

## **Sustainable Vocational Skills Development for Poverty Reduction in Northern Ghana**

By

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The vulnerability of the youth, in terms of unemployment, in Northern Ghana is manifest by persistent migration streams to Southern Ghana and its attendant negative effects, such as high crime rate. Vocational skills development has been identified as one effective means of tackling the unemployment problem of the area, which could ultimately reduce the inherent migration trends. This paper analyses the effectiveness of a vocational skills development model in tackling unemployment and migration by the Social Investment Fund in the Northern and Upper East Regions of Ghana. The study revealed the usefulness of the initiative in terms of employment generation and reduction of out-migration through the cost effective utilization of master craftsmen as trainers. The sustainability of such programs can be guaranteed through the establishment of an enabling environment for effective private sector participation.*

**Key Words:** Skills Training, Youth, Unemployment, Migration, Poverty, Ghana

### **BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM**

Poverty and unemployment in Africa have become topical issues for discussion among the international development community, researchers, and governments. The discussions have tended to centre on the basic fact that poverty and unemployment continue to grow, despite significant improvement in

economic growth in recent times. Poverty reduction has remained an elusive goal in Africa due to its insensitivity to economic growth.

According to the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA, 2005), Africa is suffering from record levels of unemployment that are undermining economic growth and worsening poverty across the continent. While macro economic performance in Africa has significantly improved since the mid 1990's, there seems to be little impact on unemployment and poverty. Whilst average annual GDP growth in Africa increased steadily from less than 3% in 1998 to 4.6 % in 2004, unemployment has hovered around 10% since 1995 with marked differences in sub-regional, gender, country, and age groups (UNECA, 2005).

Poverty is evidently pervasive in Africa despite the implementation of a number of poverty reduction programs. For example, out of the 20 countries classified by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as possessing the lowest human development index, 19 are in Africa (UNDP, 2001). Moreover, out of the world's 1.169 billion people living in extreme poverty (defined as having less than US\$1 a day to survive on) 49% are in Sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations University, 2004). The number of people living on less than US\$1 a day, defined as the poverty line, tells only half of the story. Many people in Africa, south of the Sahara, are chronically poor. Many of these chronically poor rely on seasonal employment as an avenue for momentarily moving out of the poverty bracket.

Whatever accounts for the pervasiveness of poverty in Africa, despite a myriad of poverty reduction programs, the continent's worsening degree of vulnerability, social exclusion, and falling standards of living is legendary. Poverty in Africa is characterized by limited employment opportunities and the resultant low income, failure of several kinds of basic capabilities, lack of power to command or exchange entitlements like goods and services, shelter, food, and other basic needs of life (Sen, 1981, 1985; Osmani, 2003; UNDP, 2002).

The incidence of poverty in Ghana, although declining and lower than that of Sub-Saharan Africa, still calls for concern. Although the overall poverty situation in Ghana decreased from 51.7% in 1991-1992 to 39.5% in 1998-1999 (GOG/NDPC, 2003), the figure masks incidence of growing and deepening poverty and evidence of intensification of vulnerability and exclusion among some groups and in some areas, especially in the Northern, Upper East, and Upper West Regions.

Unemployment is also a pressing social and economic issue in Ghana. According to the 2000 Ghana Living Standard Survey, Ghana had an unemployment rate of 6.7%. Though the figure is low compared to the average rate of a little over 10% for sub-Saharan Africa in 2000 (Tarantino, 2003), the unemployment problem is still alarming, especially among the youth.

The high rate of unemployment among the youth in Ghana has contributed to the high rate of poverty and insecurity in the country. It has compounded the problem of rural-urban migration as the urban centers, especially the bigger cities in Southern Ghana, have become magnets for the youth seeking a promise of a better life. A study on migration from the Upper East region revealed that in the late 1980's about half of all working age males and 15% of the working age females migrated to Southern Ghana for a period of at least one year (Cleveland, 1991). The World Bank Voice of the Poor report on Ghana also argues that young people in rural and urban communities feel they have no alternative but to leave home in search of work, since successful generation of remittances is likely to make the difference between food security and a lack of it for their families (Kunfaa, 1999). The gravitation of the youth to the urban areas in search of better life, albeit with limited skills, has resulted in high and rising crime rate, loss of feeling of safety, vulnerability, streetism, neighborhood decay, and development of slums among others.

In view of the critical importance of employment for sustained poverty reduction and curbing rural-urban migration, much attention has been placed on human resource development, skills development, youth employment programs, and micro enterprise development in recent times in Ghana (ILO, 2004). Despite the proliferation of Vocational Education and Training (VET) in eight ministries in Ghana, it still faces considerable crises in terms of cost, relevance of skills, and equity (Grunwald et al, 2004). Thus, several models of skills development, such as that of the SIF, are being explored because VET appears to be too bureaucratic and over-regulated in the view of Botchie and Ahadzie (2004).

### **Problem Statement**

The problem of migration of young people from the North to Southern Ghana has occupied the attention of the government, development partners, and local and international Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) for some time now.

A number of governmental and non-governmental agencies have fashioned out initiatives to address the problem from various angles. There is considerable NGO activity on preventing the migration of young people to the south or cities. Others are also working to improve the lives of those who have migrated and are having brush with life, whilst others have initiated projects to return the migrants to their homes in northern Ghana. The emphasis has however been on creating employment opportunities in the three northern regions to curb the high rate of exodus of young people to the south.

In line with this, government and other development partners have initiated projects to equip the young people in the north with employable skills. A number of people in the north have been trained in vocational and other skills with the view of helping them to earn a living and thereby reduce the high rate of migration of young people to the south.

Despite the numerous interventions to equip the young people in the north with vocational skills, especially through apprenticeship, there seems to be no end in sight to the problem. The young people in the north continue to troop to the south to engage in menial jobs like ‘kayaye’ or head portage.

In view of this revelation, the study seeks to find answers to the following basic questions.

- Is the training of young people in the north in vocational skills through the traditional system of apprenticeship a panacea to the vulnerability of the youth in terms of unemployment?
- To what extent can skills training of the youth reduce the high rate of migration of the youth to Southern Ghana and urban centers?
- To what extent do the trainees utilize the skills they have acquired?
- What are the challenges facing vocational and skills training in Northern Ghana?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study was to examine whether the model of Vocational Skills Training adopted by the Social Investment Fund (SIF) has been able to achieve its intended objectives.

The specific objectives of the study include the following:

- To find out whether the training of the youth in vocational skills has been able to reduce the high rate of migration of the youth to the southern part of Ghana to engage in menial jobs.
- To determine the potential of skills training in employment generation.
- To examine the extent of utilization of the skills acquired.
- To come out with factors militating against the vocational skills training initiative.
- To make policy recommendations on the skills development program.

The study was conducted in the Upper East and Northern regions of Ghana. The Tamale metropolis, in the Northern region, and the Bongo and Bawku West districts, in the Upper East region were covered. The survey was limited to beneficiaries of the skills development program who had completed their apprenticeship training under the sponsorship of the SIF.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out through the case study approach. Three sampling techniques, namely, purposive sampling, simple random sampling, and proportions were used to select the sample for the study. The sample size was determined through the use of the formula below because it is the most suitable for small sampling frames as in this case:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(\infty^2)}$$

Where n = Sample Size; N = Population or Sampling frame;  $\infty$  = Margin of Error.

At 90 percent confidence interval, where  $\infty = 0.1$  and  $N = 144$ , the sample size was determined as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} n &= \frac{N}{1 + N(0.1 \times 0.1)} \\ &= \frac{144}{1 + 144(.01)} \\ &= \frac{144}{1 + 1.44} \\ &= \frac{144}{2.44} \\ &= 59 \end{aligned}$$

Therefore, the sample size of 59 is also equivalent to 41% of the sampling frame. After the determination of the sample size, proportion was used to select samples from all the five groups that fell within the scope of the study (see Appendix 1). The sample for the various training categories within the groups was also determined through the use of proportions. Simple random sampling was finally used to select the respondents from the various groups and training categories.

One metropolitan area, Tamale, two district capitals - Bongo and Zebilla, and a relatively small community, Gowrie, in the Bongo District, were selected for the investigation to understand the dynamics of the phenomena. Structured questionnaires were used to interview the sampled respondents. Another structured questionnaire was used to interview the other stakeholders, such as the SIF Officers, the District Assembly officials, and the trainers. This was the main source of the primary data for the analysis. The data was analyzed through the use of the SPSS statistical package. This was the preferred package in view of its flexibility and adaptability for both quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

## **DISCUSSION OF MAJOR FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This section deals with the analysis of data gathered from the field concerning attempts at curbing the migration of young people in Northern Ghana to Southern Ghana through vocational skills development. It covers the type of skills acquired, the effect of the vocational skills training on migration and unemployment, the extent of utilization of the skills acquired, and challenges of the program, among others.

### **Type of Vocational Skills Acquired**

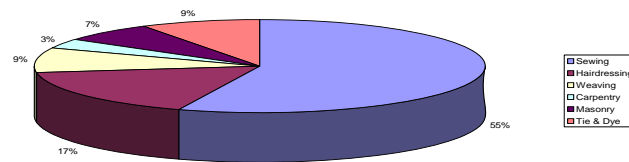
The study revealed that in 2002 the SIF embarked on an exercise to equip some unemployed youth in the Upper East and Northern Regions with employable skills with the view to reduce poverty and the migration of the youth to the southern part of Ghana, reduce unemployment, and minimize the occurrence of social vices. The study revealed that 183 people were selected for the program, but at the time of the survey 144 people had successfully completed the apprenticeship program.

The skills acquired included sewing (dressmaking and tailoring), hairdressing, weaving, carpentry, masonry, and design of textiles popularly referred to as “tie and dye”. Figure 1 (below) shows the skills

acquired by the beneficiaries. Sewing was the dominant skill acquired by the people, whilst the least selected vocation was carpentry. About 55 percent of the people were trained in sewing. Only about 3 percent of the beneficiaries were trained in carpentry.

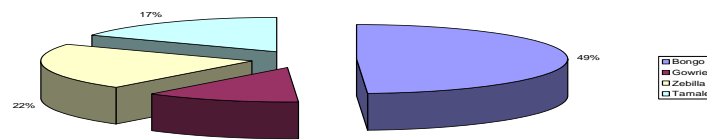
The revelation that sewing was the most dominant trade learnt confirms the findings of an earlier study done by the Ghana Statistical Service (2000) that tailoring, which includes dressmaking, was the most popular trade sought in the informal apprenticeship system in Ghana. The percentage of people that acquired the vocation (i.e. 55 percent) was over and above the national figure of 37 percent, as outlined in the GLSS 4 document.

**Figure 1: Distribution of Beneficiaries by Vocation**



The training program was carried out in four communities, namely, Bongo, Gowrie, Zebilla in the Upper East Region, and Tamale in the Tamale metropolis. Figure 2 (below) shows the distribution of beneficiaries of the training program by community.

**Figure 2: Distribution of Beneficiaries by Community**

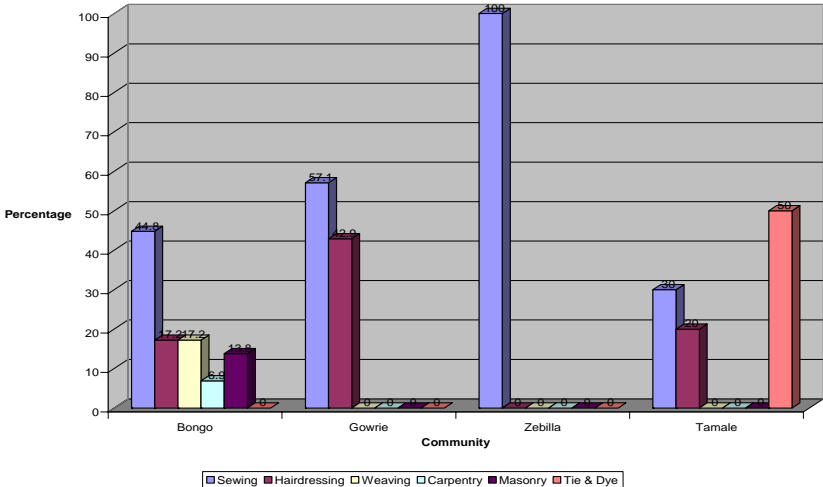


The selection of the beneficiaries for the skills development program was skewed towards the Bongo district. More than 60 percent of the people were from the Bongo District (i.e. Bongo and Gowrie). This may probably be attributed to the fact that the Bongo District was one of the six pilot districts of the SIF.

Figure 3 depicts the distribution of skills chosen and acquired within the various communities. Beneficiaries of the program were given the opportunity to choose their preferred vocational. At Zebilla, however, the president of the local dressmakers association and a member of the District Projects Approval Committee (DISPRAC), organized the youth who were interested in sewing and linked them up to the SIF for support. The only condition here was that there should be a master-craftsman for the skills selected within the community. In Bongo, for example, the beneficiaries had five options to choose from.

It was observed that some people in Tamale were undergoing training in auto mechanics; however, the beneficiaries of this option fell outside the scope of this study as they had not completed the apprenticeship program at the time of the study.

**Figure 3: Distribution of Skills Acquired by Community**



Prior to the selection of the trainees in the various vocations, field officers of the SIF embarked upon intensive community outreach and sensitization to inform and educate the people on the opportunities



under the SIF project. Those who expressed interest were encouraged to form groups, whilst existing social groups were strengthened.

It was evident from the information gathered from the field that the beneficiaries of the program were selected for training on a demand-driven basis. The skills learnt by the people were not imposed on them; people were recruited into vocations of their choice. Conscious efforts were also made during the outreach and sensitization period to reach underprivileged groups.

Table 1 presents the sex distribution of the sampled beneficiaries of the skills development program. About 81 percent of the beneficiaries were females. This may be attributed to gender redistributive policy of the SIF to target poor but productive women for support. Vocations like carpentry and masonry were chosen mainly by the males, whilst trades like hairdressing, sewing, tie and dye and weaving, were dominated by females.

**Table 1: Sex Distribution of Beneficiaries**

Skills Acquired	Sex					
	Male		Female		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Sewing	5	8.5	28	47.5	33	55.9
Hairdressing			10	16.9	10	16.9
Weaving			5	8.5	5	8.5
Carpentry	2	3.4			2	3.4
Masonry	4	6.8			4	6.8
Tie & Dye			5	8.5	5	8.5
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>18.6</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>81.4</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100</b>

It was also revealed that weaving, which is normally the preserve of males in the Ashanti region, and actually enforced through myths and taboos, was learnt solely by females in the Bongo District.

Table 2 (below) shows the type of support received during the training period. The SIF paid the apprenticeship fees of all the trainees and also provided training tools/materials. The training tools/materials were specific to the type of vocation selected. Those who learnt tie and dye were given

calico, rubber basins, foam stamps, wax, thread, and needles; whilst those that learnt masonry were provided with masonry tools, like head pans, shovels, block molding boxes, tape measures, among others.

Apart from the payment of apprenticeship fees and the provision of training tools/materials, about 5 percent of the beneficiaries were given training equipment. Sewing machines were provided to those that undertook apprenticeship training in sewing in the Tamale Metropolis. However, those who learnt sewing in the other communities were not given sewing machines. Those who undertook hairdressing were equally not provided with hair dryers.

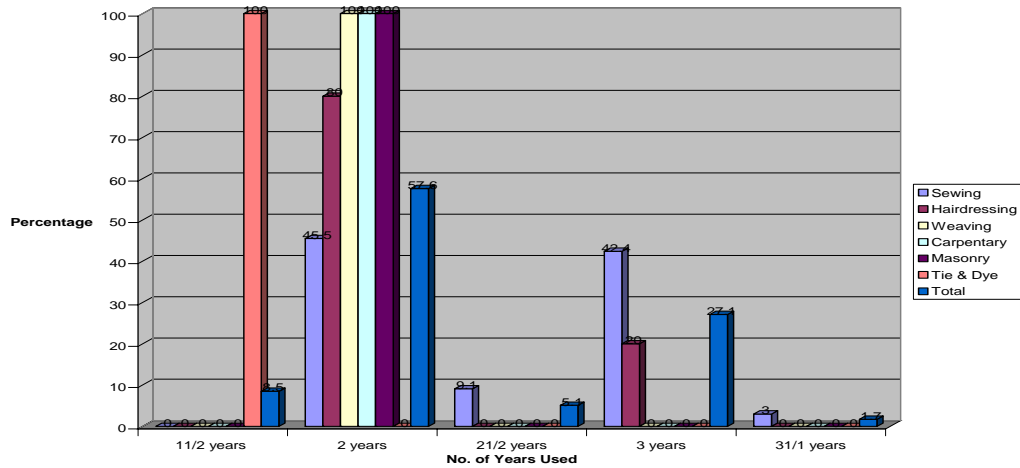
**Table 2: Type of Support Received During Training**

Support Skills Acquired	Apprenticeship Training Tools Fees &		Apprenticeship Fees, Training Tools & Working Tools		Total	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Dressmaking/Tailoring	30	50.8	3	5.1	33	55.9
Hairdressing	10	16.9			10	16.9
Weaving	5	8.5			5	8.5
Carpentry	2	3.4			2	3.4
Masonry	4	6.8			4	6.8
Tie & Dye	5	8.5			5	8.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>94.9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5.1</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>100</b>

There was no uniformity in the duration of the apprenticeship training, thus confirming the findings of Botchie and Ahadzie (2004). The average training period was two years. About 66 percent of the trainees completed their apprenticeship within two years (Figure 4). These were mainly people who undertook apprenticeship in masonry, carpentry, tie and dye, and weaving. It was observed that less than two percent of the people used 42 months to undertake the apprenticeship program.

The master craftsmen indicated that the duration of apprenticeship should not exceed 36 months. They attributed the inability of some of the apprentices to complete the training within 3 years to apathy and absenteeism on the part of the apprentices.

**Figure 4 Duration of Training**



A key dimension of the skills development program is the reduction in migration to the south to engage in menial jobs. It was revealed that the skills development program has to a large extent achieved the objective of reducing the migration of the youth to the south. Out of the 144 people that were trained, only 7, representing less than 5 percent, migrated (as shown in Table 6). Further investigation revealed that four out of the seven migrants (i.e. 57%) were women (two from Bongo and two from Gowrie), who got married and consequently joined their husbands in the south. In Tamale for instance, it was observed that all the 25 persons trained were still living in the metropolis after their apprenticeship training. This may be attributed to the fact that Tamale is a metropolitan area.

**Table 3: Migration of Trainees**

Name of Community Based Organization	No of People Trained	Migration of Trainees	
		No.	%
Bongo Unity Group	44	2	4.5
Bongo Confidence Group	26	2	7.7
Gowrie Courage Youth Association	18	2	11.0
Zebilla Youth Association	31	1	3.2
Tamale Gbubiya Group	25	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>4.9</b>

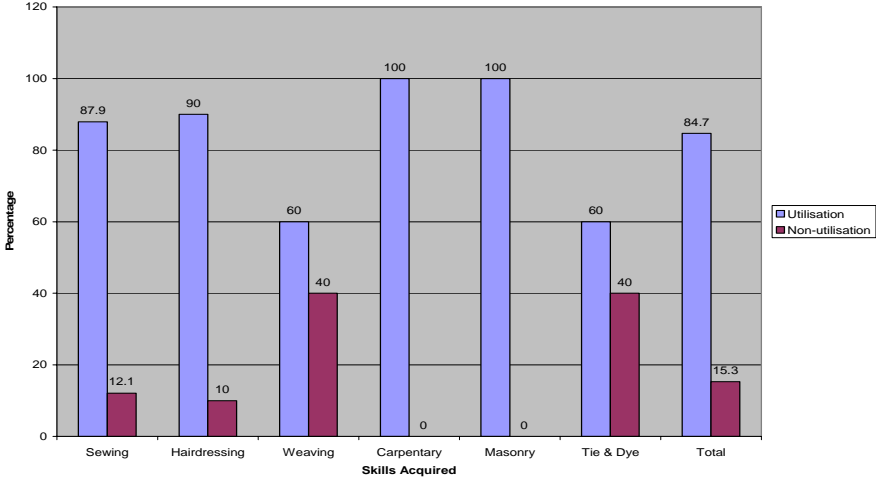
During interaction with beneficiaries it was manifested that the skills development program had helped them to stay in their respective communities. A testimony of a 22 year old female beneficiary in sewing in Zebilla (captured in box 1), which was also expressed by most of the other beneficiaries, epitomizes the contribution of the skills development program towards the reduction of migration of the youth to the southern part of the country.

**Box 1: A Testimony of a Beneficiary**

“In fact, but for this training program, I would have been in Kumasi/Accra messing up with my life for the sake of making money to care for myself. I am happy in life because now, I have opened my own shop where I am able to earn at least ₵50,000 in a week to take care of myself. I thank SIF for reversing my plight through the skills I have acquired.”

Mercy Piosey, Member of Zebilla Youth Association

**Figure 4: Extent of Utilization of Skills**



A very significant dimension of the skill development program is the creation of employment avenues. The skills development program had served as the main source of livelihood for many households and an alternative source of livelihood for others, especially during festive occasions. It was observed that about 85 percent of the people trained were utilizing the skills acquired as their main source of income. It must also be mentioned that those that were not utilizing the skills at the time of the survey indicated that they occasionally used their acquired skills to earn a living, especially during festive occasions such

as Christmas, ‘Sallah’, and local festivals, although they have not been able to open their shops. This is very significant, as the program has created a viable alternative source of livelihood and, to a large extent, reduced the level of vulnerability of many households.

The story of a beneficiary of the program in the Bongo District on how he joined the program and how it has transformed his life (Box 2) shows how the program has been able to improve the livelihood of some beneficiaries.

### **Box 2: The Story of a Beneficiary**

“I am Emmanuel Amanga. I am 24 years old and I am a beneficiary of SIF Skills Development Program in the Bongo District. I joined the Skills Development Program when I dropped out of school after my intermediate course in Building and Construction at the Bolgatanga Technical Institute where I could not pass all my papers in the final examination. Unfortunately, the practical aspect at school was also not sufficient to enable me apply what I had learnt for a living, so I was at home doing nothing.

One day, I went to the District Assembly to visit a friend and he told me about the SIF program in the District and advised me to contact the office to find out more about it. The District Liaison Officer at the time briefed me on the program and upon getting the information I also informed my colleagues and we came together to form an association called Confidence Group with a membership of 26 (16 males and 10 females). We held several meetings with the SIF officials and they gave us details about the various areas of interventions and how to obtain assistance. The group chose vocational training as a priority area for support and within the group some chose dressmaking, others chose carpentry or masonry. The group completed a proposal form designed by SIF and defended the proposal after which it was approved. We formed a Sub-project Management Committee (SPMC) and I happened to be a member. The members of the committee were given 3-day training by SIF.

Immediately after the SPMC training, members within the group with similar training interests were placed under their respective master craftsmen whom they had earlier on identified. We were nine in the masonry group and for two years, our master taught us a lot of things. We did so much practical work because at that time SIF had also engaged contractors to construct school blocks and most of them employed the services of our master craftsmen who took us to site to do the job. Our master was so nice to us to the extent that, whatever monies were released from the job, he gave us part for our upkeep. From this, I was able to save part to register my papers and through the practical experience gained within the two-year period under the SIF training program, I was able to pass my examination when I sat for the examinations the second time. I continued with the stroke one on part time basis immediately after graduating from the SIF program. I worked with contractors in the morning and attended school in the evening in order to get some money for my upkeep and to pay my fees.

I have completed the stroke one course with a certificate and I am now employed by the Ghana Education Service as a Technical Instructor in the Bongo-Soe Junior Secondary School. I earn about ₵1,200,000 every month from which I am able to take care of my self and my mother. Part of the money is also being saved to further my education and I want to take the opportunity to thank SIF for giving me a bright future.”

In terms of specific vocations, it was observed that all the people who were trained in either carpentry or masonry were effectively utilizing the skills acquired. For example, the people who were trained in masonry in Bongo were in good business. They indicated that local contractors executing projects for the District Assemblies in the region normally hire their services to execute the contracts.

This significant achievement notwithstanding, it was revealed that less than 4 percent of those utilizing the skills acquired have been able to open their own shops or businesses. Most of the people were either working in partnership with their trainers or operating on verandahs in their houses. The people attributed this to the non-provision of start up capital after the program.

It was observed that the intended beneficiaries of the skills development program, i.e. the trainees, were not the only group of people that benefited immensely from the program. The people who were contracted to train the youth in the various skills indicated that they had benefited tremendously from the skills development program. They revealed that the program helped them to expand their businesses, pay school fees of their wards, and to meet other exigencies of life. The trainers consequently called for the training of more people. The benefits of the skills development program, espoused by one of the trainers in dressmaking in Tamale, was collaborated by other trainers (Box 3), tell the story much better.

### **Box 3: Benefits of the Skills Development Program**

“The skills training program is very good. It has been of immense benefit to both the trainees and the trainers. Initially I was operating on someone’s verandah in an obscure location but due to the apprenticeship fees I got for training eight ladies in dressmaking I have been able to construct my kiosk in a strategic location and I have expanded my business. The fact that I was selected as a trainer has enhanced my status in the community as an experienced dressmaker and this has increased my customer base and the number of apprentices. The apprentices also helped me to do more work and I got more money especially during festive seasons like Christmas when they were undergoing the training. Apart from the monetary aspect, I am proud that I have contributed my quota to society by imparting skills into young ladies who otherwise would have migrated down south to engage in ‘kayaye’ if they had not been trained”.

Madam Fatima Alhassan  
A Trainer of Dressmaking Apprentices

## **Challenges of the Program**

It came to light that the program did not make provision for start up capital for the trainees to establish their own businesses after graduation. They indicated that the SIF linked them up with Micro Finance Institutions and District Assemblies to provide them with loans to start their businesses, but they did not receive any assistance from these sources. The inability of the trainees to establish their own businesses after passing out, due to lack of start up capital and tools/equipment was a major challenge for the sustainability of the program. It was observed that a majority of the people who were utilizing the skills acquired were operating in their homes and on small scale. It was observed that most of the hair dressers and seamstresses were operating on ‘table tops’ on verandahs in houses. Others were also working with their trainers with the hope of mobilizing resources to start their own businesses.

It was revealed in Tamale that in the course of the training, the SIF ceded some financial responsibility of the skills development program to the Tamale Metropolitan Assembly. The Assembly’s attitude towards the skills development program was a bit lukewarm. Some of the trainers claimed that they were not fully paid.

The trainees also indicated that the program did not make provision for passing out/graduation ceremonies and as a result some trainees were forced to raise monies for that. For instance, a beneficiary at Tamale complained that he had to borrow an amount of ₵300,000 for the passing out ceremony with the hope that he would get some donations from friends to pay back the money. Unfortunately, he got less than ₵200,000 so he incurred a dept of ₵100,000 just after graduation. Similar issues were also raised by some trainees in the Bongo and Bawku West districts.

The trainers indicated that the apprenticeship fees paid for the program were woefully inadequate. According to them, initially, they thought that SIF would provide all the training materials and for that matter did not bother so much about what they were taking for a fee. However, they ended up using the fees to procure training materials and in some instances they had to feed some of the trainees because they could not afford their own food. The trainers revealed that most of the trainees were from poor backgrounds and as a result came to work most of the time on empty stomach. This affected their morale, attendance, and level of understanding. For example, in one hairdressing training centre at Tamale, only 50 percent of the trainees were able to complete the apprenticeship training, 38 percent of

them got pregnant out of wedlock during the course of their apprenticeship, due to circumstances, the trainer claimed could have been avoided, had it not been for the poverty level of the trainees.

The trainers also indicated that most often than not immediately the trainees enrolled both the sponsors of the program and the family members of the trainees leave them to their fate. Nobody monitored the progress being made by the trainees and when they realized that their sponsors had no monitoring mechanisms in place to check attendance, punctuality, level of seriousness, and commitment to the chosen vocation, some of the trainees became truants.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

In Northern Ghana, where poverty and school dropout is significantly higher than the national averages, the traditional apprenticeship training is very critical because it is affordable for the poor and it does not necessarily require higher literacy levels (Braithwaite & King, 2006:27). Evidence from this study confirms this and, on the basis of this some recommendations, have been made with the view to ensuring the sustainability of the strategy adopted by SIF to mitigate the growing unemployment, poverty, and migration of the youth.

In addition to ensuring that the trainees do not drop out, the provisions of start-up capital to enable them establish their businesses remains critical. Various variants of start-up support and post-graduation monitoring through the involvement of the various trades associations is one strategy of intervention that could guarantee sustainability. The trainers could be motivated to support the interventions through the payment of apprenticeship fees, support for provision of training materials, continuing refresher courses for trainers, monitoring of sponsored apprentices, support for the issue of certificates, and organization of graduation ceremonies.

Since the findings of the study have confirmed many others in terms of the invaluable contribution of skills training to the solution of long term unemployment (O'Higgins, 2003), models of interventions and delivery should rather be the main concern. For some geographical locations, like Northern Ghana, where poverty and school dropout rates are highest, the need to further develop the Skills Training and Employment Placement (STEP) program in line with the Youth Employment Program so they can



extend their coverage to become a bridge from rudimentary school education to gainful employment in small enterprises through sustainable guidance, vocational and entrepreneurship training, access to business development services, and credit cannot be overemphasized (ILO, 2004).

It is a fact that the traditional apprenticeship training holds the key to the rapid development of relevant skills, as confirmed by many, including Johanson and Adams (2004). This means that any intervention that ignores this fact will not achieve much. Thus, interventions, such as that of the SIF which tried to use the traditional apprenticeship skills training, hold the key to success on a sustainable basis.

## **CONCLUSION**

The skills development program, to a large extent, has been able to achieve its intended objectives. It has helped a number of unemployed youth to acquire skills that have enabled them to become productive members of society. It has also gone a long way to reduce the migration of the youth in the study area to the southern part of Ghana to engage in menial jobs. However, for the program to be more sustainable and fully meet the expectations of beneficiaries there is the need to factor the recommendations above into future skills development programs.

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