

# SABER in Action: Workforce Development

Matching education systems to workforce needs

Equipping national workforces with job-relevant skills is a continuing challenge, and mismatches are a persistent concern. Many school graduates cannot find jobs commensurate with their education and training. Employers complain of difficulty in filling vacancies and bemoan the scarcity of soft skills for boosting productivity. More broadly, skills constraints make it difficult for companies to innovate and invest in more lucrative economic areas. A goal of SABER-Workforce Development is to help countries improve their workforce development framework.

## Establishing a framework for policy dialogue

Given the diversity of stakeholders in workforce development, as well as the diversity of the perspectives, experiences, and priorities, a common understanding of concepts and terms, backed by evidence on how the system functions, is essential.

The conceptual framework for SABER-Workforce Development (WfD) identifies three functional dimensions of policies and institutions that affect workforce development outcomes.

- *Strategy.* The alignment of workforce development with a country's national goals for economic and social development.
- *System oversight.* The governance arrangements that shape the behavior of key stakeholders, including individuals, employers, and training providers.
- *Service delivery.* The mechanisms for managing the provision of services in the field.

SABER-Workforce Development diagnoses system strengths and weaknesses relative to international best practice. The conceptual framework allows stakeholders to reach a common understanding of these issues, creating a platform for discussing priorities for system improvement.

## Building ownership and stakeholder engagement

Thirty countries with vastly different economies and levels of development are using SABER-Workforce Development to assess their policies and institutional structures and to propose and enact new policies, regulations, and assessment systems.

In each of the three functional dimensions some countries are assessed as Established or Advanced and others as Latent or Emerging. But where a country stands today is less important than its commitment to using SABER and the evidence on what works in changing policy and improving results.



SABER-Workforce Development provides a diagnostic that shows system strengths and weaknesses relative to international best practice

SABER-WfD involves country counterparts early in data collection and in workshops to present and validate initial results. The process enhances ownership of the results while the framework allows for structured conversations based on common understanding of concepts and challenges.

SABER-WfD allows countries to see what steps others have taken to address common challenges. So, not only does it provide a platform to launch reform, as the examples below show, but it also creates opportunities for learning from what has worked elsewhere.

### SABER-WfD in action

*Bulgaria.* The implementation of SABER-WfD coincided with the development of a new legal framework for technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The key TVET stakeholders drafting the new legislation were all involved in the application of SABER. Through workshops organized to validate the findings, SABER-WfD was integrated into professional stakeholder discussions of workforce development. SABER-related reports and data will be used for future dialogue with the government in developing a new law regulating pre-university education.

*Iraq.* The SABER-WfD assessment provided analysis for the development of a draft national TVET strategy that is being discussed by the government and should be approved this year. The findings were also used in the design of ongoing World Bank technical assistance that aims to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of Education of Central Iraq to implement the TVET strategy and improve vocational education.

*Uganda.* The application of SABER-WfD coincided with the government's endorsement of a comprehensive Business, Technical, and Vocational Education Law. SABER workshops provided the basis for a shared assessment by stakeholders of Uganda's workforce challenges and priorities for reform. Participants examined the structure and content of the SABER-WfD data collection instrument and identified the kinds of programs most needed. The workshops also helped establish clear targets for stakeholders to monitor implementation.

*Malaysia.* SABER-WfD was used to frame recommendations in the World Bank publication, *Malaysia Skills Report*, which identified shortfalls in the country's education system that limit its ability to become a high-performing economy. Chronic weaknesses in teacher training and an overcentralized school system were leaving the country's workforce behind other East Asian economies in developing core cognitive skills, especially in science and math.

### Better systems producing better outcomes

Countries can use SABER-Workforce Development to foster reforms that make their workforces more competitive and attractive to investors. Future work will analyze features of economies and institutional settings that facilitate or hamper a country's ability to reform workforce development.

Participatory data  
collection and  
validation enhance  
ownership of the  
results



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