Collaboration to Strengthen TVET Performance and Unlock South Africa's Skills Economy

Good morning to the leadership of SACPO, the President and Deputy , Principals colleagues, fellow leaders, partners. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this conversation. It is a privilege to engage with a group that sits at the centre of one of South Africa's most important and often underestimated national priorities.

Our approach is a little different today. We always sell but today we want to approach the conference a bit different. Many of you in this room live this reality every day. You see the pressure on your institutions. You see the potential in your students. And you see, more clearly than anyone else, the gap between what is possible and what is being delivered.

I want to begin by reframing how we think about TVET colleges.

Too often especially in our communities they are positioned as an alternative within the education system, a secondary pathway rather than a deliberate choice. That framing is limiting, and it does not reflect the reality of the work happening in your institutions.

TVET colleges are the backbone of a functioning economy. They are where technical capability is developed, where practical skills are built, and where the foundations of sectors such as manufacturing, energy, logistics, and infrastructure are laid. When we speak about strengthening TVET performance, we are speaking about economic capability, competitiveness, and the country's ability to create sustainable employment.

Despite this central role, the system continues to face persistent and well-documented challenges. Throughput remains uneven, graduate employability varies across institutions, alignment with industry needs requires strengthening, and public perception continues to lag the opportunity within the sector. Again, this is not abstract. It is something you manage every day. Students who arrive with potential but leave without clear pathways. Programmes that work well, but do not always translate into jobs or enterprise at scale.

These challenges are often treated as separate issues, yet they point to a deeper structural problem. The system remains insufficiently integrated with the economy it is meant to serve. As long as TVET institutions operate at a distance from industry, finance, and broader economic networks, outcomes will remain constrained.

The shift we required is therefore structural.
We need to move from thinking about individual institutions to building a connected, responsive skills system. This is where all of us in this room have a role to play.

Collaboration has to move from something we talk about to something built into how the system operates every day.

Institutional performance improves when learning is directly aligned with economic demand. This requires closer partnerships with industry, in which programmes are co-designed, curricula evolve alongside sector needs, and workplace-based learning is integrated into the training process. The objective is to develop individuals who can enter the workforce with relevant, applied skills. When this alignment is achieved, improvements in throughput, relevance, and employability follow.

Within this system, the role of financial institutions also requires a clearer definition. From our perspective at Nedbank, we pride ourselves **as money experts who do good**. Our role extends beyond the provision of financial services. We act as enablers of economic participation.

In practical terms, this means working with institutions and students to remove barriers to economic participation. Through initiatives such as FIX Forward, we have seen how targeted support can shift outcomes. Students begin to see enterprise as a real option. Graduates are better prepared to engage with the economy. Institutions can connect more directly with opportunity.

FIX Forward Programme

Through the **FIX Forward Programme**:

We mentor ,train and coach aspiring entrepreneurs formally register their businesses and provide essential **start-up materials and tools** to enable our students to launch sustainable enterprises/ businesses.

The programme has been **successfully implemented** at:

- **Taletso TVET College**
- **Vuselela TVET College**
- **Orbit TVET College**

114 jobs created and still counting where created and the bank spent ±R3,8m

Building on these successes, we are now **gradually rolling out FIX Forward** to additional provinces, starting with this year

- **KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), Mpumalanga (MP), Western Cape (WC)**

This expansion will allow us to reach more young people, address unemployment, and strengthen local economies through practical entrepreneurship support.

Support Required

To ensure the successful rollout and sustainability of the programme, we seek your support in the form of getting the message to the graduates so that they can register.

Alongside this, Nedbank supports financial literacy and career readiness, enables safer and more efficient campus environments through digital and payment solutions, and helps connect students to broader economic networks.

These are practical interventions, but they speak to a broader objective: ensuring that students do not exit the system without a proper pathway forward.At the same time, collaboration requires strong institutional leadership. This sits squarely with all of us in this room.

Encouragingly, there are already examples of progress. Where collaboration is structured and deliberate, the results begin to show. Students gain exposure to real economic opportunities. Institutions become more responsive to industry needs. And slowly, perception begins to shift.

We are starting to see TVET for what it is: a direct pathway to economic participation.

If this momentum continues, the impact will extend far beyond the institutions themselves. A well-functioning TVET system strengthens workforce capability, supports key economic sectors, and creates clear pathways for young people to enter the economy. This has direct implications for growth, for service delivery, and for social stability.

In closing, TVET colleges should be understood as a foundational pillar of a skills-driven economy. The extent to which they fulfil this role will depend on how effectively we collaborate, how deliberately we align with economic needs, and how consistently we lead within our institutions.

And the reality is this: the outcome of that work sits with all of us in this room.

When this comes together, the impact will be felt far beyond our institutions and across the broader economy.

Thank you.