



WEHUBIT

Country
Tanzania



Implemented by



Budget
289.000 €

Duration
02/2022 – 10/2023

Contribution to SDGs



Implemented by



Financed by



Via



Learning from the project: *Let's go digital !*

Can digital social innovation ensure the continuity of education services to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis, how and in which context?

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Reason

In Tanzania, low literacy and educational levels hinder youth to participate in higher education, and a shortage of employment opportunities force youth to opt for self-employment, for which they lack **suitable entrepreneurship** and **financial literacy skills**. The World Bank estimates that only 26.5% of young people enrol in secondary schools. 800,000 Tanzanian youth enter the job market every year – with only 40,000 formal jobs available.

The **Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA)**, the government agency responsible for vocational training, has the mandate to provide long term training to 10,000 youth, and short-term training to more than 30,000 youth per year. However, existing Vocational Education and Training (VET) does not have the capacity to meet the needs.

In addition, access to VET is impossible for many due to the **distance** to **training institutes** and **costs** involved, especially for women and youth in rural areas. Many of those in need of appropriate training to increase their income also need to continue running their activities while learning new skills. While discussing gender aspects, social realities have to be taken into account as well when considering training accessibility.

Under the YES (**Youth Employment through Skills Enhancement**) project, Helvetas and VETA have provided practice-oriented short courses to bridge skills gaps. Through this first project, partners identified a high demand for Vocational Education and Training among youths. Based on this finding, VETA, in collaboration with the telecommunication company Airtel (private sector), has developed a **mobile learning application (VSOMO)**.

VSOMO provides theoretical knowledge through an app, while practical training is then offered in one of the national VETA training institutes.

More than 40,000 people have downloaded the app, but only 400 have enrolled in the courses. Although interest and technical requirements to use the app are met, several factors hinder that the potential is fully tapped. One might be the **costs**, though not very high (120,000 TSh for short courses on the platform), for something digital, where the link to a **practical institution and training** may not be visible at first sight. Another hindering factor may be the **attractiveness** of the **course**: courses are static, with a lot of text to read and a few pictures. Considering that many youths have a low education level, attaining knowledge through reading (and understanding) lengthy texts on a smartphone, with no teacher to directly clarify questions, does not seem realistic.

Digital social innovation

The Let's Go Digital project was implemented in partnership between Helvetas Tanzania and the Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA) of Tanzania. The general goal of the project was to **increase access to market-demanded vocational education training to youth, and young women in particular**, by scaling the existing mobile learning solution VETA – SOMO (VSOMO) in Tanzania.

Several measures have been taken to answer the main challenges related to the **attractiveness** and **accessibility** of these **short courses**.

- The project has improved and gamified the content of **5 vocational training courses** (Mobile phone repair, Cosmetology, Food production and Catering services, Electrical installation and Entrepreneurship).
- The project established **5 digital hubs in rural municipalities in Dodoma and Singida**, each facilitated by a mentor, to provide youth, and especially girls, with tablets and internet connection, as well as support.
- To ensure the **completion of trainings** (theory online, and practical in training centres), the project supported **two certified Vocational Training Centres** (VTCs) (Sabasaba VTC Singida, and VETA Dodoma) in providing **practical training** and **increasing community awareness** on the VSOMO platform through radio campaigns and social media.
- Lastly, the project gave free access to the **5 upgraded online theoretical courses**. Youths will be asked for a payment only when they start the practical course at a VTC.

Since July 2023, there have been **6,717 new registrations** across the country and **248 learners** have successfully finished their online courses.

5 digital hubs have been established in Dodoma and Singida. A total of **379 (171 Females, 208 males) youth** have been using these hubs to take online courses through the VSOMO platform.



A total of **5 courses** were selected, assessed and improved through gamification. 3700 new users have registered for these courses since July 2023.

“

Omary and his friends faced domestic challenges that affected their lives mostly in terms of continuing their education. The challenges forced them to be more creative in living and supporting their families. In different locations and occasions, they work as workers in house construction performing different activities like plumbing, bricks construction and electrical installation. At that time they didn't know each other. They joined the learning hub in DCODE where they learned life skills and where they were introduced to the VSOMO application to learn the electrical installation course. After they graduated they joined and start a group business where they provide solutions to electrical issues.

A learner

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KEY MESSAGES

- ▶ Digital hubs have been used by boys, usually coming with their own device, and women with **no or little access to digital tools**, particularly young mothers aged 16 to 35.
- ▶ Digital hubs have empowered young people in rural villages at Singida, by bringing **learning connected spaces** closer to home and enabling young people to use digital platforms to gain relevant **theoretical skills for self-employment opportunities**.
- ▶ Hub mentors have helped bridge the users' digital skills gap by giving them **collective and individual support**.
- ▶ The new VSOMO platform has seen a surge in users since the launch of the **5 free gamified courses for free**. This can be explained by the interactive features creating a more immersive and enjoyable online learning experience, resulting in improved learning outcomes.

LESSONS LEARNED

Inclusion and equity

- ▶ The choice of courses to gamify (only 5 of 15) was made with a **gender-balanced perspective**. 2 mainly women-held professions were selected: Cosmetology and Food production & Catering services. However, women and men are welcome and supported in taking **whatever course they prefer**.
- ▶ The flexibility enabled by digital learning and the proximity of digital hubs have allowed mothers to show up at the hubs. **Mothers are allowed** to enter with their babies and, in the Singida Vocational Training Center (VTC), accommodation is ensured for both the trainees and their babies during the practical sessions.
- ▶ As there are a limited number of digital devices, priority is given to women and girls, who don't usually own a **smartphone**, let alone computers.

Users and stakeholders' responsiveness

- ▶ In addition to accessibility and quality issues, there were also social and cultural barriers to online learning. First of all, there was overall **unawareness** of the **opportunities** that online learning can offer, and the perception that online learning is not as qualitative as formal education. In addition, communities felt reluctant to allow woman and girls to pursue an education, especially as it entails going out of the village for extended periods of time.

The project first had to raise **awareness** and **advocate** for the use of **digital learning**, especially for women. Dialogues have been established with **local leaders** and **husbands**.



Mentors working in the digital hubs have been **ambassadors** of the VSOMO platform throughout the project and will continue to be.

Awareness and advocacy for the use of digital learning in vocational training was also organised for Local Government Authorities (LGAs). Their buy-in was crucial for the success of the project as they have provided **infrastructures** and **human resources** to run the digital hubs.

Although the hubs facilitated access to digital learning greatly, access to VTCs for the practical part of the course remained a challenge. Economically vulnerable youths can not afford 42,000 TSh for meals and accommodation and the project is **supporting** some of them, especially **young mothers**.

VET Instructors received capacity building during the project, enabling them to proficiently use the VSOMO platform for online Competence-Based Training (CBT), as they were only used to deliver CBT face-to-face. They were equipped with digital resources and tools to enhance the **quality** and **effectiveness** of their training methods. The capacity building aimed at helping them to understand how the VSOMO Platform is applied to add value in training delivery.

Use beyond the project

The sustainability of the project is based on several factors :

- The Tanzanian government is **investing** in **digitalisation** and is already convinced of related opportunities.
- The **strong partnership** with an already existing and recognised **public partner** : Vocational Education and Training Authority (VETA). VETA is the government authority for VET in Tanzania. They own and manage the online learning platform, and develop the courses. VETA relies on a well-structured network of VTC's. VETA will continue to provide a supervisory role to **hubs' operations** and **coordination** of **practical trainings** after the end of Wehubit's grant. It will provide technical support to the VTC.
- Partnership with Airtel for **assurance of internet connection** provided to the hubs even after the end of the Wehubit grant.
- Mentors that support learners within digital hubs are hired by the LGA's and will continue working in the hubs, in **direct collaboration** with the VTC's.



PERSPECTIVES

The Let's Go Digital Project has been scaled by other development agencies. The Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the GIZ **replicated the same approach**. SDC to support 800 more youths at Mwanza, SSimiyu, Shinyanga and Tabora; the GIZ, through the E4D Project, to support 1,500 more youths at Dodoma, Manyara, and Lindi.

The two Vocational Education and Training Authority Vocational (VETA) Training Center, "Sabasaba" Singida and VETA Dodoma, will continue to manage the **day-to-day activities** of the hub with the support of the mentors. The mid-term objective is that the hubs serve as an extension to the near VTC's.

Every education structure with the capacity to deliver training through VSOMO will be able to **market their program** and **enroll trainees** who will pay for themselves. 25% of the fee will go to VETA Kipawa to sustain the platform and online support activities, and 75% will go to the VTC's to support practical session delivery.

*This learning sheet has been developed in the framework
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