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## Improving Community Skills Development Centers in Namibia

Between 2009 and 2014, the Millennium Challenge Corporation funded several improvements to Namibia’s network of Community Skills and Development Centers (COSDECs), community-based institutions that provide basic levels of vocational training to clients from disadvantaged backgrounds. The COSDEC interventions included improving physical infrastructure, providing new tools and equipment, and delivering technical assistance. Mathematica Policy Research recently completed an evaluation that examined the implementation of these interventions and their sustainability, as well as the training and labor market outcomes of COSDEC trainees. This issue brief summarizes the key findings from this evaluation.

**The Millennium Challenge Corporation** funded the Community Skills Development Center (COSDEC) interventions through its compact with the Government of Namibia, which was implemented by the Millennium Challenge Account-Namibia. The COSDEC interventions were one component of a broader \$28 million vocational training activity, which was implemented under the compact’s education project. This activity focused on expanding the availability, quality, and relevance of vocational education and skills training in Namibia.

### THE COSDEC INTERVENTIONS

The COSDEC interventions had three main components:

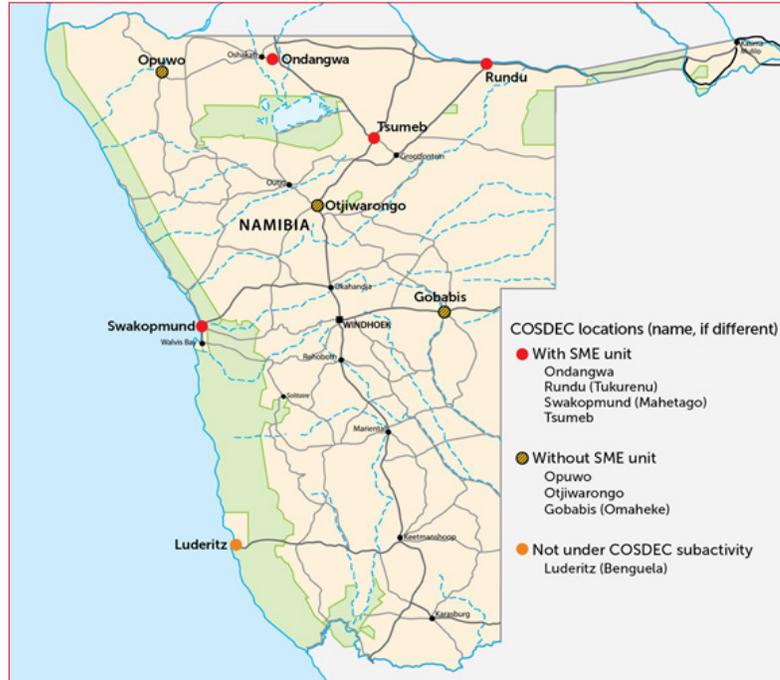
1. **Constructing or renovating physical infrastructure** in seven of the eight COSDECs in Namibia. Four of the COSDECs received a small- and medium-enterprise (SME) unit that provides a physical workspace, subsidized materials, and other support to enable graduates to start their own small enterprises.
2. **Providing new tools and equipment** in the seven new or renovated COSDECs.
3. **Delivering technical assistance** to the COSDECs and the umbrella body that oversees them (the Community Skills and Development Fund, or COSDEF). The technical assistance focused on improving financial management, developing strategic plans, providing pedagogical training for COSDEC trainers, helping COSDECs to become registered and accredited institutions (and offer accredited courses), and developing strategies to market the COSDECs in their catchment areas.



COSDEC bricklaying trainees.

Mathematica Policy Research conducted an evaluation of the COSDEC interventions that integrated a qualitative analysis and a quantitative analysis of trainees’ outcomes. The qualitative analysis explored implementation of the interventions and their sustainability. It relied primarily on two rounds of qualitative data collected from stakeholders through interviews and focus group discussions close to the end of implementation (late 2014) and again one year later (late 2015). These stakeholders included

## Location of COSDECs in Namibia



**85%**

of enrollees completed their COSDEC training

**ONLY**

**6%**

of COSDEC graduates had enrolled in additional training one year after COSDEC training ended

implementers, COSDEC trainees, COSDEC management, COSDEC staff, employers, and government entities in the vocational training sector. The trainee outcomes analysis sought to describe the characteristics and outcomes of enrollees in the seven new or renovated COSDECs. It relied on a survey of trainees who enrolled in these COSDECs in the second half of 2014, the first cohort expected to fully benefit from the interventions. The survey collected information about the participants' training and labor market outcomes about one year after the end of COSDEC training.

### KEY FINDINGS

**Almost 9 in 10 enrollees completed their COSDEC training, but few had enrolled in further training.**

About 85 percent of enrollees in our survey analysis sample reported that they had completed their COSDEC training. However, only about 6 percent of COSDEC enrollees had enrolled in additional training since the start of their COSDEC course, even though most expressed an interest in doing so. There were ongoing challenges with “articulation”—the ability of COSDEC graduates to enroll in more advanced levels of vocational training with other training providers without having to repeat levels they have already

completed—due to incomplete registration and accreditation processes at the COSDECs. These challenges suggest that COSDEC graduates' plans for directly enrolling in further training might not be realistic, at least for the intake surveyed.

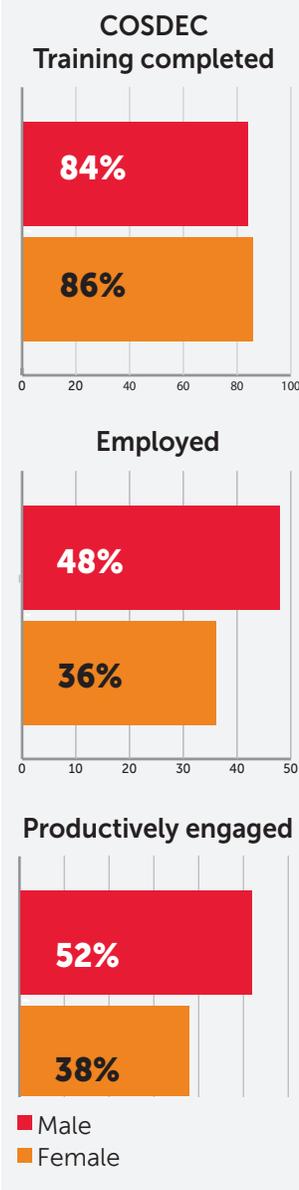
**One year after the end of training, the majority of COSDEC enrollees were not employed.**

At the time of the survey a year after training ended, about 40 percent of respondents reported that they were employed, and about 42 percent of respondents were productively engaged (defined as holding a paid job or attending further vocational training). Only about 13 percent of all respondents reported that they were employed in a job related to their vocational training at the COSDEC. In addition, many of those who were employed held jobs that were temporary or that they did not find satisfying. This finding suggests that considerable challenges remain not only in linking COSDEC graduates to jobs, but also in linking them to high quality jobs.

**Most enrollees in the analysis sample had no earnings from employment in the month before the survey.**

Consistent with the low employment rate, in the month before the survey about two-thirds of enrollees had no earnings (defined as wages or profits from self-employment, and equal to zero for individuals who were unemployed). Mean earnings were about N\$1,258 (in Namibian

## Enrollee outcomes by gender



## Average monthly earnings:



N\$ = Namibian dollars

## Features of the COSDEC enrollee sample for the outcomes analysis

- Total of 642 enrollees across all 36 courses that started from July to December 2014 at the seven new or renovated COSDECs.
- Courses were two to nine months long, with a median of six months.
- Almost three-quarters of trainees were enrolled in non-technical courses such as office administration, food preparation and serving, information communication technology, and clothing production.
- The rest were enrolled in technical courses such as bricklaying and plastering, plumbing and pipefitting, welding and metal fabrication, and carpentry and joinery.
- About 70 percent of enrollees were female and the average age at enrollment was about 27 years.
- About 41 percent of enrollees had completed grade 10, and about 42 percent had completed grade 12 or further education.
- Enrollees were surveyed 12 to 16 months after the COSDEC training ended, with a median of 12 months.

dollars, about US\$82 at the average exchange rate in the survey period). Among those employed at the survey date, mean monthly earnings were about N\$3,948, or US\$257.

### Female enrollees had similar training completion rates but significantly lower employment rates and earnings than male enrollees.

Female enrollees appear to face substantial challenges in the labor market relative to male enrollees, although their training completion rates were similar. Specifically, a significantly higher fraction of male enrollees were employed or productively engaged at the time of the survey than female enrollees, and mean earnings were almost three times higher for males than for females. These gender differences are even larger in magnitude after controlling for differences in COSDEC and course, and cannot therefore be explained by differences in the types of courses male and female enrollees take.

### Stakeholders were confident that the COSDECs will be financially sustainable in the long term.

The main funding for the COSDECs ultimately comes from the Namibian government, although COSDECs also receive tuition fees and revenue from other income-generating activities. However, because COSDECs serve youth in disadvantaged communities, they must keep tuition fees low; even then, not all trainees are able to pay. Despite this reliance on government funding, most

stakeholders did not consider the long-term financial sustainability of the COSDECs to be a problem, as they expect government funding to continue. Nevertheless, COSDECs were exploring additional funding sources to broaden their funding base.

### COSDECs have made progress toward registration and accreditation, but these processes are still not complete.

COSDEC stakeholders reported that the registration and accreditation—the official processes set up to ensure and certify training quality in Namibia—were lengthy, duplicative, and cumbersome. By the end of December 2016, communication with COSDEF revealed that none of the COSDECs was yet accredited or registered, although most were at an advanced stage with these processes. The absence of registration and accreditation poses challenges for the articulation of COSDEC graduates to higher levels of training because other training providers may not recognize COSDEC qualifications; thus, COSDEC graduates may have to repeat the basic levels of training at the new provider. In addition, without accreditation, COSDECs will be unable to access funding for training disbursed through the new National Training Fund, a potentially valuable funding source.

## Findings related to implementation and sustainability of the COSDEC interventions

Intervention component	Main findings
Construction and renovation of physical infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders unanimously viewed this component as successful</li> <li>Benefits have included a more conducive learning environment, improved perceptions of the COSDECs, and progress toward registration and accreditation</li> <li>Most COSDECs do not have a formal maintenance plan for the new infrastructure, but conduct required maintenance as needed</li> <li>SME support units were constructed as planned and were operating near capacity, but it is still too early to assess their success</li> </ul>
New tools and equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholders viewed this component as the least successful</li> <li>Many of the new tools and equipment (for example, trowels, wheelbarrows, and toolboxes) were delivered late and were of low quality</li> <li>The poor quality tools constrained the quality of some of the trainings</li> <li>To the extent possible, COSDECs purchased replacement tools and equipment</li> </ul>
Technical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>COSDECs have successfully incorporated many new management practices included in the technical assistance into their operations</li> <li>COSDECs are able to competently develop their annual budget plans, are taking an active and collaborative role in strategic planning with the COSDEF, and continue to build on the pedagogical skills of their instructors through off-site training</li> </ul>
Overall	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Overall, most stakeholders, including trainees and employers, had positive perceptions of the quality of the COSDECs</li> <li>COSDECs perceived that there had been an increased demand for training since the improvements were completed</li> </ul>



An SME unit.

This brief is based on Borkum, Evan, Kristen Velyvis, Arif Mamun, Malik Khan Mubeen, Anca Dumitrescu, and Ananya Khan. "Evaluation of MCC's Investments in Community Skills Development Centers in Namibia: Final Report." Report submitted to the Millennium Challenge Corporation. Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, December 29, 2016.

## IMPLICATIONS

The high unemployment rate among COSDEC graduates a year after they completed training suggests the need for a more effective process to align course offerings at the COSDECs with market demand. The lack of alignment between vocational training and market demand is not unique to the COSDECs, but is a broader problem in the vocational training sector in Namibia. In addition, although many trainees participated in job attachments (internships) as part of their training, relatively few reported that their COSDEC offered job placement help. This suggests that COSDECs could consider extending their involvement in the job search process beyond arranging internships—for example, by assisting trainees with compiling a resume, obtaining reference letters, and preparing for interviews.

Our findings also suggest that special attention should be given to enhancing the employment prospects of female COSDEC enrollees, who have significantly lower employment rates and earnings than male enrollees. These differences are not explained by differences in types of

courses taken, training completion, labor force participation, or other characteristics of the enrollees. Although we do not have definitive evidence of the types of inherent barriers that female enrollees face in the labor market, efforts to support them could include linking them with female mentors in the community (for example, at female-owned businesses) or undertaking affirmative action initiatives to provide stronger direct support to female COSDEC graduates.

Finally, it will be important for the COSDEF and the COSDECs to persevere with the registration and accreditation processes, although they are complex and time-consuming. Completing these processes will be critical both to access funding for training through the National Training Fund and to give COSDEC enrollees the option of articulating to further training at other providers.

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