

Community Colleges in Malawi Initiative: Transforming Malawi into a Hub of Innovation in Technology Towards Achieving Global Competiveness

Ian Madalitso Saini*

Abstract

Community Colleges in Malawi initiative was launched in Malawi 2 years ago. It was coined by the current President of Malawi, His Excellency Peter Arthur Muthalika. The Malawi Government observed that the unemployment rate was high and there was lack of skills among the youths. To deal with these challenges, Government has been introducing, community colleges to offer skills relevant to unemployed youths. As expected, the youths are getting skills. The followings are policy recommendations: A deliberate 3 year tax waiver on all businesses being established, introduction of special fund for start-up capital and easing cross border trade arrangements.

Key words: Innovation, Youths, Skills, Community Colleges and Global Competitiveness.

Introduction

Worldwide during the elections campaigns, political parties market their manifestos so as to woo voters to vote for them so as to form the next government. It was the same in Malawi

in 2013/14 towards the elections that took place in May 2014. During the campaign DPP promised to establish community colleges throughout the country to increase access to technical, entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training (TEVET).

According to concept note for establishing community colleges (2014), a community college is defined as a training institution whose educational facilities are available to youth and other members of the community. According to the concept paper (2014), it can also be an institution established in a community, owned by a community and run by a community to cater for youth and adults who would like to further their career and those who did not complete their schooling or never attended school.

Problem Statement and Rationale

According to the concept note for establishing community colleges (2014), in Malawi, unemployment is prevalent and the rural sector that is predominantly dependent on agriculture harbors most of the unemployed because of the nature of work which does not require specific knowledge and skills. In rural sector,

*Women's Programmes Officer, Ministry of Agriculture, Ntchisi, Malawi, Africa
iansaini@yahoo.com

farming is seen to be the main activity because of lack of exposure to other productive activities.

A large percentage of the rural population is migrating into towns and cities in search of jobs which unfortunately are very limited. The majority of the migrants have no employable skills that can enable them get the limited jobs on the labour market. As a result, most of them engage in socio-economic problems such as crime, drug abuse and vandalism.

To deal with these challenges, the Malawi Government has been introducing, community colleges in each district to offer productive knowledge and skills relevant to unemployed youths. The community colleges will assist their graduates to become self-employed, and/or allow them to proceed towards attainment of higher qualifications. Specialized job-placement agencies will be established to ensure skill-job matching. This clearly indicates the significance of the initiative.

Methodology

Nyasa Times Newspaper (2015) reported that

His Excellency the President of Malawi, Professor Peter Arthur Muthalika launched the concept on 21st March 2015 at Ngala in Karonga District. The newspaper quoted him saying that “Technical and vocational jobs are an important means of development and self sufficiency because they provide and achieve a turnaround in poverty indicators, if our people, especially the youth, are given Technical, Entrepreneurialship and Vocational Training.” during the official launch. According to the concept note for establishing community colleges, the first task was to establish management committees. Thereafter, potential sites were to be identified. Upon the identification of the potential sites, infrastructure development such as renovating buildings was the next activity. Trainers were identified and recruited followed by provision of training tools and equipment. The next stage was to recruit trainees (60) per college followed by training rolling out. Thereafter there was administering of community colleges and

capacity development in terms of short courses. There has been lobbying for funds for smooth running of the colleges. Finally, support business establishment for prospective entrepreneurs since the launching of the initiative. It has been the wish of the Government of Malawi to continue the construction of the community colleges.

Sustainability

There are 3 ways that have been employed to ensure sustainability. The first strategy employed is to train the entrepreneurs’ business development and entrepreneurship skills. This is a transformation in mind set whereby graduates are becoming self-employed. All in all, according to the concept note, acquisition of skills for wage employment and procession towards attainment of higher qualifications will be encouraged.

The second one is the establishment of the business incubator centers in the communities based on the area of focus with an aim creating a conjunctive business establishing environment. This in turn is making the entrepreneurs to change innovation into business. Linking entrepreneurs from community colleges to financial lending institutions such as Opportunity Bank of Malawi (OBM) Malawi Rural Finance Company and Microloan Foundation is the last strategy that is in place with an aim of allowing the entrepreneurs to access start- up capital. In addition to linkages to financial lending institutions, graduates will be provided with start - up tools and equipment.

Expected Outcomes

According to the concept note (2014), the community college is expected to reduce the prevalence of unemployment among unskilled and unproductive youth. It will also strengthen community participation in development projects as well as increase income (for the rural masses) and chances of education progression. Ultimately, it will encourage entrepreneurship among the Malawians with an aim of

encouraging innovation in technology and thus achieving global competitiveness.

Monitoring and Evaluation

To ensure the smooth running of the initiative, a number of committees have been put place as follows:

- Inter-ministerial Committee for coordination of implementation of TEVET activities and programmes
- National Steering Committee (NSC) for policy direction in the functioning of community colleges.
- Technical Working Group (TWG) for overseeing the functioning of community colleges, developing infrastructure, developing curricula, building capacity of teachers, developing training materials, providing teaching and learning materials as well as conducting monitoring and evaluation.
- District Management Committees (DMC) for identifying sites, identifying trainers, liaising with the communities, prioritizing training needs and sourcing additional operational funds.
- College Management Committees (CMC) for operational issues such as identifying training needs, identifying trainees, maintaining infrastructure, as well as monitoring college performance, discipline and quality of training.

Initiative Implementation Progress

So far so good as the community colleges are in place. As expected the youths are getting skills. With the progress made so far, it is evident enough that innovations are up for grabs and the country will be achieving global competitiveness slowly but surely.

There is a swift change in terms of the mindset as the people are now becoming entrepreneurs and thus becoming self employed and able to employ other youths too. It is a process that

is slowly gaining ground and the initiative seems to be a solution to high unemployment rates the country is facing now. Quoting President Muthalika “Community technical colleges provide with a way out of boredom and aimless idling for young men and women who have finished but were unable to get into university” Nation Newspaper (2016) reported that community colleges have been giving hope to youths.

Currently, it is difficult to give out the actual figures in terms of number of graduates and what they are actually doing on the ground. All in all, the fact remains that community colleges are really changing the Malawi’s landscape not only in terms of transforming the country from a predominantly consuming country into a producing country but also encouraging innovations in technology towards achieving global competitiveness.

Opportunities-International Recognition

There is an opening in terms of international recognition. According to Nyasa Times Newspaper, the initiative has been getting international recognition and backing. Nyasa Times Newspaper (2016) reported that ‘Malawi Community Colleges receive China backing’. Under the deal, the Chinese Government will assist the Malawi Government to construct some more community colleges across the country. Nyasa Times Newspaper (2016) also reported that “International Labour Organization said it plans to use Malawi as a model in Africa for the establishment and implementation of community colleges”. This is a great opportunity and the Malawi Government will get a great international recognition through this initiative. This generally, indicates that the initiative is a solution to problems rocking Malawi as far as youth economic empowerment is concerned.

Pre Launching Policy Recommendations

Mr. Zinza Msukuka, Executive Director of Quality Assurance (Maseru, Lesotho) had a chance to assess the initiative while it was in

an infancy stage (before commencement). He came up with recommendations in two parts. The first part looked at the short falls of the concept note and he came up with the following recommendations:

- There was no logical framework matrix so as to ease up the monitoring and evaluation process
- Some of the financial institutions to be linked to the graduates had bad reputation such as Malawi Rural Development Fund
- There was no guarantee that all mentioned banks would be in a position to give out loans to graduates.
- The paper failed to pinpoint on ways of maximizing skills from the graduates
- The second part analyzed the situation on the ground and what to do to come up with successful program. The followings were the suggested recommendations:
- There was a need to restructure technical ,entrepreneurship vocational education and training (TEVET) system in Malawi
- There was a need to channel necessary resources to run the colleges smoothly as there was inadequate resources for the already existing technical colleges
- There was a need revamp technical subjects in secondary schools and also equipping public technical colleges with enough equipment
- Improving capital investment in technical education both in the secondary schools and public technical colleges
- Increasing support to the sector in general
- Mainstreaming vocational education into general education system such as reintroducing technical and vocational training in both primary and secondary schools
- Creation of an office in the Ministry of Labour to handle all issues related to TEVET.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the ease of doing business in Malawi website, the followings are the policy recommendations:

- A deliberate 3 year tax waiver on all business being established as a result of the initiative. This will make the businesses to become moderately established before being burdened by taxes. In turn this will assist in preventing start up business failures.
- Introduction of special fund for start- up capital so as to ensure that more entrepreneurship businesses are established. This special fund to be under the Ministry of Labour. A special position such as Principal Secretary can be created to oversee the disbursements of the funds in an accountable and transparency manner.
- Facilitating/easing cross border trade arrangements so that local as well as international markets will be readily available for the products produced. The creation of a special office in the Ministry of Trade can make this a reality. The Ministry of Labour to be responsible in bringing awareness of this facility. Currently, it is always difficult for an artisan to apply for foreign trade permit.

Conclusion

Community college initiative started as a political campaign promise some three or so years ago but now it is a reality as the youths are graduating with different entrepreneur skills and start their entrepreneurship journey. In the long run, this will eventually encourage innovativeness and will become a driving force behind the attainment of global competitiveness. Afriem (2015) concurred with the Government of Malawi by reporting that “Community Colleges: The only way to go for Malawi”. Indeed, the initiative seems to be the way forward in terms of high unemployment reduction. The initiative has been getting international recognition and backing. This is

an opportunity and the Malawi Government has to grab it so as to expand the initiative. This clearly indicates that there is a brighter future as far as the initiative is concerned.

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