

\$972m Regional Skills Programme Targets 18 Million Young People Across Eastern and Southern Africa

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A new multi-country programme backed by a \$972 million financing package aims to equip 18 million young people across Eastern and Southern Africa with improved education and job-relevant skills by 2034, directly addressing one of the region's most pressing development challenges: large-scale youth unemployment.

Around eight million young people enter the labour market in the region each year, yet fewer than one million secure waged employment. An estimated 6.5 million youth are currently not in education, employment or training, including 3.6 million women. Without coordinated intervention, this gap risks widening.

A programme-led approach to job creation

The Skills for Economic Transformation and Jobs Program in Eastern and Southern Africa, known as SET4Jobs, adopts a multi-phase, eight-year delivery model. Rather than funding isolated training initiatives, the programme aligns skills investment with specific value chains expected to generate employment growth, including agribusiness, energy, healthcare, tourism and manufacturing.

From a project and programme management perspective, the structure is notable. It combines national investment projects with regional coordination, shared knowledge platforms and private sector engagement. This layered governance model is designed to balance country-level ownership with regional alignment and economies of scale.

The programme will be implemented in Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Madagascar, Mozambique, São Tomé and Príncipe, Tanzania and Zambia. Financing is provided through the International Development Association.

Linking skills to market demand

A key risk in large-scale skills initiatives is misalignment between training provision and actual labour market demand. SET4Jobs seeks to mitigate this through structured collaboration with private sector partners, ensuring curricula and training pathways reflect real industry needs.

The Inter-University Council for East Africa will oversee regional coordination, supporting tertiary education reform, applied research, incubation and industry-aligned training. A regional knowledge exchange platform will facilitate the sharing of lessons learned and performance data across participating countries, helping to drive continuous improvement.

Delivery at scale

Delivering impact for 18 million young people requires more than funding. It demands robust programme governance, phased implementation, results tracking and adaptive management. By combining IDA financing with advisory services and potential private capital mobilisation, the initiative aims to create a scalable model rather than a short-term intervention.

If successfully executed, SET4Jobs could contribute to millions of new jobs and strengthen the productivity of key sectors. For project leaders and policymakers, it represents a complex, cross-border transformation programme where coordination, performance monitoring and sustained stakeholder engagement will be decisive factors in achieving long-term outcomes.