

Policy Brief and Recommendation Set

Regional Professional Education in Agriculture (Georgia)



The publication was prepared within the framework of the project “Facilitation of Regional Professional Education in Agriculture and Rural development in EaP countries” implemented by the NGO “Center for Cross-Border Cooperation” (Chernihiv, Ukraine) in partnership with the NGO “International Business Development and Investment Promotion Centre”(Batumi, Georgia) and NGO “Pro Regional Cooperation” (Balti, Moldova).

The project benefits from support through the Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum (EaP CSF) Re-granting Scheme and is funded by the European Union as part of its support to civil society in the region. Within its Re-granting Scheme, the EaP CSF supports projects of its members that contribute to achieving the mission and objectives of the Forum.

The overall amount for the 2018 call for proposals is 250.000 EUR. Grants are available for CSOs from the EaP and EU countries. Key areas of support are democracy and human rights, economic integration, environment and energy, contacts between people, social and labor policies.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the NGO “International Business Development and Investment Promotion Centre”(Georgia) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the European Union.

Under general editorship of Zviad Eliziani, Chairman of the NGO “International Business Development and Investment Promotion Centre”



Scope of a Problem

Agriculture sector is one of the important and perspective sectors for Georgian economy and its development is among the highest priorities of Georgian government, since it has good potential for income generating activities and employment, especially in rural areas. But, the agricultural potential is not fully utilized yet. The level of productivity in Agricultural sector in Georgia is much lower than in highly developed countries as well as compared to other transition countries (Romania, Bulgaria, Armenia etc.). Among other factors, important role in explaining productivity differences among many countries is the availability of knowledge and skills. The association agreement with EU also provides vast opportunities in future for agricultural sector, but to use these opportunities, again its essential to have the necessary knowledge, skills etc. to adopt the product to EU market needs.

As analyses shows, for further development of the Agricultural sector in Georgia one of the major problem is related to lack of professional and high-qualified labor in rural sector which is connected with lack of skills and high quality professional education system (especially on regional level) etc.

The major problems which were identified during the survey and situation analyses of Education system in Agriculture Sector in Georgia (western Georgia) can be summarized as follows:

- Level/quality of education programs in agricultural sector by local VETs and education centers are low – this is associated to various issues: quality of study programs, teacher qualifications, practical trainings etc.
- Lack of Availability of information about professional education programs in Agriculture sphere which indicates on low PR of these programs. As well as attitude to VET programs among young generation is low.
- The level of cooperation of business sector with education centers for arranging internships and for job placement of graduates is low - mainly due to lack of trust to education programs
- Lack of practical components in study process which results in lack of practical skills necessary for agricultural sector
- The education / qualification level of students who graduate education centers in agricultural sector in major cases don't match to the needs of labor market / business demands – accordingly it's difficult to find qualified personnel for recruitment.

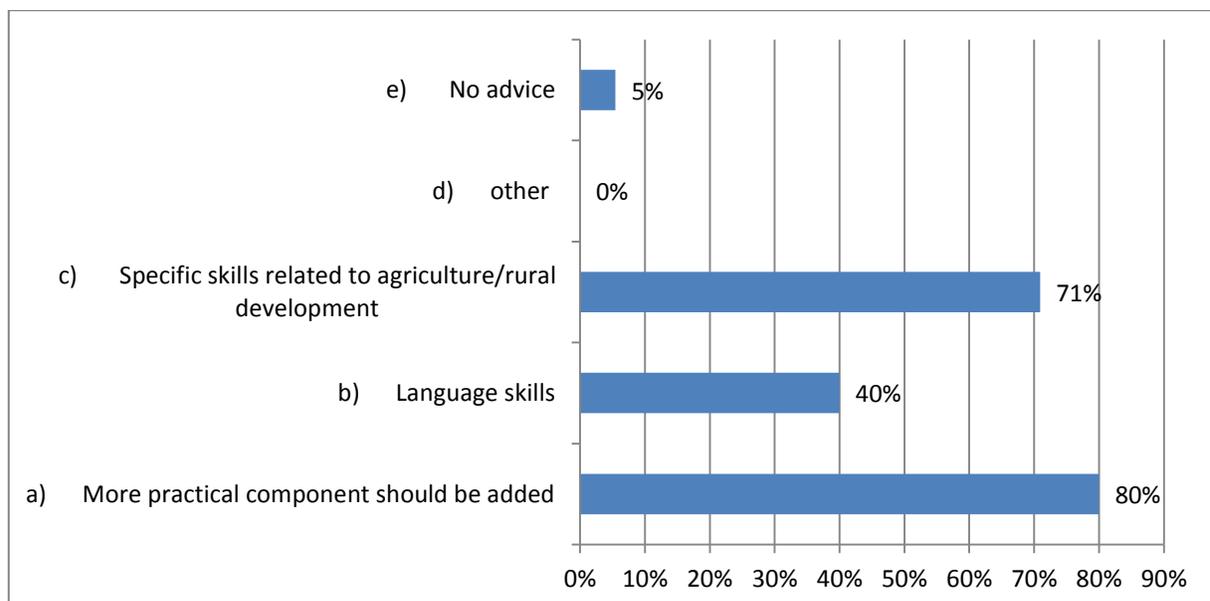
The problems existing at current stage needs thorough analyses and necessary actions steps should be taken to facilitate the development process.

Policy Recommendations and Action Steps

The recommendations and future actions steps necessary for development/improvement of Education programs in Agriculture sphere in Georgia can be summarized below.

Recommendations related to Improvement of Education Programs

- **Further reforming qualifications standards and curricula** – are essential part for improvement of quality of education programs. Although there is ongoing process of modification and changing the education programs, still the curricula and qualification standards need review and alignment to real needs of job market. For this, international cooperation and benchmarking European experience will be important.
- **Changes that can be suggested in curricula/practical lessons at education centers to ensure development of useful skills for agricultural sector** – based on survey results (held within the framework of the project) the necessary changes suggested more practical component should be added (according to 80% respondents), Specific skills related to agriculture/rural development (by 67%), Language skills (by 36%)



More detailed analyses of existing needs for qualified labor should be done and adjusting the programs (both public sector and donor financed) to address these needs. This will involve - introducing new education programs and trainings which are missing at this stage but are in demand.

- **Provision of modern infrastructure** – in order to prepare the high qualified professionals, especially in Agro-technic (drivers, technicians, technical engineers etc.), it's essential to have appropriate study technical facilities, technologies and innovative education space suitable to the contemporary demands. Since, at this moment this is missing at colleges or is presented in limited version, it's important to work on improvement of such material-technical base. This will be crucial to provide more practical skills necessary for agricultural sector

- **Improving the management** of the vocational education institutions to enhance the effectiveness of the provision of high quality education. It means implementing the modern approaches in management, training and improving the qualification of management of education centers.

- **Create effective job counseling system** – it is very important to have job coaches, career counselors and mentors at education centers, who can inform and guide learners regarding employment possibilities. They facilitate and support contact with employers, provide support with job applications, offer information and assistance to employers and provide additional support to young people, etc.

- **To raise the trainer's qualification level** – as survey shows the qualification of teachers at education centers needs more improvement. Since the quality of education programs largely depends on human capacity – the trainer's qualification. Accordingly, in long term it's crucial to implement the programs that will focus on increase the qualification of trainers. This can include the following:
 - The training of trainers
 - Exchange programs with foreign education centers
 - Better compensation system for attracting and maintaining the high qualified trainers

- **Teaching Aids and Materials** - The teaching aids and materials used in the Agricultural training programs should be prepared on the basis of the findings of research institutions, detailed analyses of current needs of the sector/business etc. Since the teaching of agricultural subjects should be given with particular reference to regional and local conditions and problems,

teaching aids and materials should be selected with regard to the economic structure of the areas where the trainee will work.

Audio-visual aids (although not a substitute for other teaching aids and methods, will be useful and effective tool for teaching. Accordingly, it will be good if education centers will work on development of such audio-visual materials. Introduction of innovative technologies for improving the quality of VET education also will be essential

- **Diversifying and Expanding agricultural programs delivered by Education institutions** – this can include the following:

- Develop and offer new programs - which have demand but are not currently offered. This can be different based on region's specifics too – for ex: in western Georgia specialized programs for beekeepers, honey producers, Nut growers, and green house developers can be very relevant. In Some parts of Georgia can be done focus on winemakers, wineries etc. Some example of new programs can be – short term (3-6 months) program focusing on issues of managing agribusiness startups (management, marketing, financial management basics, agro service related issues etc.) which will provide necessary practical knowledge to local farmers or young people who want to start small agribusinesses.
- Introduce the training program with certain stages/levels – students can pass first level (basic) and move to more advanced ones.
- To expand the trainings to remote rural areas – one of the problem associated with agriculture trainings is that those who live in rural areas (youth, farmers etc.) and need the trainings, are not always able to come to cities and spent time (several months etc.) for education programs. Accordingly, if education centers will expand their coverage to villages and do on-site trainings (can be weekend based etc.) this can bring significant benefits to rural population. For this purposes, education centers can cooperate with local municipalities or agro service centers (located in each major municipal regions) – and they can provide space for holding trainings.
- introduction short-term specific needs oriented programs in each regions – beside the general educational programs/modules offered by Education Centers/VETs, to match the needs of farmers, rural population will be essential to developed short-term, specific thematic oriented practical trainings that will address to knowledge gaps, existing (short-term or long-term) demand. This can be for ex: specific trainings for beekeepers, fish growers – on issues which are very needed at certain stages and will be helpful to improve their activity, productivity etc. For this, it is crucial to have close interaction with rural areas, farmers – survey/study their ongoing needs and adjust the trainings or introduce new training programs. Such approach will bring noticeable positive effects.

- **Agricultural extension** - that addresses the most important knowledge gaps (e.g. in farm management and crop production) and is targeted at the most motivated learners (aspiring wheat growers, female dairy workers, etc.) is likely to be more effective than general training measures which would be equivalent to raising the overall education level of Georgian farmers.
- **Developing partnerships with stakeholders** - Identifying businesses, organizations who might be social partners. There is little point in reaching out to a wide range of agricultural partners until there is a commitment to provide more courses. However, it will be beneficial to identify private sector partners, both for current programs and for the future. The potential partners list can include the following:
 - Both large companies and SMEs working in agriculture sector.
 - Information and Consultation Centers.
 - Local government bodies.
 - NGOs working in agricultural sector

Education centers should cooperate with the farming community and policymakers on both (re)defining agricultural education and training, as well as agricultural related policies on education. This can help to better reflect on new and emerging challenges for education and training programs.

Active cooperation with farmers living in rural areas can bring many positive outcomes – farmers can provide their facilities (for ex: fish ponds, fish farms, wineries), where students of VET centers can come and have practical lessons/trainings. This can be mutually beneficial cooperation.

- **Lifelong learning** - Lifelong learning forms the frontline for innovation. It consists of formal learning, informal learning and non-formal learning. More attention should be paid to lifelong learning training adapted to farmers, advisors, professionals and entrepreneurs' needs. Focus on multi-actor instruments to enhance lifelong learning, like e.g. master classes that could be developed by researchers, teachers/education and advisors together with agricultural entrepreneurs. Farm advisors need to develop more skills and experience in enhancing peer to peer learning initiatives (e.g. study groups). Peer-to-peer learning could be fostered through field schools, groups exchanging skills and expertise and inter-disciplinary workshops for both conventional and organic farmers. Stimulating peer to peer learning amongst farmers is important in lifelong learning, also with regard to the facilitating role of advisors. Especially when resources for advisory services are diminishing.

Action Steps for improving access to information and Image/Reputation of Education programs in Agriculture sector

- **Improvement of the quality and availability of agribusiness labor market information for all stakeholders** - currently there is a gap in this, and better communication, Promotion of existing programs are needed. Especially it is important to do active work with rural population – to provide information about available education programs. Provision of more publicly available, relevant information about VET will allow both the potential student and the employer make more informed and rational decisions

- **Raising the profile/image of VET amongst secondary school graduates, farmers and unemployed persons** – in Georgia the higher education usually is preferred and VET have not much high image among young generation. In last year's it's slowly changing in positive direction, but still a lot of has to be done to increase the attractiveness of VETs especially in Agricultural sector.

To achieve the better outreach and communications following channels /tools can be used:

- Special PR campaigns involving successful people in agriculture sector or some influencers will be effective in this regards.
- Television – to use the possibilities for free media coverage on local TV (and especially Georgian Public Broadcaster). Also, can be arranged periodical media coverage, special programs targeting the importance and perspectives of education in agriculture sector.
- Active use of internet and Social Media – this will be very relevant and efficient step, since young generation is getting news, information mainly via social media and internet channels.
- Organizing info tours for potential students – since young people living in rural/mountain areas lack information about the existing programs in agricultural sector, will be very effective if education centers will arrange info tours for them – bring them to VET/education centers and provide all necessary information, introduction etc. Also – education center representatives can go to villages and arrange presentations of programs.
- Highlighting the importance of agriculture sector and its potential for income generating activities – sometimes local population is not aware about the benefits which they can get via agricultural activities. Accordingly, its crucial to develop effective PR campaigns that will show:
 - the increasing demand on qualified specialists and the opportunities of potential jobs in this sphere

- Highlight the linkage to tourism sector and derived demand from tourists on agricultural products – tourism is one the important and fast developing industry for Georgian economy. Among other forms, eco and agro tourism is rising and more tourists are visiting rural/mountainous areas where they of course are interested to purchase the locally produced organic products. Thus, there is growing market for agro-products produced in rural areas, which provides big opportunities for organic agro-production from which local rural population can get income.

Recommendations for better cooperation with Private Sector

As situation analyses and survey results showed, currently the cooperation between private sector and Education centers clearly needs improvement. The close collaboration with employers will influence positively both to further improvements of education programs (to align to market demands) and to job placement of graduates, which is in fact major goal of any education programs.

To get business representatives involved in Vocational Education process, they should be able to clearly see the benefits of their involvement in this process, their responsibilities should be clearly defined and there should not be any administrative complications. They should also be involved in arranging internships (practical part of the courses) for the vocational students as the potential employees, and in market surveys, during which they can express their need for employees. Communicating with the employers should be carried out via the most effective communication means, which can be diverse. Furthermore, representatives of private sector should be involved in development process of professional standards.

The demand from private sector is increasing – year by year the agricultural sector is developing and private companies (SMEs) as well as individual farmers are producing more and need additional workforce. Accordingly, the increased demand on qualified professionals creates potential and necessity for further cooperation with education centers which can be major provider of qualified labor.

- **Improvement of partnerships between VET providers and private agribusiness for practical trainings/internships** - The knowledge and theory component is clearly the domain of the VET centers, but agribusiness companies could play a crucial role in terms of the practical skills and the work experience component. With respect to efficiency increases in the delivery of VET programs, the workplace-based internships deserve special attention. This kind of cooperative training will be an excellent starting point for going into a closer relationship between VET centres and private sector in order to enhance the employability of VET program graduates. A longer internship period will reduce the average training time spent in the VET centre. As a consequence, recurrent cost per student borne by government will decrease

and facilities can be made available for new learners, reducing the need for new investments in VET centres. For sure, small and medium size enterprises (SME"s) may need support and incentives to get involved in such cooperation. Such incentives can have various forms, for ex: The Ministry of Education might consider some financial incentives to participating enterprises (contribution to training allowances learners etc.).

- **Developing Apprenticeship schemes** – beside the internships, will be helpful to develop effective apprenticeship schemes which provide better hands on trainings, are longer period (compared with internships), are more fully integrated with work environment etc. Apprenticeship should be developed with particular reference to the needs of special branches of agriculture, regions and categories of workers, and carried out either at residential institutions or on farms approved in respect of the qualifications and abilities of the instructor or farmer. Apprenticeship should be open to suitably qualified candidates who have shown a clear desire to enter agriculture and who have or will have completed the period of obligatory schooling.
Arrangements concerning instruction in the branch of agriculture to which the apprentice aspires, the limitation of his tasks to those useful for his training, the provision of equipment and any obligation to attend training schools giving general and technical instruction, should be approved by the competent authority. Upon satisfactory completion of his apprenticeship the trainee should be considered as a skilled worker and should be so certified by the competent body.
Apprenticeship also must be more flexible in engagement with the private partner – attempting to set goals and standards of success which are connected to the demands of the particular work place rather than the demands of professional standards. For example, if a particular workplace requires the development of skills not included in the general professional standards, then training in this skill could be a criteria of success.
- **Cooperation with business associations** - Business associations that focus on a specific sector, or groups of professionals, who benefit from a connection to an institutional college, could be obvious partners for both the VET Centers themselves because they have clearly defined knowledge and expertise on a given industry. Accordingly, each education center should identify the major agriculture related associations in its region or countrywide and develop close cooperation with them, to ensure their involvement and assistance in communicating with private sector. For ex: Beekeepers association can become effective partner for VET center which provides training in beekeeping – since association members can be invited as guest speakers, students can be sent to beekeepers to get hands on experience and do practical work.
- **Introducing financial incentives for engaging the private sector** - Tax incentives for vocational education which can imply that direct and indirect funding of secondary and tertiary vocational education by employers can be

considered a tax-deductible expense. Well-designed incentive scheme can bring significant positive results since will be good motivation for private sector.

- **Adjust the programs to market needs** – many stakeholders researched note that proper professional orientation and training of the young people in accordance with the requirements of the labor market is of critical importance. In this respect, the most adequate measure would be development of the network of agricultural vocational colleges. Although it is impossible to achieve full compliance of the professionals with higher education with constantly changing requirements of the economy, still, the education provided should ensure employment and high quality of life rural areas

International Cooperation

For the further development of Education programs / VET centers it's essential the active international cooperation in various direction which will be focusing on improvement of overall the education programs' quality and adjust it to international standards.

In this regard, the following can be considered:

- Exchange programs for students – will be excellent opportunity for them to make familiar with modern approaches, methods, tools used in Agriculture sector, get international experience etc.
- Trainers' exchange programs – trainers can get better insight in contemporary methods of teaching various agriculture related subjects, get international experience, network with foreign colleagues etc.
- Active cooperation with foreign education centers, benchmarking international experience and modifying the study programs/learning materials based on international experience, etc.

All of this will require of course international donors assistance combined with specialized government programs that will focus on facilitation of such cooperation. Closer cooperation and joint efforts by international organizations and state bodies will bring much better results. First of all from financial point of view it will match the funds and will allow to implement more large scale projects and provide solution to major problem rather than to address part of it. Another very important positive outcome of such cooperation can be – increased level of trust to programs. International organizations will bring much higher credibility and will increase the trust.

For transnational exchanges between farmers, advisors, teachers, students, researchers and other actors various instruments like ERASMUS+ or specific Thematic Networks in H2020, etc. can be also used.

Recommendations / changes suggested for Policy level

To achieve the better developments in agriculture, education should focus on three levels: 1) the individual level, to develop talent and skills, 2) the economic level, regarding the labour market, with a focus on entrepreneurship for agri & food and innovation, and 3) the social level regarding connectivity, transition, sustainability and green goals. Changes in agricultural education systems should be derived from a people centered-approach. This means putting people, behavior, connectivity, interaction, values and learning at the heart of the development of agricultural education.

- **Facilitating further reforms in Education programs for Agricultural Sector**
- Ministry of education should continue more actively the reforms in Agriculture related education sphere and progressively elaborate general standards (adjusted to market needs and international experience), varying where necessary from one region to another, relating to such matters as: entry requirements for training for the different branches of agriculture; duration of training and length of courses; teaching material and textbooks; qualifications of teachers and their status, curricula; examination requirements; and conditions under which training may be considered completed. Appropriate measures should be taken to consult representative organizations of farmers and farm workers, and other interested organizations, where such exist, in the formulation of these standards.

At all stages private endeavor in initiating and administering training courses should be encouraged, and the application of the standards should be left to recognized training institutions supervised, as necessary and appropriate, by the appropriate bodies.

Currently, there is ongoing process of implementation of Dual system of teaching which implies involving practical, on-jobs training component which will bring positive results. It's crucial to continue support to this process both from government and international donor side.

- **Creating modern and market oriented financing schemes for Education programs** - VET reform in Georgia faces the challenge of quantity, quality and the complexity of the many technical tasks borne by the reform implementation process. Given challenge the Georgian VET system is facing, the planned financing model must be addressed in the long run by a combination of cost saving mechanisms, generation of external resources into the VET system and diversification of financial sources for public VET programs.

In order to achieve the effective market-orientated and learner-based VET financing system, realistically, the transformation of a traditional budget- and input-orientated financing model towards a modern market-orientated and

learner-based financing system needs to take place incrementally. This means focusing on a learner-based model as the main category of desired disbursement mechanism requiring a high degree of flexibility, sensitivity and specialization while, as far as possible, making use of existing infrastructure and resources under the above mentioned constraints. Revised policies and regulations must be integrated into existing VET systems development processes, structures and projects, but much thought must be given to the development of an information system for learners to enable them to make the right decision on how to use the new learner-based financing mechanisms.

PPP component - the appropriate role of government in VET markets is to let private training markets work under the umbrella of public-private-partnerships. This might be relevant for VET programs where the private sector shows interest and where they do not, engage the public sector. For agriculture – at first stage public financing should be prevalent, but since this sector is growing (and accordingly demand on labor) gradually private sector's involvement also should be stimulated. This definition of government's dual role in financing and providing VET programs requires the Georgian government to determine its own needs for public sector training interventions. It will need to examine the performance of its training markets, the capacity of the private sector to deliver VET programs, and its own preferences towards social policies and equity. On this basis, the Georgian government is likely to maintain a continuing role in the delivery as well as, particularly, in the financing of VET programs.

- **Vocational education and training pattern** - will be important to safeguard the following: Promote and ensure an approach where pedagogical methods, materials, assessment methods and goals are tailored to individual needs; Enable schools to maintain learner-centred approaches with regard to planning, goal setting and curriculum design to be used in the learning process; Create a framework allowing education center to establish individual learning processes using flexible approaches, which allow for the development and implementation of individual plans for learning, education, training etc. which will be oriented and focusing on regional specifics; Ensure that all VET programs and courses are under permanent review, in order to match learners' skills to labor market skills requirements.

- **Facilitate the involvement of private sector** - there is clearly a desire to engage the private sector, but the government seems to lack a well-defined program for doing so. Therefore, it's important the rethinking of private sector engagement. This should prioritize:
 - Identification of the small pool of large employers that care about specific issues.
 - High level politicians need to be visibly involved in the process of engagement.

- Engagement of the business associations that have strong relationships with their members.

Also, should be taking into account the need to have distinction of the realistic level of engagement, so that different entities can engage to varying degrees. Usually, the most businesses do not need the full range engagement. This would include at least five different forms of engagement (based on analysis of the UK model):

1. Employers engaging in Occupational Sector Skills Council strategy, working closely on an organizational level, including connecting with the OSSC Board and providing input into policy and financial support.
2. Employers engaging in qualification development.
3. Employers making use of initiatives, applying for grants or developing apprenticeships.
4. Employers making themselves available to be surveyed to help VET institutions keep up to date on issues related to skills.
5. Institutions being willing to receive information about policy.

The recommendation set provided under this document will require significant effort from government side to ensure effective coordination and involving all necessary stakeholders in implementation process. The processes of reforms are already started and there is done certain steps for modernization and improvement of VET/Education system in Agricultural sector. But to achieve the necessary results, ensure the efficient functioning of the system and adjust it to real market needs, further process of reforms should be continued.