

PUBLIC AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF TEVET ACTIVITIES IN MALAWI

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of Information, Education, Communication and Marketing (IECM) strategy by Malawi's Technical, Entrepreneurial and Vocational Education and Training Authority (TEVETA) on potential clients' awareness of the organisation's existence understanding of policies on and HIV/AIDS and Gender, and their perception of the importance of TEVET activities in Malawi. A structured questionnaire was deployed to gather data from a sample of 585 interviewees recruited using a two step sampling design. The findings suggest that the IECM activities were not successful in creating awareness of TEVETA Malawi's presence and TEVET amongst urban, peri-urban and rural Malawians. Further, the study found that potential client knowledge of what TEVETA does and its policies relating to gender and HIV/AIDS inclusiveness was limited. For TEVET to become popular and help in driving national economic growth, the study recommends that TEVETA Malawi should espouse a targeted integrated public communication strategy comprising use of multiple communication channels, strategic placement IECM materials and use of multiple languages.

Keywords: *IECM, labour market information, artisanal skills, TEVET, Malawi*

1. INTRODUCTION

Malawi is principally dependent on agriculture for its food sufficiency and foreign earnings. Agriculture absorbs about 80 percent of the labour force and accounts for up to 40 percent of Malawi's Gross Domestic Income (Malawi Government 2007; UNESCO 2010). After foreign aid, tobacco is the largest source of foreign earnings (Davies 2003; World Finance, 2014). However, the price of tobacco has been going down due, in part, to international antismoking campaigns (Chikoko 2013). While other cash crops, such as tea, sugar, coffee, macadamia and industrial hemp have the potential to contribute significantly to the country's economy, these have not been aggressively marketed as alternative foreign exchange earners (FAO 2003).

The need for economic diversification is, therefore, urgent. Malawi has realised that to diversify it needs investing its efforts in developing its human resource or human capital base. Several studies indicate that as a country's human resource, quantitatively and qualitatively grows, that country's economy also grows (Khilji *et al.* 2012). In his capabilities theory of development, Sen (1999) posits that poor people will graduate from their social condition when they are empowered with skills and the ability to transform natural resources. One way of empowering poor people is through provision of mass academic, professional and technical education. To this end, the Malawi government liberalised higher education delivery and encouraged the establishment of private tertiary education and technical training institutions to nurture employability and artisanal skills.

As Zeleza (2014) observes, higher education is central to "building human capital and constructing knowledge societies and economies for sustainable development and economic competitiveness" (p. 17). Confirming the importance of tertiary education in development, Montenegro and Patrinos (2013) argue that in Sub-Saharan Africa there is an average of 21.9 percent private rate return on investment in tertiary education against a worldwide average of 16.8 percent. This implies that investing in human resource development is a worthwhile national venture. The Malawi Government policy is that those who do not qualify for higher education should acquire technical and entrepreneurial skills (Malawi Government 2015).

Malawi's human capital development is also clearly articulated through the Vision 2020 (Malawi Government 1995) and the Malawi Growth and Development Strategy II (Malawi Government 2012), where lack of entrepreneurial and business skills are identified as a major strategic challenge. The two strategic documents also emphasise vocational skills and science-based training as the bedrock of a producing and exporting economy that leads to sustainable social development.

To operationalize this national development policy, the Malawi Government established the Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education and Training Authority (TEVETA Malawi) in 1999 through the TEVET Act of Parliament (No. 6) (UNESCO 2010). A university dedicated to scientific and technology research and teaching, the Malawi University of Science and Technology (MUST) was established in 2012. In 2015 the Malawi Government launched district-based community technical colleges to "increase access to Technical, Vocational and Entrepreneurial Education and Training (TEVET) for youth who fail to make it to formal TEVET service providers (Malawi Government 2015, p.

3). Thus, community technical colleges (CTC) complement the training provided by the Malawi Polytechnic of the University of Malawi, and several public and private national technical colleges.

When fully implemented, the CTC concept will be more fruitful than traditional technical colleges because the Malawi Government plans to engage specialised job placement agencies to ensure skill-to-job matching, CTC graduate absorption and placement, skills growth, business incubation, and linkage of the graduates with actionable and innovative business ideas to financial institutions for capitalisation (Malawi Government 2015). This approach addresses criticisms by the World Bank (Mambo *et al.* 2016) that Malawi's higher education is inadequate and irrelevant as its programmes have not "been aligned to those areas - namely engineering, business, ICT and tourism - that are critical to the economic development of Malawi," (p. xviii). For this to be achieved, potential clients need to be made aware and understand the importance and objectives of TEVET through a robust information, education, communication and marketing (IECM) strategy. In 2008 TEVETA Malawi produced such an IECM plan and this study examined its effectiveness.

1.1 Objectives of TEVETA Malawi

TEVETA Malawi was established in 1999 to promote an integrated, demand-driven, competence-based and modular technical, vocational and entrepreneurial education and training system to fill identified skills gaps in the labour force (UNESCO 2010). Additionally, it aimed to support the adoption and application of appropriate technologies; to promote managerial and business skills and create a culture of entrepreneurship in Malawi without discrimination based on an individual's gender and HIV/AIDS status. In the long term, its goal was to create a skilled, productive and efficient human resource that would positively contribute to economic growth and poverty reduction in Malawi (TEVETA Malawi 2007). According to Chafa (2003), ILO (2005) and UNESCO (2010), this training paradigm was part of a growing international reform movement and International Labour Organisation (ILO) Recommendation 195 to reorganize TEVET provision and programmes towards lifelong learning for social development and wealth creation.

Chafa (2003) and TEVETA Malawi (2007) explain that TEVETA Malawi's departure from a supply-driven to a demand-driven approach was preferred to ensure that only those skills required by the public, employers and the private sector were emphasised. In the revised TEVET approach, the government's role was to complement and support the initiatives being undertaken by TEVETA Malawi. However, as Rogers (1983), Edmond and Bruel (2007), and Jansen and Schuster (2011) observe severally, people who are not aware about a service cannot demand it. The challenge with the TEVETA Malawi Strategic Plan of 2007 was that it did not problematize the significance of public awareness as a precursor to service demand and adoption (TEVETA Malawi 2008). TEVETA Malawi attempted to address this lacuna through its Information, Education, Communication and Marketing (IECM) strategy. This is discussed in more detail in the proceeding section of this paper.

1.2 TEVETA MALAWI'S IECM

TEVETA Malawi (2007) reported that although the organisation had offices throughout the country, the public knew very little about the organisation, courses offered and its recruitment policies, such as non-discrimination based on one's gender and HIV/AIDS status. Writing earlier in 2006 Lewis Msasa, TEVETA Malawi's communications manager reported that very few members of the public or the potential clientele could distinguish between the Authority (TEVETA Malawi) and the System (TEVET) despite a seven-year attempt to create public awareness on TEVETA Malawi and TEVET. In order to better reach the public as well as corporate and other potential clients, to improve communication among its own staff and TEVET service providers, and to market the TEVET system by clearly demonstrating the linkage between TEVET training with the labour market, TEVETA Malawi commissioned studies. Notable among the studies was the Labour Market Survey conducted by Jimat Development Consultants (TEVETA Malawi 2008).

The Jimat study identified a few communication and marketing gaps. These included lack of a communication policy and strategy, lack of regular meetings at secretariat and departmental levels, inadequacy of public awareness of TEVETA Malawi's activities as a result of limited publicity and outreach activities and services, and inadequate financing of information, education, communication, and marketing activities. To increase awareness on TEVETA Malawi activities, the Jimat study recommended intensified multichannel communication, marketing and public relations activities and maintaining a steady presence in the local mass media.

According to TEVETA Malawi (2009), the outcomes of the Jimat study were integrated into the 2009 TEVETA Malawi Information, Education, Communication and Marketing (IECM) strategy. The target audiences, who included potential TEVET clients, staff of TEVETA Malawi, and TEVET training/service centre staff, were expected to be aware of and knowledgeable about TEVETA Malawi's roles and functions, and TEVETA Malawi policies on potential clients living with HIV and AIDs and on gender. In 2010, a study was therefore commissioned to examine if the IECM had created the expected awareness and knowledge or understanding (see Manda and Manjawira, 2011). This paper examines only those data related to awareness and perceptions of TEVETA Malawi, TEVETA Malawi Gender and HIV/AIDS, and TEVET by potential clients in purposively selected rural, urban and peri-urban Malawi.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

2.1 Research objectives

The general objective of the study was to assess TEVETA Malawi's communication, information, education and marketing (IECM) activities and determine whether or not the potential clientele or the public was aware of TEVETA Malawi's existence, its TEVET activities, and gender and HIV/AIDS policies. Specifically, the study intended to quantitatively gauge potential client

- (i) Awareness of TEVETA Malawi and TEVET activities
- (ii) Understanding of TEVETA Malawi HIV/AIDS policy

- (iii) Understanding of TEVETA Malawi gender policy, and
- (iv) Perception of the importance of TEVETA Malawi and its activities.

2.2 Research questions

A propos, five research questions (*RQs*) were asked:

RQ 1: Is the public or potential clientele aware of TEVETA Malawi and its activities?

RQ 2: How does the public or potential clientele understand TEVETA Malawi's policy on People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)?

RQ 3: How does the public or potential clientele understand TEVETA Malawi's gender policy?

RQ 4: How does the public or potential clientele perceive the importance of TEVETA Malawi and TEVET?

RQ 5: What does the potential clientele suggest as means of making TEVETA Malawi more visible?

3. METHODS AND SAMPLE

3.1 Instrument

This study gathered data using a structured 20-item questionnaire that was divided into five sections. Sections 1 and 2 recorded general demographic information about the location, date of interview, age, gender, and educational status of the interviewees. Section 3 collected information on the interviewees' media access and consumption behaviour while Section 4 gathered information on public awareness, understanding or knowledge and perceptions about TEVETA Malawi, its activities, and its gender and HIV/AIDS policies. The last Section asked the interviewees to indicate their language and media/outreach preferences which TEVETA Malawi ought to use in its IECM in order to effectively popularize TEVET courses it offered and reposition its public image. The questionnaire combined sixteen multiple choice and four Likert weighted questions. Other data gathering methods included administrative or project document and academic literature review.

3.2 Population and sample

In the absence of an appropriate sampling frame, it was difficult to determine the population of the study. As such a two-step sample recruitment strategy was adopted. The first step involved purposive identification of typical centres in urban, peri-urban and rural areas where manufacturing, fabrication, carpentry and other artisanal activities dominated. In the Southern region, Ndirande Township in Blantyre City and Lunzu in Blantyre District and Thyolo district centre represented urban, peri-urban and typical rural areas. In the Central Region, Kawale Township in Lilongwe, Lumbadzi, which straddles Lilongwe and Dowa, and Dowa district centre were identified while in the North, Luwinga in Mzuzu represented the urban, Ekwendeni in Mzimba represented the peri-urban and Rumphu stood for a rural place. During the first step, a cumulative population of 5850 was identified as potential clients through snowballing and availability sampling. These were distributed as follows: South: 36%; Centre: 33% and North: 31%.

The second step involved using the online SurveyMonkey sample calculator set at 95% Confidence Level, 5% Margin of Error, with 50% (normal) distribution, to identify a sample of 598 interviewees, a term preferred in this paper to respondents because the former entailed the research assistants asking the questions and filling the questionnaire items after ensuring the interviewee meant what he or she intended. As such, the research assistants were interviewer rather than questionnaire administrators.

During data cleaning 13 questionnaires could not be used because the location details were missing. Thus 585 were used for data analysis. The demographic characteristics of the interviewees are captured in Table 1.

Table 1: Aggregated Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees (n = 585)

Location 1 (by region/province)	South	Centre	North
%	36	33	31
Location 2 (by classification)	Urban	Peri-Urban	Rural
%	50	29	21
Exact Location	Urban/Trading Centres	Farms/Other	
%	92	8	
Gender	Male	Female	
%	51	49	
Age	Below 30 years	Above 30 years	
%	63	37	
Education	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
%	33	51	16

The above data indicate that TEVET clients are mostly young, urban based and with primary and secondary education. In Malawi standard primary and secondary schooling lasts 8 and 4 years respectively. There is no mandatory starting age and repetition of classes, especially in primary school, is common. As such, a learner who enrolls in Standard/Grade 1 at the recommended age of 6 years may complete secondary school at 18 years of age or over.

3.2 Procedure and ethical considerations

The study recruited three lecturers as supervisors and fifteen students as research assistants from the Faculty of Education and Media Studies at the Malawi Polytechnic, University of Malawi. Five research assistants were allocated to one supervisor. Three teams were formed and deployed to one region or province of Malawi each.

Written informed consent was obtained from each of the participants after being briefed about the nature, purpose and sponsors of the study, and assured of utmost confidentiality and voluntary participation. Data were processed in SPSS and analysed descriptively based on frequency tables, charts and percentages. A factor of analysis (a research variable such as awareness, perception, or importance) was rated as positive if more than 50 percent of the interviewees rated it positively or negatively depending on the nature of the question.

4. RESULTS

This study sought to answer five research questions (RQs). The first was whether the Malawian public or potential clients were aware of TEVETA Malawi and its activities while the second question examined how the public understood TEVETA Malawi's policy on PLWHA. The third question sought public or potential client understanding of TEVETA Malawi's gender policies. The fourth question examined the public's perception of the importance of TEVETA Malawi and TEVET and the last question called for interviewee recommendations on how TEVETA Malawi IECM could be more effective. Tables 2-5 summarise the findings to questions 1- 4 while Table 6 captures findings on the last question. These findings are further described in the sections that follow.

Table 2: Public awareness of TEVETA Malawi activities (n = 585)

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Training in manufacturing and fabrication	81	14
Training in motor vehicle repair	35	6
Training in tailoring	6	1
Training in carpentry	70	12
Promoting farming	12	2
Teaching about HIV and AIDS	6	1
Helping Orphans	6	1
I don't know	369	63
Total	585	100

Table 3: Public understanding of TEVETA Malawi's policy on People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) (n = 585)

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Encourages PLWHA to take part in TEVET programmes	41	7
No discrimination against PLWHA	59	10
Does not care about PLWHA	23	4
I don't know	462	79
Total	585	100

Table 4: Public understanding of TEVETA Malawi's Gender policy (n = 585)

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Gives equal opportunity to men and women	24	4
Encourages women and girls to participate in TEVET training	64	11
I don't know	497	85
Total	585	100

Table 5: Public perception of Importance of TEVETA/TEVET (n=585)

Variable	<i>f</i>	%
Important	59	10
Very important	350	60
Not important	6	1
Not sure/Can't judge	170	29
I don't know	0	0
Total	585	100

4.1 Level of awareness of TEVET activities

The potential clients (n=585) were asked about their awareness about TEVETA Malawi (through the question: what does TEVETA Malawi do or offer?). As Table 2 indicates, cumulatively 33 percent of the interviewees knew and correctly associated TEVETA Malawi with training in artisanal skills such as manufacturing and fabrication (*zokhomakhoma*), motor vehicle repair (*zokonza magalimoto*), carpentry (*zopalapala*), and tailoring (*zosoka*). However, up to 63 percent of the interviewees did not know what TEVETA Malawi did or courses it offered. Even worse, a small proportion of interviewees thought TEVETA Malawi was a charitable organization assisting with farming, or teaching about HIV & AIDS (1 percent), or helping orphans (1 percent).

4.2 Level of understanding of TEVETA Malawi's policy on people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

As Table 3 reveals, not many people were aware and understood TEVETA Malawi's policy on People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) as only 7 percent rightly indicated that it encouraged PLWHA to participate in TEVET programmes while 10 percent correctly reported that the policy promoted non-discrimination against PLWHA. Some 79 percent did not know anything about TEVETA Malawi's policy on People Living with HIV/AIDS

(PLWHA) while some 4 percent of the interviewees thought TEVETA Malawi did not even care about people living with HIV/AIDS.

4.3 Level of understanding of TEVETA Malawi's gender policy

On understanding about TEVETA Malawi's gender policies (see Table 4), only 4 per cent reported that TEVETA Malawi policies give equal opportunities to men and women while 11 percent pointed out that it encouraged women and girls to participate in TEVET. However, 85 percent said they did not know anything about TEVETA Malawi's gender policies.

4.4 Level of perception of importance of TEVETA Malawi/TEVET

When asked to judge whether or not, from what they had learnt, TEVETA Malawi and TEVET were important to them (see Table 5), 60 percent said it was very important, 10 percent said it was important and 1 percent said it was not important while 29 percent could not judge.

4.5 Suggestions on increasing TEVETA Malawi/TEVET visibility

The potential clients were also asked to suggest one approach and one physical location to place IECM materials so as to increase the visibility of TEVETA Malawi. The suggestions were varied (see Table 6). At least 21 percent suggested that messages should be carried on radio alone while 6 percent preferred outreach activities; 45 percent suggested a multimedia or multiple channel approach. Further, 53 percent suggested that TEVETA Malawi IECM materials should be available in and accessible from primary and secondary school as well as college libraries; 34 percent proposed that these should be located in Community Based Organizations (CBOs) while 13 percent singled out the National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) as the most convenient place. As for the language of communication, the majority of the interviewees (81 percent) preferred that the IECM materials be in local languages, such as Chichewa and Chitumbuka, although those who preferred the use of Malawi's official language, English (19 percent), should not be ignored.

Table 6: How TEVETA Malawi can increase its visibility (n=585)

Variable	f	%
<i>a) Method or Approach</i>		
Use radio	123	21
Use outreach activities	35	6
Use multiple channels	263	45
No suggestion	164	28
Total	585	100
<i>b) Physical location of IECM materials</i>		
Place IECM materials in school/college	310	53
Place them in National Initiative for Civic Education (NICE) Information Centres	76	13
Place them in Community Based Organisation/ NGO libraries	199	34
Total	585	100
<i>c) Language of communication</i>		
English	111	19
Local languages	474	81
Total	585	100

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that the largest potential clientele of TEVET in Malawi is young, urban based and educated to secondary school. However, despite TEVETA Malawi implementing its IECM, awareness of what TEVETA Malawi and TEVET activities among this potential clientele is limited. Only 33 percent of the interviewees were able to associate TEVETA Malawi with technical, entrepreneurial and vocational skills such as carpentry (*zopalapala*), tailoring (*zosoka*), and manufacturing and fabrication (*zokhomakhoma*) but the majority (63 percent) did not know anything about TEVETA Malawi and TEVET. Even worse, some potential clients had a totally aberrant understanding of TEVETA Malawi, such that they even suggested that TEVETA Malawi was an HIV/AIDS prevention organization or an AIDS orphan caring institution or, indeed, an agricultural support institution. These data are indicative of an IECM that did not work well enough to create public awareness and understanding of TEVET. The TEVETA IECM did not succeed in working as a recruitment tool for TEVET programmes.

The study also found that a substantial number of interviewees (34 percent) wanted TEVETA Malawi IECM materials to be placed in public places to serve the potential clientele well. School or college libraries, CBO centres and NICE offices topped the list. These findings suggest a weakness by TEVETA Malawi to harness and maximise use of popular and easy-to-access media, such as local language radio, to reach the larger public part of which is the potential TEVET clientele. Suggestions that TEVETA Malawi IECM materials should be placed in school and college libraries and in CBO and Non-Governmental Organisation centres, such as NICE's, indicate that these places, which are easily and often frequented by the TEVET potential clientele, are minimally used by the TEVETA IECM team.

Further, the study found that the majority of the interviewees (81 percent) preferred local languages as the medium of communication for them to easily understand the messages contained in TEVETA Malawi IECM documents and radio/TV programmes. The role of local languages, particularly mother tongues, in learning and education, awareness creation, policy understanding, and knowledge building, among others, has been adequately researched, chronicled and acknowledged (see, for example, Böhmann and Trudell 2008).

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear from the data that the majority of the potential clients were not aware of about TEVETA Malawi activities. The results of the study suggest that TEVET opportunities have not been clearly articulated and the target clientele has not been fully identified. This clientele is mostly young, urban-based and with primary and secondary school education. TEVET popularisation should target this core component of Malawi's labour force. TEVETA Malawi's objectives of developing Malawi human resources through TEVET to drive national economic growth can be achieved through adoption of a robust and targeted integrated public communication strategy comprising use of multiple communication channels, strategic placement of TEVETA Malawi IECM materials in easy-to-access locations such as school and college libraries and use of multiple languages. Design of such a communication strategy should be informed by baseline studies to establish the demographic spread and communication preferences of the potential clientele.

It can be noted that while TEVETA Malawi's demand-driven training policy is plausible from a purely marketing perspective, the need for public awareness should not be underestimated because it is often a precursor and creator of demand for services that some potential clients do not consider as necessary. As Meister (2002) argues in his infusion of innovations theory, sometimes demand for and acquisition of innovations, new technologies, new skills and understanding policies, have to be forcibly injected into a resistant and reluctant society or individuals by starting with mass awareness. In their social change agency model, Figueroa *et al.* (2002) emphasise the role of the mass media in creating awareness and infusing innovations into society for socioeconomic change and advancement.

By and large, the results of this study indicate that unless IECM is prioritised at the outset, even noble and ambitious skills building initiatives such as TEVETA Malawi's TEVET are unlikely to succeed. A more research-based, targeted integrated public communication strategy comprising use of multiple communication channels, strategic

placement of IECM materials and use of multiple languages prior to the launch of TEVET in Malawi would have made TEVETA Malawi's activities and HIV/AIDS and Gender policies better known among Malawians.

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