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## **INTERNATIONAL AND NATIONAL ACTORS ROLE IN SKILLS DEVELOPMENT POLICY TRANSFER OR POLICY LEARNING - THE CASE OF ALBANIA**

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### **Abstract**

Skills Development (SD) has attracted the attention of many researchers and practitioners, driven by recent trends such as downsizing in organizations, enterprise information technology platforms, outsourcing and off-shoring initiatives, transformations from departmental structures to process-based structures, among others. Increased global competition incites countries to develop a skilled workforce as a competitive advantage, resulting in many national and international policies that invest in workforce training and development. This is quite a challenge especially for developing countries simultaneously facing the consequences of transition and aspiring to create an attractive human capital. Typical for these countries is the strong influence of international actors (foreign governments, international NGO, implementing agencies etc.) not only in financing the implementation, but also in orienting the development policies (not always toward national needs). SD policy in Albania is an output of national and international actors' policies interactions for the past twenty years. As a relatively small country in transition and aspiring to be part of the European Union, Albania struggles to identify and reach the objectives of human development. This article aims to analyze the actors involved in SD policies in Albania (with a concentration on TVET), focusing on the impact that each actor has generally in the system and specifically in regards to these policies. It also aims to analyze whether international cooperation in SD is adding value to the system or overlapping with national priorities and disorienting local initiatives, and how SD policies contribute to and influence various other sector objectives.

**Key words:** skills development, policy learning, policy transfer, technical vocational education and training.

### **1. Introduction**

Skills, according to the Society for Human Resources Management's glossary [22] refers to "the ability to perform a mental or motor activity that contributes to the effective performance of a job task", while in the Albanian language, the word skills can be translated in several ways including: "the

ability to do something, to be skilful", and "what a workman does in a vocation, in a certain production sector or social activity". Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the system that offers necessary knowledge and skills for a qualified professional activity (VET Law nr. 2002). In the following analysis of skills development policies, the focus will therefore mainly be

placed on TVET. This education system has also the proven potential to contribute to future socio-economic development of Albania [20].

SD falls at the intersection of many national and regional institutions acting as policy makers, SD institutions, as well as SD beneficiaries with varying and sometimes conflicting interests, objectives and priorities. According to Mitchell [21], these “multiple” stakeholders, at the various levels, include: (i) the individual (workers, trainees, unemployed persons, etc.); (ii) the family (especially in the case of youngsters); (iii) the community (leaders, local institutions and networks); (iv) voluntary agencies (at the local, regional, national international levels); (v) private training providers; (vi) public training institutions; (vii) workers and their organizations (at the enterprise, local, sector and national levels); (viii) employers and their organizations (at the enterprise, local, sector and national levels); and (ix) government (local and central). Despite the expected integration and alignment of these actors toward the necessary skills development, we often observe deviations, power games, and contradictions that don’t add value to the skills development process.

In Albania, SD doesn’t have a purpose in itself, but is considered as an instrument to achieve objectives in several fields including: an increase in employment opportunities, particularly for poor populations in rural areas; the stimulation of small and medium enterprise development; an increase in

gender inclusion; and the reintegration of returned migrants (from other countries) and internal migrants (moving from rural areas to the big cities and city suburbs), etc.

## **2. Policy transfer, policy learning and donors’ coordination**

In order for the multinational stakeholder network to be efficient in SD policies, every actor should invest the proper knowledge and expertise accumulated. This is why this paper focuses on policy learning and policy transfer when analysing the interaction between national and international actors in SD. According to Argyris and Schon [2] policy learning is a form of collective learning that generally involves the learning not of one organization but of a number of organizations.

Policy learning and policy transfer research/practice approaches are similar to leadership approaches: both are among the most researched and least applied. As Chakroun [5] concludes in his literature review, quoting Bennett and Howlet [3], “The concept of policy learning has been over theorized and under applied”, and “the relationship between policy learning and policy change contours and components has only begun to be investigated and understood”. Policy learning and policy transfer don’t have the same meaning, even though there is considerable overlap. Policy transfer can encompass coercion as well as drawing lessons-learned which is a voluntary process. Learning may lead to policy transfer

but it may also produce other policy outcomes or no apparent outcome, while policy transfer does not [23].

Policy learning is directed to many stakeholders, both national and international. National actors should play an active role in developing policies aligned with the country's needs, while also reflecting the lessons learned from their experience and from that of other countries. As it is quite difficult for local actors to absorb and properly interpret other countries' initiatives and policies, donors and respective implementing agencies can be considered as the best policy translators, due to their previously initiated programs in other countries and in addition to their role in financially supporting local initiatives.

Even if the expected results of policy learning and policy transfer are high, the different stakeholders don't always meet these expectations. There might be numerous reasons for policy learning failure. According to Chakroun<sup>1</sup> "there are at least three overlapping factors that lead to policy learning failure in partner countries: misleading experiences caused by donor intervention, highly politicised models of governance which are not conducive to policy learning and the limited knowledge base." Koch et al [11], consider intricate social rules, conflicting worldviews, intense power struggles, and uneven levels of competence and funding as the main

contributing factors to policy learning ineffectiveness. In a multicultural setting, cultural differences may also act as an impediment as these differences may not only hamper effective communication, but also come up against cultures with different scales of resistance to change.

### *2.1. International cooperation in skills development: a first assessment*

International actors have played an important role in SD policies in Albania. Their contribution has been not only multidimensional (such as technical assistance, direct investments, capacity building etc., and in different fields such as environment, education, infrastructure, etc.,) but also financially represents a considerable percentage of total spending in VET in Albania. Among the most important donors (including implementing agencies and INGOs) operating particularly in the TVET sector are the EU (European Union) through its CARDS program, IPA funds, the ETF, the WB (World Bank), the SDC (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation) mainly through Swisscontact, the ADA (Austrian Development Agency) and its main project Kultur Kontakt, the German Government through GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), the United Nations through the ILO (International Labor Office) and UNICEF, the United Kingdom through the British Council, the United States of America through USAID, etc.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit.

The total grant by donors supporting the TVET sector in Albania for the period 2002-2008 is approximately 29 million Euro, with the EC providing the largest share at approximately 50%, followed by Switzerland at 22%, and Germany at 13%. Italy follows with 10%, then Austria at 4% and the USA contributing 1% [6].

International cooperation (IC) in TVET has taken place in different fields such as (i) VET Policy by the WB and the EU through CARDS in VE policies, and the ILO, the ETF and DACH plus<sup>2</sup> in VT policy; (ii) VET legislation laws and bylaws proposals and developments jointly with DACH plus and the ILO; (iii) direct financing of VET (school building, equipments, etc) by almost all donors; (iv) curriculum development by the WB, DACH Plus, the ILO and PARSH; (iv) technical support for institutions management; (v) VE assessment and exams by DACH Plus (assessment criteria) and the WB; (vi) school and centres accreditation by DACH Plus; (vii) teacher training by almost all donors; (viii) capacity building, with the goal of developing the staff that will be responsible for independently initiating and formulating VET policies and strategies; (ix) research and analysis in VET especially by

ETF; (x) VET decentralization initiated by CARDS VET3 and Swisscontact; and (xi) labour market analysis initially by the ILO and more recently by CARDS.

All actors interviewed for the purpose of this study, including TVET representatives at both the national and international level, give great importance to the role of IC in the TVET sector. According to their feedback, the TVET system in Albania would not have been as it is today without their intervention.

## 2. 2. Donor coordination

The impact of Bologna, Lisbon, and Copenhagen processes are now visible in Albania, “positively pressing” political levels to transform “partial reparations according to immediate needs” into “full long term solutions” in the context of regional and European integration [4]. Due to these developments and aside from the national actors actively involved in SD policies, international actors such as donors, implementing agencies, INGO etc., are playing an active role in SD policy formulation and policy transferring from other countries. Not only technically but also financially, the impact of international actors has been considerably high. External assistance in Albania began in 1990 and grew rapidly, followed by a decline in the mid 1990s. The sharp increase in external assistance in 1999 was mainly in the form of emergency aid as a response to the Kosovo crisis. Since 2000, external assistance levels have remained steady at between 300 - 350

<sup>2</sup> Note: A voluntary union of TVET projects funded by foreign donors, further discussed in details. DACH is the acronym for Germany (Deutsch), Austria (A) and Swiss (Ch), representing the donors who initially created this group. Since the inclusion of other projects from other donors (UK, EC, etc.), the group is called DACH Plus.

million Euro per year [7]. Aid for social development (including education) for the period 2000-2007 has been approximately 12% of the total budget.

Bilateral and multilateral aid was initiated by the European Commission (EC), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the World Bank (WB) in early 2003. Only after a donor-government dialogue for planning and budgeting in 2004 did the Government of Albania (GoA) lead a coordination of donors into the creation of the DSDC in 2005. The most important instrument used by the DSDC is the Integrated Planning System (IPS), “a broad planning and monitoring framework which aims to ensure that the core policy and financial processes developed by the GoA function in an integrated manner”<sup>3</sup>. This planning system integrates the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI) and the Government Program Priorities, the European Integration Agenda, External Assistance, and the Medium Term Budgeting Program/Public Investment Management<sup>4</sup> (MTBP/PIM).

An important initiative in donor coordination is the “One UN” programme, in which Albania also plays a role since January 2007. As a pilot country, Albania agreed on working toward a common UN presence

(including resident<sup>5</sup> and non-resident UN agencies, funds and programmes) and common elements such as “One UN Programme”, “One Budgetary Framework”, “One Leader” and “One Office.” “The response of the UN system will align and support the European integration and development goals of Albania while complementing the assistance provided by other multilateral and bilateral development partners” [1].

### *2.3 Donor coordination and collaboration with national actors*

The need for donor and project coordination is considered high by the GoA, especially for the education sector that bears the greatest number of projects (85) and donors (15), compared to other sectors such as transport and environment<sup>6</sup>. The donors themselves initiated the first integration efforts: these international actors operating in the SD field in Albania – following their direct experience as well as pressures (and obligations) posed by international trends regarding the need to integrate and coordinate their activities – took on the following initiatives:

(i) *The creation of a matrix of donor assistance to Albania.* This is an important document aiming to gather the information on TVET projects underway by different donors and sharing it in order to avoid

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<sup>3</sup> Web reference:  
<http://www.aidharmonisation.org.al/?fq=mesi&gj=en&kid=10>

<sup>4</sup> Note: in practice since 2006

<sup>5</sup> Note: including UNICEF, UNDP, WHO, UNHCR, ILO, UNESCO and FAO.

overlap and to better integrate their assistance. The VET matrix is organized according to the National VET Strategy priorities and gives information about the project focus, duration, medium-term priorities, regions covered, TVET institutions covered, and national partners. This document is well recognized and regularly updated by the donors.

(ii) *The adoption of a Sector Wide Approach (SWA)*. As explained earlier, the creation of a SWA is considered as an important initiative in the harmonization of international aid and government priorities in a certain sector. The EEEP (Excellence and Equity Program) is based upon SWA and supports the implementation of the National Strategy for pre-university education. The VET SWGs are co-chaired by line ministries (MoLSAEO and MoES) and the DTS (Donors Technical Secretariat). The decisions taken in these meetings not only integrate the donors on their site, but also are followed with the concrete interventions in IPS.

(iii) Since mid 2005, the MoES and the main donors have established a group called *Partners in Education* that aims to promote donor co-ordination and assist the MoES in implementing its National Education Strategy [12]. The goal of this group is to influence in almost every step of the strategy implementation plan.

(iv) The creation of *DACH-Plus*. The DACH-Plus<sup>7</sup> group is a voluntary non-formal union of TVET projects managed by implementing agencies and Albanian partners. The members of this group are Swisscontact (with AlbVET project), the British Council (with Skills @ Work project), the EC (with CARDS AFP project), the Educational Centre Elbasan (ECE) foundation (supported by ICCO), the GTZ (with GTZ-AFP for North East Albania project), Kultur Kontakt Austria, PARSH (Adult Education in Albania, part of the network Adult Education in Southeast Europe), and NVETA from the Albanian side. DACH-Plus meets regularly on a monthly basis. All the interviewed actors consider this initiative as very positive and helpful.

The last survey on the *Paris Declaration* monitoring shows improvement in ownership, alignment, and harmonization. Managing for Results and Mutual Accountability are still rated as low. The results of the survey present an aggregate of all donors in different fields. The analysis of these results is considered as important because it points out donor behaviour in Albania. Based on the monitoring surveys, additional desk research, and primary research based on interviews, we can assess the implementation of the *Paris Declaration* as follows.

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<sup>7</sup> Note: more information available at <http://www.dachplus.al/>.

(i) *Ownership* has increased from *moderate* to *moderate-high*, meaning that the level of leadership over development policies and strategies is still not high. Among the possible explanations is the EU integration goal and policy orientation toward the Stabilization and Association process, as even the strategy for VET is fully aligned with the European strategy for training and development as well as with the Lisbon process. Improvement to this dimension compared to 2006 is of course due to the results already achieved by the government-led donor's integration initiatives and their integration with NSDI.

(ii) *Alignment* has slightly increased compared to 2006, but still remains *moderate-low*. This is a conglomerate indicator. Reliable country systems are reflected in the creation of the Department of Public Investment Management, and the MTBP, which directly influences MoLSAEO and MoES. Aligning aid flow with national priorities has improved as a result of the IPS presented above. In almost all the donors' documents for TVET projects, the impact of donor intervention on national priorities in the NSDI is explicitly stated. Even with the GoA identifying priority areas, the number of priorities is still very high (262 priority actions in 2002 and 620 priority actions in 2003). Unfortunately, even if VET is considered as a priority – and enrolment objectives since 2003 have been set at having 40% of students finishing compulsory education – enrolment remains low, meaning

that either the initiatives were not effective or the objectives not realistic. Donor capacity-development support provided through coordinated programs consistent with NSDI has increased by 23% in general and has already achieved the 50% goal. Albanian public financial management systems are used in most of the TVET donors' interventions focused on investments. SD donors also increased their efforts to avoid parallel implementation structures through the VET matrix. Via the inclusion of donors' grants in MTBP, the financial aid is more predictable compared to 2006 when almost 40-50% of aid was not reported in the budget.

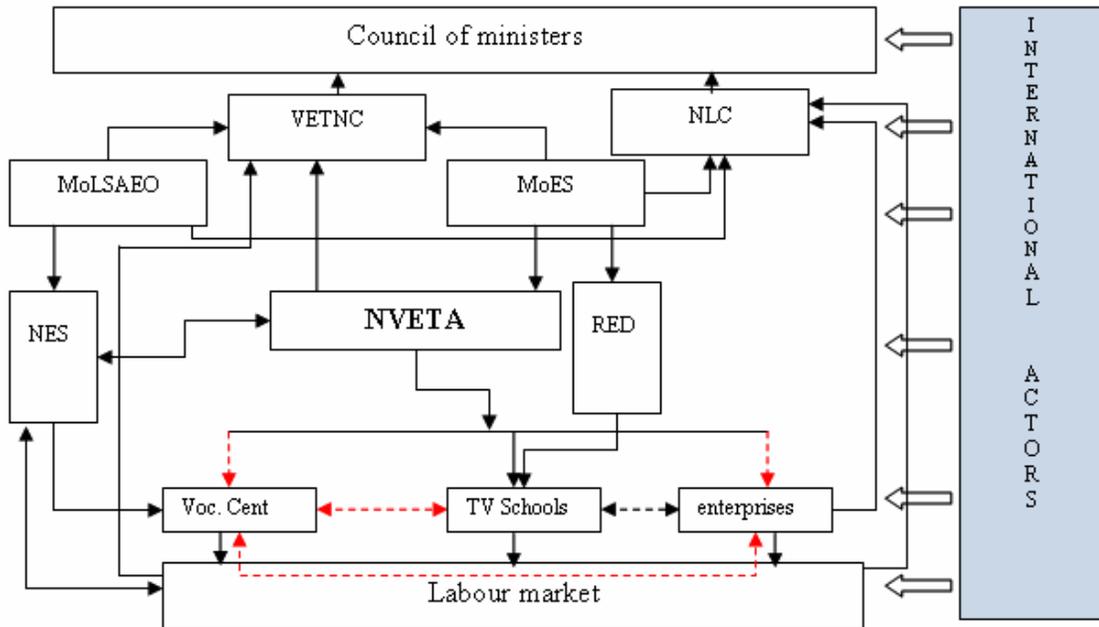
(iii) *Harmonization* is another improved indicator compared to 2006, but still needs improvements. As already mentioned, SWG in general, and Partners for Education, the VET donors' matrix, One UN, DACH-Plus in particular, can be considered as the main harmonization initiatives.

(iv) *Managing for Results* has been and continues to be low due to the absence of a results-based monitoring and evaluation system. The EC in its last progress report also identified this absence as a precondition for strategy realization. Apart from the absence of project key performance indicators, measuring the project achievements is difficult in a country like Albania with a high rate of informality, especially in the labour market. Sometimes, available data doesn't reflect the reality due to the formula used for calculation (for

example, “employment in agriculture” data which automatically registers as “self employed” the persons of working age in the villages).

(v) *Mutual Accountability* continues to be rated low because the government and the

donors still use their own approach to assess the progress in implementing agreed commitments. Periodical meetings are held and joint initiatives are taken on regular bases thanks to the SWGs, but reporting is not realized through a joint final report.



**Figure 1.** Interaction between national actors in SD policy in Albania

### **3. Skills development policy actors at the national level**

The primary responsible institutions for SD policies decisions at the national governmental level are the Ministry of Labor Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (MoLSAEO), and the Ministry of Education and Science (MoES). MoLSAEO considers SD an active area for labour market policies, because developing the target groups' skills increases chances for employment. MoLSAEO is responsible for SD policies that integrate marginalized groups such as the poor, migrants, women, children, minorities and the disabled. National Employment Service (NES) is the main executive institution of MoLSAEO responsible for employment and training services, decentralized and operating through twelve Employment Offices and ten Vocational Training Centres throughout Albania. MoLSAEO closely collaborates with public and private institutions in policy formulating. International collaboration is also crucial for SD policies presented by MoLSAEO, an issue that will be analyzed in detail in the following section.

Even if one of the goals of public policy in Albania is decentralization, the education system remains centralized. The RED are MoES executing institutions and they don't participate in policy formulation, even if they are a key element in MoES policy execution. RED is mainly responsible for teacher training and school inspection, while local

authorities (municipalities or communes) are responsible for schools (building) investments. There are thirteen Regional Education Directorates (twelve prefectures plus the city of Tirana) and twenty-four Education Offices.

The National Labor Council (NLC), created in 1996, aims to build a social understanding and save social equity through the harmonization of interests, social dialogue, the smoothing out of conflicts, and reaching common agreements. It is composed of government representatives (the MoLSAEO, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Health, the MoES), as well as ten employer and ten employee organization representatives. NLC includes seven commissions, including the employment and vocational training commission.

VETNC is an advising body to the Councils of Ministers for the VET system development policies. According to the law, VETNC is the institution that assembles almost all interested parties (mostly from the government sector including MoLSAEO, MoES, MoF, MoE, etc, as well as employer and employee organizations and non-profit organizations) and aims to stimulate partnerships and inclusion in SD policies. But since its creation in 2003, VETNC doesn't fully realize this objective for the following reasons: the range of representation<sup>8</sup>, the lack of follow-up on

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<sup>8</sup> Note: mostly from the government sector.

recommendations with concrete actions, and the resulting lack of adequate funds to sufficiently support the GoA in VET policy issues.

The National VET Agency (NVETA) is among the most important actors in SD policies in Albania, and “a principal VET stakeholder” [8]. This is another institution aiming to integrate education, training and employment. The rationale for the creation of NVETA (March 2007) was the radical reevaluation of traditional VET methods and policies for a new skills demand. A re-fashioning of the VET sector in Albania was propelled by major changes in the Albanian market due to the restructuring of the economy after the 1990s, rates of migration at almost 35% among the Albanian workforce [8], and regional and European workforce objectives for Albania to become the most competitive labour force in the world. The goal of this agency is “to create a unique national professional qualification system, nationally and internationally recognized<sup>9</sup>”. Since its creation, NVETA works closely with international donors and agencies such as DACH-Plus, and CARDS, and participates in the DACH-Plus Group, among others. NVETA is supposed to influence and guide all TVET offerings, but

mutual collaboration is more evident between NVETA and schools than NVETA and VTC.

The National Employment Service (NES) is another SD policy execution institution, responsible for active employment policies and operating through its Employment Offices, handing not only direct recruitment but also vocational training as a stimulator for successfully entering the labour market. The NES manages Public Vocational Centres (a total of ten distributed throughout Albania) and is also responsible for labour market analyses.

The Enterprises represent a major stakeholder in the VET system. Apart from directly offering skills development, enterprises are actors in national SD policy formulation. In modern TVET systems such as the famous Dual Model in Germany, business is considered as a partner in SD policy decision and implementation. The VET Law (Nr. 8872, dated 29.3.2002) actually recognizes businesses as training providers, decision-makers in occupation standards and curricula development, financing sources, and according to the Law and for enterprises included in VET, they are also worthy of State support (even if how this might be implemented remains unclear). Also, strategies of Education [15], VET, [16] and Employment [17] recognize the active role of the business sector and their inclusion in the process through employer

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<sup>9</sup> Council of Ministers Decision no. 273, date 10.5.2006, available at <http://www.qpz.gov.al/doc.jsp?doc=docs/Vendim%20Nr%20273%20Dat%C3%AB%2010-05-2006.htm>

organizations<sup>10</sup>, Chambers of Commerce and Industry<sup>11</sup>, etc. But most of the enterprises prefer to offer on-the-job training (especially among big enterprises in the processing industry) than private or public training centre training (NES survey, April 2008). Based on this study, only a small percentage (26%) allocates a budget for training. While based on a previous study conducted in March 2005 by NES with the assistance of CARDS, research results found that in most of the cases the enterprises consider themselves as responsible for human resources development, but a low percentage of them (0%-20% depending on the region) have a training policy.<sup>12</sup> This data is reinforced by IOM research [10], where more than 56% of the enterprises surveyed don't have plans for training but prefer on-the-job training. There are some good examples of business integration in SD development, however, such as the Bread Producers Association in the Durres region, which opened a training course after identifying the training needs of their staff with the help of

Swisscontact and partial funding by the business.

Trade Unions<sup>13</sup> are considered an important stakeholder in SD policies in Albania. This is why this category is represented in all-important decision-making and consulting bodies such as NLC, NVETC, etc. Although there are more than sixty trade unions registered in MoLSAEO, the Union of Independent Trade Unions of Albania and the Confederation of Trade Unions of Albania are the largest. Still Albania has a low membership compared to the regional countries (representing less than 15% of employees) [9]. Even if trade unions are part of different commissions and councils, their role is more consultative than action taking.

NGOs, as important elements of the civil society and supporting cross sectional affairs such as social inclusion, gender aspects and environmental issues, have an increasing importance in human resource development especially through the provision of formal and informal training, as well as furthering the interest of VET in different areas such as the rural sector, gender inclusion, reintegration of trafficked children and women, etc.

Education and training institutions have a very important role in SD, with direct influence on the SD target groups (youth, students, poor, women, adults etc.). Our

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<sup>10</sup> Note: including Inter Alia CONBIZ, CONFINCOM, Confederation of SME, Employers Union, Elbasan Constructors, TIRBIZ, Organization of Free Entrepreneurs, and Council of Employers' Organizations', Konfindustria, Constructors' Organization, etc.

<sup>11</sup> Note: Thirty-five Albanian Chambers of Commerce are organized in the National Union of Chamber of Commerce.

<sup>12</sup> Note: Based on an interview with the Chamber of Commerce, the research group concluded that this institution doesn't have data about their members' skills development policies regarding their employees.

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<sup>13</sup> Note: including the Confederations of Trade Unions of Albania, Union of Independent Trade Unions of Albania, Union of Trade Unions of Employees of Albania, etc.

focus will be on TVET institutions responsible for the transfer of skills or “the ability to perform a mental or motor activity that contributes to the effective performance of a job task” [22]. There are about forty-one professional schools distributed across twenty-two regions, which offer approximately thirty-five courses involving three to five years of studies. The number of enrolled students in public technical-vocational schools, including artistic, pedagogical, sports and foreign language schools (the so called social-cultural schools), accounts for approximately 20% of all students who attend general secondary education [16]. Vocational schools are concentrated in central Albania (more than 50%) and are divided into four main areas: electro-mechanic (nineteen schools), as well as economic, construction-tapestry, agriculture, forestry, and veterinary schools. There are also over thirty-six schools/licensed (private) centres that offer VE, twenty of them operating in Tirana. A small percentage of these are not Albanian (Don Bosko, Peter Mahringer etc.). With regard to Vocational Training Centres (VTC), there are ten public vocational training centres in the main districts of Albania and 150 [17] private licensed subjects, offering short-term training courses (in public centres from six to seven weeks up to four months; in private centres, from one week up to two years). Half of the public vocational centres are situated in central

Albania where the concentration of the population is higher.

#### **4. Policy transfer and policy learning in Albania: SD in a cross-sectorial perspective**

##### *4.1 SD cross-sectoral approach by national and international actors*

It is very difficult to measure the real impact of a SD policy implemented through a project or a program, because the project is just a part of a larger system (composed of many actors interrelating with each other), and the final performance is considered a system output. A project can't be successful if all the parties are not committed. Also, a single project can't change the situation, especially if it remains a pilot initiative. It also requires investment over a number of years in order to measure the full scope of long-term policy implementation, especially in the SD field where the final results are not the school or training course results, but employee productivity. Training and development performance is especially difficult to measure, because most of the time the approach is cross-sectoral. The division between the providers and the beneficiaries of SD further complicates this system. In this section we shall analyze the SD cross-sectoral approach by emphasizing the integration of local policies with donors' policies.

*Decentralization*, with the goal of offering a TVET system more oriented towards local needs, has been on the agenda

of many international donors. The GTZ project in North East Albania and Swisscontact through AlbVET in Durres clearly promote TVET system decentralization. Still, the TVET system remains centralized and with the restricted autonomy of system suppliers (schools and training centres) regarding financial mechanisms and curricula. The Ministries decide on the major policies and in turn the NVTEA, the schools and centres are the implementing institutions, creating a clear gap between policy decision-making and policy implementation. There are also some decentralization challenges in TVET such as regional VET councils that don't actually function properly.

SD is considered as an instrument for *regional development*, and donors support this. Among SD projects financed by donors, only fifteen are national, others cover very specific areas like Tirana, Durres, Korce, Fier, Shkoder, Sarande, etc. Since North East Albania is the poorest region, GTZ/PEM project was situated there with a clear goal of improving development and employment opportunities in this region. Swisscontact investment in a mobile training centre in the same region is considered a successful initiative because, apart from moving about to different areas, the centre is flexible in courses offering.

Even if "aligning the TVET offer with the market needs" is a declared SD policy among almost all the donors contributing with direct assistance to the TVET offering,

none of their projects refer to *data* offered by NES *on the labour market*. Among the reasons might be: the type of data provided, which focuses on the vocations not the skills required by the labour market; and the methodology used, mainly approximations based on the most developed sector needs for employees (not considering least developed but potential sectors). Probably due to the limitations of NES data on the labour market, the EC financed a national labour market survey through CARDS in 2005, which resulted in a non-efficient policy transfer mainly because the questionnaire was not adjusted to the different sample audiences in terms of language usage and unclear concept use.

SD is considered as an instrument for *returned migrants'* reintegration. Still there is no study on the expected impact that the returned migrants have on non formal training, such as sharing knowledge gained abroad and developing the skills of the persons they will work upon return. It is expected that emigrants gained soft work management skills, work ethics but also ICT and other technical skills in tourism, construction and the agriculture sector [20]. AQF will be essential also for the unification and recognition of qualifications acquired abroad by Albanian emigrants. In the National Migration Strategy, SD is considered important for the smooth integration of migrants in immigration countries and thus lowering the rate of illegal migration, and also for the migrant

reintegration through the acknowledgment of skills gained and on offering upgraded SD initiatives. According to an IOM survey<sup>14</sup>, 50% of the public (and 30% of the private) vocational training centres declare that they tailor their training programmes based on requests from emigrants, while only 28% of migrants attend these kind of courses. There is a clear need to harmonise emigrants' needs with the qualifications offered, even if there are some sporadic INGO offers in training for returned migrants.

SD is a direct contributor to working force *competitiveness*, but this is not a declared SD policy in Albania. Actually, Albania doesn't have a clear policy to increase the labour force competitive advantage in the region, neither focusing on highly skilled (well educated) labour force, nor competing with labour low cost. Even though it has launched initiatives to attract foreign investors through low-cost land use, facilitating investing procedures, or building industrial areas, the Albanian labour force still doesn't offer the low cost competitive advantage compared to other countries in the region [19]. International donors don't have concrete policies in this direction. We believe that a strong integration of MoES, MoETE and the Chambers of Commerce is indispensable in predicting and preparing

effective SD that ensures Albanian competitiveness and attraction.

The Albanian rate of *unemployment* is around 13%, but considering the fact that all individuals of working age in rural areas are automatically registered as self employed in the agricultural sector (over 58% in 2006<sup>15</sup>) while in reality agriculture contributes to only 23.3% of GDP<sup>16</sup>, the real unemployment rate is likely to be more than 13%. The GoA considers SD as an active labour market policy and aims to increase the employment opportunities through investments in training and development. Almost all international donors/agencies have an explicit SD policy focusing on increasing employment possibilities. Their interventions are more effective than public TVET sector offerings.

The SD policies of Albanian and international donors/agencies to enhance employment have also targeted *vulnerable groups* particularly. The *gender dimension*, with the goal of including women in the labour market, has been an indirect (not explicit) policy in most of the donor projects. Even if in the national VET strategy includes a principle regarding equal opportunity for participation without discrimination of any kind (gender, national, race, religion, etc), concrete national initiatives to integrate

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<sup>14</sup> "Local survey, identifying existing opportunities for vocational training for returning migrants and outlining gaps in Albania", 2008, "2A Consortium" survey financed by IOM

<sup>15</sup> INSTAT statistics 2008, "Employed according to economic activity (1995-2007)" available online at <http://www.instat.gov.al/>

<sup>16</sup> INSTAT statistics 2008, "GDP according to economic activity (1996-2007)" available online at <http://www.instat.gov.al/>

women into the labour market remain nonexistent. Hairdressing courses, considered as a woman's domain, are among the most frequented courses by women<sup>17</sup> and offer good opportunities for employment or self-employment, but this is more a market trend than an intentional state policy. There are some good examples of IC actors taking on gender issues, like the new gender balancing initiative in the future AlbVET project aiming to develop women-friendly vocations. SD is considered also as a *minority* inclusion policy and stated as such in both employment and roman<sup>18</sup> sectoral strategies. While there are sporadic and isolated state initiatives to integrate this population through creating employment opportunities, almost none of them concerned SD. International donors SD policies also don't have explicit policies focused on this population.

SD policies focused on *marginalized children* are strongly supported by UNICEF through YAPS (Youth Albanian Professional Service)<sup>19</sup> which is now a social business sustainable<sup>20</sup> project, and the Life Skills project directed to special target groups

(children out of parent's care; vocational training for roman community families, as a direct impact on their children's life quality; and the integration of marginalized children such as former drug abusers, HIV/AIDS victims, disabled, trafficked, etc.)<sup>21</sup>.

The stimulation of *Small to Medium Enterprise (SME)* through professional and entrepreneurial skills is another cross-sectoral SD policy. While there are good initiatives by international projects to promote entrepreneurship (Junior Achievement by USAID, Training Firms by Kultur Kontakt), based on the latest study on key competences that are included in classes or courses in the educational system in Albania<sup>22</sup>, skill building around the "sense of initiative and entrepreneurship" is not widely offered by VET, beyond business schools and sporadic programs. This represents a serious problem because it impedes one of the VET Strategy objectives, to increase the level of SMEs through the involvement of VET students.

#### 4. 2. *Lessons learned*

The implementation of different projects provides opportunities for many lessons learned that can be taken into consideration. But how much did Albanian actors learn from the donors and their projects? As most of international donor-driven projects operate with pilot schools or centres, the question of

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<sup>17</sup> Note: As well as foreign-language and computer-skills courses

<sup>18</sup> Note: Approximately 2% of the Albanian population is roman, of which 70% are unemployed; romans represent one of the poorest segments of the population.

<sup>19</sup> Note: a pioneer project in the Balkan region. The same project was implemented in Azerbaijan. More information is available at: <http://www.unicef.org/albania/YAPScasestudy.pdf>.

<sup>20</sup> Note: Now self financed.

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<sup>21</sup> UNICEF country program for Albania (2006-2010), p.11

<sup>22</sup> Note: ETF project on "Key Competences for lifelong learning", February 2007.

long-term sustainability is raised. After carefully analyzing follow-up with pilot projects, we conclude that few donor pilot projects were followed up by the local actors independently or re-implemented successfully nationwide. Increasing the usage capacity of schools and training centre sites is one of the good examples where Albanian policy learned from international policy. Most of the public VET institutions are used only for the morning-to-afternoon period. Since spending per student is considerably higher for VET students<sup>23</sup>, the international experience practiced in Harry Fultz and Don Bosco technical schools of using the learning sites and laboratories even during the afternoon to offer training courses is a new SD practice in Albania. The proper legal adjustments and budgeting is being prepared to launch this policy accordingly.

In addition, practice oriented curricula is among the most successful transferred policies in Albania coming from IC. Based on a Soviet school system, an Albanian curriculum was focused on theoretical knowledge and memorization methodology. Starting with the first capacity-building projects in the beginning of the 1990s, Albanian experts and teachers were presented with another, more productive practice-oriented approach. The WB, EC and most of the actual DACH+ projects not only applied but are actively involved in the process of

reshaping curricula towards involving more practical training and student involvement. Dual system and other approaches aiming at a close relation with the work environment as an integral part of the learning experience can be considered as an aspect of a multi-dimensional SD policy on learning (based on the past experience of students' one-month internships and also from donors' projects such as AlbVET, AgriAL, etc.) In spite of the success in TVET inclusion in higher education, there is still work to be done as the Bologna process is not only slow, but also involves many contradictions in its implementation.

At the same time, Albanian VET actor representatives have their own reserves about the flexibility and sometimes overlapping nature of international actors. Specialists of the SD policies in Albania in particular believe that, at times, working with so many international experts makes their work more difficult and time consuming, because of the different experiences involved and the persistence of international experts in positioning their expertise as superior compared with national experts or technicians.

Another problematic area for policy transfer is decentralization. As we will analyze in the following section and because of Albania's small geographical surface and population, local capacities and local actor incentives for a regional TVET system led by regional VET councils were not effective for the policy transfer. There are also some

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<sup>23</sup> Note: three times higher according to the WB calculation.

policies such as AQF and postsecondary education innovations that have yet to be validated. On the contrary, Berufsacademie of GTZ in Durres is a good example of policy learning. Even if this is a solution for speeding up the amount of qualified employees entering the market and is derived from Western Europe practices based on older populations, these courses can be a good offer with the proper marketing and incentives for enrolment.

Living in an isolated country for half a century, Albanians used to idealize the external world. Even now, if something is stated by a foreign professional it is considered as valuable and taken more for granted than if a national had said it. This is evident in public policies where international expertise is taken for granted, even if sometimes overlapping with priorities. Nevertheless, donor intervention is always reported with a superlative language. We believe that it is the time for Albanian VET policy specialists to gain more self-confidence, because they have assisted in every step of the VET system reformation and therefore carry with them institutional memory, which is a great asset in any transition process because it collects know-how and experience, and transmits this to actual working groups and experts, thus preventing the repetition of non-successful initiatives and suggesting suitable solutions. National experts should be the ones to create a clear vision on future SD policies in

Albania, also based on the experience they gain from different countries and experts.

## **5. Conclusions**

SD policies are an intriguing field of study in developing countries, involving a range of different actors working towards multidimensional objectives in a variety of sectors. Albania benefited from external aid since the beginning of 1990, even in the TVET sector. Apart from contributing financially, international donors brought their expertise and policies to their projects. International policies combined with the numerous, overlapping and non-prioritized Albanian priorities created an ambiguous SD policy situation for a certain period of time. Stimulated by international developments, most of the important donors operating in Albania initiated coordination activities, which are now being led by the DSDC responsible for a planning system that integrates the NSDI, the Government Program Priorities, the European Integration Agenda, External Assistance, and Medium Term Budgeting Program / Public Investment Management. Sector working groups, DACH-Plus, the Partners for Education project and the creation of Donors Matrix are good examples of donor coordination. Paris Declaration monitoring in Albania also indicated improvements in three out of five indicators, but these were incremental improvements of indicators from “low” to “moderate low” or from “moderate” to “moderate high”, and still two out of five

indicators remain low. Due to the Albanian strategic objective of integration in the EU, there is an evidence of EU policy domination in national SD policies. Among all the donors selected for this study, it was clear that their operations were based on the National Strategy for VET, on regional development plans, and on other country strategies. The SD projects and SD policies transferred in Albania aim to improve: lifelong learning, mobility and flexibility, public private partnerships, decentralization, efficiency and competitiveness – the same as in almost every developing country. Nevertheless, there are some sporadic projects related to specific Albanian needs such as promoting agriculture development; integrating women and marginalized groups into the labour market, including return emigrants; VET fitting with the Albanian labour market trends, involving the informal sector, SME promotion, etc. While some donors have good examples of SD policy transfer and learning, such as the close relationships with the business sector and resulting practical training oriented curricula, others policies such as decentralization of the VET supply are less effective. Finally, many other adopted policies such as AQF, post secondary courses, etc., need to be carefully managed to reach the expected benefits. If we expect this multiple system to properly function, the interrelation between local actors should be more organic and the SD policy decisions more decentralized, with an active partnership of the business sector.

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