particularly those offering HE in urban areas, to rethink their predominantly physical / hard copy enrolment processes and go digital.

On one hand, this has eased the enrolment process for many urban-based young people who have access to reliable and stable internet and can benefit from this convenience. On the other hand, these digital processes are not equally accessible to all young people. For instance, young women are left behind owing to unavailability of resources such as smartphones and laptops. Further to this, online systems sometimes lack features to ease accessibility for young people living with disabilities, and may not be accessible by young people with limited internet access in rural areas thereby widening the digital divide.



“

**For the most part, registration was done online. It was very complicated for us who live in rural areas given the new technologies we use, it is not easy for someone from a rural area to have an Android (smartphone).**

– 21-year-old female respondent from Burkina Faso.

This ‘digital divide is leaving different groups of young people behind, including young women, who often have more domestic responsibilities outside of school, rural young people who do not have the required hardware or connectivity for internet access, as well as other marginalised groups.<sup>8</sup>

Access to a reliable internet connection enables young people to successfully enrol for desired programs and courses in both TVET and Higher Education. This was highlighted by the experiences shared by rural-based focus group participants. With mostly unreliable and unstable internet availability, young women and men from rural areas cited having difficulties accessing electronic forms and completing the registration process online.

Some young people, especially those from urban areas, revealed that they received support from the administrative and management staff at the institutions during the application process. This was one of the many qualities they valued about these institutions. However, this was not the case for other respondents we spoke with during FGDs, particularly young people from rural areas, who shared that comprehensive support was given mostly to those that had connections or came from ‘privileged’ backgrounds and were able to pay or bribe for the service.

From such cases, the dominant perception amongst young people is that enrolment processes in TVET and HE are sometimes corrupt. This digital divide is likely to worsen inequalities and increase corruption, leaving behind young people who have unreliable internet access and young people from marginalised groups.

**It is therefore important that the introduction of digital or electronic enrolment, and admission processes should be inclusive and accessible to different groups of young people and should be combined with virtual or in-person support offered to all prospective learners who wish to use the systems to access TVET and HE.**

**2. Provision of adequate learning resources and opportunities for experiential learning are key to enhancing the quality of TVET/HE and meeting student expectations.**

As they transition from high school or secondary education into HE or TVET, young people hold diverse aspirations and expectations of their next big step. For most of them, the biggest expectation is to gain both theoretical knowledge and practical skills needed to access and secure decent work opportunities as well as pursue other livelihood activities in the future.

In some countries, such as Tunisia and Egypt, young focus group participants said that the quality of HE was more satisfactory in public institutions than in privately owned ones, whereas in other countries, such as Nigeria and Burkina Faso, the opposite was true. Similarly, students accessing HE in urban areas demonstrated higher levels of satisfaction compared to those accessing HE institutions situated in rural areas. Typically, this stems from the reality that urban based private or public institutions are predominantly better resourced with infrastructure, equipment, well qualified tutors, and more variety of programs, all of which contribute to a good learning experience for most young people.

<sup>8</sup> Restless Development (2021), “It’s our future: Building better education and work for young people in a post-pandemic world”.

For higher education, more urban based young women (27%) expressed a higher level of satisfaction with the quality of the education they received, compared to young men (19%) who were engaged in this research. This could be a result of factors such as the availability of diverse programs that young women are strongly interested in, as well as gender-inclusive enrolment processes and learning experiences in urban based institutions.

**“People living with a disability are not taken into account because to access the courses you would already need placement, often there are 900 students in the same room and there is no seat available, it is difficult to hear what the teacher says.”**

– 23-year-old male respondent from Burkina Faso.

On the other hand, students in both formal private and public TVET institutions reported a higher level of satisfaction with the quality of training and services they received. When choosing to enrol in TVET, most young people aspire to gain practical work experience and opportunities for job placements, internships, and mentorship to support their transition from school to work. Some of these expectations are met by TVET institutions, leading to more satisfactory outcomes for young people.

Predominantly, this was reflected by a higher proportion of young women (43%) to young men (34%), who expressed satisfaction with the quality of TVET education that they are able to access in rural and urban TVET institutions.

Whilst this is considered commendable progress by most young people, it is important to ensure that quality TVET is not only available for a small subset of young people, but instead made available to different types of young people including marginalised young people and young people with disabilities.

Young people living with disabilities face multiple barriers in their pursuit of quality TVET or HE. From infrastructural barriers to resource constraints, most TVET and HE institutions engaged in this research did not have deliberate strategies for engaging different groups of young people.

**2. Inclusive systems, infrastructure, and visibility efforts are needed to address widening inequalities between different groups of young people.**

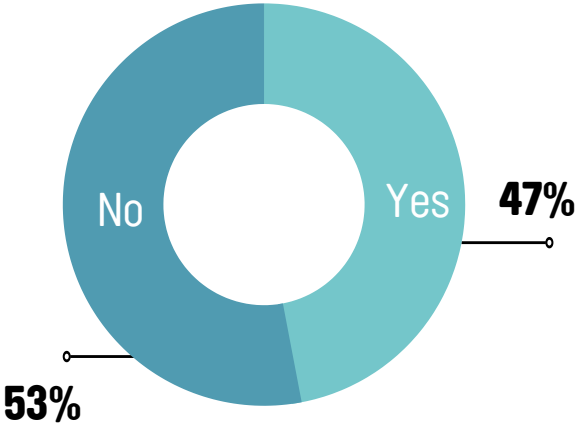
As efforts to enhance access to quality education for young people progress, it is critical to ensure that no one is left behind. Our research revealed that many institutions, both private and public, lacked intentional strategies for targeting marginalised young people, young people living with disabilities, and rural based young people. Current approaches for engaging different types of young people are poised to widen the inequalities between rural-based and urban-based young people.

**“**

**It’s not inclusive at all. It’s not inclusive in any way. I feel like we are not considered in anything they have to do... for example, I’m coming from the faculty of education, where there is a department of special education, and there are people with special needs. Yet, the department is on the second floor, whereas it should be on the first floor(where it can be more accessible). Most students living with a disability go to that department for a reason, and I feel like they should have access to certain things.**

– 20-year-old female respondent from Nigeria.

**Is your TVET/HE institution disability friendly?**



Base : Survey participants  
N= 282

Young focus group participants highlighted that this was strongly reflected in marketing strategies, visibility efforts, infrastructure, and facilities which were mostly designed to suit a homogenous group of students, leaving a number of gaps in terms of including many other groups of young people including young women.

Both TVET and HE students reported that their institutions did not have diverse enrolment requirements for different types of young people. Rather, the same standards were applied across the board regardless of gender or socio-economic backgrounds and despite their specific needs. Young people from marginalised groups and young people living with disabilities fail to access TVET and HE owing to the unsuitability of programs, strategies, and infrastructure of the institutions.



## Country Spotlight: Burkina Faso

### TVET

- In Burkina Faso, TVET institutions – both public and private, require young people to complete a physical application and registration process – involving hard copy forms deposited to the institution of choice.
- A free-of-charge application and registration process, complemented by support provided by school administration staff to prospective students encourages many young people to enrol and access TVET education.
- TVET students reported feeling that their institutions are well suited to provide quality training and a good learning experience.
- TVET students reported being somewhat satisfied by the quality of training, owing to the competency of the trainers available. However, they feel their learning conditions could be improved to enhance their overall learning experience.

### HE

- Many HE institutions in Burkina Faso require students to apply and register for their programs online, and then physically deposit required documentation.
- Young people from rural areas and low-income households find this mode of enrollment challenging citing connectivity issues and a lack of essential hardware such as smartphones that could enable them to register online. On the other hand, urban young people, most of whom are relatively tech savvy, find it easier to register online and access HE services.
- Enrolment into HE is limited as most public institutions are saturated, whilst private institutions are expensive and unaffordable for many young people

## Country Spotlight: Nigeria

### TVET

- In Nigeria, enrolment processes differ between urban and rural areas, as well as in private and public institutions. Processes in urban-based public or private institutions are largely digitised and provided at a cost. Students are required to purchase and submit application forms online. This mode of enrolment makes the institution accessible to many urban-based young people who are able to afford the costs and find it easier to do the process online as opposed to submitting physical copies.
- Most rural-based private and public TVET institutions do not have digitised enrolment processes and require students to physically submit hard copies of their application forms.
- Application fees for both public and private TVET institutions are relatively high such that many young people can not afford to enrol and hence, do not access TVET institutions.
- In some cases, scholarships and waivers are offered by private organisations, and made available to young people. Commonly, young people indigenous to the region where the institution is located are able to access waivers and pay less tuition fees compared to non-indigenous students.
- Urban-based TVET institutions are taking progressive steps to strengthen diversity including by offering a variety of programs and training with flexible schedules to young mothers.

## Country Spotlight: Nigeria [...Cont'd]

### HE

- Many students expressed that enrolment into Nigerian HE institutions is challenging. They cited a lack of support from the institutions for completing the enrolment process. Many students also reported studying programs that are different from what they actually wanted to pursue.
- Whilst the enrolment requirements apply to everyone, some students highlighted that there is a bias and favouritism towards young people from high-income, connected backgrounds who sometimes do not meet the requirements but still get enrolled ahead of young people from low-income backgrounds who meet the requirements.
- Access to quality HE is even more difficult due to high tuition costs in both public and private institutions. As such, many young people from rural, low-income backgrounds cannot afford to enrol and are sometimes left out of school.
- Most HE institutions have affiliated schools and programs situated in rural communities in order to enhance access in those regions. However, such affiliated schools do not offer many programs that young people would like to enrol for, leaving young people to pursue whatever is available despite not having strong interest in that particular field of study.
- Youth civil society and private organisations sometimes offer preparatory programs to help young people successfully enrol into HE institutions.





# Youth participation in key areas of education processes.

**In Africa, most education systems governing TVET and HE institutions have not evolved since their establishment during the post-independence era. Furthermore, many of the systems were adopted from outdated western education systems and not effectively adapted to suit the African context and prepare young people across the regions for the realities of work and economic opportunities. Traditionally, these systems were established using a top-down approach through which Governments imposed standards and policies that must be adhered to by all TVET and HE institutions. Without adapting to changing job market demands, and engaging young people in the improvement of their learning experiences, outdated education systems will fail to address the worsening unemployment challenge.**

## **1. Young people in TVET and HE institutions do not have equal opportunities to share their perspectives and priorities towards shaping national education policies that affect their learning experiences.**

As the principal beneficiaries who access education services, young people are best placed to participate and contribute to shaping education systems and related policies. 75% of young people surveyed do not feel adequately engaged in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of education policies in neither TVET nor HE institutions.

Similarly, young respondents engaged through FGDs outlined the limited availability of opportunities to share their perspectives towards how new education policies should be designed or strengthened where they already exist.

Opportunities to participate in education policy dialogues are very limited and unequally distributed across private and public owned institutions, as well as rural and urban based learning centres. This was strongly expressed by both young men (47%), young women (52%), and non-binary young people (<1%), who all mentioned a lack of adequate opportunities for engagement.

The few available opportunities are mostly found in urban-based and public owned HE institutions. In our survey, at least 66% of learners in HE said that they could access such opportunities through student bodies. Much fewer learners (33%) in TVET, both in urban and rural areas, have access to opportunities to contribute towards shaping education policy at school or national levels.

Where such opportunities were available, for instance in Tunisia and Burkina Faso, FGD respondents revealed that their institutions had deliberate strategies for communicating with and engaging young people in these important processes. Young respondents stated that their institutions often organised meetings and conferences that bring together various heads of administration, management, and student representatives. They considered such platforms to be very accommodative of their views, with the aim of providing solutions for their educational needs. However, their participation was limited to the institutional level as opposed to regional or national levels where they can contribute to education systems applied by all institutions in the country.

It is important to note that the participation of young people in shaping education systems is variably limited across private and public, as well as rural and urban based TVET and HE institutions. This is reinforced by relevant authorities or governing bodies that hold a negative perception towards young people's abilities and capacity to make meaningful contributions to decision making processes in education systems.

In spite of inadequate opportunities for engagement, young people also recognize that they have a role to play in advocating for their voices to be heard. Focus group participants recommended fellow young people to show a strong interest in these decision making processes if they would like to be engaged. Instead of being passive and waiting for opportunities to be given to them, they encouraged young people to take initiative and make an effort to demand opportunities to shape policy.

## **2. Young people in HE institutions are exploring alternative ways to make their perspectives and opinions heard in the shaping of institutional education policies that affect their academic journeys and future prospects.**

When it comes to student participation in decision making at the institution level, we found a higher rate of representation in HE institutions, where most students are organised into student bodies, such as a student union or association. Student representatives are often invited to meet management bodies and contribute to the decision making processes at the institutional level. Although many students (both young men and young women) reported having functional student unions and representatives, they feel that their perspectives and input are usually not taken on board and reflected in the final decisions that are gazetted or imposed by the institution. Instead, suggestions made by professors and directors are prioritised.

Frustrated by the lack of adequate representation, as well as devaluing of their views when they are engaged in decision making processes systems that affect their education, some students in HE institutions are turning to social media to expose gaps in their respective schools as one way of putting pressure on the administration to meet their demands and make the necessary changes.

Where young people are able to contribute to institution-level decision-making, we noted that participation levels tend to differ between young women and young men. Most student bodies and associations are male-dominated, with only a few young women holding leadership positions. Young women accessing HE are not adequately represented in decision-making spaces. This has resulted in changes and decisions that do not meet the needs of young women, for instance, infrastructural changes to classroom blocks or campus residencies that are not gender-responsive.

Young women that participated in our focus groups indicated that although they are interested in participating in decision-making forums, they are not aware of most available structures and opportunities to participate.

“

**In our institution, young people are usually not motivated to formulate, execute, or evaluate policies, perhaps it has to do with the lack of awareness.**

– 22-year-old female respondent from Tunisia.

## **2. Young people in TVET face additional barriers to contributing their insights and priorities in the formulation, execution, and evaluation of education policies and processes.**

Similarly, students in TVET institutions highlighted a significant lack of opportunities to participate in the formulation, execution, and evaluation of education policies. Whilst HE students have representation in the form of student bodies, such structures are not common in TVET institutions thereby severely limiting young people's opportunities to make their views and perspectives heard.

In the absence of such important student bodies, young people accessing TVET are only able to contribute to decision-making processes when they demand and push for it. Some focus group participants revealed that they had to persistently ask and protest to have their voices heard on education policies that concern them.

Other TVET students highlighted that the only opportunity where they get to provide their input is when their institution hosts a conference and invites students to actively participate.

Many TVET students emphasised the need for their institutions to provide spaces and equal opportunities for all young people to have representation and to contribute to the policy and decision-making processes that relate to their education. Alternative options and student platforms are therefore needed in TVET institutions to ensure learners are able to share their opinion on shaping education systems to meet their needs .

Overall, young men and young women in both TVET and HE feel that they should be more engaged in the formulation, and execution of these policies, so that they can contribute to shaping education policy in ways that meet and address their educational needs, enhance their learning experience and prepare them for the future of work. Rural-based public and private TVET and HE institutions should be prioritised when setting up structures, platforms, and frameworks that aim to enhance youth engagement in key educational processes. At the same time, more sensitization efforts should be done for existing policies – to create awareness amongst students, and showcase ways in which more young people can access opportunities to shape education policies.

“

**There is not enough opportunity for young people to express themselves on educational policies, they are not allowed to participate in the development of these policies. The only time they can participate is during the organisation of debates and conferences with members of the administration but their opinions are not always listened to.**

– 25-year-old male respondent from Burkina Faso



## Country Spotlight: Tunisia

### TVET

- TVET institutions commonly do not engage young people in the formulation, execution and evaluation of education policies.
- Most TVET students highlighted that there are no clear frameworks for them to participate in policy and decision making.
- TVET students are more focused on completing their studies/training and less eager to intervene or participate in policy and decision-making on matters concerning their school.
- Administrators or school management is commonly receptive and responds to formal requests for changes in decisions or policies made by TVET students.

### HE

- HE students have representatives in student unions and associations who amplify the voices of students in decision making spaces involving management of the institution.
- Student union representatives are sometimes given the opportunity to meet and share their views with officials from education ministries through education conferences and events.
- There is a low level of awareness of existing education policies among many students accessing HE. This is more pronounced in first and second year students.
- Many young people turn to social media to protest and influence policies and decisions that affect their education.



# Young people’s learning experiences in TVET/HE.

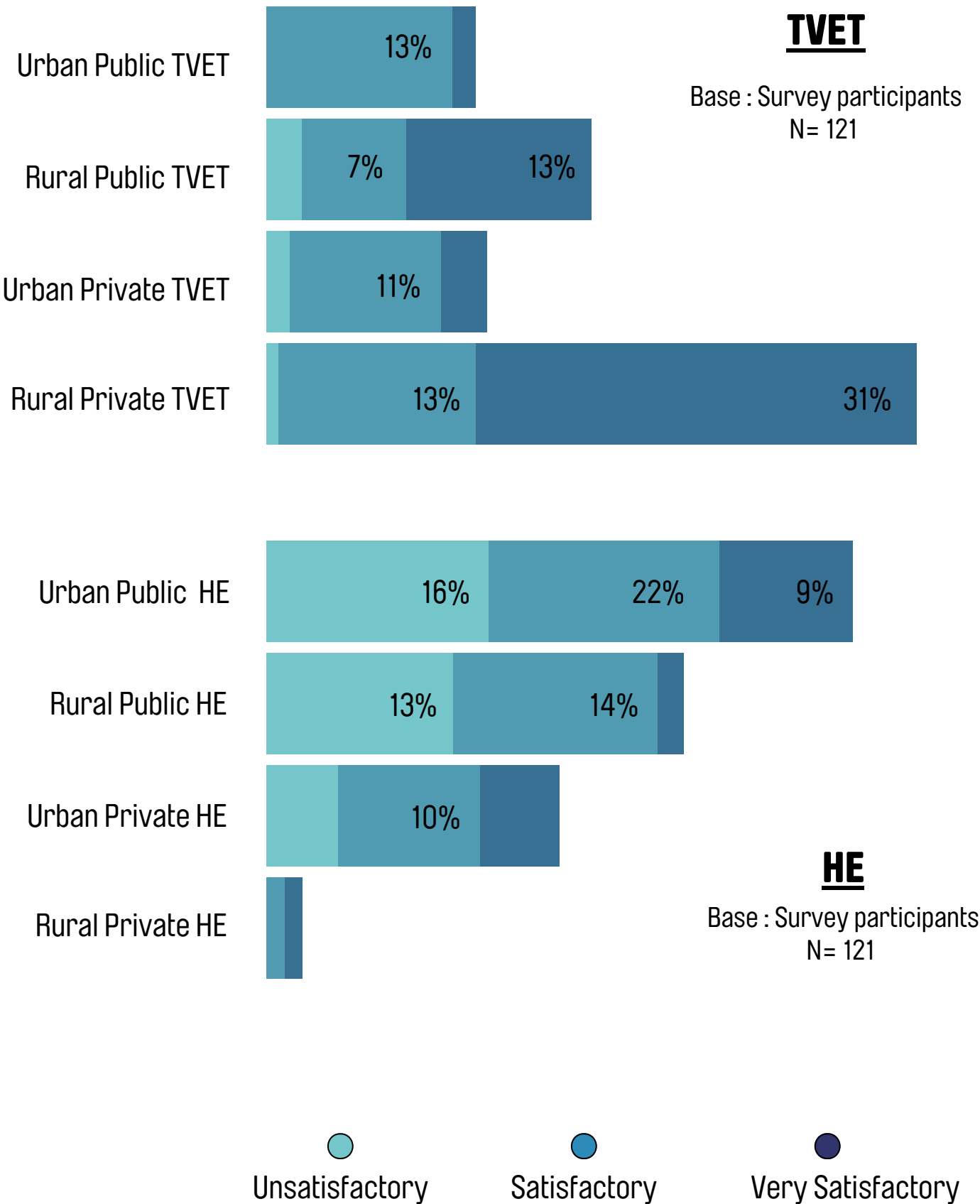
As young people transition from secondary education to TVET or HE, many of them carry high expectations. They hope to access quality education that will propel them towards a financially secure future. Whilst accessing quality education is not easy for most of them, their hopes are to acquire knowledge and skills that will make them employable in the job market, as well as equip them with the right tools to succeed in various income generating activities.

For most young people in both TVET and HE, many of these expectations are met to a satisfactory degree, and this is strongly reflected in their level of satisfaction towards their learning experience. Figure 6 below shows different levels of satisfaction between students enrolled in TVET and HE, private owned and public owned institutions, as well as those based in rural, peri-urban, and urban areas.

When it comes to the practicality of learning sessions in TVET and HE institutions, more young people (22%) in urban-based public HE said that the sessions are at least satisfactory. Notably, 31% of young people in rural -based private TVET institutions reported finding the sessions to be very satisfactory or outstanding. This portrays the value young people place on practical learning in their learning experience and preparations towards the world of work.

Several factors relating to their learning experiences, including curricula, teaching methodologies, as well as infrastructure in TVET and HE institutions affect how well prepared young people are to successfully make this transition.

Level of satisfaction towards practical learning in sessions





**1. TVET and HE curricula need to be regularly reviewed and updated to match emerging trends in both formal and informal employment pathways.**

A majority of students surveyed in TVET (64%) and HE (53%) felt that the curriculum followed by their institution was aligned with the needs of the job market. Focus group participants from HE institutions expressed that whilst curriculums are aligned, there is a need to improve on how they are implemented. In reality, curriculums are mostly well designed but not effectively implemented to give students high quality learning experiences.

In HE, some students in all four countries felt less confident about finding and securing employment and livelihood opportunities, which normally require them to have practical knowledge and skills due to the emphasis on theory when curricula are being implemented.

Beyond theoretical content, some of the gaps that young students in HE identified in their curriculum included a lack of job placement or internship opportunities and learning real life scenarios that would help them put their theories into practice.

To provide students with a well rounded learning experience, such opportunities should be offered along the learning journey of students before the end of their studies. Many young people felt such an approach would help them develop professional skills and prepare them for the labour market.

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**As a gap we can talk about the lack of practice during our training because the program is much too theoretical which leads us to lack professional aptitude at the end of our studies.**

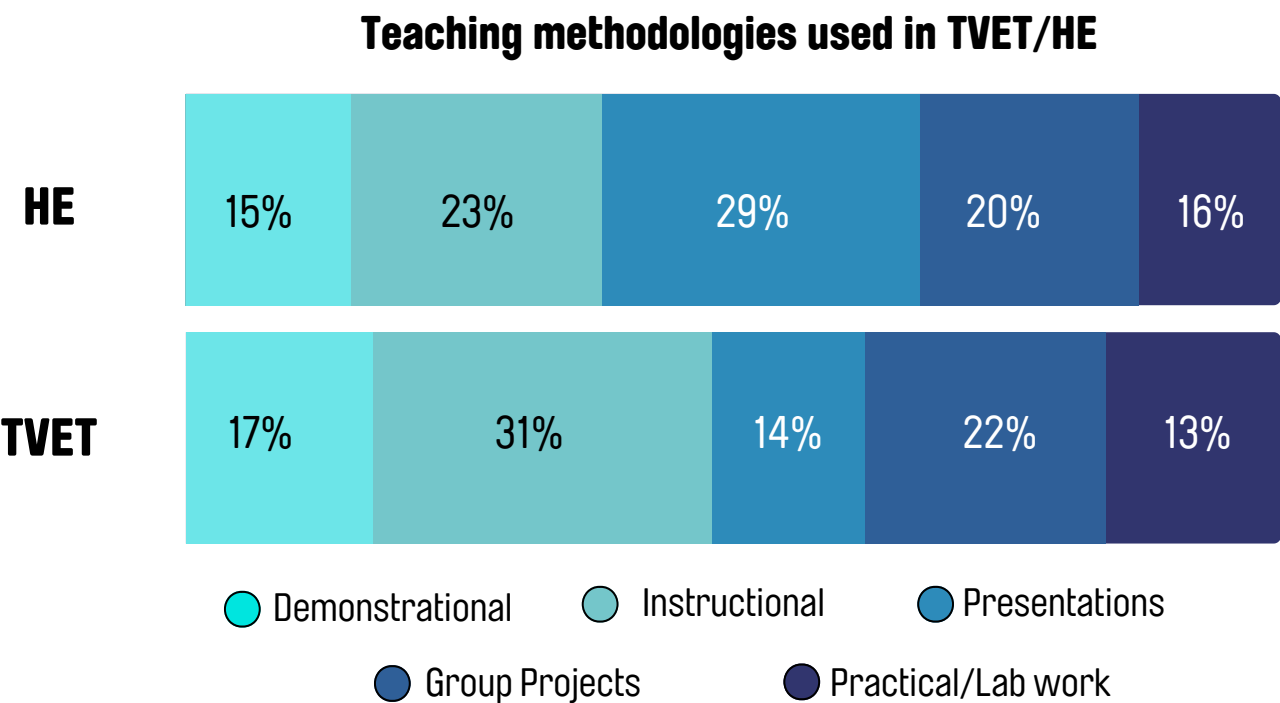
– 25-year-old male respondent from Burkina Faso.

**2. Young people in HE want a stronger blend of teaching methods that would help them develop important 21st century skills such as communication, interpersonal skills, problem solving and other skills that would enhance their learning experience and adequately prepare them for the world of work.**

In all focus countries, young respondents from HE institutions indicated that the content of their curricula and how it was delivered was mainly focused on technical skills and theoretical knowledge. They highlighted three main teaching methods that are commonly used in HE including instructional teaching, presentations (lecturing), and group projects.

Young people in HE called for a stronger blend of presentations, demonstrational and practical/experiential teaching methods that would help them develop important skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, and skills such as digital literacy, that would enhance their learning experience and adequately prepare them for the world of work.

In TVET, students indicated that curricula are implemented with a focus on practical learning. However, the challenge is sometimes inadequate infrastructure, practical experiences and learning resources such as computers and other relevant equipment for practical lessons. Young people in TVET emphasised the need for more investment in disability-friendly learning infrastructure, bigger learning rooms to accommodate the large numbers of students, more equipment and resources to enhance the delivery of demonstrational and practical delivery of curriculum content.



Base : Survey participants  
N= 282

### **3. COVID-19 has adversely impacted young people's learning experiences and threatens their future prospects for decent work and sustainable livelihoods**

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated young people's learning experience, particularly in HE institutions. Whereas physical or in-person delivery of the curriculum did not meet the expectation of many young people pre-COVID-19, they also revealed that the transition to virtual practical learning was much worse. In many cases, young students mentioned that classes were predominantly theoretical, and that the institutions were not adequately prepared or equipped to deliver their curricula virtually. Bundled together with these challenges were more difficulties for HE institutions to assess students or administer examinations online.

HE students, particularly those in public and rural based institutions felt the brunt of such challenges due to a lack of reliable internet connectivity as well as free wifi, which is sometimes only available around school facilities such as the library and lecture rooms.

### **4. Lack of adequate meaningful opportunities for practical learning is a major constraint to quality learning experiences for young people in both TVET/HE.**

For cases where HE institutions already offer opportunities for practical learning to their students, young people revealed that the experience they get is sometimes misaligned with their field of study. It is essential for HE institutions to ensure they have systems in place that support students to get an experience that is strongly aligned with their field of study or other academic interests.

In contrast, many TVET students (both young women and young men) reported having a better learning experience that matched their expectations, which were to acquire technical skills and gain practical experience for both formal and informal work. Private and public TVET institutions in both rural and urban areas focus on delivering a practical learning experience for all students. The mode in which curricula are delivered is sometimes enhanced by the availability of well-trained tutors who implement curricula to best practice.

Whilst this is true for most students in privately owned TVET institutions, many young people in public TVET institutions, particularly those in rural areas, indicated the lack of adequate suitable learning infrastructure and equipment as a major gap in how curriculum and practical learning are delivered. Governments and civil society supporting TVET institutions should therefore consider prioritising the development of inclusive learning infrastructure, complemented with the provision of necessary equipment for practical training in order to enhance the learning experience for young people in TVET.

In addressing these gaps, it is essential to start off from a point of recognition that young people in TVET and HE do not have homogenous learning experiences, rather, their experiences are diverse and will vary as you move from public to private, urban to rural, and male, female, and non-binary young people's perspectives. With still a lot of room for improvement in both education systems, young people in TVET institutions generally go through a relatively more satisfactory learning experience compared to those in most HE institutions.



## Country Spotlight: Tunisia

### TVET

- TVET students have a high rate of satisfaction with their programs and trainings which are mainly practical and well aligned with the demands of the job market.
- TVET institutions have effective recruitment strategies evidenced by the availability of well trained and competent tutors that give students a good learning experience.
- Access to TVET education is not adequately inclusive. Some institutions still demonstrate bias or discrimination, especially towards young women and young people from marginalised groups who, hence, do not get a favorable learning experience.
- TVET students have access to an array of options for internships and job placements offered by their institutions.
- Some TVET institutions have partnerships with foreign universities through which they link their students to opportunities for further education in European countries such as France. Language courses i.e. French are also offered to complement these opportunities.
- Some public TVET institutions are tuition-free and offer their students subsidised services such as transportation and co-curricular activities. Private TVET institutions charge tuition fees and offer fewer chargeable services. The majority preference for young people is public TVET institutions, whereas private TVET is only preferred by those that can afford it.

### HE

- HE institutions offer adequate support to their students to enhance their learning experience.
- HE students have access to opportunities to gain practical learning experiences such as internships.
- The duration of internships is determined by HE institutions. Commonly, internships are a minimum of 1-month long.
- HE students desire longer internship periods to gain in-depth experience in their field of study.

## Country Spotlight: Nigeria

### TVET

- TVET students in Nigeria demonstrate a high level of satisfaction with how the curriculum is delivered as well as their practical learning experience.
- TVET institutions predominantly have well trained and competent tutors who are able to meet the learning needs of many young people and delivery quality.
- Learning resources and relevant equipment are often politicised, particularly in rural-based public institutions, thus hampering young people's learning experience.
- TVET institutions offer adequate internship and job placement opportunities, however, they lack effective strategies for ensuring these opportunities align with the students' field of study or interest.
- TVET institutions are struggling to adequately adapt to new ways of working after the COVID-19 pandemic, leaving limited availability or access to online classes. In some cases, learning material was shared by lecturers using other mediums such as WhatsApp.

### HE

- HE institutions, particularly those in rural areas have insufficient infrastructure for most students.
- HE students have to be resourceful to find additional learning resources, such as on Youtube, to complement what is used in their schools.
- HE curricula are predominantly delivered physically. This left many of the institutions struggling to deliver classes virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic.

# Access to income generating opportunities for young people in TVET/HE.

**Access to opportunities for decent work and income generating activities is a challenge for both young people from TVET and HE institutions. However, the extent of this challenge varies between TVET and HE graduates. This is because of the marketability of qualifications earned from each education system, quality of education offered in each institution, as well as technical and professional skills offered by each curriculum.**

## **1. Young people accessing TVET education are more confident about leveraging their practical and professional skills to make a successful transition from school-to-work and other income generation activities.**

Most young respondents (both young men and young women), pursuing TVET education demonstrated a high level of confidence towards securing formal and informal employment, as well as succeeding in various income generating activities due to the practical skills they acquire during training. As more recruiters in the job market showcase a preference for candidates with practical and professional skills, TVET graduates are well aligned with such opportunities where they are available.

Across the different groups of young people (rural and urban young men and women, and non-binary young people, and young people living with disabilities) in both TVET and HE, confidence to find formal employment relatively differed. This was particularly noticeable between young men and women. More young women felt fairly confident (22%) than young men (13%). When you look at a higher level of confidence (completely confident), it is young men (8%) that are more likely to feel more confident about finding work and income generating opportunities than young women (6%).

In reality, there is fierce competition amongst graduates when it comes to finding formal and informal employment. At the same time, not many decent work opportunities are available on the job market, forcing a bulk of young graduates to take up entrepreneurial pathways where they are poised to succeed owing to the practical nature of their training.

According to our survey, it takes young people an average of 6–12 months to successfully transition from school-to-work. Our survey results also indicated that over the first 12-month period after completing studies: more young people (27%) who graduate from HE institutions are more likely to find a job, compared to young graduates from TVET (18%) who sometimes have to wait longer.

**27%** of survey respondents said HE graduates are more likely to find a job within 12-months of graduating.

**18%** of survey respondents said TVET graduates are likely to find a job within 12-months of graduating and sometimes wait longer.

From a macro perspective, providing support to young TVET graduates throughout their transition by facilitating linkages with institutions or organisations that provide start-up capital and business development support could help spur job creation in many economies.

## **2. Young people need additional practical, professional, entrepreneurial, and soft skills to stand a better chance of securing decent work and profitable enterprising opportunities.**

Unlike TVET students, some HE students in some of the focus countries have limited access to opportunities through which they can get practical and professional skills, or create networks with prospective employers through internships and job placements. As such, some young people feel that they are not well prepared for the world of work despite spending much more time and resources on education compared to TVET students.

To this end, many of the young respondents from HE cited the need to incorporate 21st century skills, and other valuable soft skills into their curriculum and learning experience to set them up for success once they complete their programs.

Across the board, in both TVET and HE institutions, young people strongly indicated that the reality of starting salaries offered to graduates is very different from their expectations. In all four countries, many young respondents mentioned that they expected to receive a monthly rate of \$500 – \$800 as a starting salary, considering their qualifications, however, on average, most available job opportunities only offer \$200 for HE graduates, and \$160 for TVET graduates. Only in cases where students are lucky, can they secure opportunities that pay \$300 or above as a starting salary.

## Country Spotlight: Egypt\*

### TVET

- TVET graduates find it nearly impossible to secure formal employment, especially in large corporations, with only their TVET qualification. To increase their chances of securing employment, most young people have to supplement their TVET qualification with a HE certificate/degree.
- Many young people are only able to secure informal work, most of which is usually under paying.
- Female graduates face significant discrimination when trying to obtain work. There is a dominant negative perception against young women in TVET.

### HE

- Decent work opportunities are scarce for HE graduates due to a very competitive job market.
- Females are often discriminated against in many of the available job opportunities, resulting in a largely male dominated workforce.
- For most jobs, the starting salary ranges from \$150 to \$200.
- COVID-19 has made it more difficult for HE graduates to secure work adding to an existing unemployment problem.

## Country Spotlight: Burkina Faso

### TVET

- TVET certificates are regarded as job marketable owing to the extensive practical and technical skills that are embedded into the curricula.
- TVET students demonstrate a high confidence in securing employment and succeeding in various income generating activities.
- Young people in TVET institutions have adequate access to opportunities to gain practical experience such as internships and job placements.

### HE

- The job market for HE graduates is very saturated and opportunities are not adequately accessible to young people .
- HE students, particularly those from public institutions feel that they need to additionally acquire at least 1 – 2 years of practical experience before they can secure decent work.
- HE students in private institutions are more confident of securing decent work through internship opportunities that are offered by the institutions.
- For most jobs, the starting salary ranges from \$160 – \$200.



# Recruitment systems and opportunities that facilitate a smooth school-to-work transition for young people in TVET/HE institutions.

**The transition from school-to-work is one of the most challenging phases in young people's personal and professional journeys. In a highly competitive job market, where opportunities are minimal and in most cases inaccessible, young people have to look beyond their academic qualifications to enhance their chances of securing formal or informal work. To successfully transition from school to work, young people have to overcome multi pronged systemic barriers before they can even get the opportunity to interview for a job.**

## **1. Young people need better access to information about available work and income generation opportunities to successfully transition from school into professional careers.**

Firstly, access to information about available job opportunities is very limited amongst many young people, particularly those from rural areas. Rural-based young respondents highlighted that information relating to available job opportunities is not adequately shared in their communities. Since most institutions or organisations that they could potentially work for are based in urban areas, their recruitment processes only focus on engaging young people in urban areas. Such opportunities are thus easier to access for urban-based young people based on their proximity.

As a result, many rural-based young people are left in the dark about most opportunities and are only able to access a few opportunities, where the competition for fewer open positions also tends to be very high.

Essentially, these different groups of rural-based young people have to invest a lot of resources including time and money in order to travel to urban areas just to get information or access available employment opportunities. Additionally, methods of application for most job opportunities were not sufficiently accessible to them. For instance, many opportunities require prospective candidates to apply via email and other online platforms, which young people in rural areas struggle to do due to limited internet connectivity in rural areas.

In contrast, urban-based young people reported having relatively better access to information on available job opportunities through various mediums such as social media, print media, local networks, and their peers. Applying to available opportunities is also less challenging for most urban based young people with reliable internet connectivity.

## **2. Integrity and Quality of TVET/HE education systems play a key role in enhancing employment prospects for young people.**

Secondly, recognition of TVET and HE certifications is a notable barrier for many young people seeking to secure decent work opportunities. Young people mentioned that the recognition and marketability of their qualifications largely depends on what type of institution they attended, as well as the reputation of that particular institution in the job industry. In some countries, such as Tunisia, public TVET and HE institutions were perceived to be more reputable than private institutions due to their integrity and quality of training provided to young people. Relatedly, such institutions are renowned for only enrolling high performing students, whereas low performing students predominantly enrol into private institutions.

Young people further highlighted that their qualifications were not strongly recognised in the international job market. Although some young people revealed their long term interests to secure work outside of their countries, they admitted that this is even more difficult than doing so in the local job market. Resoundingly, they identified pursuing further education, such as a Masters degree, as a reliable pathway to accessing better employment opportunities internationally.

## **3. Young women and young people from marginalised groups experience widespread bias and discriminatory practices in recruitment processes and when accessing income generation opportunities.**

Thirdly, bias and discrimination towards both TVET and HE students, particularly young women, is a critical barrier that threatens to reverse the gains made towards an equal and just world. Many of our FGD respondents in all four countries revealed that young women sometimes become vulnerable as they look for decent work and income generating opportunities. They further highlighted that even with qualifications in their pockets, some young women are forced to forfeit some opportunities after receiving indecent proposals from recruiters or experiencing sexual harassment by their employers, who threaten to terminate their employment if they decline such advances.

Negative perceptions towards young women, particularly those in TVET, are another critical barrier that young people must overcome in their transition from school-to-work. Employers in TVET related organisations feel that young women are not capable of doing certain technical roles such as engineering due to the physical demands of the work. Such attitudes from prospective employers are disproportionately affecting young women, and worsening their access to decent work and income generating opportunities on merit.

Overall, young people have strongly emphasised the need for additional support from their respective TVET/HE institutions in facilitating their transition from school-to-work. To ensure that no one is left behind, it is imperative that public and private sector institutions/organisations adopt inclusive approaches and revise existing recruitment strategies to match the current realities of young people.

## Country Spotlight: Tunisia

### TVET

- Young people in Tunisia are eager to pursue further education and training to enhance their access to future work opportunities.
- Young people identified 21st century skills, soft skills and learning new languages as critical areas for additional learning to improve their employability.
- TVET institutions have effective systems for linking students with potential recruiters and supporting them to access local and international work opportunities.

### HE

- HE students enjoy better access to formal work opportunities from recruiters who prefer to employ young people that have done more education, through both additional training and internships or job placements.
- Young people particularly young women often experience bias and discrimination from recruiters when pursuing formal employment opportunities.
- HE institutions do not facilitate linkages with prospective employers to support young people's transition into the world of work.

## Country Spotlight: Nigeria

### TVET

- The integrity and reputation of TVET institutions is an influential factor in enhancing access to diverse employment opportunities for young people.
- TVET institutions lack school-to-work transition plans that could support many graduates to find decent work opportunities.

### HE

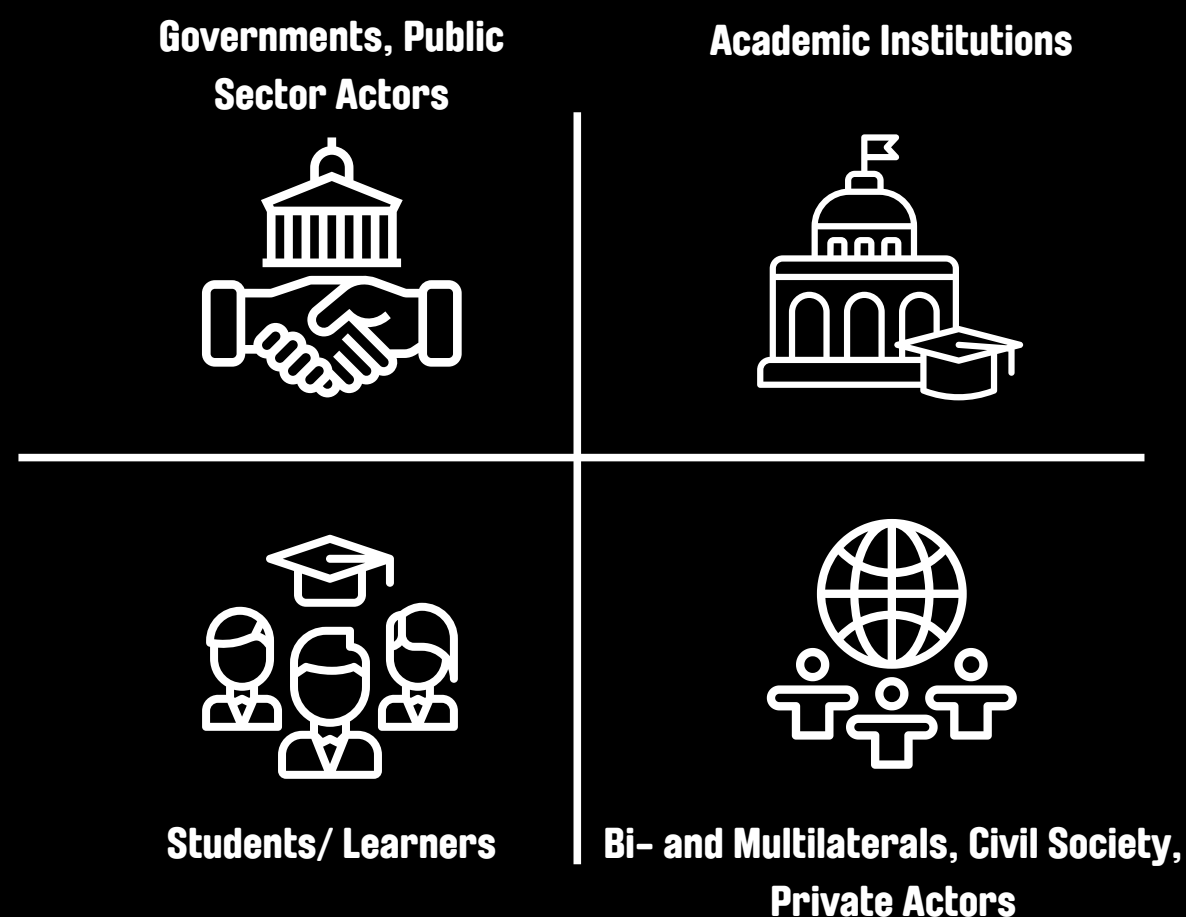
- There are fewer opportunities available for young people to connect with prospective employers. Usually, the available opportunities are provided by very few faculties within HE institutions, leaving many young people without opportunities to access work.
- Strong prevalence of negative stereotypes in certain work and income generating opportunities towards young women affect their access to jobs.



# Recommendations.

Apart from collecting data on the needs of young people and how the TVET/HE landscape is structured in the 4 countries, respondents also proffered some insights into how their experience with TVET and HE can be improved so that it is more inclusive, equitable and of high quality.

These recommendations, under each theme, are directed at different actors including the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, bi- and multilaterals, governments, civil society, public and private sector stakeholders who have the potential and capacity to improve the state of education systems in TVET and HE. Central to these recommendations are short to long term calls-to-action that can guarantee a complete shift and adjustment in students' experiences.



## Equity of Access

**As the researchers discovered the issue of access is different across countries and across populations. Many young people fail to access quality TVET or HE because of how systems and infrastructure are set up, in most cases failing to be visible and accessible to different groups of young people**



### Recommendations for Governments/Policy Makers

1. Invest in and support construction of more TVET and HE institutions in rural areas to ensure access to affordable and quality education is attainable for marginalised young people and young women in rural areas.

**Focus countries :**  

2. Strengthen existing scholarship schemes and provide more inclusive and accessible scholarships or education grants for both TVET and HE. These should target learners from low-income backgrounds in peri-urban and rural areas. Collaborations with education institutions providing TVET and HE can support the administration and delivery of these scholarships.

**Focus countries :** 



### Recommendations for Academic Institutions

3. Prioritise inclusive access of infrastructure to cater for young people living with disabilities by advocating for more accessible infrastructure, and supporting the development of new disability-friendly infrastructure in TVET and HE campuses to foster higher enrollment and progression of learners with disabilities

**Focus countries:**   



4. Promote transparency in TVET and HE enrolment systems. Lobby for institutions to enforce strict procedures that ensure equal opportunities for access to TVET and HE programs by lobbying for institutions to penalise discriminative practices and preferential treatment towards privileged or influential connections.

**Focus countries:**   

5. Support youth-led initiatives that aim to conduct information sessions in communities, particularly rural areas, to inform and support their peers in completing admission processes and choosing what to study.

**Focus countries:**  

6. Prioritise increased resourcing towards the provision of learning equipment and teaching materials for TVET learning centres to enhance the quality of training and skills development of young people, ensuring that they remain on par with job market needs and do not get left behind by new & emerging tools and skills.

**Focus countries:**    

## Education Systems

**The research shows that young people are not included in planning, monitoring and execution of education policies. Below are some recommendations for policy makers, private actors and learners on how the education system can be improved and the participation of learners enhanced.**



### Recommendations for Governments/Policy Makers

7. Provide students with opportunities to contribute towards design, formulation, and evaluation of policies related to both TVET and HE by strengthening the students unions' role in policy decisions.

**Focus countries:**    

8. Provide students with opportunities to contribute towards design, formulation, and evaluation of policies related to both TVET and HE by strengthening the students unions' role in policy decisions.

**Focus countries:**    



### Recommendations for Bi-laterals, Multilaterals , Civil Society, Private Sector

9. Support more research initiatives by youth-focused organisations to gather young people's insights into education systems to inform initiatives of both local and international stakeholders in the education sector. Such evidence-based recommendations can be used to improve learners' experiences.

**Focus countries:**   



### Recommendations for Students / Learners

10. Create both digital and physical inclusive platforms and leadership spaces to foster more collaboration between representatives of students' unions across various TVET institutions to share their opinions and ideas, and influence the formation, implementation, and evaluation of curricula to meet their needs.

**Focus countries:**    

## Learning Experience

**As the world continues to digitise and become more practical the education sector ought to adjust accordingly. Through this research we found out that the learning experience was more theory-based. The following recommendations have been made to improve the learning experience of students.**

11. Partner with education institutions in both TVET and HE to facilitate exchange programs where learners are offered opportunities to visit, learn, and create useful networks with other institutions.

**Focus countries:**  

## Income Generation Opportunities

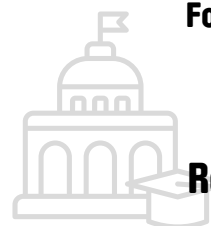
**The reason why most learners are going to school is for them to generate income after their studies and get a decent living. Below are some of the recommendations made for policy makers and academic institutions to guarantee a decent living for graduates once they finish school.**



### Recommendations for Governments/Policy Makers

12. Governments should do more to catalyze job creation by attracting foreign direct investments into initiatives, companies, and organisations that absorb graduates by offering work opportunities for young people.

**Focus countries:**  



### Recommendations for Academic Institutions

13. Academic institutions in TVET should give young girls and boys the same opportunities in all the courses that are available at that particular institution. The preference of boys in some courses makes the playing field uneven when it comes to income generating activities as some companies are not keen on recruiting females for jobs that they consider to be for males.

**Focus countries:**     

14. Provide equal opportunities for access to all available TVET training and programs to young girls and boys to ensure an even playing field that will lead to a gender balanced and equitable workforce.

**Focus countries:**     

15. Create career development centres in both TVET and HE to support students by working with them to refine their job search skills, identify and work toward career goals, find suitable careers for graduate school programs, get referrals to employers, and boost their networking skills.

**Focus countries:**     

## School-to-Work Transition

**Most companies and organisations do not recognise the importance of inclusivity when it comes to recruiting. Many fresh graduates are left out because of a number of reasons that include lack of access to information about opportunities, not having enough experience and not having access to the internet for online applications amongst other issues. Below are some recommendations that have been suggested to improve the school-to-work transition of learners.**



### Recommendations for Bi-laterals, Multilaterals, Civil Society, Private Sector

16. Support graduates from both TVET and HE with internship opportunities to gain practical experience in the area of specialisation to help them secure jobs.

**Focus countries:**     

17. Partner with academic institutions and potential employers to conduct job fairs after every graduation cycle for both TVET and HE to offer on-the-spot interviews to interested candidates.

**Focus countries:**  



## Recommendations for Academic Institutions

- 18.. Prioritise creation of partnerships with companies and prospective employers to integrate young people after their training by connecting employers with students from both TVET and HE and supporting students to transition into the job market smoothly.

**Focus countries:**    

19. Include school-to-work transition plans as part of yearly budgets/plans for both TVET and HE schools to support graduates to obtain gainful employment.

**Focus countries:**  

## Conclusion.

This research unearthed a number of challenges faced by young people in TVET/HE in terms of equity of access, education systems, learning experience, income generating opportunities and school to work transition. By having young researchers lead this work and interacting with their peers, valuable lived experiences and insights were gathered. These insights together with the recommendations are crucial in ensuring that TVET/HE programmes that target young people are more inclusive, equal and are of high quality, offering young people including young women better opportunities for their future.

As shown in this report, young people do not feel engaged in the design and implementation of education policies. This report will be a starting point for policy makers and institutions to ensure that young people are represented at the decision making table when it comes to formulating policies that concern them.

This research has shown that there is a need for further inquiry into the TVET/HE landscapes. A deep dive in scope and geographical area into the needs and priorities of young people will be essential if we are going to create a more sustained, impactful, and meaningful TVET/HE experience. Additional research into the various intersectionalities of education will be important bearing in mind that young people from marginalised groups or who are discriminated against often experience multiple forms of marginalisation and discrimination not only at the individual level, but also at the level of the institution.

Looking forward, more research around the intersectionalities of access to TVET/HE will be crucial to gaining a deeper understanding into the challenges that young people face. Access to education intersects with disability, gender, geographical location, climate change among various other issues. Getting a deeper insight into this intersectionality will be important and will guarantee a more holistic programme designed for young people to fulfill their dreams.



# Annex 1: Research Methodology.

## Design, Sampling, and Data Collection

The research employed a mixed method approach involving the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. The researchers gathered qualitative data through in-depth Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIs). The FGDs and KIs gathered ideas, insights and lived experiences of diverse young people from 4 countries. This was complemented by quantitative insights through a survey. The leadership of young people was maximised at every stage of the youth-led research process.

The researchers deliberately targeted different groups of young people to learn from their diverse experiences and identities. Discussions were held at times which were convenient for all genders and at accessible locations especially to young people living with disabilities. In addition, marginalised young people, particularly those from rural areas and ethnic minority groups were engaged through community sensitization, meaningful youth engagement, and engagement of community gatekeepers to encourage young people’s participation.

Furthermore, the researchers used different sampling methods in order to reach a diverse group of young people for example; snowballing and purposive sampling of young people from different institutions/social groups in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. We also ensured that respondents participated in only one data collection method to avoid duplication of insights and enable easy tracking of the number of unique respondents. In addition, the young researchers collected data electronically and later translated it, where applicable, and transcribed it into an interview transcript.

## Analysis

We used a deductive approach for analysis, whereby young people generated codes and coded data in line with the overarching research questions and primary data. The coded data was then analysed to find emerging patterns that could be developed into themes. Themes were synthesised against the evidence collected to unearth key findings and recommendations. A gender lens was applied throughout the analysis to explore differences in learning experiences between young men and young women.

## Validation

Validation is conducted as part of ensuring that the findings emanating from the data collection and analysis accurately reflect the perspectives of the participants and ensure the integrity of data. Failure to validate the data, could lead to imperfect data which is not representative of reality. The researchers conducted a validation exercise with randomly sampled respondents that were initially engaged through the FGDs, KIs, and surveys. Through interviews the researchers presented initial findings to a sample of those who initially participated in the research. Through these discussions, respondents had an opportunity to comment on emerging findings, critiquing whether it accurately reflected their perspectives and providing clarifications on our interpretation.

This was a unique time for the researchers to reiterate what their insights will be used for as well as next steps in the research process. Additionally, this report was also co-created and validated by the researchers so that it accurately narrates their research journey.

Table 1: Summary of survey respondents per country

Country	No. of Respondents	Institution type		Location (Rural/Peri Urban/ Urban)			Sex		
		HE	TVET	Rural	Peri-urban	Urban	Female	Male	Non-Binary
Burkina Faso	133	59%	41%	27%	14%	59%	49%	51%	-
Egypt	5	40%	60%	60%	-	40%	60%	40%	-
Nigeria	42	86%	14%	19%	14%	67%	50%	48%	2%
Tunisia	102	43%	57%	26%	33%	41%	62%	36%	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>282</b>								

Table2: Summary of FGD & KI respondents per country.

Country	No. of Respondents	Institution type		Location (Rural/Peri Urban/ Urban)		Sex	
		HE	TVET	Urban	Peri-urban/Rural	Female	Male
Burkina Faso	60	57%	43%	53%	47%	45%	55%
Egypt*	4	50%	50%	25%	75%	75%	25%
Nigeria	21	52%	48%	48%	52%	48%	52%
Tunisia	110	52%	48%	32%	68%	43%	57%
<b>Total</b>	<b>195</b>	*Key informant interviews were conducted in place of FGDs					

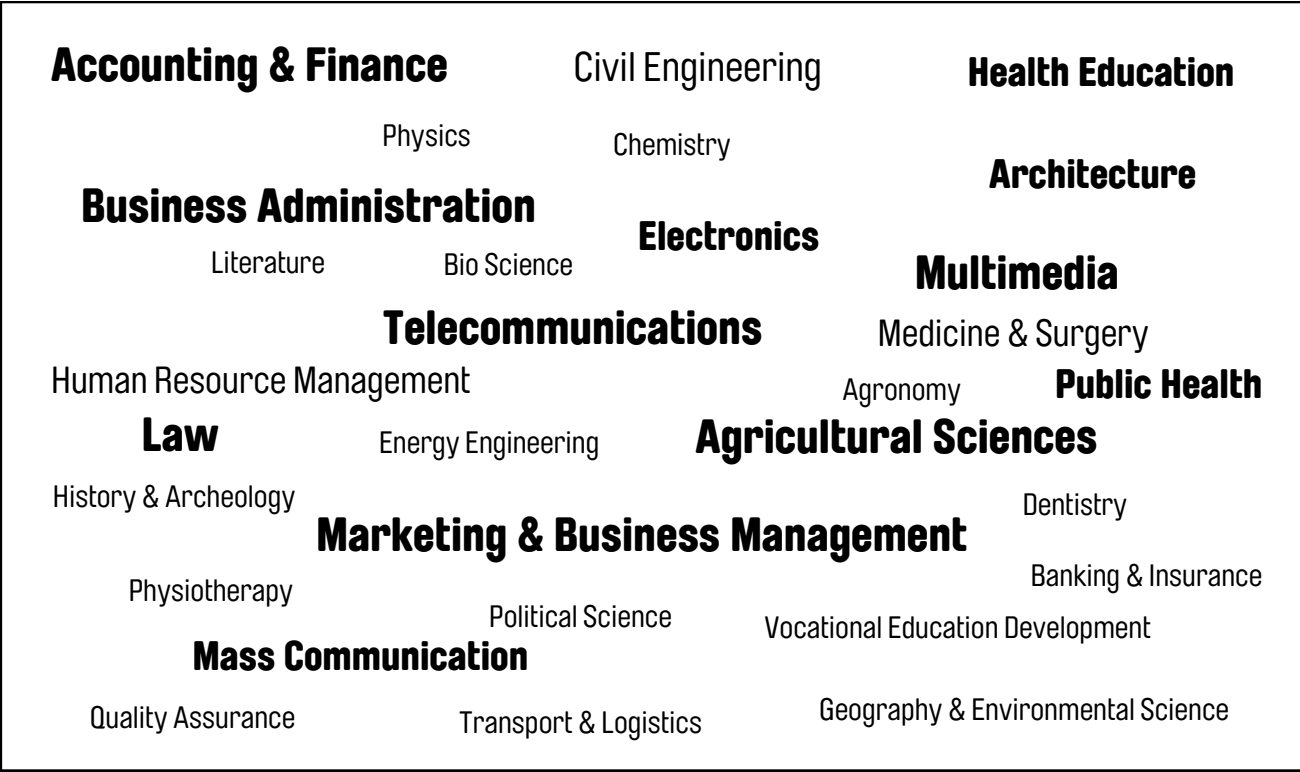
## Limitations

Despite gaining crucial knowledge and insights from young people there were some limitations that could have inhibited the research team from reaching out to a larger and more diverse sample of young people to gain a deeper understanding of the context and their experiences within TVET and HE. Some of these limitations included school strikes and closures in Nigeria, national security concerns resulting from a coup in Burkina Faso, and restrictions to large gatherings and access to schools due to COVID-19 in Egypt\*.

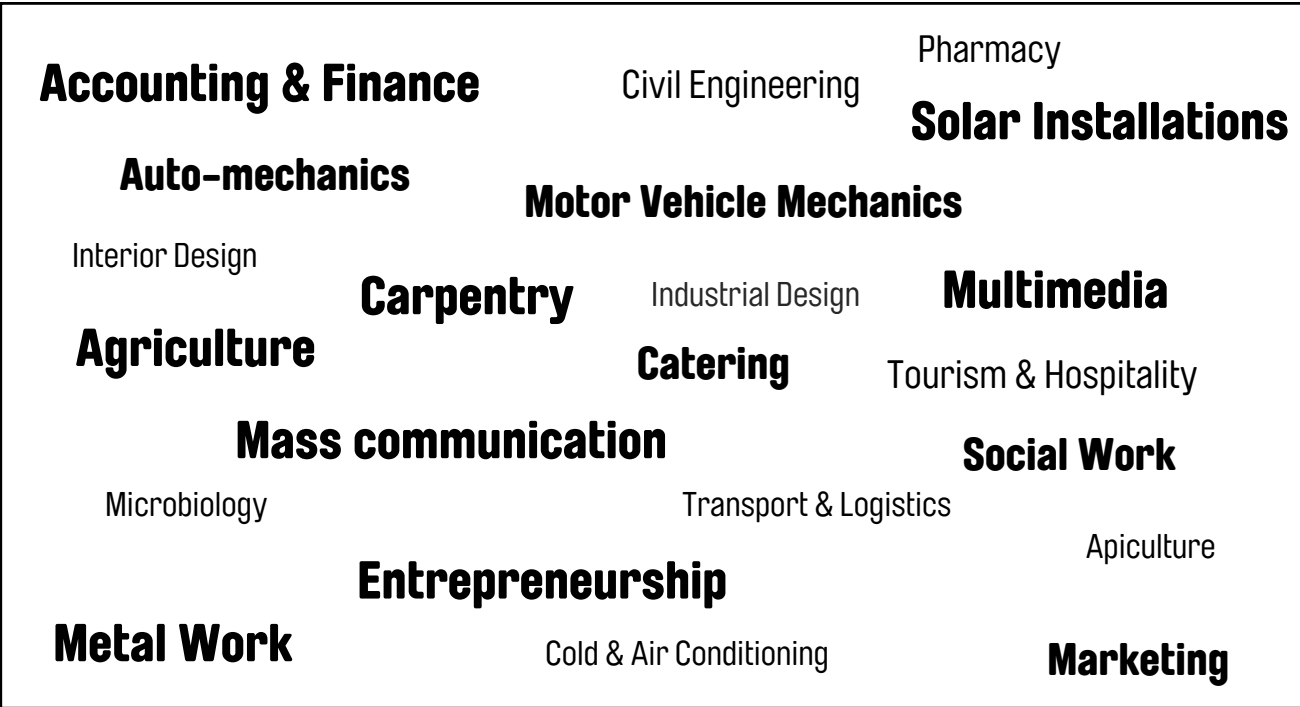
# Annex 2: List of TVET/HE Programs.

The cloud below indicates the most mentioned programs, courses, or training being pursued by survey, FGD, and KII respondents in both TVET and HE across Burkina Faso, Egypt, Nigeria, and Tunisia.

## HE Programs / Courses



## TVET Programs / Courses



# Annex 3: List of TVET/ HE Institutions

The tables below indicate the different TVET and HE institutions in respective countries that were engaged in data collection for this research.

## 1. Burkina Faso

Name of Institution	HE	TVET	Location	Area
Joseph Ki Zerbo University	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
Nazi Boni University	x		Bobo–Dioulasso	Urban
Institute of Vocational Course (ISFP)	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
Saint Thomas Aquinas University (USTA)	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
New Dawn University	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
African Unity University	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
Higher school of public works of Ouagadougou	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
International institute of water and environmental engineering	x		Ouagadougou	Urban
Norbet Zongo University	x		Ouagadougou	Rural
Dedougou University	x		Ouagadougou	Rural
Kaya University	x		Kaya	Rural
Emprint Vocational training center of Ouagadougou		x	Ouagadougou	Urban
Ouagadougou training and professional evaluation center		x	Ouagadougou	Urban
Women’s training center of Ouagadougou		x	Ouagadougou	Urban
Vocational Training Center in Bousse		x	Bousse	Rural
Emprint Vocational Training Center of koudougou		x	Koudougou	Rural
Ziniare reference training center		x	Ziniare	Rural

2. Tunisia

Name of Institution	HE	TVET	Location	Area
Higher Institute of Legal and Political Studies of Kairouan	x		Kairouan	Urban/peri-urban
Higher Institute of Arts and Crafts (ISAM)	x		Kairouan	Urban/peri-urban
Galaxy School		x	Kairouan	Urban/peri-urban
Smart Formation School		x	Kairouan	Urban/peri-urban
Open Door Center		x	Gafsa	Rural
Higher Institute of Applied Science and Technology of Gafsa		x	Gafsa	Rural
Nejam Formation School		x	Gafsa	Rural
Higher Institute of Technological Studies of Tozeur	x		Tozeur	Rural
Higher Institute of Applied Studies in Humanities of Sbeitla	x		Sbeitla, Kasserine	Rural
Technical Center of Organic Agriculture of Sbeitla		x	Sbeitla, Kasserine	Rural

3. Nigeria

Name of Institution	HE	TVET	Location	Area
University of Ibadan	x		Ibadan	Urban
Lead city University	x		Ibadan	Urban
University of Lagos	x		Lagos	Urban
The Polytechnic		x	Ibadan	Peri-urban/Rural
Kaduna Polytechnic		x	Kaduna	Rural
Yaba College of Technology		x	Lagos	Urban
Federal College of Education		x	Oyo	Rural

4. Egypt\*

Name of Institution	HE	TVET	Location	Area
Kafr El Sheikh High Technical School		x	Kafr El Shaikh	Urban
Damanhour University of Technical Education	x		Behera	Urban

\* Youth insights from Egypt were mainly gathered from a small subset of respondents from two institutions only; one TVET and one HE. This was due to limitations highlighted in Annex 1. We included these insights to give a glimpse of young people's learning experiences despite the limitations we faced in mobilizing them for interviews. Egypt is therefore a crucial country where future research data needs to be collected from in order to provide in-depth youth insights on the TVET and HE landscape in the country.



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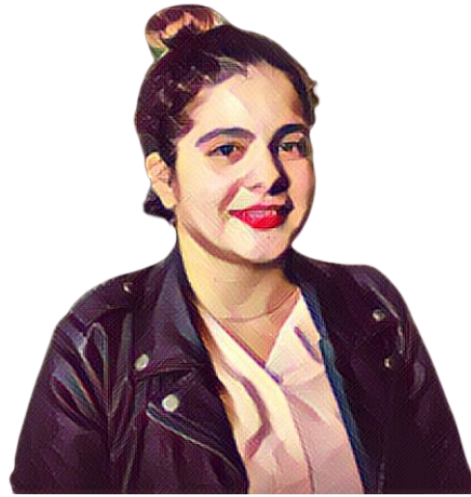
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