



COMMONWEALTH *of* LEARNING

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

Reimagining Education and Skilling for a New Generation



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Executive Summary

Young people across the Commonwealth represent an enormous demographic opportunity. With over 60% of the population in many Commonwealth countries under the age of 30, the scale of this demographic dividend is unparalleled. However, education and skilling systems remain outdated, rigid, and misaligned with the needs and aspirations of these youth.

This White Paper by the Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) presents a compelling case for reimagining educational media and distance learning to better serve the aspirations of new-age learners. It synthesises evidence from major global reports (UNESCO, World Bank, ILO, OECD, UNICEF) to identify actionable strategies that promote flexibility, employability, and inclusion.

KEY CHALLENGES AND MISALIGNMENTS

Despite emerging preferences for modular, digital, and career-linked skilling, many existing systems are still:

- Overly theoretical, with outdated curricula.
- Classroom-based and exam-focused.
- Misaligned with labour market needs.
- Rigid in structure, leaving little room for personalised or purpose-driven learning.

There is also a lack of frameworks for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), low industry engagement, minimal support for informal learning, and barriers to access for rural, female, and marginalised youth. Transnational skill portability remains limited due to fragmented standards.

YOUTH PREFERENCES: WHAT DO YOUNG LEARNERS WANT?

Youth today increasingly seek:

- Short, stackable micro-courses with immediate labour market value.
- Flexible, self-paced learning, often mobile-first and accessible offline.
- Career guidance, entrepreneurship support, and work-integrated learning.
- Soft skills, digital literacy, climate-conscious learning, and social impact themes.
- Credential recognition that is portable across borders and sectors.

CEMCA'S RESPONSE: STRATEGIC INNOVATION FOR INCLUSIVE SKILLING

To complement the strategic initiatives, the paper also proposes a set of micro-level recommendations that CEMCA can adopt as quick wins. These initiatives are targeted,

learner-facing actions that can be implemented using existing platforms and partnerships to improve content quality, accessibility, and learner engagement. They include:

- Modular micro-credentials aligned to employability and higher education goals.
- Mobile-first, hybrid delivery using WhatsApp, community radio, and offline content.
- Gamified, interactive formats to improve engagement and retention.
- Life skills and values-based media, including emotional intelligence and climate action.
- Industry-media collaboration to co-create relevant learning content.
- Real-time learner feedback mechanisms to improve responsiveness.

These micro-interventions serve as a practical starting point for CEMCA to respond to youth needs while building the foundation for broader system transformation.

The White Paper also proposes two strategic, high-impact Macro initiatives designed to leverage CEMCA's core strength in educational media and open/distance learning.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 1: SKILLSRISE + LEARNING HUBS

Empower marginalised youth (especially in rural and remote areas) through hybrid, inclusive, and micro-credentialed learning pathways using media-based delivery and AI support.

Highlights:

- Skill Packs (modular learning units) delivered via WhatsApp, community radio, SMS, and low-bandwidth platforms.
- Personalised learning journeys powered by AI dashboards and mobile apps.
- Gender-sensitive, accessible content aligned to the green economy and digital futures.
- Community learning hubs for offline support and mentorship.
- Strong linkage to employment and entrepreneurship platforms.

Key aspects: Low-bandwidth access, AI support, employer partnerships, scalable hybrid models.

STRATEGIC INITIATIVE 2: SKILLBRIDGE VIRTUAL

Create a pan-Commonwealth virtual skilling ecosystem for youth through a centralised digital platform, integrating skill-building, career navigation, and job linkages.

Highlights:

- CEMCA-led open distance learning platform with micro-courses in digital, green, and entrepreneurial domains.
- AI-powered dashboards for career guidance, assessments, and job matching.
- Mobile-first, multilingual, and accessible interface with micro-credentials tied to national frameworks.
- Employer co-designed modules, virtual internships, and placement support.
- Learner support services including chatbots, digital orientation, and peer mentoring.

Key aspects: Open university partnerships, strong employer buy-in, modular and mobile UX design, AI for personalisation.

Why These Initiatives Matter

Together, these two initiatives propose a complementary twin-track approach:

- SkillsRise + Hubs builds grassroots access using hybrid, media-powered learning.
- SkillBridge Virtual provides scale and career alignment through centralised digital delivery.

Both are scalable, inclusive, and technology-forward, and they provide actionable, future-ready solutions to address the urgent youth skilling challenge across the Commonwealth.

CEMCA is uniquely positioned to implement these interventions, drawing on its legacy in open and distance learning, content curation, and multi-country engagement. These initiatives will serve as templates for inter-country collaboration, cross-sector partnerships, and policy innovation to unlock youth potential and deliver on the promise of SDG-aligned skilling for all.



Introduction

Education and skilling systems across the globe are undergoing a seismic shift as they confront an era shaped by digital disruption, demographic transitions, and rapidly evolving labour market demands. Today's youth are no longer passive recipients of traditional education. They are digital natives, globally connected, and eager for opportunities that offer not just employment but also purpose, autonomy, and relevance. Yet, in many countries, education systems continue to follow rigid, outdated models that fail to engage learners or equip them with the skills they need for meaningful and sustainable livelihoods.

This White Paper is intended for policymakers, development agencies, skilling authorities, education providers, and digital learning advocates across Commonwealth countries. It is designed as a thought leadership document that speaks directly to those shaping the future of learning and skilling. It offers evidence-based insights, analysis of youth learning preferences, and concrete, scalable strategies to reimagine educational media in ways that are flexible, inclusive, and employment-focused.

At the heart of this paper lies a call to realign our systems with the lived realities and aspirations of young learners. Across countries like India, South Africa, Bangladesh, and Kenya, youth are

demanding shorter, more flexible pathways to learning, digitally accessible content, and credentials that open doors to modern careers. Employers are equally vocal in calling out the gap between formal qualifications and actual job readiness. Meanwhile, governments and regional institutions such as CEMCA must navigate the dual imperative of scale and equity, ensuring no young learner is left behind—whether due to geography, gender, or digital exclusion.

For the reader, this paper offers a reflection of the challenges in engaging youth in the digital learning age, and a set of pathways that can unlock their potential through strategic reform and innovation. In doing so, it positions CEMCA not just as a facilitator of open and distance learning, but as a catalytic force for next-generation skills development across the Commonwealth.

Background

Young learners today are increasingly challenging the traditional, rigid approach to education. They are seeking agile, flexible, and personalised learning pathways that allow them to choose what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. Instead of committing to long, uniform degree programs, many are opting for modular courses, online platforms, skill-based certifications, and experiential learning opportunities that align more

closely with their interests and career goals. This shift reflects a broader aspiration to break free from conventional barriers to education and skilling; embracing a more learner-centric model that values autonomy, relevance, and real-world application over rote learning and rigid curricula.

Demographic Dividend

As of 2024, over 65% of India's population is below the age of 35, and nearly 53% is under 25 years old, making it one of the youngest countries globally (Economic Survey of India, 2023–24). The working-age population (15–64 years) constitutes approximately 67% of the total population, offering a vast labour force (UNFPA India, 2023). This demographic dividend window is expected to remain open until around 2047, providing a historic opportunity to accelerate productivity, innovation, and economic growth—if India makes sustained investments in education, skilling, and employment generation (NITI Aayog, Vision 2047, ILO World Employment and Social Outlook, 2023).



System Limitations: Disconnect Between Learning Models and Youth Aspirations

Despite decades of investment in education and training, large segments of youth across Commonwealth countries continue to face systemic barriers in accessing quality, relevant, and engaging learning experiences. The dominant model of skilling and education delivery remains largely classroom-centric, exam-driven, and standardised, often overlooking the diverse aspirations, backgrounds, and future trajectories of learners. Multiple studies, including those by the World Bank (2023), ILO (2022), and UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2023), have flagged serious shortcomings in how traditional systems prepare youth for real-world employment and lifelong learning.

Key limitations include a rigid curriculum structure, a lack of alignment with current and emerging labour market needs, insufficient practical exposure, and weak linkages between industry and academia. Furthermore, trainers in many institutions lack updated knowledge of industry practices, and assessment systems continue to emphasise rote learning over applied, competency-based evaluation (UNICEF, 2022). As a result, education outcomes often fail to match the expectations of employers or the aspirations of youth.

Several national and regional policy frameworks have acknowledged these issues and proposed transformative shifts. India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, for instance, explicitly calls for personalised, flexible, and multidisciplinary learning pathways, greater use of educational technology, and the development of vocational and life skills from the secondary level onwards. NEP 2020 envisions a learner-centred system built on competency-based progression and experiential learning, which aligns closely with the reform directions advocated in this white paper. Similarly, policies such as Australia's VET Reform Strategy and Canada's Skills for Success Framework emphasise stackable micro-credentials, hybrid delivery, and inclusive learning pathways—marking a clear shift toward modular, learner-driven models. In the global context, the UNESCO Futures of

Education report (2021) calls for reimagining education systems that support creativity and inclusion. Institutional inertia, regulatory constraints, and outdated pedagogical models make it difficult for learners to personalize their educational journeys or access short-term, stackable credentials. As a result, many students find themselves disengaged or forced to pursue paths that do not align with their interests, learning styles, or rapidly evolving job market demands.

Institutional inertia, regulatory constraints, and outdated pedagogical models make it difficult for learners to personalize their educational journeys or access short-term, stackable credentials. As a result, many students find themselves disengaged or forced to pursue paths that do not align with their interests, learning styles, or rapidly evolving job market demands.



Current Gaps in Education and Training Systems vis-à-vis Youth Expectations

This section of the paper analyses misalignments between current systems and what today's youth seek in learning and career development through desk-based research.

Today's youth are navigating a dynamic world of work that demands agility, adaptability, and lifelong learning. However, many existing education and skilling systems, particularly in low- and middle-income Commonwealth countries, are not adequately aligned with these evolving expectations. Below is an analysis of the key shortcomings across transnational skills, curriculum, delivery, assessment, and outcomes:

I. Transnational Skills: Limited Skill Recognition across Geographies

As labour markets globalise, transnational skills, such as digital fluency, intercultural communication, and adaptability, are increasingly critical for youth seeking opportunities across borders. However, developing economies face persistent challenges in enabling access to these skills. A lack of harmonised qualification frameworks, limited mutual recognition of skills and certifications, and uneven access to digital infrastructure hinder the mobility of talent across countries. Moreover, disparities in training quality and assessment standards reduce the portability of vocational qualifications.

- **Lack of Harmonised Qualification Frameworks:** One of the biggest barriers to transnational skill mobility across Commonwealth countries is the absence of aligned or mutually recognized qualification frameworks. Learners often face difficulties in having their credentials validated when seeking education or employment opportunities in another country.
- **Limited Portability of Vocational Certifications:** Despite efforts to implement competency-based education, the recognition of vocational qualifications remains highly localised. This restricts labour mobility and discourages learners from investing in skills that may not be accepted beyond national borders.
- **Inconsistent Training and Assessment Standards:** Training programs often vary significantly in content depth, delivery methods, and assessment practices. These inconsistencies undermine trust in certification systems and make it difficult for employers across borders to assess skill equivalency.
- **Digital Infrastructure and Access Divide:** Transnational skills, particularly digital and remote work competencies, require access to robust ICT infrastructure. Many learners in rural or underserved regions lack the devices, connectivity, or digital literacy needed to participate in global learning opportunities.

- **Language and Cultural Context Gaps:** Soft skills such as communication, collaboration, and intercultural fluency are critical for global employability but often receive little attention in formal curricula. Language barriers and culturally rigid training content further hinder learners' adaptability in transnational work environments.

- **Weak Institutional Collaboration:** There is limited cross-border collaboration among educational institutions, regulatory bodies, and employers to co-develop programs, recognise credits, or jointly certify learners—an essential step for building trusted transnational skill pathways.

2. Curriculum Design: Static and Misaligned

- **Outdated and Theoretical Content:** Curricula often lag behind industry trends, focusing on rote learning and academic knowledge rather than application-oriented, job-relevant skills.
- **Lack of Customisation and Flexibility:** Most programs follow a rigid, one-size-fits-all structure that fails to accommodate diverse learner needs, aspirations, and entry points.
- **Minimal Emphasis on Soft Skills and Digital Skills:** Critical 21st-century skills—such as communication, problem-solving, digital literacy, and entrepreneurship—are often missing or underemphasised.

- **Limited Interdisciplinary Integration:** Curricula rarely reflect the blended skillsets required in the modern economy, such as tech-in-healthcare or design-in-engineering.

3. Delivery Models: Rigid and Classroom-Centric

- **Overreliance on In-Person, Time-Bound Instruction:** Traditional face-to-face models exclude learners who need flexibility due to work or caregiving responsibilities.
- **Limited Use of Technology:** Despite increased access to digital tools, many institutions are slow to adopt blended or hybrid learning models.
- **Teacher-Centred Pedagogy:** Instruction remains largely didactic, leaving little room for experiential learning, peer collaboration, or project-based tasks.
- **Urban Bias in Infrastructure:** Rural and peri-urban learners often face additional barriers due to a lack of internet, devices, or trained facilitators.

4. Assessment Methods: Inflexible and Exam-Oriented

- **Focus on Summative Testing:** Evaluations prioritise memory-based exams over assessments that measure real-world competencies.
- **Neglect of Skills Demonstration:** Practical skills—particularly in vocational and technical fields are not

consistently assessed through simulations, portfolios, or live tasks.

- **Recognition of Informal or Prior Learning:** There are limited systems for recognising competencies gained outside formal education (e.g., through work or community engagement).

5. Employability Outcomes: Low Industry Alignment

- **Disconnect from Market Demands:** Training programs often produce graduates with skills that don't match evolving labour market needs, particularly in fast-growing sectors like digital services, green tech, and logistics.
- **Insufficient Industry Collaboration:** Curriculum design, internships, and apprenticeships are rarely developed in partnership with employers.
- **Lack of Career Guidance and Placement Support:** Young learners frequently lack structured support in career planning, job readiness, and access to employment opportunities.

- **Underdeveloped Entrepreneurship Training:** Programs often ignore self-employment pathways, despite rising interest in freelancing, gig work, and small-scale enterprise.

Despite changing youth expectations, existing education and skilling systems remain rigid and poorly aligned to modern demands. Current education and skills development systems often exhibit significant misalignments with the learning preferences and career aspirations of today's youth. To remain relevant and effective, education and skilling systems must restructure curricula, diversify delivery, modernize assessments, and prioritize employability. The current misalignments are not just technical flaws; they represent lost opportunities to engage a motivated, ambitious generation. Addressing these gaps is essential for making learning meaningful and creating real pathways to sustainable livelihoods.

Current System Gaps / Limitations

Rigid, time-bound courses with fixed entry/exit points; lack of part-time or self-paced learning options.

Theoretical, outdated curricula with minimal exposure to real-world problem-solving or application-based learning.

Overdependence on in-person, classroom-based instruction with limited integration of online or hybrid delivery.

Limited frameworks for validating skills acquired outside formal education or through work experience.

Absence of structured career services, mentorship, or direct industry linkages for internships or job access.

Weak employer involvement in curriculum design; poor alignment with current and emerging labor market needs.

Focus primarily on formal employment; little training in financial literacy, digital tools, or self-employment skills.

Soft skills, resilience training, and mental health support are largely missing from most vocational training models.

Limited emphasis on socially meaningful or environmentally aligned career pathways.

Fragmented qualification frameworks, Inconsistent standards, Lack of cross-country institutional collaboration

Table 1 highlights the key system level gaps identified.



Stakeholder Mapping

INSIGHTS FROM: YOUTH, EMPLOYERS, AND POLICYMAKERS

Understanding the diverse perspectives of those engaged in the education and skilling ecosystem is essential to designing learner-responsive and future-ready interventions. In this context, stakeholder mapping was conducted to identify and analyse the roles, interests, and concerns of key groups that directly influence or are affected by youth skilling and learning systems. These include learners, educators and vocational trainers, employers/industry representatives, and policymakers.

This mapping exercise relied on secondary literature reviews, insights from global and national policy reports (such as the ILO's Global Employment Trends, UNESCO's GEM Reports, and national TVET policy documents). Each stakeholder group was analysed in terms of their motivations and pain points with current education and skilling models.

The significance of this mapping lies in its ability to triangulate perspectives and highlight where institutional responses diverge from learner needs and industry expectations. For example, while youth aspire for short, flexible, and digital-first learning formats, many educators remain constrained. Despite changing youth expectations, existing education and skilling systems remain rigid and poorly aligned to modern demands. Current education and skills development systems often exhibit significant misalignments with the learning preferences and career aspirations of today's youth. To remain relevant and effective, education and skilling systems must restructure curricula, diversify delivery, modernise assessments, and prioritise employability. The current misalignments are not just technical flaws; they represent lost opportunities to engage a motivated, ambitious generation. Addressing these gaps is essential for making learning meaningful and creating real pathways to sustainable livelihoods.

INSIGHTS FROM: YOUTH, EMPLOYERS, AND POLICYMAKERS

1. Youth Perspectives: A Demand for Relevance, Flexibility, and Opportunity

- **UNICEF Global Youth Survey (2020):** Involving over 40,000 respondents across 150 countries, this survey found that 1 in 3 youth believe their education does not prepare them for jobs. Key concerns included the lack of job-relevant skills, limited exposure to practical training, and a disconnect between what is taught and what the economy demands.

- **UNICEF & PwC 'Reaching YES' (2021):** Young people voiced frustration with inaccessible or unrecognized skill-building opportunities. Many felt disempowered in navigating pathways between education and employment due to a lack of clear guidance, recognition frameworks, and career-aligned training options.
- **OECD Future of Education & Skills 2030:** Youth expressed a strong desire for change in their learning, favoring flexible, personalized, and values-driven education. Many rejected rigid, exam-focused systems, instead prioritizing learning that supports real-world problem-solving and personal meaning.

2. Employer Perspectives: A Persistent Skills Mismatch

- **Manpower Group Talent Shortage Survey (2021):** A record 69% of global employers reported difficulty finding candidates with the right mix of technical and soft skills. Employers noted gaps in communication, critical thinking, adaptability, and digital literacy, which are not sufficiently addressed in formal curricula.
- **World Economic Forum (2023):** Employers in fast-changing sectors (e.g., IT, healthcare, climate tech) highlighted a growing need for continuous reskilling, micro-credentials, and digital fluency. They also emphasised the importance of work-based learning partnerships, noting that traditional education alone is insufficient to produce job-ready candidates.
- **ILO Global Employment Trends for Youth (2022):** Employers across both formal and informal sectors cited limited work-readiness among youth entering the labour market. Key concerns included a lack of experiential training, workplace etiquette, and familiarity with emerging tools and technologies.

3. Policymaker Insights: Recognition of Urgent Reform Needs

- **World Bank Education Reports (2022–23):** Policymakers increasingly acknowledge the urgency of systemic reforms. Governments in several Commonwealth countries have initiated digital skilling strategies, but report challenges in equitable access, content localisation, and teacher preparedness for hybrid and competency-based education models.
- **UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2023):** National policymakers recognise the need to integrate digital, green, and entrepreneurial skills into curricula. However, many systems lack the agility to adapt quickly and struggle with legacy infrastructure, undertrained teachers, and limited public-private coordination.
- **ILO Policy Dialogue Summaries (2021–2023):** Government officials in multiple regions emphasised the value of public-private partnerships, youth participation in curriculum design, and recognition of prior learning (RPL) frameworks. However, implementation

remains slow due to regulatory constraints and funding gaps.

The voices of youth, employers, and policymakers converge on one key message: the current education-to-employment pipeline is outdated and ineffective. Youth seek relevance, flexibility, and purpose in learning. Employers want adaptive, skilled talent. Policymakers are calling for agile, inclusive, and future-ready systems. Bridging these divides requires coordinated action rooted in insights from all three constituencies toward a reimagined education and skilling ecosystem. Please refer to Table 2 below for highlights of the Stakeholder mapping undertaken.

Stakeholder	Key Insights	Challenges	Recommendations
YOUTH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education is not aligned with career needs. • Strong preference for flexible, modular, and practical learning. • Learning often lacks purpose and emotional relevance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited access to quality digital resources, especially in rural/low-income areas. • Insufficient guidance and awareness about non-traditional learning and career paths. • Lack of recognition for informal or self-directed learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop modular, stackable learning pathways leading to recognised micro-credentials • Expand access to hybrid and mobile learning formats. • Embed soft skills, sustainability, and entrepreneurship in curricula • Include youth voices in curriculum design and feedback mechanisms.
EMPLOYERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formal qualifications do not guarantee work-readiness. • High demand for digital, soft, and adaptive skills. • Support for more industry-integrated learning pathways. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow implementation of reforms. • Infrastructure and teacher training gaps. • Difficulty scaling RPL and non-traditional assessments. • Coordination challenges among ministries, industry, and educators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalise national frameworks for RPL and micro-credentials. • Invest in infrastructure, open content, and inclusive delivery systems. • Mainstream green, digital, and life skills in formal curricula. • Foster multi-stakeholder platforms for governance, including youth and private sector voices.

Stakeholder	Key Insights	Challenges	Recommendations
POLICYMAKERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognise the need for systemic reform and future-ready learning models. • Committed to digital skilling and equity in access. • Understand importance of alternative credentials and flexible learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Slow implementation of reforms. • Infrastructure and teacher training gaps. • Difficulty scaling RPL and non-traditional assessments. • Coordination challenges among ministries, industry, and educators. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutionalise national frameworks for RPL and micro-credentials. • Invest in infrastructure, open content, and inclusive delivery systems. • Mainstream green, digital, and life skills in formal curricula. • Foster multi-stakeholder platforms for governance, including youth and private sector voices.

Table 2: Key Insights, Challenges and Recommendations by Stakeholder Groups

The comparative insights reveal a shared recognition among youth, employers, and policymakers that traditional education and skilling systems are falling short. While each group brings a unique lens, their collective priorities: flexibility, relevance, practical application, and inclusivity, point toward the urgent need for systemic transformation. Addressing their challenges through collaborative, youth-centred, and innovation-driven approaches will be essential to building a future-ready education and workforce ecosystem across the Commonwealth.



Emerging Trends in Youth Learning and Skilling

In a world marked by rapid technological advancements and shifting workforce demands, traditional education and skilling systems are struggling to stay relevant. Today's youth, particularly across India and other Commonwealth countries, are no longer content with rigid, one-size-fits-all learning pathways. They seek flexible, modular, and purpose-driven educational experiences that are aligned with real-world applications and future opportunities. This generation, characterised by digital fluency, entrepreneurial thinking, and a desire for autonomy, looks for learning models that reflect their lifestyle, career aspirations, and learning preferences. To meet these evolving expectations and fully harness the demographic dividend, there is an urgent need to reimagine how we engage youth in education and skilling.

Drawing upon a synthesis of leading global reports, including those from UNICEF, the World Bank, OECD, ILO, UNESCO, and the World Economic Forum, this section outlines the key emerging trends in youth learning and skilling and provides a comprehensive overview of youth preferences in terms of learning pathways and program formats.

1. EMERGING TRENDS IN YOUTH LEARNING, SKILLING, AND EMPLOYMENT

Several macro-level trends are shaping the direction of youth education and employability:

- **Digital Transformation and Platform-Based Learning:** There is an accelerated shift toward digitally enabled learning ecosystems, with youth accessing content via mobile phones, online platforms, and blended delivery models. The rise of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), mobile-first content, and AI-powered learning is expanding access and offering personalisation.
- **Emphasis on Work-Based and Experiential Learning:** There is growing recognition of the value of project-based, experiential, and applied learning formats. Internships, apprenticeships, and bootcamps offer real-world exposure and improve job readiness.
- **Growth of Hybrid and Asynchronous Learning:** Post-pandemic realities have normalised hybrid learning models, combining the strengths of in-person engagement with the flexibility of online access. Asynchronous content delivery allows learners to progress at their own pace.
- **Shift Toward Purpose-Driven and Values-Based Learning:** Many youth are seeking educational experiences that align with their values—particularly in areas such as climate action, equity, gender rights, and community impact. Green skills and social entrepreneurship are gaining traction.

- **Integration of Life Skills and Digital Fluency:** Employability increasingly depends on soft skills such as communication, adaptability, and critical thinking, alongside technical proficiency. Youth express a clear demand for these to be embedded within formal and informal learning frameworks.

2. LEARNING PREFERENCES OF YOUTH: WHAT DO THEY WANT?

Youth today articulate clear and consistent learning preferences:

- Short-term, flexible learning options that reduce financial and time investment.
- Blended and self-paced learning to suit personal schedules and responsibilities.
- Interactive, gamified, and applied learning models that enhance engagement and retention.
- Personalised pathways that allow learners to choose what and how they want to learn.
- Peer learning and collaborative spaces that support innovation and creativity.
- Learning with purpose, particularly programs tied to environmental and social impact.

3. SKILLING INITIATIVES PREFERRED BY YOUTH

Youth respond positively to skilling initiatives that are directly aligned with employability, self-employment, and personal growth. The most preferred initiatives include:

- Micro-credentials and industry-recognised certifications in areas such as digital marketing, data analytics, and cybersecurity.
- Digital literacy and coding bootcamps offering fast-track entry to tech jobs.
- Entrepreneurship training and incubation support, especially among youth in low-resource settings.
- Work-based learning, including internships, apprenticeships, and project-based models.
- Green and sustainability-focused skilling programs in sectors like renewable energy, circular economy, and eco-tourism.
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms that validate existing skills and informal learning.

Youth Learning and Skilling Insights

Emerging Trends in Youth Learning, Skilling, and Employment



Digital Transformation & Future Skills



Work-Based Learning Emphasis



Skill Certification Demand

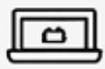


Policy & Multi-Stakeholder Engagement

Youth Learning Preferences and Skilling Initiatives



Short Courses & Micro-Credentials



Hybrid & Digital Learning Models



Experiential Learning & Industry Projects



Competency-Based Progression



Values-Driven Learning

Misalignments Between Systems and Youth Expectations



Rigid Curriculum Structures



Low Industry Alignment



Classroom-Focused Delivery



Need for Evidence-Based Methods

Insights from Recent Youth Surveys and Research



Education-Job Preparation Concerns



Need for Equitable Digital Access



Skill Gaps Reported by Employers



Desire for Flexibility and Agency

Infographic 1 summarises the key insights identified in Youth learning & Skilling.

The literature scan also indicates emerging trends in youth learning and skilling across select Commonwealth countries, offering both Global South and Global North perspectives. The countries, India, Bangladesh, Kenya, South Africa, Canada, Australia, and Singapore, were selected to ensure representation from both economically advanced and developing member states. These countries were chosen based on the availability of policy innovation, regional diversity, and active national skilling reforms that could offer transferable insights. While countries like Canada, Australia, and Singapore illustrate advanced models of micro-credentialing, hybrid learning, and labour-market-aligned skilling (Global North), nations such as India, Kenya, and Bangladesh reflect the urgency of scale, inclusion, and informal workforce integration (Global South). This comparative lens helps highlight contextual responses to youth skilling across economic and policy environments.

INDIA

Key Trends:

- High uptake of short-term vocational training under Skill India and NSDC programs.
- Strong growth in micro-credentials and hybrid learning models, especially post-COVID.
- Platforms like SWAYAM and DIKSHA offer access to self-paced digital learning.

Youth Preferences:

- Modular learning aligned to employment.
- Entrepreneurship, gig economy skills, and freelancing.
- Strong demand for mobile-friendly, flexible courses.

CANADA

Key Trends:

- Well-developed VET system with strong industry linkages.
- Rapid growth of digital skills training through TAFE and private providers.
- Government support for micro-credentials and upskilling pathways post-pandemic.

Youth Preferences:

- Recognition of prior skills and flexible re-skilling routes.
- Online and blended delivery models are increasingly preferred.
- Courses that combine academic content with hands-on application

SINGAPORE

Key Trends:

- SkillsFuture initiative provides credit to citizens for accredited skills training.

- Heavy investment in AI, cybersecurity, green tech, and advanced manufacturing training.
- Integration of lifelong learning and national skilling strategy.

Youth Preferences:

- Self-paced, industry-aligned learning with clear career outcomes.
- Micro-learning and just-in-time skilling models.
- Emphasis on quality digital credentials backed by top institutions.

KENYA

Key Trends:

- Focus on digital and green skills via government and private programs (e.g., Ajira Digital).
- Uptake of TVET and agri-skills in rural areas.
- Use of mobile platforms to expand access to skilling.

Youth Preferences:

- Short-term courses with direct employment outcomes.
- Strong emphasis on practical, competency-based training.
- Blended learning is preferred, especially where access is limited.

SOUTH AFRICA

Key Trends:

- Work-integrated learning via SETAs and TVET colleges.
- Emphasis on RPL (Recognition of Prior Learning) and youth entrepreneurship.
- High engagement with digital platforms for job search and training.

Youth Preferences:

- Blended, industry-aligned learning models.
- Demand for training that includes life skills and mental health support.
- Interest in creative industries and self-employment pathways.

BANGLADESH

Key Trends:

- Government initiatives like SEIP support digitised, demand-driven training.
- Emphasis on female skilling and entrepreneurship.
- High rural engagement through local training centres.

Youth Preferences:

- Community-based, flexible skilling options.
- Micro-entrepreneurship and gig economy platforms.
- Mobile-enabled learning and marketing skills.

COUNTRY	KEY TRENDS	YOUTH PREFERENCES
India	Digital & hybrid learning growth- Rise of micro-credentials- Public-private skilling via NSDC, SWAYAM	Short, modular courses- Mobile-friendly, flexible formats- Gig economy, entrepreneurship skills.
Kenya	Digital upskilling via Ajira, Andela- TVET in agriculture, ICT- Green skills emerging.	Practical, hands-on learning- Government-backed short courses- Offline-capable, mobile-first formats.
South Africa	Work-integrated learning via SETAs- Emphasis on RPL- Youth entrepreneurship programs.	Blended learning with job exposure- Life skills & mental wellness- Creative sector training.
Bangladesh	SEIP and community-based digital skilling- Focus on female participation- Mobile-based learning.	Flexible local access- Short-term vocational courses- Micro-entrepreneurship, home-based skills.
Canada	Micro-credential expansion- Work-integrated learning- Inclusive strategies for youth.	Stackable certifications- Hybrid & experiential models- Digital, health, and green sectors.
Australia	Strong VET sector- Government-backed digital upskilling- Growth of online micro-courses.	Prior learning recognition- Online/blended delivery- Skills with applied, job-ready outcomes.
Singapore	SkillsFuture initiative- National lifelong learning strategy- Investment in tech skills.	Self-paced, accredited learning- Micro-learning- Digital credentials with strong employer backing.

Table 2: Comparative table summarising youth learning and skilling trends across seven key Commonwealth countries

To summarise: In order to remain relevant, education and skilling systems must be:

- Flexible and Modular
- Aligned with Industry Needs
- Technology-Enabled
- Rooted in Real-World Skills
- Inclusive and Purpose-Driven

Investing in youth-centric skilling is essential for unlocking the potential of this demographic dividend. Governments, education providers, and development agencies must collaborate to redesign learning systems that reflect these emerging preferences and realities.



Table 2: Comparative table summarising youth learning and skilling trends across seven key Commonwealth countries



Best Practices and Innovations in Youth-centric Learning & Skilling

Across India and other Commonwealth countries, a growing number of innovative education and skilling models are demonstrating how learning systems can be made more inclusive, flexible, and aligned with the future of work. These approaches reflect a shift away from rigid, one-size-fits-all systems toward learner-centred, demand-driven models that combine digital delivery, industry relevance, and community engagement. A few select examples are listed below:

1. MODULAR AND STACKABLE SKILLING PATHWAYS – NSDC, INDIA

The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) has spearheaded modular skilling frameworks that allow learners to acquire bite-sized, industry-recognised certifications. These modules can be accumulated and converted into diplomas or advanced qualifications over time, providing learners with flexibility, multiple entry/exit points, and vertical mobility.

- **Impact:** Over 14 million youth trained through Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana (PMKVY), with specific sector skill councils co-developing content to meet market demands.
- **Scalability:** Adopted widely across India's skilling ecosystem and integrated into public-private models. Supported by the National Education Policy 2020 and the National Credit Framework guidelines 2023.

2. DIGITAL LEARNING PLATFORMS – SWAYAM (INDIA) AND COL'S SKILLS FOR WORK (PAN-COMMONWEALTH)

- **SWAYAM**, a Government of India initiative, offers MOOCs across disciplines, enabling access to over 2,000 courses with certifications endorsed by national institutions like AICTE and UGC.
- **The Commonwealth of Learning's (COL) Skills for Work** initiative provides access to free, self-paced courses via global platforms like Coursera and Udemy, specifically targeting marginalised youth and women across Commonwealth nations.

Impact:

- ✓ SWAYAM has enrolled over 10 million learners and offers certifications that are increasingly recognised by employers and academic institutions.
- ✓ COL's initiative has benefited more than 300,000 learners, particularly in India, Kenya, and the Caribbean, with strong uptake in digital, business, and entrepreneurship skills.

3. RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) AND COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION – AUSTRALIA, SOUTH AFRICA, INDIA

- Australia's AQF framework and South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (NQF) both institutionalise RPL, allowing individuals to earn formal credit for workplace experience, informal training, and community-based learning.
- In India, RPL under PMKVY allows informal sector workers (e.g., artisans, drivers, tailors) to receive recognition and upskilling through short bridge programs.

Impact:

- In South Africa, over 150,000 learners have accessed higher education or jobs through RPL pathways.
- India's RPL model has reached more than 4 million workers, helping them access formal job markets and wage enhancements.

4. INDUSTRY-INTEGRATED SKILLING – TATA STRIVE, NSDC-IBM FUTURE SKILLS, TVET-AUSTRALIA

- Tata STRIVE blends digital learning, soft skills training, and workplace immersion in partnership with local employers. It offers career readiness modules, mentorship, and industry-aligned internships.
- IBM and NSDC's Future Skills initiative in India focuses on digital literacy, AI, cloud computing, and cybersecurity—delivered through a blended model with hands-on labs and micro-certifications.
- Australia's TAFE system (Technical and Further Education) builds strong employer linkages through dual training models and employer apprenticeships.

Impact:

- Tata STRIVE reports over 70% placement rates, with demonstrated improvement in learner confidence and job-readiness.
- TAFE and similar dual systems in the UK and Germany are considered global benchmarks in employer-led skilling.

5. COMMUNITY-BASED SKILLING AND GRASSROOTS ENGAGEMENT – YUVA PARIVARTAN (INDIA), HARAMBEE (SOUTH AFRICA), YOUNG AFRICA (ZIMBABWE, MOZAMBIQUE)

- Yuva Parivartan, a Mumbai-based NGO, brings skilling to underserved youth in slums and rural areas through community centres offering short-term vocational courses, literacy, and entrepreneurship training.
- Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator in South Africa connects young people to jobs through psychometric assessments, career guidance, and on-the-job training in collaboration with over 500 employers.
- Young Africa operates across Southern Africa, combining skills training with life coaching and business incubation, particularly for vulnerable youth.

Impact:

- Yuva Parivartan has trained over 1 million youth, especially school dropouts and rural unemployed youth.
- Harambee has helped over 600,000 youth transition to work and influenced national policy on youth employment.



Global Case Studies: Innovative Skilling Models That Work

To better understand what effective, youth-centred skilling looks like in practice, this section presents an overview of four global case studies that highlight proven, scalable models from across the Commonwealth and beyond. These initiatives were selected for their ability to address core challenges in employability, inclusivity, and system relevance.

The following models demonstrate how flexibility, employer engagement, competency-based progression, and digital delivery can be strategically combined to produce meaningful education and employment outcomes for young people.



Case Study 1: Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator – South Africa

Background:

South Africa's youth unemployment crisis is among the most severe in the world, with over 60% of young people aged 15–24 unemployed as of 2023. Many are first-time job seekers from marginalised communities who lack access to quality education, professional networks, and career guidance. Traditional education pathways often fail to equip them with the soft and practical skills employers require. Harambee was founded in 2011 as a social enterprise to tackle this gap by creating a scalable, inclusive bridge between underprepared youth and employers seeking entry-level talent.

Methodology:

Harambee's approach is both data-driven and demand-led, grounded in behavioural science and co-designed with employers. Youth are recruited through mobile platforms and community networks, then assessed using behavioural and cognitive diagnostics rather than academic credentials.

Bridging Programs:

Candidates complete customised “bridge” programs that focus on soft skills (e.g., punctuality, resilience), digital literacy, and basic technical know-how tailored to

specific industries (e.g., retail, call centres, logistics). Using a custom algorithm, youth are matched with employers based on potential and job fit rather than qualifications. Post-placement coaching and digital nudges improve retention and performance. Harambee also works with policymakers to influence youth employment policy and improve inclusive hiring practices across the private sector.



IMPACT

- Supported over 600,000 youth in accessing work or further learning.
- Improved first-year job retention by up to 30% among employer partners.
- Influenced South Africa's national youth employment strategy and contributed to the Presidential Youth Employment Intervention.



KEY SUCCESS FACTORS:

- Human-centred design focused on potential, not just credentials.
- Strong partnerships with over 500 employers.
- Scalable, tech-enabled systems for profiling, learning, and matching.

Harambee's approach to inclusive youth employment- <https://www.harambee.co.za>



Case Study 2: SkillsFuture – Singapore

Background:

In anticipation of future workforce disruption, the Government of Singapore launched SkillsFuture in 2015 as a national initiative to transform how citizens engage with education and work throughout their lives. With the rise of digital technologies, automation, and an ageing workforce, Singapore recognised the need for lifelong, modular, and industry-relevant learning. SkillsFuture was positioned not only as an economic strategy but also as a social compact, enabling all Singaporeans to remain employable and adapt to change.

Methodology:

SkillsFuture operates as a multi-pronged ecosystem targeting individuals, employers, and training providers. Every adult Singaporean receives SGD \$500 in credit, usable across thousands of approved short courses in digital skills, languages, healthcare, and more. Co-created with industry sectors, the skill frameworks define career pathways, skills standards, and training options for each role. The initiative supports career advisory services, upskilling for mid-career professionals, and funding for work-study programs. SMEs and larger employers are incentivised to develop workforce plans and participate in employee training through subsidies and recognition schemes. The entire system is underpinned by strong digital infrastructure and public awareness campaigns.

Methodology:

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IMPACT

- Over 500,000 Singaporeans used their SkillsFuture credits within the first 3 years.
- Boosted participation from mid-career and older workers, particularly in tech, health, and business sectors.
- Over 2,000 training providers accredited under the scheme, including universities, polytechnics, and private firms.



KEY SUCCESS FACTORS:

- Government coordination and long-term policy continuity.
- Employer buy-in through co-development of content and frameworks.
- Strong emphasis on skills over degrees, backed by national media campaigns.

<https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg>



Case Study 3: Technical and Further Education (TAFE) – Australia

Background:

Australia's Technical and Further Education (TAFE) system has been a cornerstone of the country's workforce development strategy for decades. As industries evolve due to automation, green transitions, and service sector growth, TAFE institutions are central to retraining the existing workforce and preparing young people for dynamic labour markets. Operating in every Australian state and territory, TAFE is funded and regulated through a national vocational framework that ensures high standards, consistency, and flexibility.

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Methodology:

TAFE delivers vocational education and training from basic Certificate I levels up to advanced diplomas. The key features include:

- **Competency-Based Training (CBT):** Learners progress based on demonstrated skills rather than time spent in class.
- **Work-Integrated Learning:** Each program includes mandatory on-the-job training, internships, or simulations tailored to industry standards.
- **Nationally Recognised Qualifications:** All credentials conform to AQF and are recognised across sectors and states.
- **Industry Collaboration:** Curriculum is developed in consultation with industry advisory groups to ensure it stays current with employer demands.
- **Flexible Delivery:** Offers full-time, part-time, online, and hybrid modes, including regional and remote access centres. TAFE also offers direct pathways into higher education, enabling students to “ladder up” into university degrees.



IMPACT

- Trains over 1.2 million learners annually across diverse industries including aged care, construction, IT, and hospitality.
- Around 78% of graduates employed or in further study within four months of course completion (NCVER 2022).
- Plays a critical role in skilling workers for Australia's green economy and health care expansion.



KEY SUCCESS FACTORS:

- National consistency via the AQF, yet responsive to local needs.
- Deep employer engagement in curriculum and assessment.
- Strong integration with labour policy, career services, and higher education pathways.

National VET Information (MySkills):
<https://www.myskills.gov.au>



Case Study 4: Micro-Credentials for Lifelong Learning and Workforce Readiness – New Zealand and Ireland

Background:

With rapid technological change and shifting labour market demands, traditional degree programs often fall short in equipping learners with up-to-date, job-relevant skills. Recognising the need for flexible, fast, and stackable learning options, countries like New Zealand and Ireland have pioneered national strategies for micro-credentials that support both initial employment and upskilling/reskilling across a lifetime. In both countries, micro-credentials are being used to fill skill gaps in sectors such as information technology, health care, construction, and green jobs. These credentials typically consist of short, competency-based learning modules, often delivered online or in blended formats.

Methodology: New Zealand (NZQA-led Model)

- In 2018, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) formally introduced micro-credentials into the national qualifications framework.

Micro-credentials are defined as 5–40 credit packages that address specific, assessable learning outcomes not already covered by existing qualifications.

Providers (universities, polytechnics, private training establishments) must seek NZQA approval and demonstrate industry demand before offering micro-credentials.

Ireland (National Framework & Universities)

- Spearheaded by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), micro-credentials are embedded in the National Framework of Qualifications.
- In partnership with the European Union, Ireland has developed a MicroCreds project, led by the Irish Universities Association (IUA), to scale up short, flexible programs for learners and professionals.
- Courses are often stackable, digitally certified, and recognised by employers, especially in fields like data analytics, cybersecurity, and green technology.



IMPACT

- New Zealand: The number of NZQA-approved micro-credentials has grown steadily, particularly in sectors requiring rapid upskilling (e.g., agri-tech, construction, transport).
- Ireland: The MicroCreds project has expanded across seven universities, serving professionals seeking career advancement or sector shifts, with strong participation from SMEs and mid-career learners.
- Learners report higher confidence, employability, and clarity in career progression after earning micro-credentials.
- Employers use micro-credentials to upskill teams without disrupting work schedules and to validate specific competencies for hiring or promotions.



KEY SUCCESS FACTORS:

- National-level policy integration: Inclusion in formal qualifications frameworks ensures legitimacy, recognition, and alignment with labour market standards.
- Employer co-design: Many micro-credentials are developed in direct consultation with employers, ensuring relevance and demand.
- Flexible delivery: Online and modular structures allow working adults and non-traditional learners to participate.
- Digital certification and portability: Credentials are digitally verifiable, allowing for easy integration into digital CVs and LinkedIn profiles.

Lessons for the Commonwealth and Beyond:

- Micro-credentials offer a powerful tool for bridging the gap between formal education and workforce realities, especially for youth and mid-career professionals.
- Their success hinges on quality assurance, industry alignment, and formal recognition.
- Institutions like CEMCA can play a catalytic role in facilitating regional frameworks, capacity-building for content providers, and awareness campaigns to drive adoption.

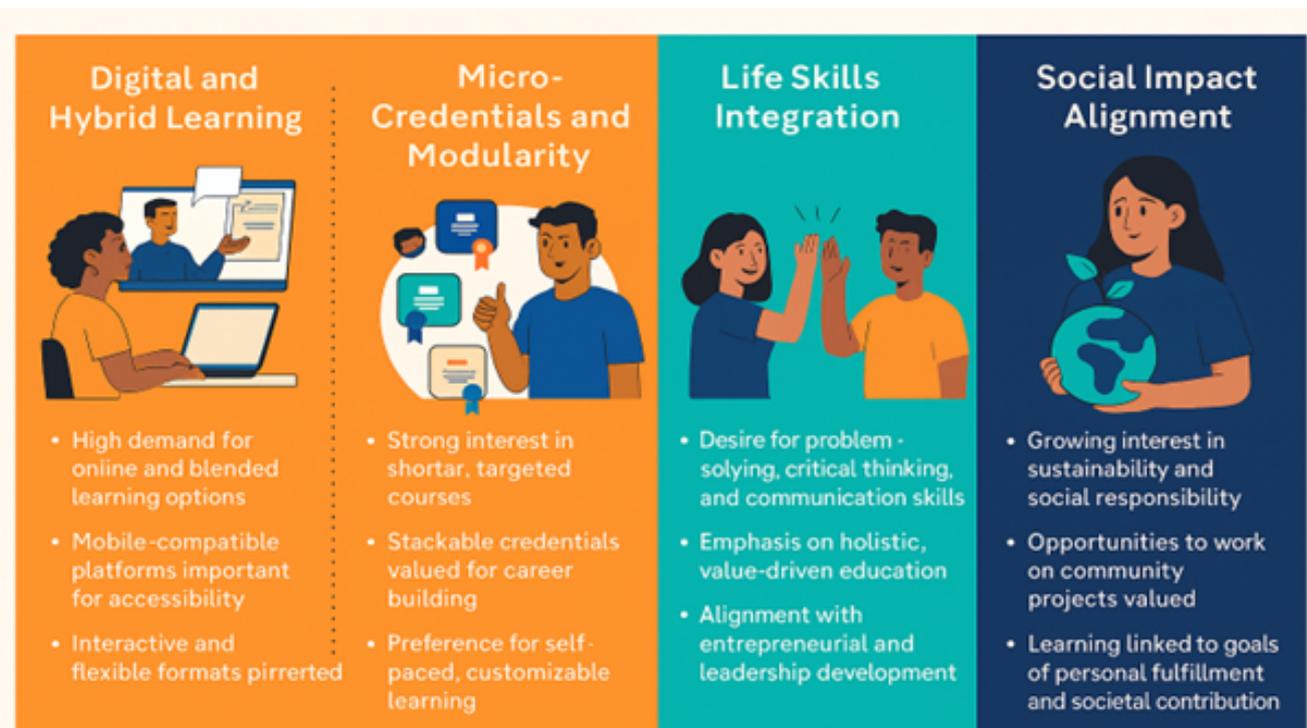
These best practices and case studies illustrate how flexibility, industry relevance, digital access, and grassroots delivery are transforming the education and skilling landscape. Whether through modular pathways, public-private partnerships, RPL frameworks, or digital learning, these models offer replicable blueprints for CEMCA, aiming to modernise distance and skills-based education across the Commonwealth.



Strategic Recommendations for CEMCA: Reimagining Educational Media for Youth- Centric Distance Learning

Skills for Today, Power for Tomorrow

In an era shaped by climate urgency, digital transformation, and widening skills gaps, education and skilling institutions must transition from traditional content delivery to agile, learner-centric ecosystems. Reports referred in the previous sections underscore the growing demand for skills-first, lifelong learning ecosystems, and modular, stackable, and digitally verified credentials.



Infographic 3 below summarises the learning & skilling preferences of the youth.

Across the Commonwealth, large segments of the youth population, particularly girls, rural learners, persons with disabilities (PwDs), and out-of-school youth continue to be excluded from mainstream skilling initiatives. Therefore, there is an urgent need for solutions that not only reflect the learning preferences of youth but also ensure reach, inclusion, and scalability.

While digital platforms have emerged as powerful tools for education and training, they often fall short for those who lack reliable internet access, culturally relevant content, or flexible learning formats.

This is where CEMCA's expertise in educational media and open learning can play a transformative role. With its specialised mandate and regional presence, CEMCA is well-

positioned to design and implement inclusive, modular, and SDG-aligned skilling ecosystems that reach and empower these underserved groups across the Commonwealth. This white paper proposes two tiers of strategic recommendations for CEMCA to strengthen its role in advancing youth-centric learning across Commonwealth countries. The first set comprises micro-level recommendations; targeted, learner-facing innovations that enhance access, engagement, and outcomes through the effective use of educational media and technology. These are practical, scalable interventions aimed at improving delivery and learner experience in the immediate future.

The second set includes macro-level recommendations, which are systemic in nature and combine multiple micro-level initiatives to focus on strengthening policy frameworks, institutional linkages, and ecosystem-wide reforms. These are more complex initiatives and require more time and effort to get all key stakeholders to align to a shared vision and objectives.

This section outlines the micro-level strategies that CEMCA can adopt and operationalise within its existing mandate of open and distance learning. These include actions to promote modular and flexible learning, leverage mobile-first and hybrid delivery models, develop interactive and inclusive content, and strengthen industry linkages and learner feedback loops. Collectively, these recommendations are designed to make educational media more responsive to the needs of modern learners, particularly those in remote, underserved, and digitally constrained environments.

MICRO LEVEL INITIATIVES

1. Promote Modular, Micro-Credential-Based Learning Pathways

Many young people today don't want to or can't commit to long, traditional courses. Instead, they prefer short, skill-based programs they can complete quickly and combine over time into a larger qualification. These are often called "micro-credentials" or "stackable" learning. This helps learners enter the workforce faster while continuing to build new skills when needed.

Modular learning allows youth to complete smaller chunks of training (Skill Packs), earn digital badges, and build credentials over time. These can be paused, resumed, or customised to suit individual career goals. This approach is especially valuable for those juggling work or family responsibilities or those looking to upskill quickly for new job opportunities.

What CEMCA Can Do:

- ✔ **Support the design of modular audio-visual content** aligned with competency frameworks, covering employability skills such as: (This is only a suggestive list)

- Digital literacy (basic computer use, using emails, online safety)
- Communication and workplace etiquette
- Customer service fundamentals
- Basic entrepreneurship and financial literacy
- Introduction to green jobs (e.g., solar panel basics, waste management)
- Foundational courses in “Introduction to e-commerce” and “Using social media for small business marketing”

✔ **Develop a CEMCA-branded micro-credential framework**, in collaboration with national accreditation bodies or TVET councils, that recognize completion of short digital media-based learning modules.

Example 1: Partner with institutions like IGNOU or Symbiosis Open University to pilot “Skill Packs” of 3 to 5 each leading to digital badges that learners can share on LinkedIn or attach to job applications.

Example 2: Collaborate with community colleges or rural training institutes to offer “Quick Skill Certificates” in trades like tailoring, digital bookkeeping, or food processing.

2. Leverage Hybrid and Mobile-First Delivery Models

Youth need learning formats that are accessible via mobile devices and compatible with intermittent connectivity. Most youth today use mobile phones more than desktop computers. Many live in areas with poor internet, so it’s important to design learning that can work on mobile devices, with or without a strong connection. A hybrid model mixes digital learning (videos, mobile apps, WhatsApp) with offline learning (community sessions, radio programs, local mentors), making education more flexible and accessible.

What CEMCA Can Do:

✔ **Create mobile-optimized audio-visual content** that works offline or on low bandwidth, with downloadable formats via apps or WhatsApp broadcasts. Few suggestions are:

- How to prepare for interviews
- Running a micro-business
- Using smartphones for work (e.g., mobile photography, basic editing)
- How to navigate job portals and online “applications” or “Understanding gig work platforms” in regional languages

✔ **Promote hybrid models** by linking digital content with on-ground learning circles, community radio discussions, or local facilitators.

Example 1: In rural India, CEMCA could work with community radio stations to host weekly skill-focused broadcasts, supplemented by WhatsApp learning groups where youth receive follow-up quizzes and links to short videos.

Example 2: Partner with women's Self Help Groups or youth clubs to conduct monthly "Media-to-Action" workshops using downloaded videos and discussion guides.

3. Create Interactive, Learner-Centric Media Formats

Passive media formats often fail to engage youth. Interactive tools improve motivation, retention, and application. Young learners tend to lose interest in passive videos or long lectures. They respond better when learning feels like a conversation or game. Making content interactive through quizzes, choices, or storytelling keeps them engaged, helps them remember more, and encourages them to apply what they learn in real life.

What CEMCA Can Do:

Develop gamified simulations around: (Few suggestions)

- Customer handling in retail
- Decision-making in a small enterprise
- Time and task management at work
- Interactive budgeting exercises to understand basic income management

 **Develop media with embedded** decision points, quizzes, or simulations, using platforms like Articulate /others.

 **Introduce gamified formats** where learners earn rewards or points for completion of modules, particularly in high-demand topics like financial literacy or entrepreneurship.

Example 1: Develop an interactive series where a character navigates real-life job and life decisions. Learners choose the character's path, receive feedback, and reflect on outcomes.

Example 2: A video where learners act as a delivery agent or shop owner, navigating common challenges with guided choices.

Example 3: A role-play simulation where learners act as a community health worker or agripreneur, choosing actions based on local challenges.

4. Integrate Life Skills and Values-Based Learning in Media

Youth seek content that supports not just employment, but also personal growth and resilience. Beyond just getting a job, youth also need skills like self-confidence, communication, managing emotions, setting goals, and working with others. These are known as life skills, and they are crucial for personal and professional success. Young people

also want to learn about real-world issues such as climate change, gender equality, and ethical leadership. This kind of content builds well-rounded individuals, not just job seekers.

What CEMCA Can Do:

✔ **Produce short-format content on: (Few suggestions)**

- Workplace behaviour and ethics
- Gender sensitivity and teamwork
- Handling rejection and feedback
- Dealing with workplace anxiety, building resilience, and positive thinking

✔ **Include stories** from youth-led climate action, community entrepreneurship, or peer learning groups across Commonwealth countries.

✔ **Produce short** storytelling content on emotional intelligence, communication, goal-setting, and gender inclusion, in formats such as vignettes, short dramas, or testimonials.

- Customer handling in retail
- Decision-making in a small enterprise
- Time and task management at work
- Interactive budgeting exercises to understand basic income management

✔ **Develop media with embedded** decision points, quizzes, or simulations, using platforms like Articulate /others.

✔ **Introduce gamified formats** where learners earn rewards or points for completion of modules, particularly in high-demand topics like financial literacy or entrepreneurship.

✔ **Collaborate with youth-led organisations** to co-create video or podcast series on topics such as climate action, ethical leadership, and social innovation.

Example 1: A docu-series titled *Voices of Change*, where young entrepreneurs from Commonwealth countries share how they built their ventures with minimal resources, sparking local youth engagement.

Example 2: An animated series titled *Everyday Leaders*, where youth characters demonstrate values like collaboration, honesty, and civic responsibility in real-life settings.

5. Foster Industry-Education-Media Collaboration

Aligning media content with current labor market demands enhances employability and system relevance. To ensure that learning leads to employment, the content must reflect the real skills that employers are looking for. By involving businesses and industry experts in

in designing media-based learning, students get practical knowledge and a better sense of workplace expectations. Employers can also share real-world problems for learners to solve, making learning more applied and meaningful.

What CEMCA Can Do:

- ✔ Work with employers to **design** content such as:
 - "A day in the life of a logistics assistant"
 - Short training modules on hospitality service or warehouse safety
 - Video case studies on teamwork and problem-solving
 - Interviews with HR professionals explaining what they look for in entry-level candidates across sectors
- ✔ Launch **campaigns** where companies post simple challenges like:
 - Create a pitch to sell a product
 - Solve a customer complaint scenario
 - Design a local tourism route or digital flyer for a community event as part of a design-thinking challenge
- ✔ **Facilitate industry co-creation** of learning media, where employers contribute to content development or offer case studies for inclusion in media modules.
- ✔ **Organize media-based "skill challenge" campaigns** where companies post real-world problems and youth respond with responses/ project submissions.

Example: Partner with tourism boards or logistics companies to create short media modules on "How to be job-ready in XYZ sector," ending with a virtual mentorship Q&A session OR Collaborate with local cooperatives or small businesses to co-create a mini-series on work-life expectations in the informal sector.

6. Establish Monitoring, Feedback, and Youth Participation Mechanisms

Continuous input from learners helps refine content, ensure relevance, and foster ownership. To make sure learning tools stay useful and up to date, it's important to ask learners for their feedback regularly. Their input can help improve content and delivery. Involving youth in shaping and reviewing content also ensures that what is being offered truly meets their needs and reflects their voice.

What CEMCA Can Do:

- ✔ **Embed polls and quick surveys** into digital media or host SMS-based feedback systems to gather real-time user data.

- Embed short polls like “Was this course helpful?” after videos.
- Use SMS or chatbot-based tools to collect learner input.

✔ **Form youth media advisory councils** to co-develop content, vet ideas, and ensure generational alignment.

Example: After every 5-minute video module, prompt users with one question like “Was this useful?” or “Would you recommend this to a friend?” to gather rapid feedback for improvement.

MACRO LEVEL INITIATIVES

positioned to design and implement inclusive, modular, and SDG-aligned skilling ecosystems that reach and empower these underserved groups across the Commonwealth. This white paper proposes two tiers of strategic recommendations for CEMCA to strengthen its role in advancing youth-centric learning across Commonwealth countries. The first set comprises micro-level recommendations; targeted, learner-facing innovations that enhance access, engagement, and outcomes through the effective use of educational media and technology. These are practical, scalable interventions aimed at improving delivery and learner experience in the immediate future.

learning solutions rooted in community ecosystems and inclusive pedagogy. These are distributed, media-powered distance learning models that deliver micro-credentialed, SDG-aligned content through a mix of:

- Low-bandwidth multimedia (radio, podcasts, mobile videos)
- Community-supported learning hubs
- AI-driven, personalised learning dashboards
- Local facilitator support and offline learning kits

A few suggestions on macro-level initiatives are listed below:

1. **SkillsRise + Learning Hubs** is an initiative designed to help young people, especially those from rural areas, underserved communities, and disadvantaged backgrounds, to gain the practical skills they need to succeed in today’s changing job market. Many young people across the Commonwealth still face serious challenges in accessing quality education or skill development programs. These challenges include a lack of internet access, limited transportation, and traditional teaching methods that don’t match the needs of today’s learners or employers.

This initiative will focus on creating flexible, easy-to-access learning options that can be delivered through a combination of mobile phones, radio, videos, and local community centres. SkillsRise will help bridge this gap by bringing modern, job-focused training directly to where young people are whether it’s through a mobile phone, a community radio station

or a local learning hub. The training offered under this initiative will be planned into small, focused modules called “Skill Packs” that teach specific skills relevant to today’s economy, such as digital literacy, climate-friendly jobs, basic entrepreneurship, and communication. These short courses can be taken one at a time and built up gradually into a larger qualification or certificate. This way, learners can progress at their own pace, even if they are working or have other responsibilities.

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SkillsRise also helps young people move closer to real job opportunities by connecting with local employers and organizations. It creates learning pathways that are not just theoretical, but linked to real work and income-generating opportunities.

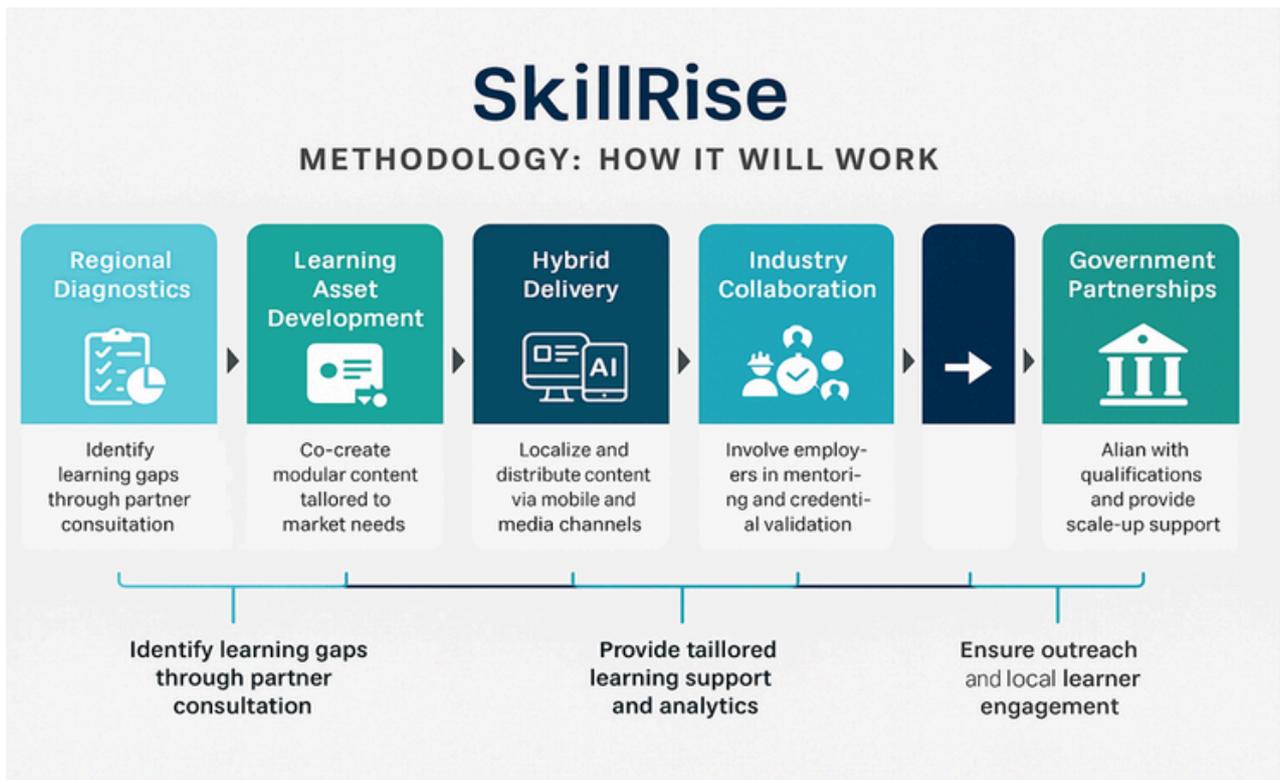
Use of AI: SkillsRise will use simple AI tools to make learning more personalised and supportive. AI will help tailor the learning journey of each student by:

- Recommending relevant Skill Packs based on the learner’s background, interests, and career goals.
- Tracking progress in real-time and offering reminders, feedback, and encouragement to help learners stay motivated.
- Assessing strengths and gaps, and suggesting next steps or additional support materials to improve learning outcomes.
- Guiding learners toward job opportunities by matching their completed Skill Packs to the kinds of roles local employers are hiring for.

The use of AI doesn’t require learners to be tech-savvy; it works in the background to make the experience more personalised, efficient, and rewarding.

Connecting Learners with Real Work Opportunities: SkillsRise is not just about learning; it will also be about connecting that learning to real jobs, internships, and income-generating opportunities. The initiative will work closely with local employers, NGOs, industry bodies, and entrepreneurship networks to ensure that the content is relevant to the skills they need. Here’s how it will support that connection:

- Employers help co-design certain Skill Packs, ensuring the training aligns with current job market needs.
- Learners receive digital micro-credentials or badges that can be shared with employers, attached to job applications, or posted on platforms like LinkedIn.
- Through local learning hubs or WhatsApp groups, learners get updates about job fairs, internship opportunities, and vocational apprenticeships in their region.
- Employers and mentors can host virtual career talks, mentorship sessions, or practical challenges to help learners apply their skills in real-world settings.



The infographic above provides a visual workflow of the proposed initiative.

This approach helps ensure that learning is not just theoretical but leads directly to employment, entrepreneurship, or further training pathways, giving youth the confidence and tools to shape their own future.

In summary, SkillsRise + Learning Hubs is a flexible, inclusive, and practical model that combines technology, community support, and local partnerships to equip young people with the skills, confidence, and connections they need to succeed in today's world of work. It reflects CEMCA's commitment to making education and skilling more open, accessible, and effective across the Commonwealth.

2. SkillBridge Virtual, Integrated Digital Skilling for Youth Employability

SkillBridge Virtual is planned as a digital platform designed to help young people across Commonwealth countries learn the skills they need to succeed in today's job market from wherever they are, using just a mobile phone or computer.

Today, many youth, especially in smaller towns, rural areas, or low-income households, struggle to access quality training programs. They may not be able to attend in-person classes due to distance, cost, or time constraints. At the same time, employers are looking for candidates with practical, up-to-date skills that can be applied immediately in the workplace.

SkillBridge Virtual aims to solve this challenge by offering a digital learning space that connects youth directly with skill-based training, career guidance, and job opportunities. The platform will host a wide variety of short online courses on high-demand topics such as digital literacy, green jobs, customer service, entrepreneurship, and communication skills. Youth can take one course at a time, and gradually build toward a certification or broader qualification.

These courses will be:

- Available online and mobile-friendly, so youth can learn anytime, anywhere.
- Designed in small units (Skill Packs) so they're easy to complete in short timeframes.
- Offered in multiple languages.

This means even if a young person has never done online learning before, they can start at their own pace and gradually build skills that are relevant to real jobs.

Career Guidance and Personal Support: Most young people don't know where to start or what careers match their interests and strengths. SkillBridge Virtual will use simple technology tools to guide them:

- An AI-powered dashboard will suggest courses based on the learner's background, goals, or job interests.
- Learners can take short self-assessments to understand their skills and get recommendations.
- Youth who complete courses will get digital badges or micro-credentials that can be shared with employers.
- The platform will include tools like resume builders, interview prep kits, and job-readiness checklists.
- Access to career talks will help learners hear directly from professionals
- The platform will feature job boards, internship listings, and virtual job fairs, where youth can apply for roles suited to their skill sets.

By combining learning with clear pathways to jobs, SkillBridge Virtual bridges the gap between what youth learn and what the labour market demands. Employers will also be part of the platform. They can help shape course content, share real-world challenges, and even offer internships or interview opportunities directly through the system.

SkillBridge Virtual

Integrated Digital Skilling for Youth Employability



DIGITAL MICRO-COURSES

Modular, industry-focused training



PLACEMENT SUPPORT

Career navigation and mentorship



LABOR MARKET INTEGRATION

Real-time alignment of skills with jobs



INCLUSIVE DESIGN

Accessible, equitable skilling ecosystem

Infographic showing the workflow for SkillBridge Virtual

Proposed Approach:

Given its current mandate and future priorities, CEMCA can adopt a phased, multipronged approach to implementing the recommendations. In the short term, it can focus on achievable "quick wins" by investing in the micro-level initiatives, which are practical, scalable, and aligned with CEMCA's core strengths in distance learning and educational media. These interventions can demonstrate immediate value and impact.

As these early actions take root, CEMCA can gradually transition to more complex, long-term macro-level initiatives. These may require broader partnerships, system-level changes, and in-depth feasibility assessments. Where necessary, such initiatives can be simplified or implemented in phases, allowing for learning, adaptation, and sustained impact over time. This approach ensures both momentum in the short term and strategic transformation in the long term.

Conclusion

CEMCA's strategic pivot should position it not merely as a producer of media content but as an orchestrator of transformative, youth-centric learning ecosystems. By prioritising modular, mobile-friendly, interactive, and locally grounded content, and by embedding youth participation and values-based learning, CEMCA can lead the way in redefining distance education for the future of work and society.

To support the implementation of the recommended strategies for youth-centric educational media and distance learning, CEMCA must also advocate for and contribute to enabling policy environments across Commonwealth countries. These policy-level recommendations should aim to influence national and institutional frameworks in ways that support flexibility, accessibility, relevance, and innovation in learning systems.



Additional Inputs on Policy Formulation

To support the adoption of youth-centric educational media and skilling strategies across the Commonwealth, CEMCA can advocate for the following policy actions:

1. Institutionalise Micro-Credentials and Modular Learning

- Partner with national TVET bodies to formally recognise short, stackable learning programs.
- Align modular content with national qualifications frameworks.

2. Embed Digital Media in National Curriculum

- Promote digital content integration in school and TVET curricula.
- Support open educational resource (OER) policies for reuse and localisation.

3. Develop National RPL Frameworks

- Advocate for the formal recognition of media-based and informal learning.
- Collaborate on assessment standards that validate experiential knowledge.

4. Ensure Mobile-First, Inclusive Access

- Recommend mobile-optimised content and community-based access models.
- Push for policy incentives for zero-rated educational platforms.

5. Integrate Life Skills and Values-Based Learning

- Develop media on soft skills, financial literacy, and citizenship.
- Align content with SDGs and UNESCO's life skills framework.

6. Promote Youth Co-Design and Participation

- Institutionalise youth advisory boards in content and policy planning.
- Establish participatory media development frameworks.

7. Enable Public-Private-Community Collaboration

- Encourage industry partnerships in content development.
- Use CSR and innovation challenges to co-create learning media.

8. Standardise Open Access and Interoperability

- Advocate for Creative Commons licensing and interoperability standards.
- Create cross-border repositories for shared media resources.

CEMCA is well-positioned to guide policy transformation and content innovation across the Commonwealth. By enabling modular, mobile, interactive, and values-based learning supported by coherent policies, CEMCA can unlock new learning pathways and empower youth for the future of work and society.

FEATURE	INITIATIVE 1: SKILLSRISE + LEARNING HUBS	INITIATIVE 2: SKILLBRIDGE VIRTUAL
Focus	Community-supported, hybrid media-based skilling with inclusion emphasis.	Centralised, fully virtual skilling and career navigation platform.
Mode of Delivery	Hybrid (radio, mobile, offline kits, community learning hubs)	Fully digital/virtual (online platform, AI dashboards, mobile-first tools)
Target Learners	SkillsFuture initiative- National lifelong learning strategy- Investment in tech skills.	Broader youth population including urban and semi-urban with basic digital access.
Technology Use	Media-based (radio/WhatsApp), AI for personalisation.	AI-driven dashboards, blockchain-based certification, LMS integration
Credentialing Approach	Micro-credentials issued	Digital certification aligned to NSQF/TVET frameworks; employer-backed badges.
Stakeholder Engagement	High local involvement – NGOs, youth hubs, radio partners, peer facilitators.	High institutional engagement – open universities, SSCs, national job exchanges.
Strengths	High grassroots accessibility, strong community orientation, media leverage.	Scalable, efficient, AI-personalised learning journey, strong industry linkages.
Challenges	Requires local facilitation capacity; high coordination with local partners.	Requires stable digital infrastructure and institutional onboarding for reach.

Comparative Analysis of Strategic Initiative 1 & 2 (Suggested for Internal Consumption only)

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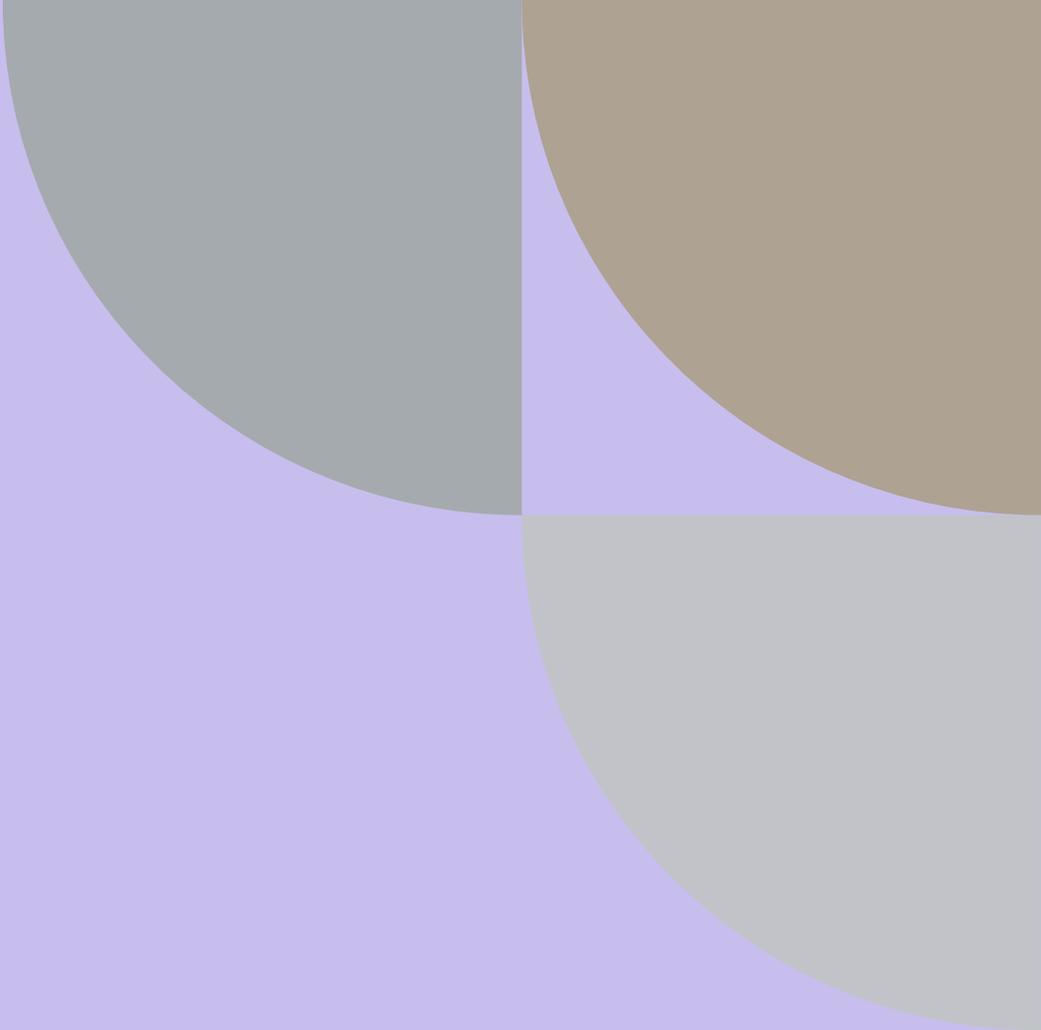
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Appendix B: List of Global Platforms and Initiatives in Youth Skilling and Learning

1. WAYAM (India) – Government-led MOOC platform offering skill and academic courses.
<https://swayam.gov.in>
2. DIKSHA (India) – National digital infrastructure for teachers and learners.
<https://diksha.gov.in>
3. SkillsFuture (Singapore) – National program offering citizens credit for certified upskilling. <https://www.skillsfuture.gov.sg>
4. MySkills (Australia) – Central database for VET courses and providers.
<https://www.myskills.gov.au>
5. Skills for Work (Commonwealth of Learning) – Free online learning initiative focused on employability. <https://www.col.org/programmes/skills-work>
6. Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator (South Africa) – Public-private platform connecting youth to jobs and training. <https://www.harambee.co.za>
7. Ajira Digital Program (Kenya) – Government program to equip youth with digital and freelance skills. <https://ajiradigital.go.ke>
8. TVETA Kenya – National body regulating and promoting TVET in Kenya.
<https://www.tveta.go.ke>
9. SEIP (Bangladesh) – ADB and government-supported initiative for skills training with gender inclusion. <https://seip-fd.gov.bd>
10. Future Skills Centre (Canada) – Canadian hub for innovation in workforce development.
<https://fsc-ccf.ca>
11. TAFE (Australia) – Network of technical and further education providers.
<https://www.tda.edu.au>
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