ATVET Income Generation through On-Campus Businesses

ATTSVE LEARNING SERIES
Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Ethiopia’s Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) strategy prioritizes work-based learning, stating that 70% of students’ time should be spent in apprenticeships or other hands-on learning, and only 30% should be spent in a classroom. In practice, however, students spend the majority of their time in classrooms because of low employer involvement and a lack of hands-on training opportunities such as demonstration sites at TVETs. The Agricultural Transformation Through Stronger Vocational Education (ATTSVE) project worked with four Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVETs) institutions to implement two Micro Value Chain Development projects (MVCDs) at each; these are on-site demonstration farms which provide practical agricultural and entrepreneurial experience for both instructors and students, with the intention of also generating income for the ATVET. The eight MVCDs bring numerous benefits to the colleges where they are housed. These campus-based demonstration sites give students increased opportunities for practical learning in the areas of agricultural practices and the business side of farming. MVCDs enhance colleges’ reputations, as neighbouring communities recognize their increased knowledge and expertise. MVCDs also generate income for colleges to invest in infrastructure, maintenance, and inputs.

Unfortunately, income generated by the college typically results in a comparable decrease in the funding they receive from the government, which disincentivizes productivity. Other challenges include low staff commitment due to increased workloads arising from MVCD tasks; resource constraints, such as water shortages and lack of reliable inputs; and ATVET capacity, especially in the areas of business planning and financial management. This learning document makes several recommendations for future programming, including prioritizing accurate record keeping, aligning product pricing with market rates and maximizing hands-on learning without jeopardizing product quality.
Introduction

About the ATTSVE Project

Agricultural Transformation Through Stronger Vocational Education (ATTSVE) was funded by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and implemented in Ethiopia from 2014-2021 by Dalhousie University, McGill University, Jimma University of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine (JUCAVM) and Mennonite Economic Development Associates (MEDA). The goal of the ATTSVE project was to increase the number of men and women graduates from selected Agricultural Technical and Vocational Education and Training (ATVET) institutions in Maichew (Tigray region), Nejo (Oromia region), Wolaita Soddo (Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Region), and Woreta (Amhara region), with skills and knowledge required by the labour market for the commercial agriculture sector in Ethiopia.

MEDA was the project lead for business, entrepreneurship, and value chain development, focused on strengthening the educational and economic capacities of the targeted ATVETs through the following interventions:

- **Business advising and Innovation Fund Grants to ATVETs and graduating students** to promote sustainable and replicable income generating activities
- **Strengthening industry linkages** to facilitate skills development, enabling practical learning opportunities for students in appropriate sectors through facilitation of cooperative placements
- **Curriculum development** in value chain and business management in the selected ATVETs

The MEDA ATTSVE Learning Series

This paper is part of a series of learning documents developed by MEDA focused on identifying and sharing key lessons learned over the life of the ATTSVE project. There are a total of four documents in this series, each focusing on a key project element, namely:

- ATVET Income Generation through On-campus Businesses
- Establishing Successful Student Start-Up Businesses
- Industry Engagement through Cooperative Placement Programs
- Market-Driven Business, Entrepreneurship, and Value Chain Curriculum Development

This learning paper focuses on the ATVET Income Generation through On-campus Businesses program, highlighting what the project has learned about supporting ATVETs to start on-campus businesses for income generation and hands-on learning in Ethiopia.

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1. Technical Vocational Education and Training or TVET is defined as education and training which aim to equip people with knowledge, know-how, skills and/or competences required in specific occupations or more broadly on the labour market. TVET institutions differ from universities in that they focus on providing more practical and experiential learning. Agricultural TVET or ATVET is a sub-set of the TVET system focused specifically on the agricultural sector. In this paper we also refer to ATVETs as agricultural colleges or colleges.
The Innovation Fund

A key component of MEDA’s role on ATTSVE was the establishment of an Innovation Fund with three distinct grant mechanisms supporting project objectives related to college income generation, youth entrepreneurship and industry linkages as outlined below:

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<tr>
<th>Innovation Fund Strategy</th>
<th>Overview</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy 1:</strong> Micro-Value Chain Development Grants</td>
<td>• <strong>Description</strong> – Grants for ATVETs to start businesses on campus. Each ATVET chose two commodities for a total of eight grants during the project.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Goal</strong> – To provide practical learning opportunities for students and instructors as well as provide a source of income generation for the ATVET.</td>
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<td><strong>Strategy 2:</strong> Student Start-Up Grants</td>
<td>• <strong>Description</strong> – Grants for graduating students to fund new businesses. Students could apply in groups of up to five students. A total of 272 young people (90 women) received grants during the project.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Goal</strong> – To provide practical ways for students to apply their learnings and provide a source of income generation.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Strategy 3:</strong> Student Cooperative Placement Stipends</td>
<td>• <strong>Description</strong> – Stipends to cover living and transport costs for students to participate in four- to eight-week long cooperative placements with industry actors. A total of 2,580 students (1,006 women) completed the placement program.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Goal</strong> – To provide practical learning opportunities for students, work experience and connections to potential future employers.</td>
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Methodology

A combination of primary and secondary research was conducted for this paper. Between February and July 2021, interviews were conducted with 20 members of the staff and management at three partner ATVETs, in Nejo, Wolaita Soddo and Woreta. Across the three ATVETs, eight Income Generating Unit (IGU) staff were interviewed, eight members of the college management teams and six instructors. The instructors had varying levels of contact with the IGUs. Relevant information from project reports and monitoring documents have been included where appropriate and have been supplemented by secondary research.

The Maichew ATVET is located in the Tigray region, and due to the ongoing conflict, it was not possible to conduct interviews with staff or students for this paper. Where possible, data on Maichew is included from alternative sources, such as project reports.
Vocational Education in Ethiopia

Ethiopia’s TVET strategy prioritizes work-based learning, stating that 70% of students’ time should be spent in apprenticeships or other hands-on learning, and only 30% should be spent in a classroom. Apprenticeships are implemented by both public and private employers to enhance the quality of training and increase students’ employability by exposing them to real workplaces. In practice, however, students spend the majority of their time in classrooms because of low employer involvement and a lack of hands-on training opportunities such as demonstration sites at TVETs. National enrolment in vocational training increased a hundred-fold between 2000 and 2015, with 50% participation of women, but overall numbers still fall short of the target that 80% of secondary students should enter TVETs: the actual number is less than 2%, though enrolment is growing by about 7% annually.

TVETs in Ethiopia are funded by the federal government, specifically the Ministry of Science and Higher Education (MSHE), which recently became independent from the Ministry of Education. Regional authorities contribute some funding for infrastructure and maintenance of TVET centres. Funding for equipment, research and capacity strengthening is very limited. The International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that though a small number of private sector actors are involved in hosting apprentices from TVETs, they do not contribute financially to the TVET system. To make up for budget shortfalls, many ATVETs have dedicated departments for income generation. During the implementation of ATTSVE, the project team learned that Ethiopia’s finance laws stipulate that any income earned by an ATVET must be declared and may be deducted from the budget provided by the government. Though ATVETs can apply to their regional authority to use their earnings, it is not guaranteed that their request will be approved.

Agricultural TVETs, or ATVETs, were originally established in Ethiopia to train a cadre of Development Agents (DAs), or extension agents, who would be located at Farmer Training Centres in each Kebele (village). In principle, each Centre hosts a DA specializing in natural resources, one for crops and one for livestock. Additional specialists are located at the district administrative levels. One study noted that with the full complement of approximately 70,000 DAs now deployed, ATVETs may shift their programming to offer more specialized training. ATVETs are also subject to the requirement that they offer 70% practical instruction, though in practice they lack facilities and resources to meet this target. Some colleges form agreements with local farms or agribusinesses to provide hands-on learning for students. The ATTSVE project worked with four ATVETs to implement Micro Value Chain Development projects (MVCDs), on-site demonstration farms which provide practical agricultural and entrepreneurial experience for both instructors and students, with the intention of also generating income for the ATVET.

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Overview of the ATTSVE MVCD Grant Program

Each of the four ATVETs supported by the ATTSVE project run two MVCDs focusing on specific agricultural products, as seen in the figure below:

At three of the four colleges, the MVCDs are run through a formal Income Generating Unit (IGU) within the institution, managed by the Dean or Vice Dean. Maichew ATVET does not have a formal Income Generating Unit; instead, their income generating activities are overseen by ATVET management.

The MVCDs vary in size: Wolaita Soddo employs approximately 160 day labourers; about 20 staff, technicians and day labourers work at Woreta’s MVCDs; Nejo has seven staff and only five or six day labourers, which staff acknowledge is insufficient for the operation. Maichew has a number of instructors with expertise in agriculture as well as farm managers that support on implementation of the operation.
Product Selection and Pricing

Rapid Labour Market Assessments (LMAs) were conducted in 2015, early in the ATTSVE project, in each of the four districts. MEDA staff from North America and Ethiopia led the assessments, with support from the appropriate ATVET instructors and administrators. These assessments were designed to identify and understand promising sectors with growth potential. In addition, MEDA included college staff in the assessment process and provided training on market research. After the Rapid LMAs, colleges completed the market research and incorporated their findings and crop selection into their business plans.

Two of the three colleges have pricing committees which assess the local markets and set selling prices. Nejo’s committee liaises with finance and management to determine the appropriate price, taking expenses and market rates into consideration. Wolaita Soddo’s pricing committee members include the Income Generating Unit Head, and representatives from finance and other departments. Each May, a multi-departmental team prepares a production plan based on an evaluation of the previous year’s performance, laying out what products will be produced in the coming year and in what quantities. Unlike Wolaita Soddo and Nejo, Woreta’s income generating unit does not have a pricing committee, relying instead on finance, procurement and income generating specialists to calculate the cost of production and determine a minimum price. The animals being raised for fattening are sold using a bidding process.

MVCD Markets

All three colleges sell produce to their staff, generally at prices that are lower than market rates, and once internal demand has been met, any excess produce is sold to the neighbouring community. Wolaita Soddo operates a store on campus, selling eggs to staff at 2.5 Birr each, and to external customers for 4 Birr each. They also sell to neighbouring areas that have been identified as food insecure and any excess product that remains is sold to nearby hotels, restaurants and hospitals. Woreta’s on-campus store sells dairy products to the college community, and since there is rarely excess product, they do not have an external marketing plan. Nearby hotels are the main market for Woreta’s beef. Nejo sells vegetables to the college community and surrounding areas, and sells coffee seedlings to farmers and local and international NGOs.

On MEDA’s advice, each of the three colleges have begun to raise their prices over time, to more closely align with market rates. The Woreta Dairy MVCD was originally selling milk at 10 Birr per litre, significantly below the market price of 25 Birr per litre. They have since increased the price to 20 Birr per litre. Similarly, the Maichew Dairy MVCD originally charged 10 Birr per litre for milk and have increased the price to 14 Birr per litre. Soddo ATVET adjusted their egg prices from 1.5 Birr to 2.5 Birr, on MEDA’s counsel.
Mini Case Study

Income Generation at Meru National Polytechnic:

ATTSVE included activities to share learnings across countries and projects, including a 2019 conference specifically to share learnings among representatives of the Ethiopian and Kenyan TVET systems in partnership with Colleges and Institutes Canada (CiCan) and the GAC-funded Kenya Education for Employment Program (KEFEP). Meru National Polytechnic has been extremely successful in generating agricultural income, and following its 2019 conference presentation, staff shared additional learnings with MEDA in support of this learning product.

Meru National Polytechnic is a TVET located in Central Kenya offering over 50 programs to almost 10,000 students. Supported by international donors and in partnership with Wageningen University, based in the Netherlands, the TVET hosts a Centre of Excellence in agriculture, through which they continue to hone expertise in greenhouse horticulture and nursery management. With a campus encompassing over 50 acres of land, Meru operates two fishponds and two farms, supporting livestock, vegetable production and animal fodder.

Like the Ethiopian TVETs featured in this study, Meru National Polytechnic operates an income generating unit (IGU) focusing on three activities – farming, conference facilities and textile production. Agricultural activities are managed by a Farm Committee composed of nine people from different departments within the college, including finance, procurement, administration and hospitality, a major consumer of the college’s produce. The committee provides oversight of the farm activities, sets policies and makes decisions on crops and pricing.

In addition to generating income for the college, the agricultural IGU also functions as a demonstration farm, providing practical learning opportunities for students. In fact, despite the clear financial benefits to the college, Farm Committee Chair Joseph Rarama stressed the educational value of the farm, stating that knowledge acquisition for students was the primary objective.

Clients:
The main markets for Meru’s produce are the college itself, staff and students, and also community members from neighbouring areas.

Pricing:
The Farm Committee investigates typical market rates for produce and then sets their prices slightly below market. For example, eggs, the most popular item produced, are sold in the market at KES 330 per tray (approximately CAD 3.70), and Meru’s discounted price is KES 300 (CAD 3.30). This discount is available to all Meru customers, including staff, students and community members. The Committee Chair stated that a consistent price for everyone was the most practical: if a preferential price was set for staff and students, community members would simply ask those ‘insiders’ to purchase products on their behalf to access the savings.

Profitability:
Between July 2020 and June 2021, the farm generated turnover of KES 7.2 million (almost CAD 81,000), for a profit of approximately KES 500,000 (approx. CAD 5,600). These profits are used by the institution to purchase vehicles, upgrade facilities and meet budget shortfalls not covered by funding they receive from the government and other sources. Farm Committee Chair Joseph Rarama stated that no institutions receive enough government funding, and in recognition of this, the government encourages colleges to generate their own income.

Interview with Joseph Rarama, November 5, 2021
Results and Discussion

Benefits of MVCDs

During Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), the ATVET staff and management noted numerous benefits resulting from the MVCDs.

Opportunities for Practical Learning

MVCDs provide the ATVETs with demonstration sites where students can practice the theory they are learning in the classroom. Unlike previous demonstration sites which in some cases were located far from the colleges, the MVCDs are located on campus, meaning that students do not need to travel in order to visit them. In addition to learning about animal and plant sciences, students are exposed to the business side of farming. MVCDs show students how products are produced, but also how they are costed, packaged and marketed. Woreta management noted that student performance could be more accurately evaluated when they are marked on both agricultural science and business. In a KII, one college administrator spoke of expanding the vegetable, roots and tubers MVCD, saying, “students should see profitable business.”

Nejo staff reported that students visit the MVCDs almost every day, even twice a day at the busiest times of the year. Instructors also benefit from the opportunity to provide hands-on training to students.

Increased Income for Colleges

By selling products from the MVCDs, ATVETs are able to generate additional revenue to invest in infrastructure, maintenance and inputs. One member of ATVET management noted that the enhanced income reduced the school's budget shortfall.

In addition to the income generated from selling agricultural produce, Woreta staff noted that the MVCDs created demonstration sites around which the college could host trainings themselves, rather than being forced to seek training from external providers which incurred costs.

Improved ATVET Reputation

The MVCDs have enhanced the colleges’ reputations in several ways. Neighbouring communities, particularly farmers, are increasingly recognizing the increased knowledge and expertise housed in the MVCDs, and many began attending courses to learn the business side of farming. Woreta management noted that MVCDs have increased their reputation because the college can now host zone and woreta (regional) trainings, bringing officials and trainees from neighbouring communities to the campus.

Several staff members noted that the MVCDs increased staff commitment to the colleges. Potential faculty are attracted to the dynamic working environment and the opportunity to increase their own skills. In addition, staff benefit from the high quality, subsidized food products.

Balancing Hands-on Learning with Quality Control

The Maichew ATVET runs a dairy MVCD which serves the dual purpose of generating income and providing opportunities for hands-on learning. The staff split the dairy herd into two groups, one dedicated to income generation and the other designated for student instruction. The milk collected for commercial use was kept strictly separate to ensure appropriate quality control.

It is an eye opener for the college and awareness raising in business. Before the project the college treats poultry for teaching purpose only. Now the college combines together both income and practical teaching. It has great impact as students will start their own business after finishing their learning.” – ATVET Administrator, KII

6 College administrator, KII. Names have been removed for confidentiality purposes.
Increased Business Orientation of Colleges

Several instructors and management staff interviewed noted that running the MVCDs increased the business orientation of the ATVETs. For example, they learned to do cost benefit analysis, business planning and market segmentation. Interviewees acknowledged that these skills needed additional improvement, but important steps have been taken.

Challenges

Despite the numerous benefits of running MVCDs, staff and management at all three colleges interviewed for this study noted challenges.

Financial and Structural Challenges

Though the MVCDs may provide ATVETs with an additional income stream, the Ethiopian regulatory framework requires colleges to apply to their regional administration (TVET bureau or Ministry of Agriculture) in order to use this income. Typically, income generated by the college results in a comparable decrease in the funding they receive from the government. This structural challenge disincentivizes educational institutions from attempting to raise income. All three of the colleges interviewed for this study are in negotiations with their regional authorities but note that the process is complicated.

Low Staff Commitment

All three ATVETs noted challenges with the levels of staff commitment to the MVCDs, stemming primarily from the additional workloads arising from farm expansion. Nejo staff, in particular, noted that budget restrictions limited the number of labourers they could hire; the majority of the daily work in running the MVCDs thus fell to existing staff, who completed these tasks in addition to their existing workload.

In addition to the increased workload, Woreta staff noted that morale was impacted by the fact that it was primarily academic staff who were selected to attend trainings, leaving few or no capacity building opportunities available for administrative staff.

Resource Constraints

In addition to the staffing constraints noted above, staff and management at the colleges described resource limitations. Water shortages were a frequently noted constraint. Wolaita Soddo staff were able to mitigate this by negotiating with the town authorities to use available water on a shift basis. In Woreta, simple irrigation equipment helped mitigate the water shortage. In KII, staff noted other constraints such as the lack of animal health experts and artificial insemination technicians on campus and in the community. Reliable sources of inputs, such as animal feed and seeds, were also challenges.

ATVET Capacity

Colleges experienced constraints because of capacity limitations in financial management / business planning and some specific technical areas. Staff and management from all three colleges described challenges in keeping accurate records of production costs of their products, including labour costs, seeds, fertilizers and other inputs. Once produce is sold, income from all income generating activities tends to be pooled into one account, rather than separated and tracked by activity or crop. As a result, production plans are based on incomplete data and cannot focus on maximizing the activities that are most profitable. In addition, product pricing may not cover the operating cost of the business. Though ATTSE staff provided twelve training sessions on business and financial management, ATVET staff were challenged to implement new practices due to staff juggling multiple responsibilities, turnover and bureaucracy. In addition, the Finance team was typically responsible for oversight and management of cash flow and record keeping, so IGU staff did not always have access to detailed financial data.
Lessons Learned and Recommendations for Future Programs

The following recommendations are aimed at organizations that are implementing or supporting income generation activities at TVETs or agricultural colleges (ATVETs). Though some refer specifically to the Ethiopian context, they are applicable to a broad range of environments.

**Resource staff appropriately:** Colleges considering MVCD activities should ensure that adequate human resources are available to manage and operate the business. ATTSVE ATVETs varied significantly in the sizes of their MVCD staff, with Wolaita Soddo employing approximately 160 day labourers and Nejo only five or six, which limited their production capacity. All ATVETs noted that as the farms expanded, staff workload increased and commitment decreased.

Creative staffing solutions could generate multiple benefits. For example, some ATVETs like Wolaita Soddo leveraged the MVCDs as hosts for cooperative placements, facilitating employment and learning opportunities for summer students and simultaneously providing the colleges with much-needed human resources.

In addition to those working directly on the farms, ATTSVE staff found it challenging to engage finance staff and instructors because their time was not budgeted by the project. Though the college realized financial benefits from the project, this funding did not support engagement of individual staff members, particularly support staff not directly connected to the MVCDs. Though it may not be sustainable for project budgets to pay for staff time, future projects should consider how to incentivize partner colleges to support staff engagement in project activities.

**Maximize hands-on learning without jeopardizing product quality:** Students and faculty benefit from regular, intentional engagement with practical, hands-on skill-building opportunities that meet the current and future needs of industry. Students’ employability will increase, as they acquire, hone and practice skills on a functioning agri-business. Instructors will increase their skills and will also have more effective teaching tools available to them, with the demonstration sites that the MVCDs offer.

ATVETs with MVCDs should maximize the skill building opportunities they bring. However, it is important to ensure that student visits and work opportunities do not jeopardize product quality. Food safety practices are essential and must be observed. ATVETs should seek innovative ways to balance the demands of commercial production with the benefits of hands-on teaching, as Maichew was able to do with their Dairy MVCD (see textbox in section 5 Benefits of MVCDs for more information). It is worth noting that learning about food safety is critical for students, and an important element of their work in a functioning agri-business.

**Prioritize accurate record keeping:** In addition to providing an important opportunity for hands-on learning, MVCDs generate revenue for the ATVETs and should be run as businesses. This requires accurate financial record keeping, broken down by products. All production costs should be tracked, including labour costs, seeds, fertilizers and other inputs and materials. Monthly yields and sales by crop should also be documented carefully to inform future production plans and provide year-on-year comparisons. Despite support from the ATTSVE team, in the form of training and tracking templates, colleges continue to struggle with record keeping.
Align product pricing with market rates: It is recommended that products be sold at market value to all customers, including community members and staff. All ATTSVE colleges interviewed for this paper sell to staff and students at preferential rates, a practice that brings other benefits to the college, including increased staff retention and satisfaction. At very least, these discounted rates should cover full production costs, to ensure the business is not operating at a loss.

One significant outlier was Nejo ATVET’s MVCD producing coffee seedlings, which were always sold at market price and generated significant revenue for the college. ATTSVE's analysis indicated that this was possible because the college staff were not interested in purchasing seedlings, making it much easier for Nejo to price the product accurately and sell to external buyers in the community.

In addition to agricultural products, ATVETs could consider offering services to the community for a fee. For example, several interviewees noted the lack of artificial insemination services, and if colleges are able to train their own staff in such skills, these would be valuable to the community.

Maximize peer learning opportunities among ATVETs: A learning network of ATVETs could provide a powerful way to share knowledge and promote learning across institutions. Building a learning network – even an informal one – would allow ATVETs to share approaches that are working and showcase successes in agricultural practices and MVCD operations. This would require coordination and resources, but could have a strong multiplier effect.

Market agri-business as a viable career pathway for young people, and ATVETs as the gateway: Though ATVETs are often seen as a way to secure a government job, innovative colleges could change this perception by marketing their advantages to potential students. Institutions with strong entrepreneurial education and MVCDs providing opportunities for hands-on skill building could position themselves as springboards for students to launch their agri-businesses. This would require ATVETs to strengthen their commitment to entrepreneurship education and MVCDs.
Conclusion

The eight MVCDs featured in this study provided numerous benefits to the four colleges where they are housed. These campus-based demonstration sites give students increased opportunities for practical learning in the areas of agricultural practices and the business side of farming. MVCDs enhance colleges’ reputations, as neighbouring communities recognize their increased knowledge and expertise. MVCDs also generate income for colleges to invest in infrastructure, maintenance and inputs. Unfortunately, income generated by the college typically results in a comparable decrease in the funding they receive from the government, which disincentivizes productivity. Despite this and other challenges, MVCDs are a promising model that benefits ATVET students and staff alike. If colleges are able to resource appropriately and maximize hands-on learning without jeopardizing product quality, MVCDs can bring value to students, staff and institutions.
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