



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ethiopia/Ezra Millstein, 2023

## Short-term, fee-based skills development: A new model for technical skills training in Ethiopia

For the increasing numbers of young women and men transitioning out of pastoralism (TOPs) in the lowlands of Ethiopia, a lack of technical skills is a key obstacle to their success in navigating a pathway to employment. A major underlying challenge is the absence of technical courses and services that are relevant and accessible for these youth TOPs.

*This learning brief describes how the Mercy Corps-led RIPA-North program partnered with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in the lowlands to pioneer a new model of short-term, fee-based training courses. The brief highlights the success of this model, including an impressive 79% of graduates gaining employment, but also the challenges of access for young women.*

### KEY CHALLENGES

- Courses provided by public and private TVET institutions in the lowlands are not accessible for youth TOPs, as they are too long and therefore too expensive, and not appropriate for their lower levels of schooling.
- TVET courses tend not to be tailored to the specific needs of employers, and TVET institutions in the lowlands provide minimal post-training support for graduates. As a result, unemployment rates among TVET graduates are high, at 50% nationally.
- Youth in pastoralist areas lack information about TVET services.
- Some TVET institutions have delivered short-term technical training under contract by NGOs, but the course fees are paid by the NGOs which makes this model unsustainable.

## RIPA-NORTH INTERVENTION APPROACH

The vision of the RIPA-North team is to catalyze a new model of technical training and associated services that is appropriate for the interests and capacities of youth TOPs, is profitable for TVETs and therefore sustainable, and ultimately results in young people accessing wage employment and self-employment after graduation.

### ***RIPA-North established partnership agreements with three TVET institutions for the pilot phase, but convincing partners that the new model could be viable was not easy.***

Initially, most institutions were only interested in the traditional NGO model of being paid to deliver the training to youth. The RIPA-North team held in-depth co-creation workshops with potential partners, and these were instrumental in convincing three TVET institutions to try the new core approach of short-term, fee-based courses. They also surfaced other areas of partnership that the RIPA-North team hadn't been considering, such as nationally accredited 'Certificates of Competency'. The three 'pilot phase' institutions were Liberty College and Degahbour TVET in Somali Region, and Etsegenet Training Center in Oromia Region. Degahbour TVET is a public institution, while the other two are private. Interestingly, four government TVETs that were originally not convinced by the viability of the fee-based model, have all changed their minds now they have seen the success of RIPA partners and are part of the scale-up phase.

### ***The core innovation for partner TVET institutions was to introduce new short-term, fee-based courses, but they also introduced a number of other innovations in services.***

<b><i>i. Short-term, fee-based courses</i></b>	Prior to the RIPA partnership, all three partners were primarily offering courses 12 and 24 months in duration, with some courses lasting 6 months. All of these were prohibitively expensive for many youth, in terms of the course fees (private institutions) and also the cost of living while attending long courses. While the private sector TVETs were run on a for-profit basis, Degahbour TVET, as a public institution, had never previously charged fees for courses so this was a radical innovation for them.
<b><i>ii. Market assessments to select market-ready courses</i></b>	All TVETs conducted labor market assessments to identify the skills in high demand by the market, the interests of youth, and institutions and businesses with potential to provide internship and job placements for graduates. TVET institutions used this to select priority courses and then developed course curricula and built capacities of trainers. Examples of courses are driving license and plastering/quartz (Degahbour), application development and mobile maintenance (Liberty), and barbering and tailoring (Etsegenet).
<b><i>iii. Proactive marketing to target pastoral communities</i></b>	To generate awareness and demand for the new courses among a new category of target students, the TVET institutions launched marketing campaigns through a range of channels, including social media, street banners and exhibitions in schools. Particularly important were community mobilizations and sign-up events in rural towns and kabeles.
<b><i>iv. Competency certification</i></b>	All TVETs leveraged connections with national-level certification bodies to introduce accredited competency certification for the new short-term courses. This was seen by TVET staff and youth as key to increasing their employability and therefore interest in the courses.
<b><i>v. Internships</i></b>	Using information from labour market assessments, the TVETs placed new emphasis on helping their graduates find internships (or in a few cases job placements) after the training, including by organizing job fairs
<b><i>vi. Impact assessments</i></b>	The TVETs introduced tracer studies to understand how successful their courses and post-graduation services were in supporting youth to successfully find employment or self-employment. These were conducted between 6 and 12 months after graduation and, importantly, the data from these studies is being used by TVETs to attract more students to enrol.



**11 of 13**  
NEW COURSES HAVE  
BEEN SUCCESSFUL /  
SUSTAINABLE

**91%**  
OF GRADUATES  
ACCESSED AN  
INTERNSHIP  
THROUGH THE TVETS

**3 of 3**  
PARTNERS  
INDEPENDENTLY  
INVESTED IN NEW  
COURSES

**INTERVENTION IMPACT** **EVIDENCE OF SUSTAINABLE MARKET SYSTEM CHANGE**

A key measure of systemic change for this intervention is whether short-term courses have been successful and sustainable in terms of student enrolment and generating revenue for institutions. Out of the 13 short-term courses introduced across the three institutions, TVETs are continuing to offer 11 (at least four rounds so far). Moreover, the TVETs report increasing interest in their short-term courses over time, as reflected in registration rates that have almost doubled over the course of 9 months, reaching 500 for Q3 of 2023. As the Dean of Degahbour College reflects, *“Before there were places available but now all courses are full and there is a waiting list”*. Total revenue generated by TVETs is significant at \$65,000 across the three institutions over 18 months (around 50% of which is profit), and this has also been steadily increasing, from \$3,500 in Q3 of 2022 to more than \$22,000 in Q3 of 2023. For the Dean of Degahbour TVET this has been a revelation: *“It is so amazing!*

*We were not thinking like this. We never thought to take fees from our students and generate an income”*. In an excellent sign of systemic change, all three partners have independently invested their own resources and added new short-term courses to their portfolio, such as bajaj driving license and women’s hairdressing (Degahbour), cyber security (Liberty) and soap production (Etsegenet).

There are also positive signs of success and sustainability of the other innovations in services introduced by the TVETs. 80% of graduating students achieved a ‘Certificate of Competency’ and TVETs have also recognized the value of labor market assessments, with Degahbour (two assessments) and Etsegenet (one) subsequently conducting additional assessments to inform new short-term courses. Most impressively, the three institutions supported 91% of graduates to access a job placement or internship.



Photo: Mercy Corps, Ethiopia, 2023

### **Business Success Story**

Since Tesfaye Meskel opened Etsegenet Training Centre with his wife in 2013, the only course they offered, until recently, was women’s hairdressing. Though they had ideas about starting other courses, they did not have the confidence or capacity to do so, and they graduated less than 30 students per year.

The partnership with RIPA-North has transformed Etsegenet from a simple hairdressing training college to a fully-fledged TVET offering multiple courses. Etsegenet has upgraded and expanded their classrooms, professionalized their documentation and record-keeping, and introduced competency certification for the first

time in partnership with the local public TVET institution. Financing the required 50% cost-contribution for the partnership was not easy for the owners, but they managed through a \$4,000 bank loan and \$4,000 from their own savings. Today, graduations from Etsegenet have reached 36 per quarter and rising (a four-fold increase), and the new courses have generated revenue of nearly \$20,000 over the past year, enough to repay their loan and re-invest in new courses. They have also achieved a remarkable success rate of 88% of graduates finding employment.



**1,243**  
YOUTH PAID FOR,  
AND GRADUATED  
FROM, NEW SHORT-  
TERM COURSES.

**79%**  
OF GRADUATES  
HAVE SECURED  
EMPLOYMENT

**1,317**  
JOBS CREATED  
IN BUSINESSES  
STARTED BY  
GRADUATES

## INTERVENTION IMPACT EVIDENCE OF IMPACT ON TARGET GROUPS

The success in stimulating systemic change in TVET services, described above, can only be deemed impactful if it helped significant numbers of young women and men secure wage or self-employment. Over the 18-months since partner TVETs first started delivering short-term courses, more than 1,200 youth have graduated. Each of the TVETs carried out tracer studies of employment outcomes between 6 and 12 months after graduation, which revealed that an impressive 79% of graduates have succeeded in securing employment. More work is needed to assess the socio-economic demographic of students, but qualitative information from focus group discussions indicates that around 20% come from small villages in rural areas, around 40% had parents who were pastoralists, and the remainder are third generation or more living in a town. The major challenge has been the consistently low enrolment

and graduation of young women. Just 18% of graduated youth are female, and the dynamics around this outcome are described below in the Gender box.

Interestingly, the proportion of graduating youth who have started a business or are self-employed (53%) is significantly higher than the proportion who found wage employment (26%). This is partly explained by the entrepreneurial ambition and mindset in the Somali context, where 58% of graduates from the two partner TVETs found self-employment and just 18% found wage employment. For the TVET in Oromia this is reversed, with 32% securing self-employment and 56% wage-employment. Moreover, RIPA-North's annual survey of businesses started by TVET graduates revealed they have created more than 1,300 full-time jobs (2.25 jobs on average per business).

### Participant Success Story

When Hausa Mohamud Yusuf graduated from a three-month driving license course at Degahbour TVET, she became the first licensed female driver in her community. She knows very well the challenges that women face in accessing opportunities and recognizes she's lucky to have the backing and financial support from her family. Taking the course opened Hausa's mind to her own potential and gave her new ambitions. On completion of the course, she immediately signed up for a longer-term automotive mechanic course (with a scholarship from the

TVET), with the goal of opening an auto repair business. She also plans to teach in the college after graduation, not only to get extra income but also to serve her community because "people trusted me and I want to pay back that trust". Hausa's story has also inspired other women to acquire new skills. Nasra Shafi Abdi was aware of the courses offered by the College, but it was only after she saw a short documentary about Hausa's experience on social media that she decided to sign up for the driving license course.



Hausa (left) and Nasra (right). Photo: Mercy Corps, Ethiopia, 2023



## Gender

Gender integration was a major focus from the early design stage of this intervention. Gender-specific barriers and new approaches were identified during co-creation and included in the partnership agreements. Liberty College, for example, introduced reduced fees for female students and a monthly payment modality, to help address the fact that young women typically have lower financial means and less support from families. All TVET institutions introduced gender-sensitive marketing strategies, such as promotional videos featuring female students to inspire other female applicants and market day promotional events, to help overcome the lower access to information for young women. Degahbour TVET also introduced less demanding entrance

requirements for female applicants in terms of educational background.

Despite these gender-sensitive approaches, female enrolment in Somali Region remains very low. One key reason is that the course topics selected by Degahbour and Liberty focused on traditionally male occupations, something recognized by Degahbour as they are now introducing women's hairdressing and catering to attract more female applicants. In addition, gender norms in Somali Region are so entrenched that it will take time to create change, for example Degahbour has just one female teacher out of 97 and very few female graduates to serve as role models. Notably, for Etsegenet in Oromia region, 68% of graduates and 3 out of 5 teachers are female.

### LESSONS LEARNED

1. Short-term, fee-based courses are a sustainable and effective business model for both public and private TVET institutions.
2. The short-term, fee-based courses proved remarkably effective in helping young people attain employment (only 21% of graduates were unemployed 6 to 12 months after graduating).
3. The various innovations in services that TVETs introduced were key factors in this positive employment-rate outcome, including 'Competency Certification' and TVETs finding internships for 91% of graduates.
4. To increase participation by young women in Somali Region, TVETs should increase short-term courses with topics of interest to young women, increase their number of female teachers, and expand the use of marketing strategies targeting women.
5. The intervention has delivered an excellent return-on-investment of \$30 for each job created. Moreover, since the courses are sustainable, this return keeps improving over time.
6. A recent change in the government's national TVET policy, requiring TVETs to start generating income, presents an excellent 'crowding-in' opportunity for RIPA-North.



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**Resilience in Pastoral Areas – North (RIPA-North)** is a five-year, \$38 million USAID-funded program operating in lowland areas of Somali, Oromia and Afar regions of Ethiopia (2020 – 2025). RIPA-North aims to improve the resilience capacities of households, markets, and governance institutions, collectively contributing to enhanced food security and inclusive economic growth.