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**WORKING GROUP FOR INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION IN
VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Working Paper No1

***Donor Policies on Technical and Vocational
Education and Training :***

***Presentation of the Working Group and
Comparative analysis and main issues
of the sector policies***

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INTRODUCTION

The *Working Group for International Cooperation in Vocational and Technical Skills Development* was established in 1996. At its second meeting, held in Frankfurt during November 1996, five bilateral agencies presented their current policy positions regarding skills development, summaries of which follow this introduction. A further series of presentations from other donor agencies took place at the third Working Group meeting (London, May 1997). A report on those presentations will be available soon as the second in this new series of discussion papers.

This series of papers is intended to provide summaries of agency policies regarding skills development and think pieces which both provide a flavour of agency discussions and highlight some of the controversies and dilemmas in the field. These papers are intended to facilitate information-sharing and improvements in the operation of development assistance between agencies, but should also be of interest to wider constituencies.

A report on the Frankfurt meeting as a whole has been produced by Michel Carton of NORRAG.

DENMARK

1. Policy Objectives

The main objective of the DANIDA Sector Programme Support strategy is to promote the effective and sustainable reduction of poverty by emphasising national ownership of development efforts, including donor assisted efforts. The national ownership of development efforts should not only be at the central government level, but also appropriately established at regional and local levels.

Denmark has identified three cross-cutting themes which are to be pursued across all levels and sectors of Danish development assistance. These are:

- promotion of women's participation in development processes;
- promotion of environmentally sustainable development; and
- promotion of respect for human rights, democracy and popular participation.

2. From projects to sector support

During the last couple of years DANIDA has changed its approach to development assistance from a project oriented approach to a sector support oriented approach. This strategy implies that the bilateral Danish assistance will be provided mainly to a limited number of sectors (2-4 sectors in each country with which there is cooperation). A sector is defined as a coherent set of activities which need to be looked at together to make a meaningful assessment, and which can be relevantly distinguished in terms of policies, institutions and finances.

Compared to the project approach, the Sector Programme Support strategy is a longer-term framework for broader Danish assistance to a sector. This is to avoid the creation of donor-driven and donor-managed "project islands" where national institutions are not assisted to cope with future responsibilities, and where investments in the projects are unsustainable and out of proportion with

investments in related areas. This means in principle that in the future there will not be a “DANIDA Sector Programme”, but instead DANIDA will support a national sector framework and specific elements of this framework. DANIDA will consequently not perform its “own” projects or programmes in developing countries but support national activities.

3. Conditions for support to TVET

A general condition for assistance to the TVET sector in a specific country is in principle that one of the following conditions is met:

- A TVET policy and strategy is available, or
- policy formulation and strategy planning activities have commenced, or
- local TVET authorities have decided to develop a policy and strategy.

This implies that support proposed or initiated at earlier stages may be discontinued or drastically down-scaled, if a TVET sector review has identified major policy problems for which the solution is outside the scope of the intervention, or where the political will to make adjustments is not demonstrated.

When entering a new cooperation country the first step will typically be a policy dialogue (possibly jointly with other donors) and the first components could be to assist the country concerned to formulate policies and strategies and prepare plans for the sector. These activities could be supplemented with pilot projects of different kinds, including institution building activities.

4. Key elements of potential support to TVET

In supporting development of the TVET sector, DANIDA considers the following elements important for an effectively functioning TVET sector:

- training is organized according to needs;
- stakeholders, including employees' and employers' organizations, are involved in the management of the sector;
- a sustainable mechanism for financing of recurrent and capital costs is developed; and
- training can be shown to cater for the formal as well as for the informal sector.

This strategy has been applied in Tanzania and Zambia for some years, and the results seem to be encouraging. A dialogue for supporting the TVET sector has also been initiated in Eritrea and Malawi. In the above countries, DANIDA support, together with support from other donors, is expected to play an important role in the development of the TVET sector. In other countries smaller involvement is expected within the TVET sector, but the above principles will apply in designing the interventions.

Germany

1. Trends in German assistance to TVET

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has always been and still is of particular importance within the scope of GTZ. Initially, the emphasis of its assistance concentrated on the physical establishment and organisation of training centres for skilled labour. Such a concern included curriculum development, centre management, teacher training and, in exceptional cases, advisory services in system development. In a later period, during the eighties, co-operation was sought with the future employers during the training process and training was oriented more explicitly towards the demands of industry.

2. A differentiated approach

At present, the assistance offered by GTZ is more differentiated. A holistic approach is favoured. This involves advising partners on all levels of planning, co-ordinating and implementing training strategies. Partner agencies of GTZ, to a large extent, remain the local ministries of education, labour or industry, but numerous countries are establishing autonomous organisations for the national co-ordination of TVET. These National Training Authorities allow for a wider participation of other representatives of the society, like employers federations, chambers of commerce and industry, unions and other important actors within the TVET sector.

The differentiated approach also takes into account different target groups and various levels of training. Employment orientation has become a major emphasis not only in the modern sector but also in the informal sector. The latter is where the vast majority of the population in developing countries will find their only chance of employment or income generation.

3. The 1992 sector policy paper

The sector policy paper of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation and Development (BMZ, 1992) was a remarkable milestone with regard to the concepts for future technical assistance in the field of TVET. The sector paper reflects the change of objectives noted above. The following are some of the more important aims of the sector paper and these are accompanied by a brief comment on the degree to which they have already been achieved:

3.1. Linking assistance across levels

In an increasing number of current projects, and in almost each new project, GTZ offers assistance to concepts linking all levels of planning, co-ordination and implementation of TVET and seeks to ensure the inclusion of all important actors in the training system.

3.2. Developing a demand-oriented approach

Sector surveys, including labour market surveys, analyses of the existing training system and tracer studies are instruments applied in the project planning process to identify the skills required and to discover the strengths and weaknesses of the training system. Active participation of employers in the planning and the delivery of TVET is sought to secure that training programmes correspond to the demand of the private sector.

Enterprises of the formal sector of most developing countries are by no means in a position to absorb the increasing demand for employment. The majority of people will have to make a living in the informal sector. The TVET system must react to this situation and although a number of projects offer a larger range of different training programmes, more initiatives are required for the existing training institutions to address a greater variety of target groups, particularly the more disadvantaged.

Integrated approaches and programmes are necessary to prepare individuals for employment or self-employment in the informal sector. GTZ has introduced regional teams comprising the know-

how of various sectors, such as economic policy development, private sector promotion, small-scale enterprise promotion and creation, self-employment, credit and finances and vocational training. After the experiences of special employment-oriented training and promotion programmes for refugees in the Sudan and in Pakistan, GTZ presently supports pilot programmes in Laos and Cambodia and the assistance to an integrated promotion programme in Zambia is about to start.

3.3. Promoting appropriate models of management and finance

GTZ assists an increasing number of countries in reforming their TVET systems (e.g. India, China, Indonesia, Thailand, Philippines, Pakistan, Laos, Botswana, Lesotho, Uganda, Tanzania and Jamaica). Many partners are in the process of establishing autonomous institutions and organisations and are delegating a great part of the responsibilities for the co-ordination and delivery of TVET to these (tri-partite) organisations and to the private sector. At the same time a decentralisation process can be observed in an increasing number of countries.

Financing TVET deserves special attention in a global situation of shortages of public funds. While, in some of the projects, finances are secured by introducing a levy fund, other examples try to delegate cost intensive practical training to the private sector. In many cases this leads to an increase of efficiency and effectiveness of training at the same time. The financing problem in countries of the former Soviet Union is a particular challenge. A special GTZ sector programme organises the exchange of experiences and workshops to work out new concepts for a TVET financing system.

3.4. Integrating gender sensitivity into all TVET activities

Women have always been under-represented among the target groups of TVET support. In order to change this, GTZ has in this sub-sector developed a guideline for planners and field staff containing instruments and strategies for the consideration and integration of women into TVET programmes. It contains

recommendations and examples which refer to job-opportunities for women in different cultural societies and to different stages of the project cycle. (An English version of the guideline is under preparation).

3.5. Making use of existing forms of on-the job training

Existing forms of traditional on-the-job training have largely been neglected in the design of training modes as assistance was concentrated on the formal training system for the formal sector. Considering the wide scope of training actually being performed, the awareness of traditional modes of on-the-job training needs to be increased, particularly with respect to employment opportunities in the informal sector. GTZ is conducting case studies in Zimbabwe and Tanzania to learn about different forms and the coverage of traditional training, non-formal or formal arrangements between the employer, the trainee and his/her parents, and their links to the formal training system.

The experiences GTZ has gained in the great variety of TVET assistance projects already undertaken are thoroughly evaluated both in a project specific context as well as in sector review programmes. In addition, special sector pilot projects enable GTZ to assess previous experiences and to develop further concepts and programmes and thus add to the know-how in this sector.

SWEDEN

1. Introduction

SIDA's policy and strategies can be found in its Policy for Co-operation in Basic Education and Education Reform document. This is presented here along with a recent inventory of Skills Development components in sponsored projects and SIDA's present plans to develop a comprehensive education policy, including the practical aspects of primary education.

2. The Policy for Co-operation in Basic Education and Education Reform.

One of the important objectives of education is to prepare individuals for working life. The dynamics and complexity of the labour market, however, make it difficult to adjust education to market needs. Those who are trained for a certain profession may end up elsewhere professionally. Moreover, both skilled and unskilled workers over time may move between the formal and informal sectors.

It will continue to be important to consider the relationship between what children learn in school, and what skills they need in working life. In addition, whatever these skills may be, it will be important for people to learn how to adapt to new situations and build upon their basic education. Conclusions drawn about what needs to be learnt will affect the present relationship between education and work in developing countries as well as developed countries. Some of the factors in such a decision are listed below:

2.1. Expectations of modern sector employment

Expectations of well paid posts in the public sector or in modern industry have been the main force behind demand for education. As a result, the number of school leavers and higher education graduates far exceeds the number of jobs available in the formal sector.

2.2. The weakness of TVET institutions

Difficulties exist in replicating the conditions of industry in institutions for vocational training due to rapidly changing technology. Reform of vocational and technical education will be necessary, probably with an increased emphasis on general education subjects in preparation for the world of work.

2.3. Recognition of the informal sector

The growing importance of the informal sector affects how education is defined in relation to the world of work. Activities in this sector constitute a large part of the economic activities in the poorest countries.

2.4. The need to consider more than just schooling

It is necessary to consider what should be done in addition to general strengthening of basic education for children and adults. This will lead to a particular exploration of the role of NGOs, and provision outside the field of formal education and training more generally.

3. The Survey of Skills Development Components in Projects 1996.

After the amalgamation of all Swedish government aid agencies into one agency, a survey of all projects/programmes with a skill training component was carried out. The survey included skill training in all vocational areas, both pre-service and in-service training. However, it only included such training if it was done in a planned and organised way. Moreover, support to Eastern Europe and to university-based training was not included in the survey.

The survey revealed that a total of some 243 MSEK (38m US\$) was allocated for skills development components in Swedish development aid during 1996. Out of this, 70 MSEK (10m US\$) was allocated to support for reform of vocational training systems and vocational schools in a total of 17 projects. Support to Skills Development (SD) projects through the Education Division amounted to 22 MSEK (3.5m US\$). Strikingly, it has only the 4th largest level of divisional support to SD. The most important departments or divisions are Health- 112 MSEK (17m US\$), Natural resources- 36 MSEK (5.5m US\$) and Technical Co-operation- 26 MSEK (4m US\$).

The support gives emphasis to in-service training, both specific skills training and management training. Another area for Swedish support is entrepreneurship training. In addition to what is surveyed in the above mentioned report is support through Swedish Non-Governmental Organisations, through the disaster relief funds and through international courses.

It is reasonable to assume that the concentration on in-service training and further education, which is indicated by the survey, will continue. The type of vocational training that will be supported, in most cases, will concern a certain field of work or a certain organization and most probably will be closely related to other activities supported by Swedish development assistance. The necessary co-ordination of activities within such assistance will be met through the normal project preparation work.

4. Development Work on a Policy for Skills Development.

At present SIDA does not have a policy that covers the field of skills development, but it does support a number of projects with skill development components. As indicated above, these are scattered over the whole structure of the agency. In the future a decision will have to be taken centrally regarding the appropriate way to handle issues common to the whole organisation, e.g. policies on project-related training and employment promotion. However, in the area of TVET institution-based (or basic) skills development, a policy proposal will be developed by the Education

Division. The policy work will build on and expand the already existing policy for Co-operation in Basic Education and Education Reform and will deal with the issues of practical training in basic education, the relevance of basic education in preparation for the world of work, and connections between basic education and skills training.

Among the issues that the Education Division will look into during the development work are the following:

4.1. Making primary education more relevant

In what way can the primary school curricula be made more relevant for all students that pass through primary education? Some 80% of students in the developing countries do not continue schooling after primary school. Have their needs for a relevant curriculum been sufficiently accounted for? Should the curriculum perhaps contain practical elements not present today?

4.2. Getting the balance right in Non-Formal Education and Training

Many adults and youth in developing countries do not learn basic reading skills in schools but in non-formal training programmes. Do their training programmes contain the appropriate mixture of basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills compared to basic practical training? Are there lessons to be learnt for primary education from what is done in practical training in non-formal education?

4.3. Training for retrainability

In the developed world, youth are prepared for a world of work for which they need to be retrainable over their entire life span. Any worker will have to be prepared to change profession as job opportunities alter. This normally means a prolonged and more theoretical preparation for the world of work or in some cases a wider basic practical training. In fact it means that training should provide the students with a platform for further training. The

crucial question in such a context becomes the composition of this platform.

4.4. Preparing school leavers for self-employment

In many of Sweden's countries of cooperation, job creation in public and private enterprises does not match the number of graduates from the school systems. For these school graduates an alternative would be self-employment. Are there therefore ways of preparing them for self employment by including a certain range of skills in their preparation at school?

4.5. Supporting training materials production

Training material provision for practical subjects in prevocational training is also an issue of concern. Demand for textbooks for specialised training tends to be rather small and, therefore, the field has limited interest to commercial publishers. What are the possibilities for donors to support this special field?

4.6. Agreeing on the same concepts

Many different ways of describing the concepts of practical training exist. Almost all the donors use different concepts. Therefore, it is necessary to try to define and categorize these different concepts.

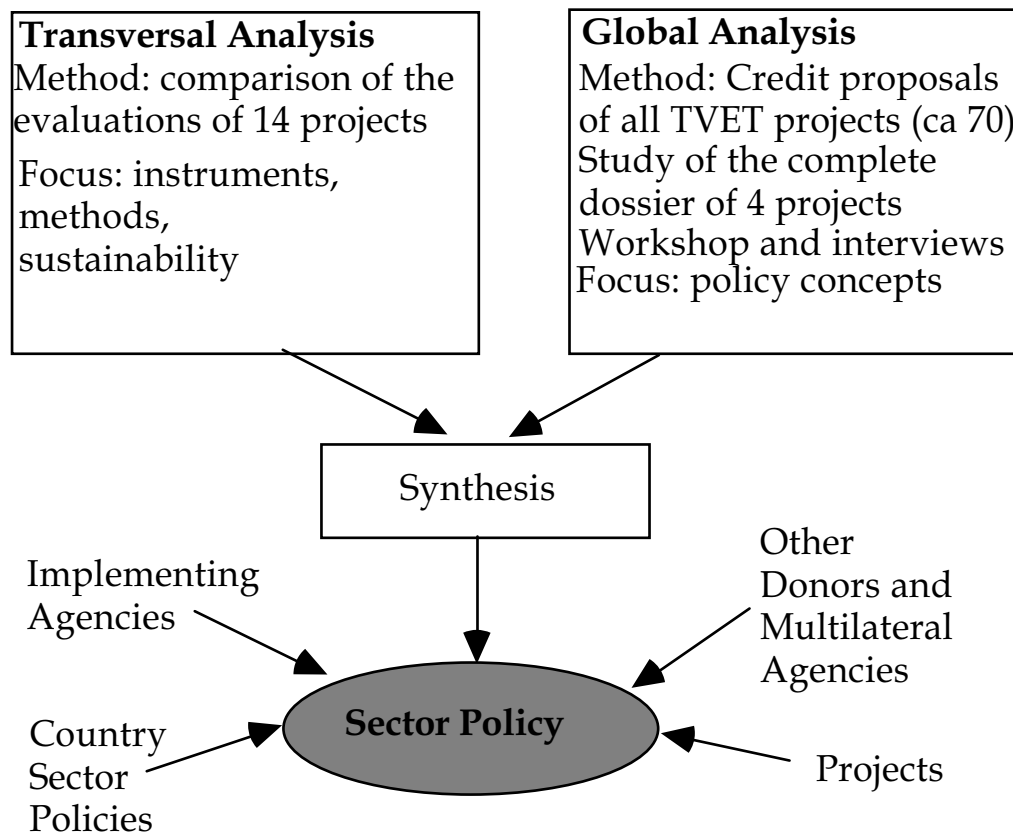
SWITZERLAND

1. Introduction

As in many other agencies, the programmes of SDC emerged from individual projects and interventions. The programme perspective, and even more so the perspective that a programme is more than the sum of individual projects, is a comparatively new perception. To-day, sector policies are compulsory instruments in Swiss development assistance. Their development and monitoring is a major task of the respective sectoral services and their form is prescribed at the level of the operational manual of SDC.

The broad field of technical education and vocational training continues to be a centre of gravity for SDC, as about 15% of the total spending is directed towards the sector.

2. The Sector Policy development process



The above diagram illustrates the complex process involved in the development of the sector policy. It started with two major studies, followed by a synthesis and the formulation of the sector policy, which in turn again was influenced by the development in other donor and multilateral agencies, by projects, by implementing agencies and even through simultaneous endeavours in individual countries to develop a country sector policy.

3. The synthesis paper- main issues

Questions and recommendations of the synthesis paper were as follows:

- A decision on the appropriate level of potential interventions (post-primary, secondary, post-secondary, tertiary) ought to be taken;
- The appropriateness of projects and programmes within the local context should be carefully examined;
- There is no universally applicable, single best way or model of a vocational training system. Thus, the use of different approaches and instruments is indicated;
- Though some centres of excellence are quite successful, a question mark should be put around an approach based on support for such centres;
- TVET interventions should become more employment-oriented and thus contribute towards poverty alleviation;
- In addition to co-operation with government partners, co-operation with other partners ought to be investigated;
- Co-operative forms of vocational training ought to be promoted;
- Interventions should include the different levels (micro, meso and macro) and thus include a policy dialogue.

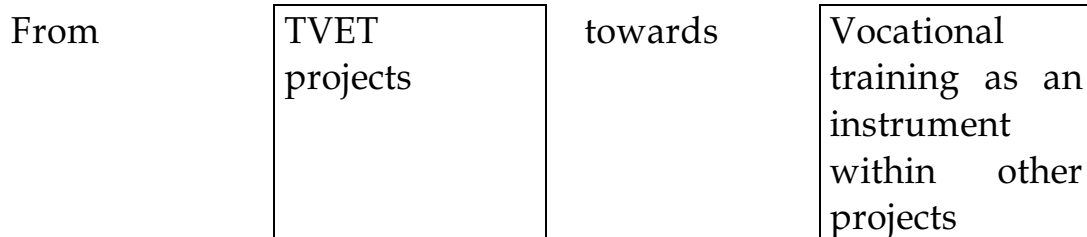
4. Orientation of the sector policy

On the basis of the above recommendations, the sector policy for TVET was formulated. It centres on two principal objectives:

- vocational and personal qualification of craft and other workers in the SME sector; and
- TVET oriented to disadvantaged target groups in the informal sector.

The sector policy also implies the following trends:

| | | | |
|------|---|---------|--------------------------------|
| From | Modernis-ation strategies | towards | Employment orientation |
| From | Centres of excellence | towards | Co-operative training forms |
| From | Education | towards | Skills training |
| From | Government partners | towards | NGOs Employers Associations |
| From | Formal training | towards | Non-formal training |
| From | Male dominated vocations in the modern sector | towards | Gender balanced approaches |
| From | Individual projects | towards | TVET systems |



These are developmental trends and a general orientation, but they do not constitute a complete shift in priorities and practices. SDC still supports formal training and continues to co-operate with government partners, in particular at the policy level.

5. Implementation

The sector policy only was approved in 1994 and the experiences thus far are not yet highly conclusive. Nevertheless it can be indicated that the re-orientation of country programmes has started and the following trends are noteworthy:

- Interventions at the tertiary level, except for instructor training, are gradually being reduced;
- In an increasing number of projects, in particular within small enterprise promotion programmes, vocational training activities have been introduced as an instrument;
- Co-operation with a variety of new partners (associations, training centres, NGOs, employers) has been initiated;
- More effort is put into policy dialogue and into the support of vocational training systems as a whole;
- Individual country sector programs have been re-oriented accordingly and new projects are being formulated along the lines of the new sector policy.

UNITED KINGDOM

1. Aims and responsibilities

The Education Division in ODA¹ is responsible for advice on all matters relating to education including technical and vocational education and training (TVET). ODA adopted a new “mission statement” in 1995, the purpose of which is to “improve the quality of life of people in poor countries by contributing to sustainable development and reducing poverty and suffering”. To this end ODA aims to:

- encourage sound development policies, efficient markets and good government;
- help people achieve better education and health and widen opportunities- particularly for women;
- enhance productive capacity and conserve the environment;
- promote international policies for sustainable development and enhance the effectiveness of multilateral development institutions.

2. The Education Division’s Existing Policy on Skills Development

The Education Division has produced a policy document, *Aid to Education in the 90s*, (1992) which states that “in essence the policy involves a modification of current support to lay increased emphasis on the provision of basic education (including adult literacy and non formal), and on education management and planning. However, the overall increase should not involve neglect of other levels and areas of education...”.

Tertiary education is recognised as essential within the policy, for academic and economic development, but aid to the tertiary sub-sector as a whole will not be a major strand of ODA’s policy for

¹ As of May 1997 the ODA has become the Department for International Development (DfID).

global assistance to education. With reference to TVET, the paper states that: “Technical and vocational education and training at tertiary level will be appraised on a country specific basis taking into account labour market demand for its graduates as well as its efficiency and provision of access.”

3. Priorities and Geographical Coverage

Priority in relation to TVET has changed in the past ten years. ODA does not now normally invest in “diversified” education or vocational training at school level (the exception is in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, under the Know How Fund). The emphasis has been on post-school TVET including higher education. There is investment however in relation to “technology” and enterprise education at the school level.

Geographical coverage in terms of projects being implemented has shifted since 1992. Involvement in projects in Africa, including North Africa, has been reduced such that the area is not now one of major activity. There has been increased activity in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, and continuing activity on the Indian sub-continent and in the Far East. The result of the change in priorities has been a reduction of about 40% in the number of TVET projects, with a reduction by nearly 80% in sub-Saharan Africa.

The ODA continues to place a major emphasis on research in the field of TVET. Six research projects in this field have been completed during the past few years, concerned with:

- Reducing the Costs of TVET
- Distance Education in Engineering
- Education and Training for the Informal Sector
- Labour Market Signals and Indicators
- In-Service Support for a Technological Approach to Science Education

- Education and Training of Artisans in the Informal Sector in Tanzania.

(the final reports of all of these projects are available free from the ODA)

4. The Future

Within the framework of the four aims referred to above, TVET straddles the first and the second, but perhaps has a stronger relationship in operational terms to aim 3 - the enhancement of productive capacity and conservation of the environment. However, the influence of general education on productive capacity and the environment needs no emphasis.

The Education Division is about to begin a review of policy as laid down in the 1992 document. This will inevitably be written with the four aims in mind and will probably be planned around these four aims. It is not possible to indicate what the process will lead to, but it is unlikely that the role of TVET in the emergent policy will be less than at present.

A major change to TVET policy is an increased emphasis on the importance of training for the informal sector. A measure of the change is the agreement within the Education Division to fund a major research project on the informal sector, an initiative which has resulted in the largest commitment of research funds on one project to date in the Education Division. This emphasis has in part been influenced by two papers referred to above on Artisan Training in Tanzania and Training for the Informal Sector.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND MAIN ISSUES OF THE SECTOR POLICIES

The donor positions presented above make clear both the commonalities and divergences that characterise bilateral donor views and strategies regarding assistance for skills development. Common experiences and the influence of widely disseminated research; meetings such as the Education for All conference in Jomtien (and the mid-term review follow-up in Amman); and structures such as the Association for the Development of African Education, have all encouraged considerable commonality of outlook and approach. On the other hand, the specific experiences and viewpoints of Britain, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Switzerland have ensured significant divergence in emphasis. In the next few pages some of the most important points of both commonality and divergence will be highlighted.

1. Evolving best practice

One of the first points to emerge from a reading of the five outlines which follow is that Skills Development is an area of donor activity where recent years have seen considerable changes in what is considered to be best practice. Although not every donor has moved along the same path at the same pace, the Danish and Swiss presentations give a particularly fine flavour of the shifts that have been going on. Of these, the move from a project focus (and the creation of “project islands”) towards programmatic and sectoral concerns is perhaps the most important.

However, this process, like others, should not be overstated. For instance, the Swiss sector policy notes that “international experience has demonstrated that successful [TVET] programmes have evolved from modest project beginnings” (23). This seems to hold out a continued role for the project as a source of innovative potential in the TVET field.

This is a very important point that must be emphasised in relation to donor strategies. Support for national policy and the avoidance of project islands are positive steps. In particular, they highlight

the need for sustainability and replicability. These concerns have been felt to be too often absent from donor assistance in the past.

However, arguably much of what has been best in donor support has been contained within the small innovative project. Such projects offer a source for learning that is unlikely to be there in the sector policy approach. An important challenge, therefore, is that of wedding the sectoral approach with continued support for innovation and rigorous piloting. Danish policy, for instance, talks about a limited continued support of this kind, but whether there is sufficient commitment across the agencies is unclear.

1.1. A shifting focus- regions and levels

Another shift of importance is in the range of countries for which assistance can be considered. Here, two forces seem particularly pertinent. First, the reduced budgetary levels typical amongst bilateral agencies have led to a concentration of focus, often on the poorest countries (evident, for example, in the UK's shift in overall assistance announced in 1996). Second, the collapse of the Soviet bloc at the end of the 1990s has resulted in a new grouping of recipient countries.

Crucially, these countries are at very different levels of socio-economic development than many traditional recipients, as well as having very different existing education and training systems. Of particular importance for those engaged in skills development activities are the large vocational training systems of many of these countries. As the UK position paper below notes, this has resulted in very different strategies of support to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) in these countries than are the norm for other regions such as Africa.

A shift in focus can also be seen with regard to the level within the TVET system for which support is available. The United Kingdom, for instance, is withdrawing largely from supporting TVET at the secondary school level. The burden of evidence seems to point towards training activities being more properly located at the post-school level. This of course in many countries has to be

supplemented by provision for the many potential clients who have little or no formal education. It is also worth noting that post-school generally does not include university level offerings. Sweden, for instance, excluded university-based provision from its 1996 survey of TVET support activities.

1.2. Towards national policies

As was noted above, a crucial shift in bilateral practice has occurred, leading to a focus on the development of national strategies for skills development. Both the Danish and German positions place emphasis on support for the development of a national policy process, although Denmark expresses a preference for supporting countries in which such a process has already resulted in a national strategy. A key element in the development of such strategies in many countries has been the establishment of national training authorities, and this is a concept which appears to find widespread donor support.

1.3. Ownership and conditionality

In the eyes of these bilaterals, the involvement of stakeholders is crucial in the development and maintenance of a national training strategy (although the degree of particular bilateral emphasis on this may perhaps be related to the place of stakeholder politics in their own countries). At the heart of this concern from the agency community is a desire to promote national ownership of skills development policy. Although not strongly represented in the presentations tabled here, the Frankfurt meeting did consider this issue critically.

There is an apparent tension in current donor language between this concern for local ownership and a tendency to stress an ever greater list of conditionalities upon which development assistance is dependent. As the donors are well aware, even this call for national ownership by a wide stakeholder community could itself be seen as an intrusive conditionality, particularly in countries which have weak traditions in this regard.

This tension in the notion and realisation of “ownership” appears to arise in part from the dual rationale that it is possible to deduce for local ownership. On the one hand, it appears to be part of a genuine donor concern that policy decisions should be authentically embedded in local cultures and value systems (stressed, for instance, in the Swiss sector policy). On the other hand, however, there is still an extent to which embeddedness is prized primarily for its efficacy in ensuring policy implementation. In the latter case, it also raises the equally two-edged debate on sustainability.

Those present in Frankfurt were also concerned with the often large gap that seemed to exist between the language spoken by the donor agencies and that of the country politicians, officials and stakeholders with whom discussions on assistance take place.

Equally, the potential power imbalance present in the donor-recipient relationship was seen as making local ownership of the assistance process problematic. However, in this regard it was noted that some of the more economically successful recipients (sometimes at the start of their own careers as donors, it should be noted) have shown a greater ability to take control of the training strategy development process.

2. Donor priorities

Support for policy development and implementation can be made problematic if the decisions made during the development phase, with donor support, run contrary to other priorities of the donors when it comes to the implementation phase. Moreover, it was noted that the desire of several agencies to build up long-term relationships with recipients as part of the process of developing national sector policies potentially could fall foul of their own governments’ requirements with respect of funding cycles and mechanisms. Such requirements often place an emphasis on short financial commitments (often a single year) and on swift disbursement of funds. Both of these may be inimical to long-term relationships based on careful development of local agendas. Given the capital intensive nature of skills development

interventions, such concerns may be even more apparent in this area of cooperation than is the case elsewhere.

2.1. TVET and basic education

It is of little surprise that another main concern of the donors represented here was the link between their work in skills development and the priority area of basic education. The Swedish position paper is the most explicit in this regard. It notes that the relationship between skills development and training institutions, on the one hand, and education and schools, on the other, is of central importance in development assistance strategies.

It was evident in the discussion that surrounded the presentations in Frankfurt that there continues to be a concern that basic education is not addressed in a sufficiently critical or broad manner. This is not particularly remarkable, given the concerns raised even in the Amman Affirmation with the narrowness of some interpretations of basic education.

2.2. Preparation for work

The Swedish contribution also makes clear the need to consider the impact of basic education in terms of relevance, expectations and preparation for the world of work. Such a concern leads us into an area in which there does seem to be significant divergence in donor positions. Some donors have been strongly associated with the notion that academic education is the most relevant preparation for the world of work (and this position appears to be supported to an extent by the UK's shift away from diversified and vocational schooling - except in Eastern Europe). However, the Swedish position seems to indicate a reluctance to move this far away from a role for some form of vocational preparation. It is important to note that here the Swedish stance is intended to cover both formal and non-formal education. In respect of the latter, it would appear to sit well with the concerns of others such as the Swiss.

The Swedish paper also asks us to consider critically the ways in which the formal education system prepares its graduates for the informal economy. This is particularly pertinent given the interest shown in all the other donor papers with skills development for the informal sector.

This interest in enhanced preparation for the informal sector has been present in donor formulations for quite a while now. However, during the 1990s this has increased and diversified. As well as the above concern of Sweden with formal education's role in such preparation (seen also in the UK's research interests), there has been a growing interest in the reorientation of formal training towards this aim, and a continuing concern with developing more sophisticated means of supporting and intervening within "informal" training systems. Although much of this work has been promoted by multilateral agencies such as the International Labour Office and the World Bank, there is additionally a clear bilateral interest and involvement from the German and Swiss agencies in particular.

The Swedish paper also is valuable in its highlighting of the current international debates about the changing nature of work. Given the apparent shift away from jobs for life (even in the much vaunted Japanese employment system), the Swedish contribution points to the need to consider the most appropriate form(s) of education and training for retrainability. This concern is less apparent in the presentations of the other bilaterals. The Danish sector policy for instance places the greatest emphasis on the fulfilment of "immediate labour market demands for skill" (9). In this regard we should also point to research in this field recently commissioned by the UK (see above).

2.3. TVET and gender

Many of the other concerns expressed in the position papers below have become well-established during the 1990s. Gender concerns, for instance, have led the Germans and Swiss to develop new policy documents on this aspect of their support to skills development. This issue is seen as vitally important in the

statements of the other donors too. Here, the discussions in Frankfurt made it clear that many of the problems in promoting female skills development lay outside the training system, either in employment practices or in broader societal attitudes, structures and norms.

2.4. Other donor priorities

A range of other concerns were raised by these five agencies. A better dialogue with NGOs was also seen as important, particularly in the Swiss statement. Environmental concerns were highlighted in the Danish and UK positions and can be found in the sector policies of other agencies. The importance of sustainability, both managerial and financial, was also emphasised in the Danish contribution. The imperative to make training more demand-oriented was another of these now well-known themes, although here Sweden acknowledges the very real limitations of such an approach that result from the complexity and dynamism of markets. The call for demand-led training position is closely linked to a call for more on-the-job training, and this is reflected explicitly in the German contribution. However, as the Swedish presentation notes, there will continue to be a need for assistance to vocational training institutions, not least because of the weaknesses their critics have identified.

3. Policy articulation

As well as this range of what may be termed substantive issues, the presentations also raised a number of more procedural concerns. Given the nature of the working group, the most significant of these is the issue of policy articulation. The presentations, and the policy documents behind them, point to three different levels at which articulation of donor policies should be addressed.

3.1. Articulation within agencies

The first level is the intra-agency level. As several agencies note (e.g. Switzerland) skills development has both a sectoral and a vectoral approach. That is to say, there are both programmes located within the education and training sector and others where training is instrumental to activities in another sector whether that be health, water or agriculture. The challenge for these agencies lies in trying to ensure that common principles and strategies govern the range of such skills development interventions. Clearly this is an area in which agency staff whose primary responsibility is in the field of skills development can play a central role.

Intra-agency policy articulation is also evident in UK's emphasis on its four aims and the recent development of inter-disciplinary groups within the agency to coordinate efforts towards their achievement. In such a coordination process TVET specialists necessarily will have a less central role than in the above model. The German decision to merge their vocational training and small enterprise development administrations of course imposes a different logic on the process.

3.2. Articulation between donors to SD

There is also the level of inter-agency articulation within a particular field of activity, in this case, skills development. Both the presentations and the discussions in Frankfurt fought shy of the term "coordination" as this was seen as potentially disempowering both for donors and recipients (see the appendix for a flavour of this). Rather, the importance of light structures, such as this working group, through which concerns and experiences could be disseminated, was stressed.

The move towards support for national policy strategies, noted earlier in this commentary, gives impetus to such trends. In the vision of support to the development of national policies contained in the Danish paper, we can detect a strong emphasis on the desirability of donor cooperation in facilitation.

3.3. Articulation across agencies and across disciplines

The third level at which articulation can occur spans both disciplinary and agency divides. The interest in the informal sector shown by the donors presenting at Frankfurt indicates one obvious theme around which cooperation is possible. Here cooperation is facilitated by the existence of a similar donor group for small enterprise development (again, see the appendix). Although some way in the future, those present at Frankfurt pointed to the desirability of formal interactions with that group. Also in the future might be dialogues with other disciplinary areas.

4. Conclusion

Central to the activities of the Working Group for International Cooperation in Vocational and Technical Skills Development is the notion of dialogue. The quality of the interactions in Frankfurt and the support for the notion of further such meetings, including within them presentations from other bilaterals, is indicative of the extent to which the notion of dialogue is falling on fertile ground. The above discussions also point to the challenges ahead for the process of dialogue.

In relations with partner countries there is an awareness of the need to promote local ownership. Dialogue is central to this: between donors, with governments, and with/between relevant social actors. Dialogue within and between agencies, and within and across disciplinary specialisms are also key concerns and commitments of the bilateral policies presented here. The importance of dialogue with NGOs and other potential delivery agencies equally has been noted. All these avenues of dialogue present major challenges and progress will not be a simple matter. Nonetheless, the Frankfurt meeting was a step in the right direction. It is for the working group in its future meetings to build on this beginning.

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This (and the papers mentioned in the policy overview) is available from:

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