

## **'BLUE COLLAR' EDUCATION WILL TRANSFORM KENYA**

The terms "blue collar" and "white collar" are occupational classifications that distinguish workers. Blue-collar workers are working class persons who typically work with their hands. They are sometimes called *Jua Kali* or informal sector workers.

A majority of Kenyans associate white collar jobs with hefty pay checks and prestige, yet many talented and skilled blue-collar workers earn huge monies in the six figure range. Blue collar jobs or the Jua Kali sector is not suitable only for people without formal education.

The skills necessary for blue-collar work vary by occupation. Some blue-collar occupations require highly skilled personnel who are formally trained and certified. Blue-collar work may involve skilled or unskilled manufacturing, mining, sanitation, custodian work, oil field, construction, mechanical, maintenance, warehousing, fire fighting, technical installation and many other types of physical work. These workers include aircraft mechanics, plumbers, electricians and structural workers among others.

The need for highly skilled blue collar workers is growing. In almost all countries in Africa, large numbers of graduates from the formal school system are unemployed, yet many opportunities for skilled workers exist in the economy. According to the World Bank, Kenya's unemployment rate is 40% and will grow to 50% by the year 2020. This leaves the average Kenyan stranded in such a tough market place. This gap can be filled by blue collar skills training which gets the graduates into highly skilled, well-paying jobs.

**TECHNICAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING (TVET) IN PRODUCE  
 GRADUATES FOR BLUE COLLAR JOBS IN KENYA**

*TVET is defined as all forms and levels of the educational process involving, in addition to general knowledge, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, know-how, attitudes and understanding relating to occupations in the various sectors of economic and social life. (UNESCO, 2001:1-2)*

This definition highlights the importance of the acquisition of practical knowledge, skills and attitudes in any training offered by TVET providers. It is widely recognised that TVET education provides skills that improve productivity, raise income levels and improve access to employability. TVET is considered as an important measure for the development of trained labour force required for the socio-economic development of a country. Basically, if our people lack knowledge, technical or entrepreneurial skills, Kenya’s natural resources will remain unutilized, underutilized or even mis-utilized.

The Kenyan TVET system gives an opportunity for its graduates to be employed in both the formal and informal sectors including careers like:

✚ Mechanics	✚ Technologists	✚ Welders
✚ Plumbers	✚ Technicians	✚ Architects
✚ Building Contractors	✚ Bakers	✚ Pharmacists
✚ Electricians	✚ Masons	✚ Surveyors
✚ Caterers – cooks and waiters	✚ Carpenters	✚ Entrepreneurs

## TVET INSTITUTIONS IN KENYA

Kenya has a vast network of technical and vocational institutions providing a wide range of programmes for all categories of school leavers. TVET institutions in Kenya comprise of:

- National Polytechnics (NPs)
- Technical Trainer Colleges (TTCs)
- Technical and Vocational Colleges (TVCs),
- Institutes of Technology (ITs)
- Vocational Training Centres (VTCs)
- Youth polytechnics (mentioned in paragraph below but not on original list)

A well-developed TVET system offers a chance to those students who are more comfortable with practical as opposed to theoretical education. It is an alternative to those who drop out of the general academic cycle, for example the youth polytechnics in Kenya, established to cater for class eight drop outs.

In the Kenyan education system, TVET institutions mandated by the TVET Act 2013 offer courses as follows:

- ✚ Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) up to Artisan Certificate
- ✚ Technical and Vocational Colleges (TVCs) up to Diploma level
- ✚ Technical Trainer Colleges (TTCs) up to Higher Diploma Level
- ✚ National Polytechnic (NP) up to Higher Diploma Level

The minimum entry qualifications needed to train in TVET courses at Higher Diploma, Diploma, Craft Certificate and Artisan levels are as follows:

- ✚ Higher Diploma : Diploma holder
- ✚ Diploma : KCSE Mean Grade C- (Minus)

- ✚ Craft Certificate : KCSE Mean Grade D (Plain)
- ✚ Artisan Certificate : KCSE Mean Grade D- (Minus)

Technical vocational training and education (TVET) develops a skill culture in contrast to a purely academic culture. It simultaneously nurtures the *hand* and the *mind*, the *practical* and the *abstract*, the *vocational* and *academic*. The development of occupational skills leads to technological advancement that ensures optimum utilization of resources and leads to enhanced productivity. It therefore increases the level of economic growth, competitiveness and job satisfaction as well as a reduction in the gap between job demand and supply.

### **THE FUTURE IS BLUE COLLAR**

With technological advancements competing for space in the global markets, the significance of TVET education cannot be overemphasized. TVET is seen as the vehicle to steer countries towards industrialization and sustainable economic leaps. In Kenya, realization of vision 2030 is anchored on training of engineers and technicians and raising their skill competencies to the level that will make Kenya a competitive industrializing nation.

Most economies in Africa, Kenya included, face declining job opportunities in the formal sector. The informal sector has huge potential to create jobs, develop future entrepreneurs, and to produce quality and attractively priced products. There are many opportunities for employment for those who acquire and master blue collar skills, particularly in the building, construction, mining, agri-business and ICT industries. These are the careers of the future!

Technical vocational education and skills development increases the productivity of individuals, profitability of employers and expansion of national development. By offering

hands-on skills training, TVET has the potential to transform the informal sector. It has the potential to curb high rates of unemployment especially among the youth and women.

Pressure is mounting on our TVET system to improve and increase range of hands-on skills offerings and match them with the demands of the labour market. TVET has the potential to provide these skills and not only graduate employable trainees ready for the job market, but also produce graduates who will enhance the informal sector by facilitating self-employment and alleviating the high rates of unemployment and frustration emanating from competition for the limited available jobs in the formal sector.

Watch this space!

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