



## SABER

## Workforce Development

2016

*Equipping the workforce with job-relevant skills is a continuing challenge around the world, and mismatches are a persistent concern. Many school leavers and graduates are unable to find jobs commensurate with their education and training while employers complain of difficulty in filling their vacancies. Workforce development (WfD) in most low- and middle-income countries is not functioning as well as might be desired. To be productive and employable members of society, education must equip young people with relevant market skills that blend knowledge and technical knowhow with soft and hard skills. Employers want workers who have technical expertise, communication skills, can work collaboratively in teams and know how to analyze problems by thinking critically. SABER-Workforce Development focuses on the effectiveness of education and training systems in generating skills demanded by employers and on the availability of channels for employers to articulate and communicate their skills needs.*

### Why do countries invest in workforce development?

A skilled workforce is a powerful asset for economic productivity and growth. Inadequate investments in skills compromise the well-being of people and their communities, putting people at risk of poverty, poor health, and social disengagement; blunting firms' ability to compete successfully in the global economy; and reducing a country's ability to harness technology to propel economic and social development. In recent decades, the premium on skills has been rising as a

result of technological and scientific advances. Many countries—rich and poor alike—are actively reassessing their skills and education strategies to help foster economic competitiveness, job creation, and inclusive growth.

### What challenges exist?

Many countries have invested in education and training and have made good progress in expanding coverage at all levels, as well as paying more attention to learning outcomes, to the broader array of skills beyond academic achievement, and to technical and vocational education and

training. Yet, a growing pool of more educated workers has not always produced the expected results. Despite increases in school enrollment and completion, employers complain of skills shortages and mismatches and equity in access to education and learning is lacking in many emerging economies. Without key foundational skills, the prospects for jobs, earnings, and productivity gains are bleak. Technological progress is changing not only the types of jobs available but also the skills needed to succeed in the labor market. Many countries also have large numbers of

graduates that are unable to find jobs commensurate with their education and training. Educating for today and tomorrow's job market is crucial.

## What is SABER-Workforce Development?

Using new diagnostic tools and detailed policy information, the World Bank Group's Systems Approach for Better Education Results (SABER) platform collects and analyzes comparative data and knowledge on education systems around the world and highlights the policies and institutions that matter most to promote learning for all children and youth. SABER's detailed data-gathering and analysis are organized by "domains," or areas of education policymaking within an education system. These currently include levels of education (early childhood development, primary and secondary, workforce development, and tertiary), types of quality resources and supports (school finance, school health and school feeding, and teachers), areas of governance (engaging the private sector and school autonomy and accountability), information sources (education management information systems and student assessment), and complementary inputs and

cross-cutting themes (equity and inclusion, information and communication technologies, and resilience). SABER aims to give all parties with a stake in educational results—from students, administrators, teachers, and parents to policymakers and business people—an accessible, detailed, objective snapshot of how well the policies of their country's education system are oriented toward ensuring that all children and youth learn.

SABER-WfD assesses the policies and institutions that affect the supply of and demand for skills. On the demand side, the tool captures such aspects as the positioning of skills development in relation to a country's economic development priorities, the practice and quality of assessments of skills demand, the role and engagement of employers and social partners in policy dialogue, and incentives for employers to invest in skills development. On the supply side, it addresses issues pertaining to training provision by both public and private providers through such channels as pre-employment, on-the-job, and life-long education and training, as well as active labor market programs. SABER-WfD relies on its analytical framework and standard procedures to collect and organize data

to enhance national and international policy dialogue around priorities for system improvement.

## What drives effective workforce development?

SABER-WfD uses data collection and validation tools based on an analytical framework that identifies three functional dimensions of WfD policies and institutions. Taken together, these three dimensions allow for a holistic assessment of the system for WfD:

- **Strategic framework**, which focuses on the existence and nature of advocacy, partnerships, and coordination, typically across traditional administrative boundaries, to advance the goal of aligning WfD to priorities for national development.
- **System oversight**, which documents the arrangements and practices for funding, quality assurance, and learning pathways that influence choices by individuals, employers, and training providers to invest in skills formation.
- **Service delivery**, which addresses the diversity, organization, management and operations of training provision, both state and non-state, that enables individuals to acquire job-relevant skills.

## How is SABER-Workforce Development helping to improve education systems?

SABER-WfD is supporting governments in their efforts to improve education results by:

- Creating a common understanding of concepts and terminology among the diversity of stakeholders typically involved in WfD through the underlying analytical framework, thus establishing an efficient platform and language for dialogue and exchange. This is an essential first step in the search for common ground for action.
- Standardizing data on WfD policies and institutions and analyzing them in a way that enables cross-country learning and self-assessment against global standards. Such knowledge helps countries benefit from other nations' experiences in their quest for better results in WfD.
- Aiding countries in analyzing their education systems through continued and inclusive policy dialogue by involving system stakeholders early in data collection and validation. This enhances ownership of post-assessment reforms and allows new relationships to be forged among stakeholders.

- Enhancing the global knowledge base on effective WfD policies.

## How are countries and partner organizations using SABER-Workforce Development to improve system effectiveness?

### **Armenia and Georgia.**

SABER-WfD country reports and related data for Armenia and Georgia were utilized for country and regional policy dialogue and reports. This work became an input for the Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP) surveys in those countries, as well as the recently published report, *Back to Work: Growing with Jobs in Europe and Central Asia* (Arias et al. 2014). The latter publication addresses the steps that countries can take to create more and better jobs in the region and the ways in which they can make work opportunities accessible to all.

**Grenada.** In close collaboration with the National Training Agency, the SABER-WfD tool was used to inform the development of a new national strategic plan for technical and vocational education and training in Grenada. The plan is expected to continue to build on interventions undertaken under the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States' Skills

for Inclusive Growth Program to improve skills training in Grenada.

**Solomon Islands.** Solomon Islands has applied a number of SABER tools, including Early Childhood Development and WfD, many of them in partnership with the Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as part of the Pacific Benchmarking for Education Results (PaBER). The SABER-WfD work created an evidence base for the creation of a National Human Resources Development and Training Plan (NHRDTP). During the course of SABER-WfD implementation, a series of participatory, multi-stakeholder workshops reviewed evidence and drew implications from the findings. The findings resulted in a series of widely owned recommendations for NHRDTP priorities. The workshops were part of a crowd-sourcing methodology designed to reduce data collection time, improve accuracy, and build awareness and ownership of the SABER-WfD initiative among a broad array of skills sector stakeholders.

**Sri Lanka.** The SABER-WfD tool was used to analyze WfD policies in Sri Lanka. Findings were then used to generate a deep analysis of the demand for and supply of skills in the country, with a particular focus on technical and vocational

education and training (TVET). The analysis provided insight and data on key policy implementation issues, such as coverage and financing. *Building the Skills for Economic Growth and Competitiveness in Sri Lanka* (Dundar et al. 2014) analyzes demand drivers and employer needs for skills in the country, the skills supply of the workforce, the way in which skills are formed by education and training systems, strategic directions in skills development,

and how the system is managed and financed. The report also offers suggestions on how to improve skills development so that Sri Lanka is in a better position to achieve economic growth and reduce poverty.

## **SABER-Workforce Development Partners**

SABER-WfD has received support from the Korean Trust Fund, as well as from the Russia Education Aid for

Development (READ) Trust Fund program, a seven-year partnership of the World Bank Group and the Russian government that focused on improving education quality in low-income countries. The Australian Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) is also a strong supporter of SABER and education systems research and has done much work to support the application of SABER globally.