

**NORRAG SPECIAL SESSION 4:  
“BRIDGING RESEARCH AND POLICY  
DEVELOPMENT”**



**THREE COMMENTS ON THE MAIN WORKING DOCUMENT**

**Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training:  
A comment from Latin America**

**Claudio de Moura Castro, Bel Horizonte, Brazil**

This is an ambitious paper, trying to cover all fronts of TVET, for the entire world. It broaches a broad perspective but has difficulties in being sufficiently specific, to be of help to individual countries. Perhaps this is inevitable.

The paper touches on several critical issues and suggests future directions. In that respect, it is an admirable synthesis. However it is much stronger on what to do than on how to do it. Like most documents of this nature, it underplays the difficulties, contradictions and dilemmas. The three lenses are a good metaphor, but the bitter tradeoffs between them are not spelled out.

In particular, it is a bit misleading when suggesting that TVET can be a major help to the chronic unemployment problems found almost everywhere. This is an old theme where most experts never hid their skepticism.

It also glorifies planning, coordination and integration, ignoring the persistent difficulties in bringing together organizations with diverse and contradictory agendas and cultures. Being such a daunting challenge, it seems to this author that it is better to focus efforts on the truly critical requirements of articulation and forget the ideals of everybody talking and joining forces.

Latin America remains a region dominated by the (relatively) independent training systems, funded by a levy on the payroll. Hence, the discussion of its problems needs to be grounded on the essential split between them and whatever training and education ministries of education offer. Most critical issues cannot ignore it when addressed. Even the term TVET can be misleading, as training tends to be separated from technical education. It also ignores the motley proprietary training institutions, mushrooming all around.

Latin American training systems have had persistent difficulties in catering to significant proportions of those who are in the informal sector. Much has been tried and little achieved - at the massive scale required. By the same token, programs catering to the dispossessed show disappointing results. The paper offers scant guidance on these matters.

TVET offered by the systems under the ministries of education have persistently put unprepared teachers in workshops, instead of real professionals. But amateurs cannot prepare professionals. Without seriously addressing the legal and cultural constraints in choosing and paying experienced instructors, the quality issues will remain dramatic.

The use of ICT depends much on the nature of the institutions. Academic schools have had disappointing experiences with it, in contrast to training institutions, the mushrooming Lan Houses of the region and increasing private ownership of computers.

To sum up, this paper widens the discussion of TVET and offers new and interesting paths. But given the peculiarities of Latin America, the guidance offered loses some of its vitality. It remains too generic and underplays the difficulties in moving along the suggested lines.

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## **Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training A Comment from Asia**

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UNESCO has produced a brief 28 page main working document for the Third International Congress, probably in anticipation of a longer full-length report to appear after the Congress. The main working document has three parts: Global Development and their Implications for TVET; Analytical Policy Areas, Challenges and Advancing Frontiers; and Partnerships for Training TVETs. It is a surprisingly tame document for what is only the third ever International Congress on TVET.

The document makes a few important points, which are empirically well-founded in Part One. One, it notes that during the present decade the working age population will increase globally by around 600 million. Increased working age population is a major challenge for skill provision. Second, it recognizes that over 1999-2008 global GDP increased by 47%, but global unemployment declined only from 6.4 to 5.7%. Some of this unemployment must be due to a mismatch between supply and demand of skills. Third, it notes that time series data suggests that successive waves of innovation have had a duration which has become shorter over time. As a result, the workforce needs not only specialist skills, but workers also have to acquire generic skills needed to adapt quickly to new technologies. Finally, an important fact the document recognizes is the rising demand for secondary education as 88% of children enrolled in primary reached the last grade of education in 2009. Hence, secondary education must grow. As secondary education grows, so must secondary TVET expand.

A global report usually tends to avoid making any statements in regard to country or region. As a former chief economist of the global Human Development Report, I recall the difficulties of generalising across widely varying country situations. This main working document suffers from the additional problem that it is barely 28 pages long. Hence it can appear so general and so sweeping in its general comments that it loses any value that it otherwise might have had. For instance, Part 2 uses three analytical lenses: economic, equity and the transformative lenses. It remains entirely unclear how these three lenses add value to the 10 policy areas that Part 2 then goes on to discuss. It leaves a sense that there may be more in the longer report than this executive summary has been unable to capture.

At least for the rather fast growing Asian economies, the policy areas that it emphasizes have been articulated in rather exhortatory manner: “social goals of TVET”, “inclusive TVET”, “empowering learners”, and “modernizing TVET”. Unfortunately, however, in the few paras devoted to each of these 10 policy areas, there is precious little serious content for the policy makers who will be collecting in Shanghai for a jamboree in mid May, 2012. One of the defining characteristics of successful TVET programmes is the extremely close articulation of private sector

employers with the provision of TVET. The main working document barely even begins to recognize that in many countries in the world the absence of this private sector engagement is a serious problem. In the past TVET systems around the world have been mainly supply-driven, and relied upon public sector provisioning of TVET. The document notes the fact that there is now recognition in countries of the need for demand-driven TVET, but there is little recognition in the document that private sector involvement in TVET leaves much to be desired, certainly, but not only, in Asia. The one page devoted to Partners for Transforming TVET (Part 3 of the main working document) barely makes passing reference to private sector employers' responsibilities and roles in the future. This is far and away the most important challenge facing the expansion of TVET in a large country and the second fastest growing large economy in the world, India.

Moreover, Part 2 recognises the need for more TVET teachers and trainers, but hardly comes up with serious alternatives to the current model of providing trainers and instructors for TVET. TVET systems, certainly in South Asia, are straining to find instructors in the required numbers and the requisite quality. Private industry should be willing to provide such instructors, but practical modalities have to be found to ensure that employers come forward themselves to provide such trainers from industry in their own interest. The main working document has little to say on such important issues.

Asian economies are among the fastest growing and diversifying economies of the world. The centre of gravity of the world economy is shifting to Asia. The implication is that not only will the workforce expand most importantly in Asia but demand for skills will also grow fastest. The section on financing TVET (in Part 2) has rather little to say in the half page devoted to it. It could have made a signal contribution by pointing to the need for ear-marked taxes to finance training funds which have emerged in 63 countries around the world. The experience with them could have been briefly summarized.

Finally, there are legal lacunae in many countries trying to re-build their TVET systems. If TVET is to be aspirational (which it currently is not) it needs to ensure joint certification of skills by private and public bodies, so that employers can safely employ graduates of the TVET system, since the public-only certification system of the last half century has proven to be less than trustworthy in terms of the quality of training and its practical utility from the view point of employers. However, legal systems in many Asian and other countries currently do not provide for the kind of joint certification that has been practiced for some time in both developed (e.g. Germany) and emerging market economies (e.g. Malaysia). Without legal backing for such joint certification the public-only system of certification may continue to leave the graduates of the TVET system high and dry after their training is over, in other words, without employment.

UNESCO has unfortunately, missed a major opportunity to reach out to policy makers at such a major event where it would have access to the eyes and ears of important policy makers from around the world.

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## **Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training: How Many Skills for Work and Life?**

**Kenneth King, Editor *NORRAG News***

The challenge of the Third International Congress on TVET in Shanghai is on how to transform TVET so that it offers 'skills for work and for life'. In other words, conceptualising how skills do relate to work and to life is central to the messages of this main working document for Shanghai. This short commentary will focus on how this Report actually uses the key word 'skills'.

Despite the sub-title of the Report for Shanghai: 'Building skills for work and life', the main text does not use the term 'work skills' at all, and only uses 'life skills' twice.

Beyond this, it uses many different terms for discussing skills needed in the transforming of TVET. Here is a listing of the main terms from amongst the 84 times skills are mentioned in some 20 pages of text: Life skills; vocational

and entrepreneurial skills; transferable skills; foundation skills; generic skills; pedagogical skills; technical skills; ICT skills; interpersonal skills; specialist skills; basic skills; literacy and numeracy skills; specialist skills; occupation-specific skills; skills for cultural industries; cross-cutting skills; skills for youth employment; citizenship skills; low-skills.

The challenge for the policy makers in Shanghai, who are principally from Ministries of Education, is to know what skills are required, in what combinations, in different levels of both general education and vocational education.

An analysis of most of the skill terms mentioned above would lead us to the following breakdown into the four groups:

- A) Foundation skills, basic skills, literacy and numeracy skills
- B) Transferable skills, generic skills, interpersonal skills
- C) Vocational skills, technical skills, specialist skills, occupation-specific skills
- D) Entrepreneurial skills

This categorisation still leaves out skills for youth employment, pedagogical skills, citizenship skills, skills for cultural industries, low-skills, and that very slippery concept, life skills.

Our preliminary breakdown above into A, B, C and D would suggest that the first group of basic skills (A) are essential in all levels of general education, but they are also essential in vocational education, and in work-based learning.

Equally, the second category (B), which is often termed soft skills (a term not used in this Report), is also essential in all levels of general education. But also is vital in the workplace according to most employers, whether small, medium or large-scale.

Thirdly, category C which is often thought, wrongly, to be all that TVET is really concerned with, is located in vocational streams of general secondary schools and separate vocational schools and colleges. But these skills are also massively present in the progressive workplace.

Fourthly, category D – entrepreneurial skills – is analytically distinct from the other three. It is closer to the conative or attitudinal domain than the cognitive, but it too needs the support of all the other three skills categories.

What do we learn in the Shanghai Main Working Document about the location of these many categories of skills and in what combinations they are to be found? The answer is not very much. However for the crucially important informal sector of the economy which provides the bulk of work-based training in many developing countries, we hear the following comment about their lack of most of the main categories of skill just discussed:

“There is also a skills mismatch in the informal sector, which includes a lack of basic literacy and numeracy skills, broader life skills, vocational and entrepreneurial skills and citizenship skills.” (p. 10)

What do we learn in the Report about the skills in general and vocational secondary education? We don't hear specifically about skills mixes in this vital sub-sector, but we do hear that there is a blurring of the line between general and vocational education, leading to forms of ‘hybridisation’. What this means for our different skills categories is not clear.

Finally, what is there in the Report about the skills in the all-important sector beyond schools, - in the vocational training institutes, vocational training centres etc? These institutions are not mentioned in the Report, and nor is vocational training mentioned apart from its being included in the term, TVET.

In terms of history, this is a pity. At the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education in Seoul in 1999, one of the major changes in the Congress Recommendations was the addition of the letter T (Training) to TVE, and the final recommendation was to develop in close collaboration with ILO ‘a common concept of Technical and Vocational Education and Training’.

Arguably, this common concept implies **transforming** the current fragmentation of TVET in different ministries (particularly Labour and Education) and creating a genuine national partnership across ministries and across the public and private sectors.

Furthermore, a suggested hierarchy or typology of the terminology of skills used in this Main Working Document could have been very useful, set against the different locations for skills development in formal education, formal training and the formal and informal workplaces.