

Development of Small and Medium Enterprises through Technical Vocational and Educational Training in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study aims to explore current trends of vocational skills needed for improving the livelihood of Afghan youth. In the same vein, this study also investigated the role of Technical Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) in job creation and self-employment in Afghanistan. For this purpose, qualitative methodology was employed under the lens of interpretivist philosophy and inductive approach. Phenomenological methodology is employed to achieve the study objectives. Under the lens of phenomenological approach, interpretation in a hermeneutic manner is used for the extraction of themes. This is followed by in-depth interviews from twelve respondents of Kabul and Khost provinces of TVET program. This study explored current trends of technical vocational skills needed for improving the livelihood of Afghan youth like mobile repairing, motor bike repairing, solar lights related works, tailoring skills and metal works. Finally, this study recommends that institutions and training centers should be established to impart the technical skills to promote establishment of small enterprises and initiation of more projects related to technical skills to streamline the unprivileged youth of Afghanistan.

Keywords: *Technical skills, vocational trainings institute, youth, Afghanistan*

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Introduction

In the last decade, academic literature has already concluded that influx of youth in higher education institutions without appropriate national level strategy ultimately lead to unemployment in the country. To overcome this situation, countries develop national strategies to create employment opportunities for their human capital considering various pool of youth. Keeping different pool of youth in view, not entire youth is placed in higher education's institutions. Therefore, national level strategies are developed for higher education as well as for developing small and medium enterprises through technical and vocational skills development. In this regard, academic literature has provided ample support to corroborating notion that technical vocational and educational training has remarkable role in not only producing skilled manpower but creating an environment where youth can initiate their small enterprises and become the source of employment for many (Bianchi et al. 2010; Abouzeedan et al. 2013; Colombo et al. 2014). In fact, nations cannot be developed without developing small and medium enterprises. In regard to this, literature has also concluded that there are many antecedents effecting SMEs (Lee et al. 2010; Spithoven et al. 2013). However, one of the major factor reported in the literature is the development of Technical Vocational workforce. The results of Technical Vocational workforce for creating self-employment has already been reported in developed countries. However, the situation of developing countries is in constant shambles in general while Afghanistan in particular. The context of Technical Vocational and Educational Training in Afghanistan is in infancy stage. Nevertheless, the National Technical Vocational and Educational Training (hereafter, TVET) Strategy of Afghanistan has focused and describes that there is high need for a strong TVET system because the principal objective of TVET program is to train youth workers, and make them ready to work in the labor market.

Furthermore, the context of Afghanistan is completely different than other developing countries due to war-ravaged situation in the country. However, with the assistance of international community like United States Agency for International Development (USAID), United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Danish Committee for Aid to Afghan Refugees (DACAAR), *Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit GmbH* (GIZ), government of Afghanistan initiated many projects like Afghanistan skills development, establishment of TVET institutes are among those projects. Though, these projects have contributed in economy of Afghanistan through provision of jobs, however, the reports suggested that these projects and TVET institutes are now at the

verge of failure due to sustainability issues. Failure of projects in Afghanistan would definitely lead to increase in unemployment in the country. Therefore, the best solution is the development of SMES in Afghanistan as a sustainable solution. The foregoing discussion implies that there is a dire need to address the development of SMEs issues in Afghanistan. Therefore, the issue under scrutiny is the development of SEMs through technical and vocational training programs. In the same vein, current study is designed to explore the current skill trends in the context of Afghanistan to develop pool of individuals for the establishment of SMEs and make the individuals able to work in the labor market. In regard to this, following research questions guide the current study.

1.1 Research Questions

1. What are the current trends of technical vocational skills needed for improving the livelihood of Afghan youths?
2. How TVET can be a source of job creation for formal and for self-employment?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Technical Vocational and Educational Training

Looking to the concept of Technical Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) by the UNESCO (2005), this is the type of education which provides individuals with skills, knowledge and attitudes for effective employment in a specific occupation. The major objectives of the Technical Vocational and Educational Training program are to empower the individuals for paid or self-employment. Furthermore, providing the necessary skills and knowledge to unprivileged group of people, to enable them to become self-sufficient, job creators rather than job seekers. When people are empowered, the community is empowered and when the community is empowered, the nation is better off.

TVET is playing a vital role in poverty reduction of a nation through employment generation in society (Bennel, 1998). TVET is highly concerned with the acquisition of knowledge and skills for the world of work to increase opportunities for productive work, personal empowerment, sustainable livelihoods and socio-economic development in knowledge economies and rapidly changing work environments (Maclean, Wilson et. al. 2009). Alhasan, et. al (2013), reported that on daily basis there are many challenges for youths in developing countries. To overcome these challenges and to reduce the burden of unemployment and poverty, the government should improve funding in the TVET sector to increase access

to technical and vocational education for the ever growing youths (Fluitman 2002; Atchoarena et. al. 2003; Maria Hartl, 2009; Bhurtel, 2015).

2.2 TVET Job Market

As stated earlier, the main purpose of the TVET program is offer those courses of relevant skills that can be best fit in the labor marker, thus this set of skills acquired by the trainees could help them and be saleable in the industries and could get employment with more opportunities to get comparable wages in the competitive market and strengthening their opportunities for employment. In this regard, Inyiagu, (2014), conducted a detailed study and described that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is highly considered as a significant player in introducing skilled workforce to the labor market that could operate independently. He has also added it is very important for governments to make every effort to encourage the expansion and strengthening of industry at all levels (including small industries) to improve their TVET systems for social economic development. In the same vein, Radwan, Akindeinde et al. (2010) argue that, in order to achieve the goals of African development, young people need access to education as well as technical skills Along the similar lines, Edmond et.al (2014), conducted a detailed study and explained that the major role of TVET is to empower individuals for paid or self-employment. When people are empowered, the community is empowered and when the community is empowered, the nation is better off. When TVET is properly developed and positioned it will gradually reduce unemployment and its associated social voices like theft, kidnapping, killing, armed robbery. Abdul Karim, (2012) also reported that self-employment is a form of working that works for oneself and refers to a situation where an individual starts his/her own business and takes the overall control of the business in their hand for every decision and it is not working for any employer.

2.3 TVET and Afghanistan

A policy handbook by Antonio Soma, private sector development indicted that the development of TVET program is an essential cornerstone for the Afghan recovery process and poverty alleviation. However, in Afghanistan like general education, VET has been affected by years of war and requires significant investment in human and fixed capital by government and private training providers. It also clearly indicated that the current TVET physical infrastructure is virtually destroyed and teaching methods are outdated. The existing curriculum uses in TVET institutes is not focused on the needs of the labor market and often has very little relevance to modern, highly-skilled trades. To consider the current situation of Afghanistan, the policy makers have to re-consider the skills development

projects to develop pool of youth for self-employment rather than developing job seekers. In this regard, and to cope with the current ongoing situation in the country, the Afghan government should work together with various donor agencies, international organizations, and bilateral donors such as the World Bank, USAID, the European Union and Korea, both to promote student and staff exchanges, as well as to receive and attract foreign aid. The same notion is air by Asia-Pacific Journal of Cooperative Education in 2013 by saying that Vocational and technical education is better passport to employment opportunities in countries.

The foregoing discussion and literature provide the clear path to policy makers of an urgent call to intervene and to devise proper strategy in this regard. However, before developing any kind of strategy, it is essential to explore the current trend of skills in Afghanistan market to overcome unemployment and to produce self-employment opportunities. Therefore, this current study is an endeavor in the same direction to explore the skills trends and to explore the TVET institutes role for the same purpose. The below part cover methodological aspects of the present research study.

3. Methodology

The qualitative methodology under the lens of interpretivist philosophy and inductive approach was employed. Phenomenological methodology is employed to achieve the study objectives. Interpretation in a hermeneutic manner is used for the extraction of themes. The reason justify selection of the qualitative methodology is the exploration of aforementioned phenomenon which is mostly followed by in-depth interviews under the lens of phenomenological approach. Therefore, in-depth interviews from the respondents of the TVET program were taken place to explore the study phenomenon. It was made possible through in-depth-interviews discussion. Issues discussed during interviews were specific skills needed for Afghan youth with relation to various sectors, skills Afghan youth should take interest in to promote SMEs or self-employment. Moreover, issues related to the role of TVET were also discussed in the context of developing skills for promoting SMEs, specific steps needed to improve self-employment.

3.1 Sample and Sampling

Creswell (2013/2017) suggest that number of respondents for the interview must be in the range of minimum 5 to maximum 25. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) and Creswell (2007) if the interviews were to be conducted face to face, then the rule of thumb is to have at least 12 respondents. Therefore, total twelve respondents were selected based applying purposive or judgmental sampling technique. All the twelve respondents were the employees of TVET projects of Kabul and Khost

provinces of Afghanistan (Refer to Appendix A for respondents' demographic characteristics.)

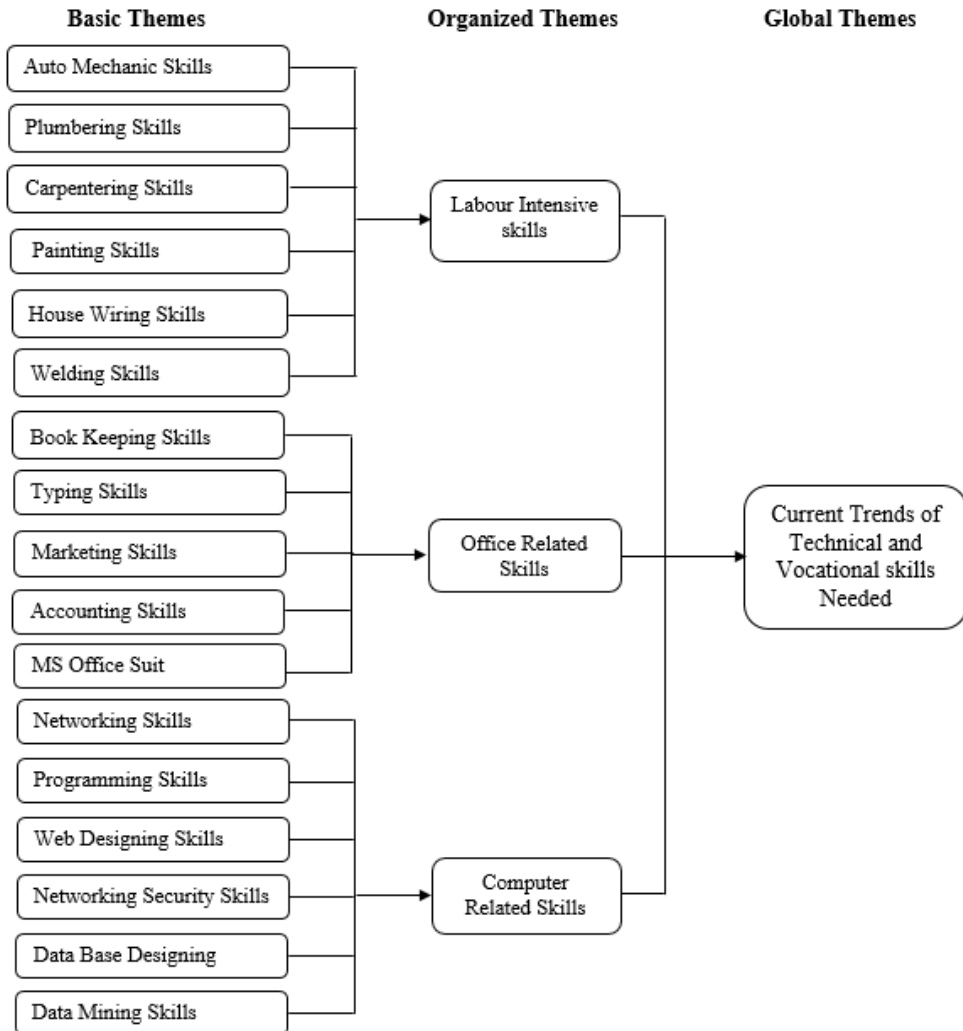
3.2 Data Analysis Method

Following a naturalistic inquiry method, interviews, data collection, analysis and interpretation was made by a method propose by (Spiggle, 1994). The data for this study is analyzed based on theme extraction process of qualitative data analysis. The analysis process followed steps started from transcribing the interviews, identification and highlighting of key concepts based on research questions of the study. By following trustworthiness criteria of Guba (1984), the key concepts identification process was applied two times so that to ensure conformability aspects of the research. Furthermore, as one of the team member of this research is working in the TVET project of Afghanistan, therefore, prolong engagement in the field criteria is also fulfilled to ensure credibility of the research.

4. Results and Findings

As stated in earlier section, main purpose of the current study was to explore the current trends of technical skills in Afghanistan Job market and further to explore the role of TVET of Afghanistan. In regard to this results are presented below. The Figure 1.0 indicates the results of interviews which shows various themes of current trends of TVET skills needed for self-employment. The results of research question are presented in form of basic theme, organizing theme and global theme as depicted below Figure 1.0. It is worth to mention that first basic themes as a codes were extracted from the text and then from basic themes organizing themes were extracted in the second step. Lastly, then organizing theme were converted to develop global theme. The Attirdue- sterling (2001) proposed process of themes extraction is followed in the current study.

Figure 1: Technical Skills



Source: Author's compilation

The figure 1 clearly indicates the current needed technical and vocational skills that were observed and extracted from interview questions for research question (RQ1), which were organized in the form of basic themes, organizing theme and global themes. During the interview analysis for RQ1 it was found that respondents basically focused on three major needed technical skills that were labor intensive skills, office related skills and computer related skills.

During interview and analysis process for RQ1 It was found that nine (09) respondents shared similar thoughts and emphasize on the labor intensive skills that should be provided by the TVET programs such as auto mechanic, plumbing, carpentry, painting, welding, motorcycle repairing, home wiring. The nine (09) respondents: DCR-1, DCR-3, DCR-4, DCR-5, DCR-

6, GIZ-1, GIZ-2, KU-1 and DH-1 shared mutual thoughts and explained by DCR-3 as:

I would say as a developing nation they need lots of skills that will help them get income and lead their life properly. Skills that would help them create their own jobs are also vital. Skills like metal work, construction, automotive, carpentry, building construction and finishing, electricity, plumber, computer repairing, motorcycle repairing and house wiring seem to be relevant [DCR-3].

Similarly, it was found from second interview question for RQ1 that seven (07) respondents agreed that the office related skills should also be considered and provided by the TVET program that will help Afghans to get jobs and support their families, which will lead to better socio-economic life. The seven (07) respondents: DCR-1, DCR-2, DCR-5, GIZ-1, GIZ-2, GIZ-3 and DH-1 shared these similar skills and explained by GIZ-2 as:

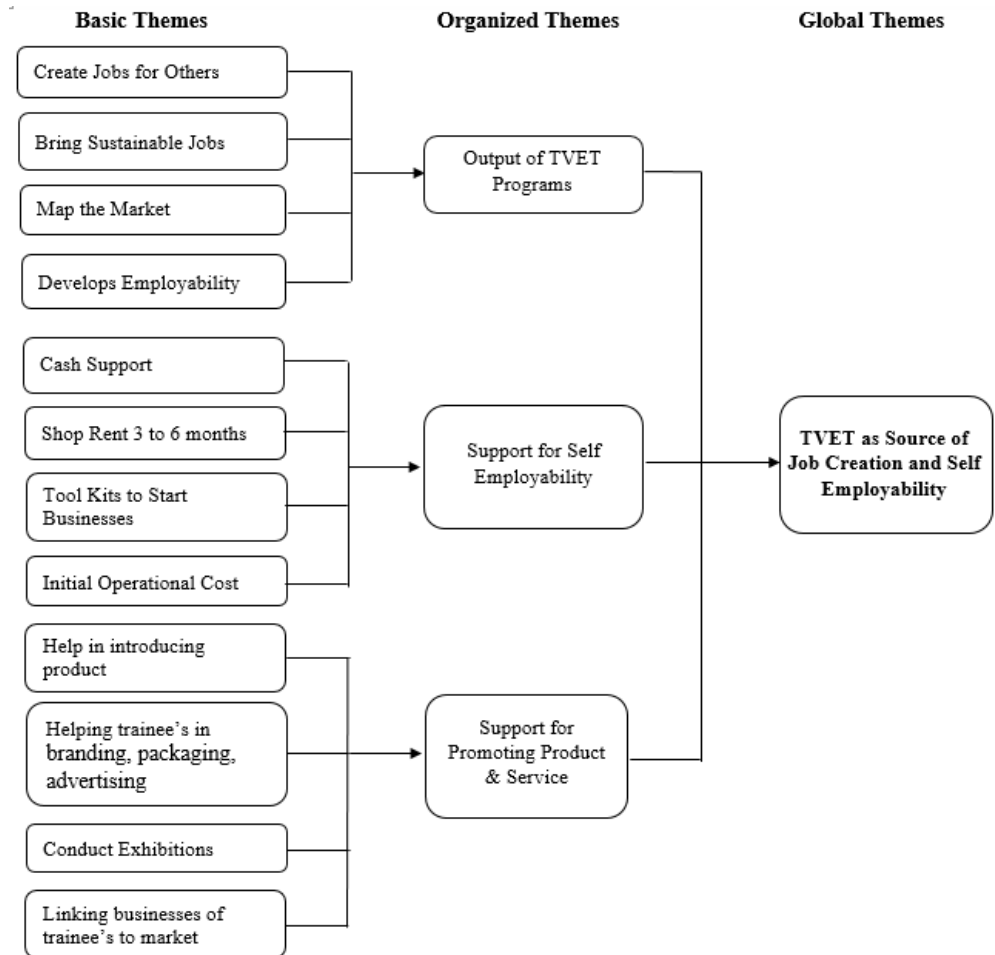
I believe that office skills are very important for the Afghans youth to get jobs in the Kabul market, I can have suggested along with management skills book keeping, administrative, typing, marketing and accounting skills should be provided by the TVET programs. So that, it helps them to start their own small scale ventures and lead them grab jobs in market [GIZ-2].

During the analysis of third interview question for RQ2 it was found that ten (10) respondents highlighted the importance of computing skills in getting job in office. They insisted on the following computing skills that should be provided by the TVET programs in Kabul and Khost. Which were networking, programming, web designing, data base designing, data mining skills. The ten (10) respondents: DCR-1, DCR-2, DCR-3, DCR-4, DCR-6, DCR-7, GIZ-1, GIZ-2, KU-1 and DH-1 shared similar computing skills and explained by GIZ-2 as:

According to my experience with TVET program in Kabul, I believe that business is becoming more dynamic and complicated. Introduction of Information technology have opened new doors of opportunities for many businesses. With adoption of information technology by numerous businesses in Kabul city have created demand for the computing skill. It is suggested that along with current programs, TVET should also focus on providing skills such as programming, data mining, network designing and data base designing [GIZ-2].

The figure (2) clearly shows role of the technical vocational and educational training in becoming source for job creation and self-employability, which were extracted from the interview questions for research question (RQ2). During the interview analysis and extraction process themes were extracted and organized in the form basic, organized and global themes. During the interview analysis for RQ1 it was found that respondents mention that support for self employability, support for promoting product/service and output of TVET program will become source of job creation and self employability.

Figure 2: Output of TVET



Source: Author's compilation

It was found during analyzing the interview question for research question (RQ2) that ten respondents shared related thoughts and emphasized that grants should be provided to young trainees of TVET program to support the self-employability. The eight (10) respondents: DCR-1, DCR-2, DCR-3, DCR-4, DCR-6, DCR-7, GIZ-1, GIZ-2, KU-1 and DH-1 shared similar thoughts and explained by GIZ-2 as:

Yes, if the TVET organizations providing them with toolkits and the graduates will not have some cash money to rent the shops in the market at least to support them for 3-4 months after graduation, so in this case the TVET package is not completed, so it will be difficult for them to rent, because they are vulnerable community and will not be able to rent the shop for their business after graduation, therefore the business start-up grant playing a good role in the starting of a business for the graduates trainees so need to consider this point which is essential in the TVET program [GIZ-2].

During the analysis another interview question for RQ2, it was found that nine (08) respondents shared similar view about the support required by the trainees to promote their product and service in the business market. The respondents were DCR-2, DCR-3, DCR-5, DCR-6, DCR-7, GIZ-1, GIZ-2 and DH-1 who share identical views and explained by DCR-5 as:

I believe that a full support is required to the trainee's even after they are graduated. The TVET organizations need to provide full support to the TVET trainees during the 6-9 months' program for their practical and theoretical lessons duration and also after graduation. Conduct the exhibitions and business forums for the graduates produced products. Encourage the graduates to participate both in provincial, national and international exhibitions for showing their products to the market/ private enterprise, governmental ministries, NGOs' and INGOs' donors and local community, that the audiences know the graduate's skills, products for long term business linkages and having good income from their established businesses. The TVET organizations should also work with the graduates for their business/ products marketing, branding, packaging, packing, labeling, advertising, which has 100% positive on their business progress, improvements and high incomes further. The TVET organizations should work with the graduates and encourage them to bring innovations into their businesses for obtaining more and more incomes further [DCR-5].

Above section presented interview results and some of the respondents' views are also presented as examples. The following section in this regard present discussion on the study phenomenon.

5. Discussion

The results and findings of the research questions of this study shows current trends of technical and vocational skills needed for improving the livelihood of Afghan youths. The current situation of Afghanistan shows that most of the Afghan youth is jobless, illiterate rate is high, it is better to Afghan government to attract donors to implement projects in the area of technical vocational and Education programs for youths who are illiterate and could not find white color jobs. The study also indicated that there are

two types of jobs one is employability and the other is self-employment, both words have the same meaning but with a little difference, the study indicated that labor intensive skills that are currently needed for employability and creating jobs for themselves and to others are mobile repairing, motor bike repairing, Solar system related works, tailoring skills of women and men, metal & PVC works , through which they could be attracted in all those factories and companies they need such type of skilled labors in the above mentioned skills and be hired for construction purpose, automotive, painting, tailoring, carpentry, metal works, and the trends for self-employment is accounting, office management, IT skills, secretarial jobs to work independently is another source of income for Afghan youths, through which they support their families.

Furthermore, how TVET can be a source of job creation and for self-employment for Afghan youths in current situation, as mentioned by different respondents TVET is a big source of job creation and for self-employment. TVET is a major source for income generation, because Afghanistan has many talented labors and many sources of materials, it is necessary for the policy makers of Afghanistan to encourage the donors to fund TVET programs in Afghanistan.

6. Conclusion

This section of the study conclude weather research questions designed for the study were achieved through interview answered by the respondents. This qualitative study was divided into two major research issues that is the identification of the current trends of technical vocational skills needed for improving the livelihood of Afghan youths and How TVET can be a source of job creation for formal and for self-employment. To address the first research question of this study, three interview questions were asked form the respondents, based on the respondents' views, themes extraction process have answered first research question. Concluding the first research question, it was found that TVET program need to focus on skills such as mobile repairing, motor bike repairing, construction, motorcycle repair, solar system related works, tailoring skills, metal work & PVC works. Afghanistan most operates on funds provided by the donor agencies. Unfortunately, donors who were providing funds for different projects, nowadays those funding are decreased day by day, which has resulted in many young afghans to be jobless and will not have any other supporter for their families, thus through getting different skills in TVET programs they could learn and start their own business

According to the respondents these skills will help Afghans to find jobs, create jobs for others, support their respected families and improve their

socio-economic life. It was also concluded from the respondent's response that Afghans should focus on labor intensive and office related skills to improve their employability and self-employment.

To establish the valid and reliable conclusion of the second research issue. Three interview questions were also asked from the respondents of TVET program in Kabul and Khost province. Summing up and concluding the second research question of this study, it was found that respondents believe that TVET programs in Kabul and Khost provinces is helping Afghans to get jobs, bring sustainable jobs and develops self-employment. Respondents agreed that initial support for the trainees for their self-employability in the form of providing cash support, tool kits, initial operational cost and support in rent for six months by TVET Program will be a great help. Finally, it was concluded from the response of the respondents that TVET programs should support their trainee's after graduation by helping them to link their businesses to market, support them to promote, brand, label their product and encourage them to introduce their products in different exhibitions at national and provincial level.

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Appendix A

ID No	Name	Age	Gender	Education	Position	Organization
DCR-1	Muhiburrahman	35	Male	Bachelor	PM- TAALIM	DACAAR
DCR-2	Kharka Ravi	35	Male	Masters	Developmental Worker	DACAAR
DCR-3	Bizusew kebede	38	Male	Masters	Head of finance	DACAAR
DCR-4	ShahidUllah	28	Male	Bachelor	SSED Officer	DACAAR
DCR-5	Laila Amin	30	Female	Bachelor	Sr. Women Empowerment officer	DACAAR
DCR-6	Farid Ullah Hotak	28	Male	Masters	SSED Sr. Officer	DACAAR
DCR-7	Mohd Saeed	35	Male	Bachelors	Field Officer	DACAAR-Khost
GIZ-1	Muneeb Tanha	32	Male	Masters	Skill Program Specialist	GIZ-TVET
GIZ-2	Nadia Nasimi	27	Female	Masters	Program Associate	GIZ-TVET
GIZ-3	Nawroz Safi	33	Male	Bachelors	NGO Staff	GIZ-TVET
KU-1	M. Shakir Aziz	25	Male	Masters	Lecturer	Kateb-University
DH-1	Shafiullah Ibrahimi	33	Male	Masters	Program coordinator	Dutch