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Skills for green jobs: Occupational changes in the green economy

“Working together is vital for the greening of the economy. Through intensive social dialogue with and between employer organisations, trade unions, government and civil society, many of the challenges relating to the greening of the economy can be overcome.”

Skills development is widely recognised as a critical aspect of Namibia's socio-economic development. For an economy to grow, the necessary skills need to be present and to develop according to the economic development path of the country. This brief covers the importance of skills in the process of greening the economy and provides some insights into what can be done in Namibia.

Challenges towards green skills development

The ILO is actively working to identify green skills, and provide technical assistance to governments and social partners on green skills as a driver for change towards the green economy.

To illustrate the important role of green skills development, major challenges have been identified concerning skills in the green economy transition, amongst others:

1. A lack, or absence, of green skills is creating bottle necks in the greening of the economy in many countries

A lack of the skills necessary to meet the requirements of changing and emerging occupations, which are necessary for green investment and green economic development, is already hampering the greening of the economy. This also applies to skills in established occupations, for which demand is growing.

2. Skills and policies need to merge

Countries in Southern Africa, like Namibia and South Africa, are known for the high quality of their national environmental and conservation policies. However, a good climate change policy does not necessarily lead to its proper implementation. One of the reasons for this is that policies tend to assume the presence of certain skill sets, which are often not present. The absence of a skills dimension in policy development can be caused by suboptimal co-ordination between the different ministries and stakeholders involved as well as poor co-ordination and consultation with the sectors involved. Employers' networks, trade unions, training authorities and sector representative organisations play a major role in this process and need to be strongly involved.



3. Green change will be profound in certain sectors

Greening the banking sector will have less of an impact on the workplace of a banker than greening of the construction or agricultural sectors will have on related professions. Workers in these sectors will need to acquire new skills (skills upgrading) as their sector is restructuring. Moreover, new job opportunities will arise as economies go green, which will need to be met with the necessary skills. Renewable energies, green construction methods, water resource management as well as recycling and waste management are amongst the sectors that will require new sets of professional skills. This requires training systems to pair workers with new positions and to retrain workers to make the most of the skills they already have.

4. Skills required in a greener economy need to be identified

It is of vital importance that green skills are taken into account in national skills identification mechanisms, such as those generated through labour market information systems, labour market observatories and essential skills lists. In many countries this is not the case, and skills gaps are being identified by individual enterprises or sectors which find themselves confronted with new requirements or technologies that affect specific jobs. Skills authorities therefore need not only to reform their research and appraisal systems, but also to link up closely with organisations representing workers and employers in order to draw from this knowledge base and improve the response time to upcoming skills gaps.

5. Appropriate training needs to be put in place

Related to the above, once skills are identified, training programmes need to respond quickly to new skills requirements. Experience shows that government funded training programmes play a vital role in the creation of green skills, as do universities and training institutions which tend to adapt relatively quickly to new demands. Technical and vocational training centres also play a crucial role in providing entry level skills for green jobs (e.g. plumbers, electrical installers, recyclers, etc.).



Skills in the green economy

The greening of the economy arises from several factors, amongst others, green policies and regulations, green technologies and green investments. A crucial factor to be considered within this process is the occupational changes this will cause in the workplace, and the effect the green economy will have on skills.

New and emerging green jobs mostly require higher-level qualifications and managerial skills, while changes in existing occupations happen more often at the low and medium-skill levels. Many existing jobs, for example those of plumbers, electricians, metal workers, and construction workers, will be redefined as the day-to-day skill sets, work methods, and profiles are 'greened'.

The National Planning Commission recently expressed its concern regarding skills development in Namibia, and requested Cabinet to approve the National Human Resources Plan (NHRP). The plan will assess the currently available human resources and skills in the country and match these with the demands of the economy in view of the realisation of Vision 2030. This provides the opportunity to include green skills in the assessment.

What can be done in Namibia?

Working together is vital for greening of the economy. Through intensive social dialogue with and between employer organisations, trade unions, government and civil society, many of the challenges relating to the greening of the economy can be overcome. The following checklist, developed by the ILO, can provide some guidance:

- Does Namibia co-ordinate environmental policies and policies devoted to green job skills development? If yes, how are skills issues included in national environmental strategies?
- How are training and retraining needs anticipated and met within industries undergoing substantial green transformation?
- How do public employment services provide information on, and access to, retraining courses for green jobs?
- Is environmental awareness a routine component in general and vocational education and training?
- Are training programmes for green jobs available to, and affordable for, disadvantaged youth, people with disabilities, rural communities and other vulnerable groups?
- What are the instruments used to include disadvantaged groups in the greening of the economy?
- Does Namibia have a policy or incentives to support female enrolment into science, engineering and other types of technical education and training?
- Do initial and continuing training programmes for teachers and trainers include components on environmental awareness, new green services and green production methods?
- Does Namibia have a system to detect new skill demands? Is it used to detect new skills arising as a result of greening? How is the country improving the system to capture new developments in the green economy?
- Does the system for anticipating skill needs incorporate a co-ordinating mechanism to allow skills identification and information exchange across green sectors and line ministries? Is it used to identify skills for green jobs?

This background brief is part of an Information Campaign on crucial elements in greening the economy, from the perspective of workers, employers and the government. Subsequent briefs will touch upon Green Skills, Green Entrepreneurship, Green Jobs Assessment and Policy, and finally some sectoral perspectives on green jobs.

For more information:
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