

STRATEGIC NOTE

# Employability and Learning Pathways in the Green Economy

January 2019





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# Introduction

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On the 9th October 2018, JET Education Services (JET) and the National Business Initiative (NBI) co-hosted a Green Skills Colloquium aimed at sharing lessons from recent programmes and developing scalable solutions for meaningful pathways for unemployed youth into the Green Economy. The Colloquium formed part of the J.P.Morgan Chase Foundation's New Skills for Youth (NS4Y) programme, which has included a Green Skills pilot programme in Orange Farm.

The Green Economy offers a range of opportunities for job creation in South Africa over the next decade (Ramsarup, 2017)<sup>1</sup>. However, job creation potential in the Green Economy is undermined by the absence of a clear framework and system for skills development and limited pathways for youth, particularly at the entry and intermediate levels. This situation restricts the capacity of the various sectors to leverage off the opportunities that the Green Economy offers.

This strategic note outlines lessons from three recent programmes which have sought to test new models for increasing employability and skills within the Green Economy, particularly at the intermediate level. The three programmes are as follows:

- The J.P. Morgan Chase Foundation NS4Y Pilot in Orange Farm, managed by MSC Artisan Academy in partnership with Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (NS4Y pilot);
- The Nedbank Foundation Solar Water Heating Installation and Maintenance Pilot, managed by NBI in partnership with Harambee and the Institute of Plumbing South Africa;
- The Skills for Green Jobs (S4GJ) project, a partnership between Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Institute of Plumbing South Africa and the insurance sector focusing on skills in the plumbing industry to undertake Solar Water Heating Installation.

The lessons from these programmes are drawn from the programme evaluations as well as tracer studies that were conducted<sup>2</sup> and provide important guidance for future interventions that are seeking to optimise the potential of the Green Economy for job creation. More specifically, this paper highlights the lessons from the programmes to date and then outlines how these lessons are being consolidated in taking the work forward.

1 Ramsarup, P. (2017). Systems elements influencing the emergence of learning pathways from a Green Skills perspective. *SAQA Bulletin*, 17(1).

2 For the Nedbank Solar Water Heating Pilot and GIZ Skills for Green Jobs programmes, findings were drawn from the following reports:

Singizi Consulting Africa. (2018). Evaluation of the NBI/Harambee Solar Water Heater Installation Project.

Singizi Consulting Africa. (2018). Tracer study of the Solar Water Heating Installer ELP to consider an upscaling of the initiative. Conducted on behalf of GIZ S4GJ programme.

Singizi Consulting Africa. (2018). Reviewing key aspects of the S4GJ SWHI training initiative, in order to understand the implications going forward. The consolidated report from two studies conducted by Singizi for GIZ.

# Comparing the Models

## Programme objectives

While the three programmes shared a common focus on green skills, their target audience and objectives were distinct.

	NS4Y Pilot	Nedbank Foundation/ NBI Pilot	GIZ S4GJ
<b>Programme Objectives</b> 	Increase employability of youth in the Orange Farm Community through skills programmes and workplace learning for Solar Water and Photovoltaic (PV) Installation.	Enable young people to access increased levels of employment and self-employment as a result of a more responsive Solar Water Heating programme offered at a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college.	Up-skill existing workers in companies (who would work under qualified and licensed plumbers and become qualified plumbers) with the skills required to install solar water heaters.
<b>Target Group</b> 	Unemployed youth in informal settlement community.	Unemployed TVET College graduates.	Employed workers of various ages working in plumbing/related companies who have experience but no formal training opportunities.
<b>Approach</b> 	Making technical skills accessible to youth in an impoverished community on the outskirts of Johannesburg through a newly established skills centre, managed by a private artisan training provider.	Using an existing public TVET College in the vicinity of industry with additional industry capacity.	Upskilling employed workers to gain specialised skills through a local private training provider and public TVET College.
<b>Industry Focus</b> 	The intended focus was on both formal and non-formal industries which would be easily accessible for the candidates from the informal settlement.	Focused on formal sector small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in and around central Johannesburg.	Focused on formal sector employees in the plumbing industry within the insurance supply chain across Johannesburg and Cape Town.
<b>Recruitment/ Selection</b> 	Recruitment and selection by Harambee.	Recruitment and selection by Harambee.	Recruitment and selection by participating employers.
<b>Programme Structure</b> 	12-week technical training curriculum, combining credit bearing (Solar Water) and non-credit bearing (Photovoltaic) units of learning.	6-week technical training at the college, 4-week work readiness training/1-week entrepreneurship boot camp and 6-month workplace learning. Comprises 34 credits at NQF level 2.	Approximately 72 hours of knowledge and practical training combined with 80 hours of workplace learning.  Comprises 34 credits at NQF level 2.



The three programmes all sought to solve labour market failure to provide access to formal, demand-driven occupational training that could enhance both employability and labour market mobility. Such labour market failure particularly affects marginalised African youth from impoverished environments. For those who do manage to secure employment, their lack of formal training – particularly in a technical environment – limits their progression and restricts movement within the labour market. The three programmes provide important insights into the challenges associated with providing training that aligns to viable learning and career pathways.

The alignment of training with learning and career pathways is achieved by ensuring that training is first and foremost guided by occupational roles associated with available or emerging employment opportunities. Recognising and defining these roles ensures the training is fit-for-purpose and will enable the individual to effectively apply the knowledge and skills acquired, thus increasing both employability and career progression. The three programmes described here targeted Solar Water Heating Installation (and Maintenance - in the NBI

case) skills, based on the expectation that these were skills in demand and could advance employment opportunities. The demand for these skills was not fully realised as many of the participants have not necessarily applied their Solar Water Heating Installation and/or Maintenance skills in the workplace. The programmes therefore provide some important lessons around how to better determine the occupational roles and skills in demand.

Moreover, a comparison of the three programmes provides insight into the elements that are required to ensure programmes are demand-driven and aligned to workplace requirements. Specifically, three key factors are analysed, including:

- Appropriate recruitment and selection of candidates;
- Appropriate curriculum content aligned to required workplace competencies;
- Appropriate balance of theory, practical and workplace learning to optimally build competence through both institutional and workplace practice.

## Recruitment and selection

Selection processes for both the NS4Y and NBI programmes were both managed by Harambee. For the NBI programme, the candidates were most effectively recruited directly through colleges and through social media. There was a significant challenge in finding TVET College graduates with a plumbing related qualification – the college indicated that there is a high dropout rate because students get teased for opting to study plumbing, despite the range of employment opportunities available in the plumbing industry. The selection criteria therefore had to be broadened to allow for a larger pool of applicants. However, the students were put through a rigorous psychometric assessment process aimed at matching the candidates with the opportunity and ensuring high levels of retention.

The NS4Y programme was less prescriptive about selection and focused specifically on unemployed youth from the Orange Farm community, with candidates needing only to have completed Grade 12, preferably with Mathematics and Science. The tracer study report for NS4Y raised the risk of youth in Orange Farm applying for the programme because of a lack of alternative opportunities in the community rather than out of a particular interest in the programme. The NBI and GIZ programmes explicitly targeted candidates who were either on a pathway to a technical occupation or were already working in the plumbing industry, respectively.

In addition, while the NBI programme focused on college students that already had some background in plumbing-related studies and would be provided with a specialisation in

Solar Water Heating Installation and Maintenance, the NS4Y programme focused more specifically on Solar Water and PV Installation and de-emphasised any plumbing or electrical prerequisites. Therefore, while the scope of training for both the NBI and GIZ programmes was linked specifically to opportunities in the plumbing industry, the NS4Y programme did not explicitly offer a pathway to plumbing. The NS4Y students would have therefore been more limited in their pathways beyond the completion of the programme, especially given the relative infancy of the Green Economy in terms of job creation.

The GIZ programme had the least structured selection process as candidates were already employed. According to the findings of the evaluation, candidates were generally unclear about whether selection had taken place. Some candidates had been informed about the programme by their employers, while others heard about the programme through informal channels such as from friends and others in their communities. While some basic criteria were in place for recruitment, it does not seem that these criteria were applied evenly across the different companies. Many learners could not cope with the Mathematics or English requirements of the programme and indicated that remedial measures to address this had to be introduced, which placed additional pressure on the service providers. These remedial measures were highly practical in nature to ensure that candidates were able to apply mathematical principles to solve problems that were relevant to what they were being trained for, rather than abstract.



## Curriculum content

The programmes offered short skills programmes focused on addressing the necessary technical skills that would enable the candidates to perform effectively in the workplace. All three programmes offered credit bearing skills in Solar Water Heating Installation (the NBI programme also covered Maintenance of Solar Water Heating) which are recognised as industry standard.

Given their focus on unemployed youth, the NS4Y and NBI programmes included foundational hand skills prior to the specific Green Skills training. The GIZ initiative assumed that the candidates would have adequate plumbing skills in place, given that they had already been working in the plumbing environment. However, there was variation in the candidates' levels of plumbing skills, and some learners needed additional content covering basic plumbing before being introduced to Solar Water Heating Installation, since not all learners had a sufficient practical understanding of plumbing.

Despite this, the tracer study of the GIZ programme found that:

- Employers were happy with what was covered: the programme introduced learners to changing processes and learners were empowered because they now understood how their work fitted into the broader picture. "Prior to the training, workers had done their tasks much like automatons merely receiving

instructions on specific tasks to be completed without an overall understanding of where they fit in the overall system. There was also an overall improvement in technical skills among learners."

- In addition, there was a stronger understanding and improved implementation by both the business and the learners of safety and policy regulations.
- Another company representative commented on the candidates that they hosted stating that "They know their tools. When on the job they know exactly what to bring at any given time without being told."
- Learners felt more empowered to engage customers and talk more confidently about the job at hand.

The NBI programme was strengthened by the inclusion of work readiness and entrepreneurship skills. The Harambee work readiness intervention is based on an analysis of workplace requirements and made fit-for-purpose. The evaluation of the programme found that employers (supervisors and mentors) were satisfied with the level of candidates' work-readiness. This view was generally shared, and company representatives agreed that the candidates were confident, they were keen to learn, and they were professional in their behaviour and attitude. The NS4Y programme also included soft skills training, although the effect of this on the work readiness of the candidates has not been established.

## Integration of theory, practical and workplace learning

While all three programmes set out to provide a combination of institutional (theory and practical) and workplace learning, only the NBI and GIZ programmes achieved this. For both these programmes, industry partners determined the programme requirements and were instrumental in selecting and recruiting the participating workplaces. While workplace learning was explicitly planned upfront in both the NBI and GIZ programmes, plans for workplace learning were not fully in place at the start of the NS4Y programme. There was an expectation that the City of Johannesburg, as a project partner, would assist with placement. While some of the first cohort were placed in apprenticeships in the municipality, this commitment was not formalised upfront and did not fully materialise.

The NBI candidates and employers indicated that more time should be spent on basic hand skills, particularly the handling of tools. A candidate remarked how she had struggled to handle pliers correctly, though she observed that she had since developed this capacity with the support of her mentor. Ideally though, it was felt that developing these basic skills further prior to going to the workplace is

important for the confidence of the candidates; this would mean extending the institutional training component to allow for more time to practice these skills.

Similarly, candidates on the NBI programme spent 6 months in workplace learning, which was found to be insufficient for optimising the workplace learning opportunity. It was suggested that the candidates should spend a year in the workplace with the support of the mentors; and the workplace learning should be structured in a way that ensures the candidates have sufficient opportunity to practice what they learned at the institution as well as to experience different aspects of the trade. As a result, NBI extended the workplace experience for a further 6 months for candidates who were not immediately taken up into employment. In addition, many of the mentors suggested that they did not feel fully equipped to mentor the candidates and indicated that they would have benefited from a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities and more support on how to mentor the candidates.



## Employment outcomes

The programmes highlight the challenges of successful employment outcomes. Despite the strong industry involvement and curriculum alignment in the NBI programme, post-placement employment still required extensive intervention from the project team. Of the 22 candidates that completed the programme, 8 were immediately offered permanent jobs with the employers with which they were placed. The remaining 14 candidates were provided a further 6-month placement with one of the employers, funded by the project, which then allowed them to further develop their skills and for permanent placements to be found.

The NS4Y programme sought to channel students into apprenticeships or learnerships. An initial tracer study with 25 of the 42 participants who completed the programme found that only 5 were in employment 6 months after completing the programme, mostly on fixed-term contracts. A further 2 reported being in self-employment, while 4 were still studying. None of the placements were in roles where Solar Water Heating Installation skills were specifically required. A key challenge was that the programme implementers could not dedicate enough time to identify and pursue potential workplaces where graduates could be placed. A second challenge was the absence of industry in surrounding areas, which impacted transport costs. The limited or absence of capacity amongst the City of Johannesburg and other partners to host the candidates also made it difficult to place candidates. In response to challenges associated with placement, the implementing partner appointed a staff member in the role of Placement Officer to more effectively address placement challenges for the second cohort of the pilot.

In a tracer study of 22 candidates from the GIZ programme, most went back to their previous employment, and some of these were given higher salaries in recognition of their improved skills. Four candidates started a new small business with an increased sense of optimism. From a company perspective though, the availability of new Solar Water Heating Installation skills offered new business opportunities or additional capacity to take on more work in solar water heating. However, the companies indicated that they did not see significant demand for solar water heating, given the high costs, and suggested that this would be a disincentive for participating in further training in this specific area. Given that the programme was framed around plumbers within the supply chain of the insurance industry, an important question emerges as to how much awareness the insurance industry creates with its clients to opt for solar instead of regular geysers.

The entrepreneurship training in the NBI programme had provided an understanding of how to initiate and run a business related to what the candidates had studied, although there was not necessarily an expectation that many of the candidates would start their own businesses. Rather, it was likely that they would complete the full plumbing trade qualification over three years, and those that demonstrated entrepreneurial acumen would start up their own plumbing business after that. Being placed in small and medium-sized enterprises exposed candidates to the day-to-day challenges of being an entrepreneur, particularly in a plumbing environment, which could assist young people to decide whether they were suited to dealing with entrepreneurial demands.

The introduction of an entrepreneurial education programme into the NS4Y project was a way to provide an alternative exit path for those not able to enter an apprenticeship. The entrepreneurial education programme was not well communicated to the students, and the perception was created that students had to choose either skills training (and employment) or entrepreneurship. Therefore, the pathways were not perceived as choices but rather as a trade-off that required sacrificing one or the other. As a result, the use of entrepreneurial training and mentoring to support candidates to establish their own businesses did not fully materialise.

# Lessons and Way Forward

## Overview of lessons

The three programmes have illustrated a number of important lessons:

- **Demand-side engagement and activation is the critical starting point for demand-driven occupational training (the GIZ pilot was directly linked to the supply chain of the insurance industry). Confirmation of and commitment to placement opportunities provides the basis to ensure that candidates will be able to apply their skills in an authentic workplace setting.** Successful placement involves an understanding of both the occupational role and the work environment into which the candidate will be placed so that the selection, matching, training and workplace preparation can be optimised.
- Understanding the occupational roles and workplace requirements informs the **profile of the candidate that should be selected for the programme and enables the training institution to ensure an optimal match of candidate to the role and workplace culture, and then fill any gaps in the candidate's readiness to enter that role.**
- **Ensuring sufficient coverage and integration of theoretical, practical and workplace learning, even where workplace learning is not a mandatory requirement, enables the candidate to acquire the principles, apply them in a simulated setting and then practice them in a real-world context. Employers therefore play an integral role in the training process by making sure the workplace environment is conducive for learning and thereby preparing the candidate suitably for labour market entry.**
- **Industry should lead the identification of skills demands and the associated curriculum. The role of the Institute of Plumbing South Africa (IOPSA) in engaging with its members is essential for unlocking latent demand for skills and enabling the necessary learning opportunities in the workplaces.**
- The programmes demonstrate the need for an organisation to play an **intermediation function between supply and demand**, ensuring that stakeholder relationships, learning delivery in both college and workplace, and the journey of the individual candidates are all well managed. Such an intermediary should ensure that the mechanisms and capacity are put in place to sustain these relationships over time, so that eventually the intermediation is not needed.
- **Sector-level partnerships are important** for harnessing and optimising resources and avoiding duplication. Considering the resource intensity associated with technical training, companies with shared interests in building the skilled and work-ready talent-pool for their respective industries should be mobilised.
- **Local government is a key role player**, particularly in township economies, but firm commitments and exit strategies must be established upfront.
- Given that the programmes are seeking to develop new learning pathways, it is important to clearly **define the structure of workplace learning and the role of workplace mentors** upfront, in order to optimise the on-the-job learning components. Workplace mentors should be adequately briefed and trained prior to the candidates entering the workplace so that the mentors are equipped to provide the candidates with sufficient levels of support.
- **The period of time for workplace learning should be sufficient** to enable the candidate to gain competence in the required skills areas. This requires that the workplace environment must be conducive to learning and provide the candidates with sufficient opportunity to practice what they have learned. It may also require that candidates be exposed to different aspects of the workplace or be rotated to different worksites, where possible.







## Scaling and sustaining the programmes

The three programmes were all conceived as experiential pilots which could be replicated and scaled up if successful. Therefore, the main objective was to derive lessons from the programmes that could inform replication and scaling across the system.

Industry partnerships are an essential component of sustainable demand-driven training, in that they ensure ongoing buy-in to the programme once the pilot is complete. The NBI and GIZ worked through the industry association (IOPSA) which acted as the intermediary between the employers and the colleges. According to the evaluation reports, both initiatives were able to bring relevant implementing partners together in support of the programme objective and specific purpose. However, neither project was able to strengthen relationships between the college and the employer directly. As such, the continuation of the partnership would have been contingent on the industry association continuing to play this role. In the context of a proliferation of small and medium-sized enterprises, a coordinating role played by the industry body is a desirable approach because it ensures efficiency and makes it easier for the members to participate. The entry-level pathway training programmes offer the opportunity to unlock SMEs that are not currently offering workplace experience to learners as entry-level training is not as onerous as training for the full trade qualification. The large numbers of SMEs offer the scope to achieve scalable placements if the relationships are well structured and managed.

Funding is another essential component of sustainability. Private funding for the three pilots was provided through the respective funding partners who provided funding for the institutional training component and, in the case of the NBI and GIZ, the stipends for the workplace learning component. However, no plan for sustainable funding was evident across all three programmes. The NBI and GIZ programmes work directly with public TVET Colleges, which receive state funding for national programmes but do not currently receive guaranteed funding for occupational programmes. This funding has to be sourced from the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) on an annual basis. While there is a shift towards occupational training in colleges, the funding mechanisms for this have not yet been established. Theoretically, however, such programmes are more likely to be funded by the state through the fiscus budget if delivered through public TVET Colleges.

The stipends for workplace learning are even more challenging. While the stipends can similarly be funded by SETAs if the workplace learning is aligned to a recognised occupational pathway, this has implications for the ability of the programme to be responsive to industry needs.

SMEs reported that the application process of SETAs is too cumbersome and complicated to complete. In the case of the NBI project, the model was not based on traditional pathways into plumbing/solar water heating. As the participating employers were largely small or medium-sized enterprises, they struggled to fund the stipends for trainees. Yet workplace learning is a critical feature of meaningful occupational learning pathways, and therefore a sustainable funding solution is required to ensure that such workplace learning is funded on a sustainable basis, even where it is not directly linked to a formal qualification.

Finally, sustainability is highly dependent on institutional capacity. The NBI programme had a specific focus on strengthening the capacity of TVET Colleges to enable young people to access increased levels of employment and self-employment, on the assumption that the lessons generated would be automatically taken up by the college and applied to future delivery of these programmes. Due to capacity constraints, the TVET College was supported by a private training institution to deliver the programme, and there was an expectation of transfer of the capacity to the college through the pilot delivery; the ownership of the programme post-pilot by the institution was, however, not fully realised. The evaluation found that the college was in a high state of readiness with respect to infrastructure and confirmed that one of its facilitators had been trained during the pilot to take the programme forward. In spite of this, the college has yet to receive accreditation for the delivery of the skills programme, and the programme has not become embedded in the institution.

Even where the TVET College is better equipped to deliver occupational training, as was the case in the GIZ programme, the college struggled to sustain the programme largely because of the lack of availability of consistent funding and industry demand. In addition, the GIZ programme experienced difficulties in finding a college in Gauteng that met their criteria and therefore went with a private provider.

Of interest, given the perceptions that many employers express about TVET college graduates, some company respondents observed that recruiting from colleges is now seen to have potential as it enables the company to find people who at least have a foundational knowledge of plumbing. The respondents suggested that they were comfortable offering additional training to such new recruits and recognised that the company has to play this role as individuals with the relevant experience and qualification could seldom be found.



## The way forward

The experience of the three programmes and the various partners involved provide an important base from which to build a scalable and sustainable learning and employment pathway for young people into the Green Economy. Going forward, the key elements of this solution include:

- IOPSA, together with the Plumbing Industry Registration Board (PIRB) and with support from GIZ, is driving the development of a new structured learning pathway for young people into the plumbing industry. This includes reaching agreement with the industry regulatory body and the employers themselves on a competency/credentialing framework that includes the newly recognised qualification “Technical Plumbing Assistant<sup>3</sup>” which entails new skills programmes aligned to the full plumbing trade, and a delivery framework which will optimally prepare candidates for this role.
- The curriculum will emphasise a core focus on Plumbing Skills and the development of foundational principles and practical skills required for the plumbing trade. The delivery of Solar Water Heating Installation and Maintenance skills should then complement the Plumbing skills in the form of an area of specialisation.
- IOPSA will continue to play an active role in advocating for the programme and mobilising its membership base to open their workplaces to host candidates for workplace learning. It is anticipated that this will build a talent pipeline for these businesses and the employers will be incentivised to retain the candidates in permanent or contract employment following the completion of the workplace learning.
- IOPSA and GIZ will develop and implement more rigorous tools and training to prepare employers to host and mentor candidates. Given that many SMEs may not be experienced in providing structured training for young people, such tools would help ensure that the workplace provides an effective learning environment.
- Targeted TVET and Community Colleges should be geared up to deliver on the institutional training component of the new learning pathway. This requires that these colleges have plumbing workshops that meet industry standards and qualified plumbers who can facilitate learning. Ideally candidates should enter the programme with existing qualification/part-qualification which includes civil engineering subjects from a TVET College or Technical High School. It is critical that the necessary support is put in place to ensure colleges are equipped with the appropriate pedagogical and curriculum management capacity to deliver on the programme in a demand-driven manner.
- Building on the work that has been done by Harambee to date in developing a framework for sourcing and selection of candidates, it is necessary to build a profile of the optimal candidate so that colleges can be equipped to better select candidates that match the requirements of the workplace. In addition, the Harambee work readiness component of the programme, aligned to workplace requirements, must be embedded in the colleges as a core part of programme delivery. The Installation, Repair and Maintenance (IRM) Initiative provides a useful base for achieving this integration in a practical way. The Harambee pathway management platform is an important mechanism for ensuring that the pathways of the large numbers of candidates are adequately tracked and coordinated so that the necessary evidentiary base can be provided to guide the evolution of the IRM model.
- The skills programmes is being designed to combine institutional and workplace learning in an integrated manner, allowing some of the practical skills to be developed in a workplace context. This shifts the paradigm for demand-side training away from a pure reliance on simulated workplace training to authentic workplace training which enhances employability and entry into the labour market. This requires employers to be an integral part of the training process by creating the conditions for learning in the workplace and providing candidates with the necessary mentorship to develop them as well-rounded employees and potential entrepreneurs.

<sup>3</sup> The actual designation is still to be confirmed.



- In order for the integration of theoretical, practical and workplace learning to be realised, the institutional components (theory and practical) will be based on an understanding of industry work tasks, thus preparing candidates effectively for what they will encounter in the workplace.
- The programme should be tailored to provide two exit pathways – into formal employment (as a Technical Plumbing Assistant) or into self-employment. This approach also lends itself to upskilling existing employees in the plumbing industry that currently have no formal qualification or recognition. The scope of self-employment opportunities and the support needed to realise self-employment/a micro-enterprise will still need to be more clearly defined and designed.
- The programme will be underpinned by rigorous knowledge development and a monitoring and evaluation strategy aimed at achieving the following:
  - Providing evidence that the model is effective in terms of cost, quality and employment outcomes and can be scaled and replicated across the TVET and Community College sub-systems;
  - Providing evidence that TVET and Community Colleges can be developed to effectively deliver on a demand-driven curriculum that is responsive to industry requirements and adequately prepares young people to enter the workplace.
  - Provide the evidentiary basis for developing a sustainable funding model and mechanism within the Post-school Education and Training (PSET) system.