

Nigerian delegation visits the Netherlands

It takes three to tango!

The Dutch Employers' Cooperation Programme (DECP) is a public-private partnership established by Dutch employers and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with the aim of strengthening the position of employers' organisations in developing countries. DECP wants to strengthen the capacity of business organisations in developing countries by transferring knowledge and experience, by cooperating with national and international organisations and through financial contributions to programme activities. One of the key fields of expertise is skills development.

The Nigerian Employers' Organisation NECA (Nigerian Employers' Consultative Association) and the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) have been promoting Technical and Vocational Education in Nigeria for over 7 years through a Public-Private Partnership for the same purposes. Nigerian youths are being empowered with skills for employment, entrepreneurship and wealth creation through the ITF-NECA Technical Skills Development Project (TSDP). A major component of the activities for the TSDP this year was a Study Tour, by major decision makers, of a country with an effective technical skills development scheme.

The Netherlands has been identified as one such country. That is why DECP set up a programme that enabled the guests and the hosts to meet and to exchange experiences. The delegation met their hosts at inspiring locations, where companies, schools and government work together, where students learn from teachers as well as from company specialists. The Study Tour took place from 11 until 15 September.



Nigeria, ambitious leadership

Just think of a country with 200 million inhabitants, of which 25% are younger than 18. Take into consideration that skills development is an important condition for economic growth and you will come to the conclusion that labour market issues are of major importance. Nigeria is such a country and full attention is being paid to improving technical vocational education and training (TVET) constantly. In fact, the issue is considered to be so important that the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade & Investment Aisha Abubakar decided to clear her schedule and lead a delegation of decision makers and advisors during a study tour in the Netherlands. Among them the honourable Mr Olusegun Adesanya Oshinowo, Director-General of NECA, Sir Joseph Ntung Ari, Director-General of ITF, Dr Sam Egwu,

Chairman, Senate Committee on Industry and the honourable Abubakar Husaini Moriki, Chairman, House Committee on Industry. The members of the delegation can be seen as critical stakeholders who want to study the Dutch approach to skills development – especially at the vocational level – to compare it with projects that take place in Nigeria and to exchange experiences and achievements.

‘What’s in it for me?’

The Dutch Employers' Cooperation Programme (DECP) was more than happy to organise inspiring visits at top locations where companies, schools and government work together to guarantee high standards of education for students preparing for a career and employees who want to upgrade their knowledge and skills.

DECP and skills development

One of DECP's main fields of knowledge and experience is skills development. DECP has a broad network of companies, sector

organisations and schools for vocational and higher education in the Netherlands. Most of them work together with various emerging countries. That is why they were happy to open their doors to the Nigerian delegation. They did so not only to present their approach and achievements but to get to know the most important challenges of the Nigerian delegation as well. And these challenges turned out to look pretty much the same as the Dutch challenges! How can we match curricula to labour market needs which change constantly? How can we offer opportunities to organise lifelong learning? How can we design education in such a way that students are prepared for their future careers? These starting points were shared by all parties.



The Nigerian delegation in front of the building of the STC-College

Visits to successful education sites like the RDM Campus in Rotterdam, the Sustainability Factory in Dordrecht and STC-College in Brielle proved that cooperation between schools, companies and government is the key to success. At the same time, it became clear that it takes time and perseverance to start and grow these kinds of programmes. Obviously, national and regional government play a determining role in making it work. Interaction between all players not only pays off in terms of well-prepared students, but the students become teachers themselves! The honourable Minister Aisha Abubakar noticed: “Both teachers and students develop knowledge. Students are challenged by companies to create relevant innovations. These kinds of actual company needs encourage schools to

innovate together with these companies. This concept is quite unique and it seems to work.”

Knowledge transfer and lifelong learning

The next stop was in the Brainport region in the South of the Netherlands. A visit to Bosch Security Systems showed the perspective of a multinational company with respect to skills development. Mr Andries Nouwens is the Regional Director for Africa. He presented the activities of the Bosch Group in Africa. Bosch Academies have been set up in various African countries, including Nigeria. They work together more and more with local schools for technical vocational education. This concept contributes to upgrading vocational education rapidly to today’s standards. The same kind of cooperation was found at ROC Ter AA (Regional School for VET) and the AAE company in the city of Helmond. ROC Ter AA is supplying technical education for Brainport Industries, a cooperation of around 100 high-tech companies in the region which are all in constant need of skilled technicians, engineers and craftsmen. The management of ROC Ter AA insisted on not only visiting the school – where two enthusiastic students showed a project they worked on together with students from a Polish school – but visiting AAE as well. “Education and company development go hand in hand” was a remark of Mr Paul Sijbers, who is Operational Director at ROC Ter AA. “We simply have to work together to be successful.”

‘Finally, the students are the winners’

The same observations could be made the next day, when the delegation visited the training facilities of Brabant Water – the regional water-supply company – and Enexis, which is one of the Netherlands’ major energy network and distribution companies. In both training centres, employees are upgraded on a regular basis. All facilities and trainers are available and educational programmes are supported by ROC Koning Willem I, located in the city of ‘s-Hertogenbosch. Mr Maarten Blacquièrè, a member of the Management Board of Enexis,

explained that “We guarantee constant availability of electric power for companies, households, public transportation and so on. This is a major enabler for economic growth. We can only do so if our employees are familiar with the most advanced technology and equipment. Therefore, lifelong learning is part of our employment contract.”

Lessons learned

ROC Koning Willem I welcomed the Nigerian delegation Thursday afternoon to enjoy lunch and to get acquainted with the educational concept of this school through a presentation by Mr Theo Prinssen, who is a senior advisor and programme manager. Then, the delegation took the time together with Mr Jos van Erp, who is special advisor on skills development at DECP, to summarize what lessons could be learned from this charged programme. First of all, it was concluded that it takes three to tango: schools, companies and government (national and local). These parties are only prepared to invest in education if the following question is answered: “What is in it for me?”

‘The macro-economic context is extremely important’

Companies invest money, equipment, expertise and time, but in return they are able to recruit the right people to help their company grow. Besides, they contribute to creating the infrastructure which allows them to send employees ‘back to school’ for lifelong learning. Innovation is done together with schools, which stimulates growth. In the longer term, the regional labour market is upgraded, which benefits all companies. The same goes for the national and regional government. Investing in making the educational wheel go round leads to a better match between labour market needs and the capabilities of the educational system. Economic growth, economic perspective and political stability are the reward for that, especially when trade unions are involved as well. This tripartite cooperation allows the school to perform and

to attract the best teachers and motivated students. Finally, the students are the winners. They get modern and relevant education which opens the door to employment, a good salary and an interesting career. The Netherlands has chosen a regional approach which focuses on regionally dominating activities and related competencies. Therefore, the national government only sets the standard for some elementary components of curricula, but regional companies give their input to fine-tune these components. In TVET, Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) go hand in hand and ICT is becoming increasingly important. “Do not forget the macro-economic context” was one of the additions of the participants. And indeed that context is essential! There is no such thing as ‘one size fits all’. The Dutch approach might work well in the Dutch context but the Nigerian context is different in some ways and should be approached accordingly.

A day for the government, the employers’ organisation and a formal farewell

The last day of the programme started at the HighTechCentreDelft (HTCD). This modern, well-equipped education centre is comparable to the other education sites which had been visited earlier that week. However, this centre is working together especially with the small and medium-sized companies that dominate this particular region. Entrepreneurs and government were able to start this interesting project. Mr Henk Boes of Platform Bèta Techniek (PBT) presented how the Dutch government is stimulating tripartite cooperation.



Competence based education at HighTechCentreDelft

To conclude and finish the programme, the delegation was personally invited by Mr Hans de Boer, Chairman of VNO-NCW, the main Dutch employers' organisation and stakeholder of DECP. "It is my honour to have you as my guests and to explore if our two countries can reinforce each other in the fields of skills development, knowledge transfer and business." VNO-NCW even invited the representatives of 10 Dutch companies that do business in Nigeria, including Heineken, Fugro, Shell and Rabobank. The formal farewell was warm and promising. Mr Hans de Boer expressed his wish to visit Nigeria with a Dutch trade delegation. The honourable Minister of Industry, Trade & Investment Aisha Abubakar told him that he would be more than welcome.

But, first things first, the reason for the visit was studying the Dutch approach to skills development. The Minister concluded:

**'There is no such thing as
'one size fits all''**

"We had an instructive and inspiring study tour and we have learned a lot which encourages us to continue our work. These new insights will help our policy makers develop creative solutions in the Nigerian context!"



Mr Hans de Boer hands over a present to the honourable Minister of Industry, Trade & Investment Aisha Abubakar

NB. DECP will organise a cross-cutting workshop on skills development in Nairobi, Kenya, at the end of November this year. Representatives of NECA will participate and share their experiences and insights with colleagues from other African employers' organisations.



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The Nigerian delegation together with the STC-management



The Bosch Group is active in Africa in the field of technical vocational education and training. One feels at home!



Students of ROC Ter AA present their project which is conducted in cooperation with students from a Polish TVET institute and contributes to the innovation needs of a high-tech company



AAE, a hightech company located in Helmond, explains why they cooperate with schools and government. 'We constantly need skilled people at various levels of education'



Brabant Water can only meet maximum standards because of lifelong learning of their employees



Enexis guarantees 99,9% power availability. 'Human performance is even more important than technology'



The HighTechCentreDelft meets the needs of Small and Medium sized Enterprises (SMEs) in the region. 'Impossible without support by the Dutch government and companies'



Mr. Hans de Boer, VNO-NCW: 'We'll meet again!'

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