

Does TVET make a difference?

How vocational training ignites hope for young people worldwide – findings of a five-year study

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1. Executive summary

'Does TVET make the difference' is a five-year research study among Woord & Daad partners which provide vocational training to vulnerable youth. In this study, 40 youth from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia and Ethiopia were interviewed during five years after completing their training.

In 2020, five years after the first interviews, 34 alumni from the original sample participated in the final interviews. Despite the Covid-19 pandemic which had a major effect on employment worldwide, 33 of those alumni were either employed (32) or continuing their studies on university level (1). Most of the alumni are self-employed (59%) and even more are dreaming of having their own business.

As is visible in the data of the past five years, for a few alumni it takes time to find a job. In 2018, 84% of the alumni were employed, while in 2020 94% of alumni were employed. Job counseling through the Job and Business Center of their TVET supports alumni to find a job more easily, and through the skills they learned it is easier to find employment.

The average income of alumni has increased during the years, and most alumni earn above minimum wage, although quite some variation is visible between the highest and lowest income per country. Though majority (65%) of alumni who have a job are satisfied with their income, and most alumni (91%) can support their family with this income, there is still room for improvement. Most alumni are satisfied with their work environment, but working conditions are not always satisfactory which is a point of concern.

Looking back to their vocational training, most alumni (87%) are positive and state that the connection between their job and the training is good or excellent. At the same time, some alumni would be interested in training on additional topics. And still many of the alumni did not completely realize the big dreams that they had for professional (59%) or personal life (35%).

Summarizing, 95% of the alumni state that the training had a positive impact on their lives. It helped them to become employed, to earn an income and to support their families. Besides the knowledge and skills they developed, the training increased their self-confidence, gave them hope, trust in God and helped them to live a dignified life.

In conclusion, this study shows that TVET training does make a difference for vulnerable youth. The most important difference it makes, is giving the youth hope and an opportunity to support themselves and their family. Both soft skills and technical skills are indispensable elements of vocational training to make this difference for the students, and alumni are positive about the quality of training that they received. This is a motivation for Woord & Daad and their partners to continue to work on quality vocational training, and it gives an opportunity to explore possibilities to provide short term follow-up skills training to alumni.

At the same time, the study also shows that only vocational training is not in all cases sufficient to find a job or start a business immediately after finalizing the training. Therefore, Job and Business Services are an important supplement to vocational training, to support alumni to find a job or to give them access to markets. Besides, not all alumni were able to find decent work and/or receive fair wages. To make not only a difference, but the difference for vulnerable youth, a broader intervention is needed. A single TVET or a JBS cannot influence the labor market and has limited bargaining power towards employers or the government. This underlines the importance of broader interventions, like the Job Booster approach which was initiated by Woord en Daad after the research study started in 2016.

2. Introduction

'Before TVET training I didn't have any goal in my life. I dropped out from my education and I had bad companies. Then my technical course in HTI gave me hope. I started to dream of a better future. Frankly speaking, being in a poor family like ours, I never thought of doing a formal job. But this impossibility has become reality because of TVET training.' Nilkontho Mridha (21), Bangladesh

Woord & Daad believes that technical vocational education and training can make a difference for young people worldwide. That is the reason why Woord & Daad since many years has supported technical training of youth worldwide. Over the years, many youth worldwide benefitted from this training and were able to find employment due to this training. But what is the long term effect of this training? And how does the training influence the professional and personal life of students after three or five years? How can TVET education be improved? To answer these questions, the 'does TVET make a difference?' project started in 2016, with the following goals:

- Get insight in the quality of the TVET program, and improve it
- Get a lot of useful material for fundraising, like pictures and interviews
- Make the program attractive for donors, showing that we conduct long-term result measurement
- Gain experience with innovative PMEL methods (long term research, mobile data collection)

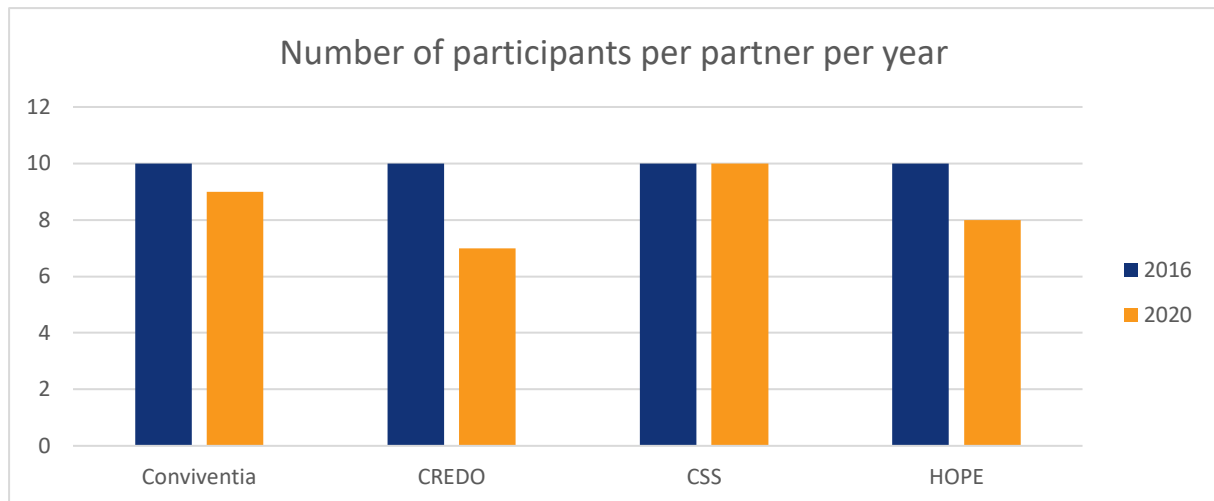
From 2016 till 2020, every year 40 alumni from TVETs in four countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia and Ethiopia), were contacted for a questionnaire and an interview. These alumni were selected by the partner, whose task was to balance the interviewed group so that it represents the student population. Another important criterium was the estimate if the students could be contacted annually for a period of five years. Each year, general data were collected on employment status, personal situation, income and relevance of the TVET education. Besides, open questions were added to the quantitative data, to collect more in depth information about the developments in each year. Finally, each year also pictures were collected which visualize the developments of the alumni, and in 2020, the final year, a few alumni shared their experiences from the past five years in a video.

Five years after starting this project we are able to look back, to learn from the lessons that the alumni and the TVET institutions have learned and see what difference the TVET education has made in the lives of young women and men worldwide. More detailed findings can be found in this report, but we are thankful that we can conclude that for most of the alumni, TVET has made a difference in their lives. As Nilkontho Mridho, explains: the TVET training gave me hope. And that hope made a difference in the life of many students.

3. General information, methodologies

Woord and Daad started the 'Does TVET make a difference' journey in 2016, with a sample of 16 female and 24 male TVET alumni from Bangladesh (CSS), Burkina Faso (CREDO), Colombia (Conviventia) and Ethiopia (Hope). In 2020, at the end of our journey, we finish the project with 14 female and 20 male TVET alumni. Though the project started with 10 students from each participating partner organization, during the years most partner organizations lost contact with some of the alumni or were not able to track all alumni each year. Due to technical difficulties in data collection, no data were collected in Ethiopia in 2017.

Tracking former students was a time consuming task for TVETs, as some of the students moved, or changed contact details. As one of the partner organizations concluded: *'As part of the collection process, we understood the importance of good planning based on the program of the people surveyed and of making several phone calls before the data collection date.'* CREDO, 2020. Even though it was not possible to track each student every year of this project, at least 80% of the original sample participated in 2020 in this impact study. No major difference was observed in drop-out between male and female alumni.



In 2016, the average age of the participants was 23 years (and 28 years in 2020), but age differences are visible between the different countries. Most students from Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Ethiopia were between 19 and 23 years at the start of the project, the average age of alumni from Colombia (33 years) was significantly higher.

At the start of the project, the majority of the participants was single (34), few were in a relationship (2) and some were married (4). Five years later, more alumni are married (10) or in a relationship (4), but still the majority is single. Out of the 14 female alumni, the majority is either married (5) or in a relationship (4).

The type of training that the alumni finalized in 2016 is quite diverse, from technical trainings (electricity, masonry, automobile, welding) to administration, housekeeping, bakery or stylist.

4. General findings

During the five year of this project, 40 alumni from 4 countries received every year a questionnaire existing of 30 questions, on their personal and professional situation. Even though the sample is relatively small (40), the additional information which was gathered through the qualitative interviews gives a good overview of the development of individual alumni as well as some general conclusions on the changes that took place during the years. This report focuses on four main questions, combining data from the questionnaires and interviews:

- What changes took place in 2020?
- Did you find a job?
- Are you satisfied with your income and working conditions?
- Did you achieve what you hoped for?

Though we mainly focus on the last year of the data collection, when relevant also developments during the former five years are taken into account.

4.1 What changes took place in the year 2020?

2020, the last year of this project, was quite different from the previous years. In answer to the question above, most alumni used the same word: Covid. Worldwide, Covid-19 had an impact on professional and personal life of the alumni. *'I faced some difficulties in last year because of the recession caused by the pandemic time lockdown. My work was stopped for two months. At that time, my mother became ill but I couldn't help here much. Earlier, I sent enough money to her but failed to do it when it was needed most.'*
Razu Sheikh, Bangladesh



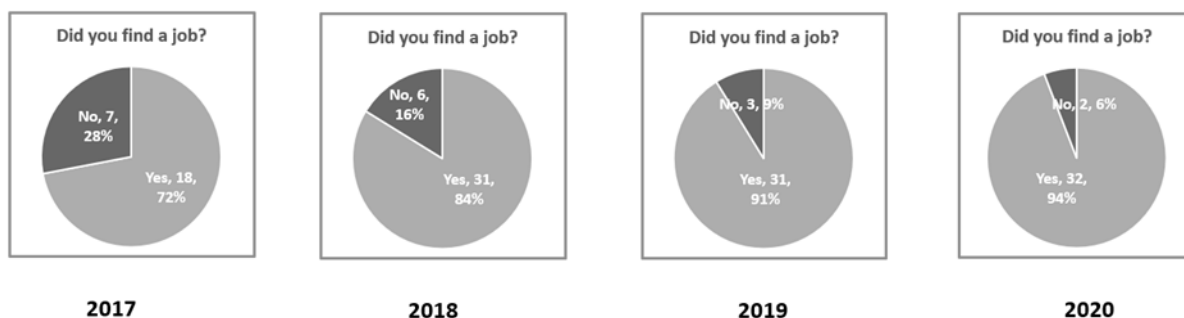
Photo 1: Wendy del Carmen Hernandez Moreno, Colombia

This influence was especially felt by the alumni from Colombia, where a long term, strict lockdown reduced economic activity and some alumni, or their family members, were dismissed. Remarkably, in quite a number of cases, alumni in difficult circumstances, were able to overcome these circumstances and translated challenges into chances. *'I had to return to my hometown with my husband and son, because I became unemployed due to a drop in sales and the company cut back on staff. However, it has been a great opportunity to work independently, to make my products known to my own customers and thus continue to contribute to the support of my family.'* Wendy del Carmen Hernandez Moreno, Colombia

However, Covid-19 was not the only important change which took place in the life of alumni in 2020. Some bought new materials or learned new skills, others changed jobs (for better or worse), one got debts because of investments needed for his farm land and another alumni was able to get a loan from a micro finance institute. Also in the personal life of alumni a lot has changed. Four alumni married, three alumni became father or mother (one of twins!) and many mention as an important

success of the past year that they were able to support their parents, their family or their children. One of the alumni sees as the most important success that she is able to support some street children. *'In the year 2019, I was planning to help some street children; now I am able to support them and we have decided with husband to feed them once per month.'* Kidist Mitiku, Ethiopia. This shows that, five years after finalizing vocational training, the alumni have been able to develop themselves, have developed their careers, but also have been able to support others.

4.2 Did you find a job?



After five years, most alumni (94%) found a job. As is visible in the picture above, two years after they finalized a study, 84 % found a job (2018) and in 2019 91% were employed. The majority of the alumni is working in the trade that they are trained for, but 5 out of the 34 are working in a different trade, of which 4 alumni are from Ethiopia. Some alumni did not succeed to find a job in their own trade, others chose to work in a different sector. *'When I was trainee in Hope Enterprise TVET, we created a small business enterprise with my previous classmate. After we graduated, we obtained license in construction and generated a business for almost one year and half in construction sector. We have divided our profit and agreed to run new business individually; then I made market analysis to start a new business privately. Finally, I decided to do my current job and start a boutique.'* Zelalem Mitiku, Ethiopia.

Some of the alumni who are employed, have more than one job, to make sure that they earn more or because that is easier to combine with family life. *'In the tile business, I am the manager of the company myself, with my husband who does the same job, if one of us finds the market my husband executes and I stay with the children and teach in a school.'* Veronique Tebda, Burkina Faso



Photo 2: Delphine Kologo, Burkina Faso

In 2020, 2 out of the remaining sample of 34 alumni do not have a job, of which one female and one male alumni, both from Burkina Faso. Having a closer look at their story, the female alumni explains what was her dream: *'In 2016 my wish was to have the BEP (Brevet d'études professionnelles); the BAC (next level of education) and also to have a husband. Today I live with a man and I have a child.'* Asking her why she was not able to find a job, she explains: *'For me the obstacles are the following: lack of material and financial means, lack of support and lack of assistance.'* Delphine Kologo (25), Burkina Faso

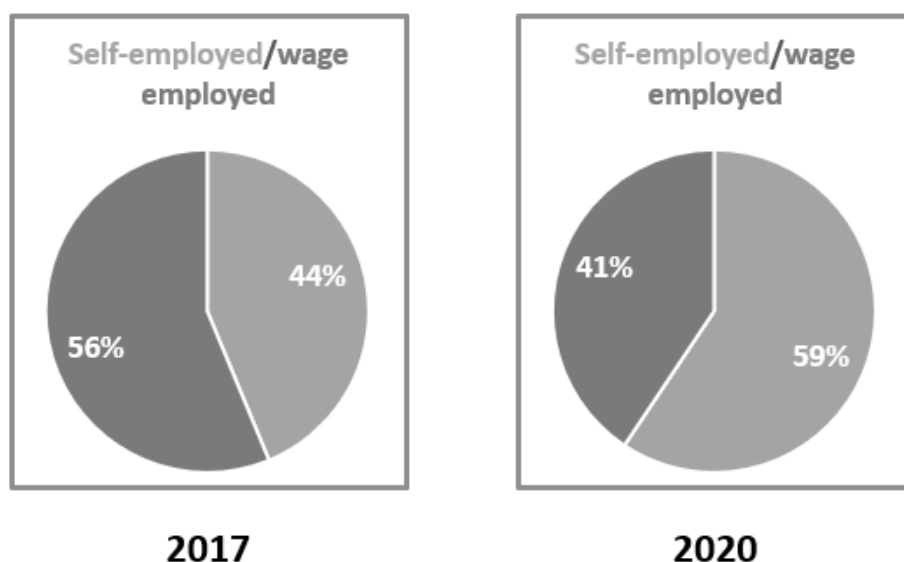
The male alumni who did not find employment yet, also had the desire to continue studying after finalizing TVET education. In 2020, he is in his third year of university, studying Electrical Engineering. Though he did not succeed to get a job yet, he actually is successful in achieving what he wanted to achieve in his future. *'In 2016, I wanted to continue my studies and thanks to the support of an older brother I was able to enroll in school to further my education.'* Sanou Seydou (24) Burkina Faso



Photo 3: Sanou Seydou, Burkina Faso

At the end of five years, most alumni managed to find a job, but what kind of job? During the years, the percentage of alumni who are self-employed increased, from 44% in 2017 to 59% in 2020. Further investigation of the development on type of employment for alumni, shows that a number of alumni started to work in wage employment and later on started their own business.

The percentage of self-employment is higher among female alumni (77%) than among male alumni (47%). In all countries, self-employment is more than 50% of total employment, except for Bangladesh, where 60% of the alumni are wage employed, while 40 % (including all female alumni) are self-employed. Self-employment is highly valued by most alumni. For female alumni, it provides them the opportunity to combine their own business with their family responsibilities. And for many alumni being a successful entrepreneur is what they dreamt of. *'I am satisfied with my job because: It is my own garage. There is a huge scope of income. My income has increased more than before. I got a personal identity and a social recognition in my locality.'* Mithun Sarker, Bangladesh. Others still are employed by others, but dream to be independent. *'In my case, I work with a boss, and it is through his markets that I am able to provide my services. Otherwise, I would say that I am always looking for personal materials to ensure my autonomy.'* Kabore Jacques, Burkina Faso



The majority of alumni who found a job, did receive support in job finding, like counselling, mediation or training in soft skills, but not in all countries this service was available in 2016. All students from Bangladesh and from Colombia received counseling and mediation, while only two alumni from Ethiopia (Gambella branch) and no students from Burkina Faso received job counselling. Comparing the year when alumni got a job, it seems that alumni from Bangladesh and Colombia find a job more easily than alumni from countries where no or limited job counseling is available. But job counseling is not the only success factor for employment. Many alumni mention the support of family members or relatives who linked them to job opportunities, even when job counseling is available. *'Yes I received job mediation services from JBS. First they contacted with me and enrolled me as an internal client from Hope Technical Institute. From JBS I got various trainings on work place attitude, Moral values and ethics, Job interviews etc. JBS also took my CV for getting me employed in any service. In the meanwhile, I got job with a help of my relatives. My learning from JBS helped me securing this job.'* Razu Sheikh, Bangladesh.



Photo 4: Razu Sheikh, Bangladesh

4.3 Are you satisfied with your income and working conditions?

During the years, the income of the alumni has increased. In the table below is visible that the average income is increased from 2017 (first year of measuring this question) till 2020 in all countries. The largest increase is visible in Burkina Faso and Bangladesh, while the increase in Colombia and Ethiopia is lower (but still significant). It is difficult to compare the average income between the different countries, translation of the local currency in euro's does not take into account local living costs. Comparing the average income in 2020 with the national minimum wage, shows that in all countries, except for Bangladesh, on average alumni earn more than the minimum wage. This is an average, having a closer look at individual students shows that 14 (including the 2 alumni without jobs) out of 34 students earn below the minimum wage, while others earn (far) more than the minimum.

	2017		2020		Minimum wage	% increase
Colombia	996,000	€ 232	1,387,500	€ 323	980,657	139%
Burkina Faso	20,000	€ 30	93,285	€ 142	34,664	466%
Bangladesh	2,233	€ 21	7,370	€ 69	8,000	330%
Ethiopia	5,583¹	€ 116	7,216	€ 150	420²	129%

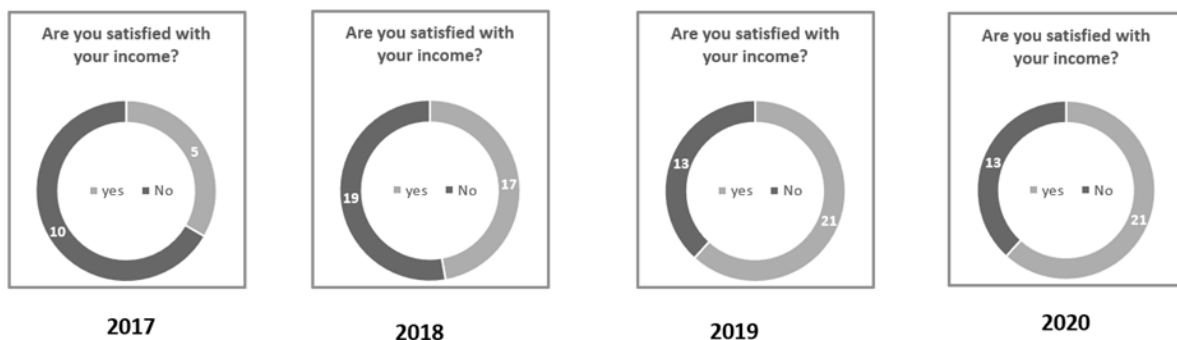
As indicated by the alumni, the increase in income results in a higher contribution to the household income. In 2017, 11 from the 26 alumni interviewed (42%) contributed to the household income. In 2020 this picture is changed: 31 out of 34 alumni (91%) contribute to the income of their household. On average, the contribution of the alumni is 48% of the total household income.

The increase also results in higher satisfaction with the income. In 2017, only 33% of the alumni was satisfied with their income, while in 2020 the percentage of satisfied alumni was increased to 62% (65% if only those who are already employed taken into account). Alumni mainly value their income because it allows them to take care of their family needs. For women, income also empowers their position in the family. *From a woman's perspective, I am satisfied with my income because I never need to go outside for earning. Whatever I earn is enough for my personal expenses including some savings for my upcoming*

¹ From Ethiopia, no data for 2017 are available, 2018 is used as a reference

² This is the absolute minimum. High skilled workers normally earn 4370-6500 ETB (2018)

child. Pollobi Gosh, Bangladesh. Others are not satisfied with their income, one alumni mentions that he is not satisfied, because he is not able to get better paying jobs such as electrical installations in bigger buildings. *I am dissatisfied, because the type of market I am winning is not satisfactory here in Bobo. Namakouno Ousmane, Burkina Faso*



According to the open interviews, a number of alumni have mixed feelings about their income, though they like to receive more income they also value the stability that they have through their job. *I would like to have a higher income, but I feel satisfied with the stability of having a job and stable income, working in a safe environment and providing my services to the community. Natalia Benites Solarzano, Colombia*

In general, alumni work quite some hours to earn their income, in average they work 53 hours a week, but some work up to 84 or 91 hours a week. Though most employers (97 %) did provide a safe working environment in 2017-2019, in 2020 19% of alumni did score their working environment as unsafe. It is not clear what is the reason for this change in the last year. It seems the question is interpreted differently by different alumni. In the interviews, different items are mentioned related to safety, such as protective clothes, the nature of the job (driving in Ethiopia is dangerous), network problems or the slowness of the market. One interviewee reports that the safety is reduced, because he had to change jobs because of the effects of Covid-19. *My working place lacks safety measures as it is a local market. I don't have no safety shoes, no safety eyewear and no fire protection system. Also my workshop is very small. Mithun Ray, Bangladesh*



Photo 5: Mithun Ray, Bangladesh

Though some alumni did experience discrimination at the start of their career in 2017 (20%), in 2020 no discrimination is reported by the 34 alumni. Besides, most alumni are satisfied with the opportunities for professional development. During all years of this study, the majority (more than 60 %) received on the job

training. Also, most of the alumni do get sufficient chances to update their skills during the years (from 73% in 2017 till 82% in 2020). Still, a few alumni mention that they are interested to receive extra training on specific topics.

4.4 Did you achieve what you hoped for when you finalized the training?

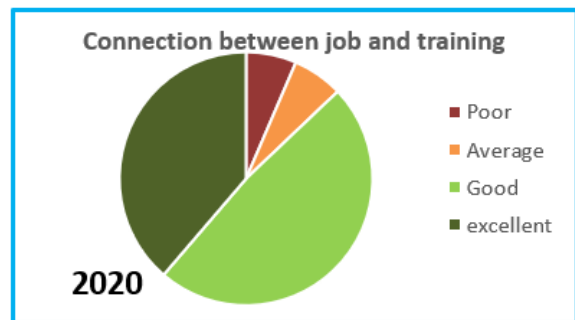
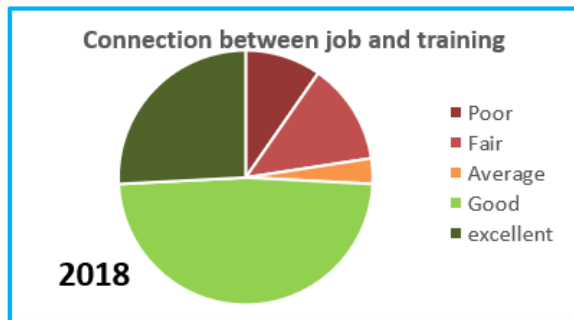
After five years, 14 out of 34 alumni (41%) have achieved what they hoped for in their professional life. Differences are visible between the different countries. Most alumni from Colombia and Ethiopia are satisfied, while the majority of alumni from Bangladesh and Burkina Faso is not satisfied yet. Also quite some differences are visible between the different alumni. Some achieved more than they expected: *I have achieved more than dreams at the end of the training, because I wanted to perform in the profession I learned, but I have achieved this and more when managing the business of the company where I link, I acquired greater knowledge in my learning, in administrative areas and personnel management that enables me to have my own business as long as this is possible. Arturo Avila, Colombia.* Others comment that they do not make progress in achieving what they hoped for: *In 2016, I was expecting to have my own materials, but I can't make progress because I don't have the financial support to continue my studies and to have the materials. Jacques Kabore, Burkina Faso.* But quite a number of alumni explain that they did not completely achieve what they hoped for yet, but they trust they are on their way to get there. *'After finishing the TVET training I hoped to find a job in big automobile workshop. However, my hope has not been fulfilled yet though I am doing a decent job. I am optimistic that one day I will fulfill my dream.'* Apu Hazra, Bangladesh.

The satisfaction of alumni with their personal life is higher, 22 out of 34 (65%) is satisfied with their personal life. Dreams for personal life are often related to what is achieved in professional life. Many alumni wanted to build their own house, start their own family or support their family members, which is often related to the income that is realized. As one of the alumni explains: *I am satisfied enough with my current income. Because, now I am independent I can't wait for or received financial support from anyone else. I able to support my families and relatives. Before the end of 2020 I will have a child and I will become father and this makes me one step forward in my life. Thanks to God! Zelalem Mitiku, Ethiopia.*



Photo 6: Zelalem Mitiku, Ethiopia

Both in professional and in private life, female alumni tend to be more satisfied with their actual situation than male students. This is also visible in the number of alumni that are looking for another job. The majority of female alumni is not looking for another job, while the majority of male alumni is looking for another job. Most probably this is related to the opportunities that women have when they have children, often their family life does not allow them to achieve all the dreams that they have. *After finishing my TVET training, I hope to be a trainer. But I didn't get any opportunity as well as I didn't have any scope because of my conjugal life. Shetu Mistry, Bangladesh*



Every year since 2018, alumni have given their opinion about the connection between their job and the TVET training that they completed. In general, satisfaction with the training is high. In 2020, 87% scored the connection between the training and their job as 'good' or 'excellent'. 6% of the alumni scored the connection as 'average' and another 6% as 'poor'. Those who scored the connection 'average' or 'poor' are from Ethiopia, which is at least partly explained from the fact that a number of alumni from Ethiopia are not working in the trade that they are trained for.



Even though most alumni are satisfied with the training, some mention that they are interested in further training on specific topics, such as fashion designing (Tailoring), cake decoration (Bakery) or office automation (Administrative Assistant). *Everything I learned in the Labor Technician has allowed me to perform at work, the seminars, beauty brigades and the knowledge imparted by the teacher are a solid foundation that helped me to want to learn more every day. I want to continue training in everything related to health and beauty, as it is an art that has permanent changes, for this reason it is good to update.* Marcela Torres, Colombia

Photo 7: Marcela Torres, Colombia

4.5 Did TVET make a difference?

In the interviews, alumni shared different details about their jobs, their income and the impact of the TVET education on their personal lives. In 2020, the final year of the project, we asked the alumni to look back and summarize what difference the vocational training has made. Although not all alumni answered this question, 95% of the alumni that the training had a positive impact on their lives. It helped them to become employed, to earn an income and to contribute to their families. And besides, some explain that the education also increased their self-confidence, gave them hope, trust in God and helped them to live a dignified life. To answer the main question of this project, does TVET make a difference, below an answer from four alumni from each of the four participating countries.

My TVET training gave me enough skill both in academic and personal skills. Now, I am professionally competent and can do any jobs in related to my profession. It makes me self-supportive and confident. Robel Tewodros, Ethiopia

With the training in tiling my living conditions have changed I can pocket 50000 FCFA per day sometimes which is not obvious in other fields of activity. For me, entrepreneurship in tiling is more profitable than any other office activity. Tebda Veronique, Burkina Faso

From the training opportunity in the PTI, he has presented changes in the different aspects starting with spiritual growth, trust, dependence and the support of God in life. In the personal area, expanding my vision as a person and the opportunity to serve those who have contact with me, in the knowledge for a better job performance and provision of services, and professional, expanding the vision and projection in the short and medium term. Yessica Castilla Contreras, Colombia

To summarize TVET training is the catalyst that has changed my life in a better way. I never thought of formal education and jobs. However, this TVET training has given me the strength and foundation to move forward. I see many unemployed youths around me; however, I didn't need bear curse of unemployment for longer period of time only because of this training. The happier days and solvent times of my family are ensured by the application of my TVET training. Apu Hazra, Bangladesh

5. Conclusions and implications

Insights in the quality of the TVET program

In conclusion, this study shows that TVET training does make a difference for vulnerable youth. The most important difference it makes, is giving the youth hope and an opportunity to support themselves and their family. Both soft skills and technical skills are indispensable elements of vocational training to make this difference for the students, and alumni are positive about the quality of training that they received. This is a motivation for Woord & Daad and their partners to continue to work on quality vocational training, and it gives an opportunity explore opportunities to provide short term follow-up skills training to alumni.

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Besides, not all alumni were able to find decent work and/or receive fair wages. To make not only a difference, but the difference for vulnerable youth, a broader intervention is needed. A single TVET or a JBS cannot influence the labor market and has limited bargaining power towards employers or the government. This underlines the importance of broader interventions, like the Job Booster approach which was initiated by Woord en Daad after the research study started in 2016.

Sharing impact stories

One of the objectives of the 'does TVET make a difference' study was to collect materials for fundraising. During the years, many stories and pictures have been received and shared with our constituency. Even though this was supportive, in many cases the life stories that were shared in activity reports have been mainly used for communication.

Besides, not all partners were able to make (quality) pictures, because often communication with alumni took place through mobile phone. Also, the initial idea to enrich the annual interviews with interviews during visits of WD colleagues was only in a few cases realized, probably because not all colleagues were aware of this research study because of changes in staff.

Qualitative PMEL

The final objective of this study, was to gain experience with different a type of data collection. This study was a unique opportunity to follow some alumni during a longer period and to test online data collection.

Following a relatively small sample of alumni for a longer period of time has been an important learning experience, of which the results are visible in this report. It gives more qualitative information on the long term impact of a project on the lives of individual alumni, and is as such a valuable addition to more quantitative information. In this case, the study was a separate project in which the results from four different countries were compared. To make sure that this is a learning experience within the project, and to create fast learning loops, it is advisable to make this kind of study part of the project proposal.

In three countries (Bangladesh, Burkina Faso and Colombia) the online data collection was successfully used. In Ethiopia, online data collection was not implemented, but an Excel sheet was provided to collect the same data. The data collection through Kobo Toolbox, in combination with an Excel tool for analysis, was an easy way to collect and analyze data. Besides, the Excel tool could be easily shared with partners to be for their own learning process.

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