

Conference in Leipzig, excerpt of the speech delivered by Wolfgang Zagel, HELOG Academy

Vocational training – no time to wait – no time to postpone

Every year a new generation, of young people leaves the high schools and rush to the labor market, in addition to this, over 2 million young people within the age of 30, are already unemployed. Unemployment of the youths quickly may cause a critically effect to the political stability of a nation.

There is no time to wait, there is no time to postpone, and there is even no time to discuss and to develop long reports about this serious situation.

What immediately is needed is a coordinated action to raise funds and engage professional training institutions to take over these tasks.

The government is promoting foreign investments, but any investment requires an educated workforce. There is a simple formula:

No education – No investment - No investment – No economic growth.

For the private sector, for the industry, investment makes no sense when one cannot rely on a well-trained workforce!

Under this premise, Wolfgang Zagel, chairman of Helog Academy in Liberia, introduced the history of the Academy which is located in Shiefflien, 30 km east of Monrovia. He reported about the challenges they faced when setting up this institute, especially the interruption caused by Ebola epidemic, generated a loss of approximately USD 300,000.

But with the efficiency of a former international Aviation operator, Helog Academy restarted the project in mid-2015 and was able to set up the building, the whole organization, recruiting of the students out from 380 applications, as well as the training of the teachers and implementation of the newly developed curriculums within five months. HELOG imported state of the art tooling and equipment and as a novelty is providing a laptop to every single student. In January 2016 the first training course started with 30 students, with the aim to obtain a job certificate as industrial mechanic, after the 18 months training course.

The curriculums are developed following the German Dual system which is successfully implemented for over 60 years in Germany, and is producing a large number of highly qualified young people to the job market. In general it consists of a shared education, partly done in school and workshop and the other part in the industry. Therefore it is important that also the industry has qualified foremen in the companies, who can train the trainees on the job.

However, after six months of operation, HELOG has realized that the training might be too long because Liberia currently needs a high number of qualified workforces to be trained in a shorter period. Helog therefore has developed a special training course, lasting for 12 months and ending in the job title as Maintenance Engineer. This training includes a specialization in the last two months of the training, in servicing heavy machinery, agricultural equipment and other demands from the industry.

HELOG Academy is a very flexible school and is able to implement training courses according to requests from the industry. Because of its standardization of all elements, i.e. training of teachers, modern curriculums, modern training equipment, QM system, handbooks, building structures etc., HELOG meets international standards. In his own statement, Mr. Zagel, believes that in Liberia, HELOG is unbeatable in this field.

This 18 months training course is completely private funded but Helog re-emphasizes, that urgently further funds are required to bring this course to a successful end.

Funding, however, is an important general issue in this vocational training environment. Obviously the pragmatic and highly effective approach as well as the fast implementation of 4 months only from the date of the approval to the first lesson in the school, mainly because of HELOG's long commercial history, is overstraining the systems of the usual donors like EU, World Bank, UN, BMZ and others. With its performance, HELOG sometimes is feeling to appear suspicious to other traditional players. When it comes to funding the preference, unfortunately is still towards the large traditional organizations. I leave the judgment of their performance to the auditors. I by myself haven't seen any institutes and concepts in Liberia being able to compete with our performance in vocational education.

Apart from the traditional funding schemes Helog had to find a new and innovative way. With its industrial DNA profile, HELOG is currently starting a campaign to raise funds to enable the Academy a sustainable existence.

One of HELOG Academy's major tasks is to fill a large gap in education and to generate well-trained future employees. We support the private sector in an extraordinary way but we also expect from the private sector, to support HELOG with its schools in a fair partnership. Our background is the private sector. The private sector is the motor of any economic development; it is the architect and the implementing power of future prosperity of the population.

We at HELOG rely on the responsibility of the private sector, not only to their corporate social responsibility commitment but also to their purely economic interests. To make it short: HELOG

is an initiator of a vocational education pact of the industry, the Helog Academy pact. We invite all responsible companies to join the Pact and to support the HELOG schools with monthly contributions. Of course this is not limited to Liberians companies only; also international and German companies are most welcome to join.

The members can rely on a regular reporting of the performance of the schools, as well as a quarterly report how funds are being used. The pact offers to the member's valuable incentives which are already paying off the contributions. I assure the members that this pact will not be just a chattering platform; it will become a critically but highly efficient organization of the private business to push all efforts in vocational training.

A second line to secure funding for the sustainability of the school is to generate revenues in sales and repair activities. Helog has developed a small solar box for households which come together with the interesting financing concept for the clients. To offer a proper servicing Helog will start a four months training course to train young electricians in solar and photovoltaic technology. With the sale of these solar systems, HELOG is expecting revenues to be used for the school and at the same time being able to offer training courses for interested young people.

A similar project is the offer to hospitals to repair medical equipment. It is also going in line with a six months basic training course for graduated electronic engineers. The repairs will be conducted by specialists, at the same time the students can be trained on the job.

These two above-mentioned commercial approaches are currently in the development stage and are planned to be implemented within the next 2 to 3 months.

We hope that the HELOG campaigns are also drawing attention to the government of Liberia and a significant support would be very much appreciated by HELOG.

We from Helog invite you to regularly visit our website and to sign in for our "Flashlight" newsletter. You will have access to all the news of the Helog engagement in Liberia

Liberia is a beautiful country with friendly and peaceful people who are interested in all opportunities which are helping to improve their living conditions. These people deserve our support, and our attention but also I would like to recommend to you, to take the opportunity and follow the invitation of the Honorary Consul Mr. Kölsch and travel in the Delegation to Liberia to make your experiences by your own.

Thank you very much for your attention.

Wolfgang Zagel