

A Technical and Vocational Education and Training Strategy for UNESCO. A Background Paper

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We do not really know how we are doing on skills, because we have not figured out properly how to define them and measure them, Nick Burnett, Assistant Director-General, Education, UNESCO, Gaitskell Lecture, 22 May 2008, University of Nottingham

Summary

This outline review of issues for the UNESCO TVET strategy covers the crucial normative dimension of skills, capacities and qualifications; the role of new upstream policy analytic work on skills development; the concerns with capacity, critical mass and a skills development community of practice; the statistical challenge of skills development data; and the relation of these suggestions to the current draft of UNESCO's Programme and Budget for 2010-2011.

BACKGROUND, METHOD, HISTORY AND CONTEXT

During the 179th session of the Executive Board of UNESCO in April 2008, at the request of Germany and with the very strong support of many member states, there was a decision to develop a UNESCO Strategy for TVET. It was suggested that such a Strategy could include: the scope, fields of action, and vital aspects of TVET, such as its linkages to employment and self-employment; the UNESCO role in country-specific TVET needs assessment and consultation, as well as complementarity with other providers; the dissemination of best practices in TVET in different training locations, in both the formal and informal sectors; the integration of TVET into secondary education; and finally a review of the internal coherence of the present configuration of TVET staffing and financial resources across different UNESCO units, sections and offices.

A consultation process with some of the key stakeholders has been underway since early August 2008, initiated appropriately through a discussion in Bonn with the German Commission for UNESCO and supportive German organizations. Consultations followed with DFID, GTZ and BMZ. At the end of August there was a small expert meeting held, again in Bonn, but hosted by UNEVOC. In early September there was a formal exchange with a significant number of the permanent delegations to UNESCO, hosted by the German Ambassador to UNESCO. Discussions followed with the ILO in Geneva and the European Training Foundation (ETF) in Turin. At the end of September there was a consultation with the Leadership Group of UNESCO (Education),¹ and a meeting with the OECD. In November, there were discussions with the World Bank, UNICEF and USAID; and an internal UNESCO consultation was carried out within the framework of the International Conference on Education in Geneva, as well as a formal presentation about the progress on the strategy to one of its working sessions. There was a further expert

¹ King, K. 'The momentum towards a UNESCO TVET Strategy', 29th September 2008.

meeting held in Bonn in early January 2009 which captured reactions from a wide range of member states as well as from bilateral and multilateral agencies. There was also an intensive series of face-to-face and email exchanges with those who have been responsible, at different points in the last two decades, for the leadership of education or one of its sub-sectors in UNESCO. Drawing on the reports, papers² and discussions from the Bonn meeting, as well as its own resources, UNESCO Headquarters will develop a Draft Strategy which will be presented to the 181st Session of the Executive Board in April 2009.

UNESCO's earlier TVET policies and strategies

UNESCO is not starting from scratch in 2008 in developing a TVET strategy for the organisation. There are many basic strategic assumptions made by UNESCO about technical and vocational education (TVE) embedded in the *Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education* of 1962 (revised 1974 and 2001), and in the *Convention on Technical and Vocational Education* of 1989; their primary purpose has been to seek to influence the policies and strategies of member states.³ Equally in the 'Establishment of an international long-term programme for the development of technical and vocational education' after the 1999 Seoul Congress, it was confidently anticipated that the Seoul Recommendations on TVE would duly become the 'core of a new UNESCO global strategy for TVE' (UNESCO, 1997a). There is even a full document from the year of the Seoul Congress, laying out 'UNESCO's strategies on technical and vocational education and training for the first decade of the 21st century'. Neither the strategy document nor the full ambitions associated with the international long-term programme for the development of TVET were confirmed or implemented. It may be valuable, therefore, almost ten years later, to reflect briefly on why the powerful momentum for a TVET strategy from Seoul was lost. If there are lessons to be learnt from this episode for the present determination to develop a global TVET strategy for UNESCO, we should acknowledge these and bear them in mind.

For one thing, we shall need to understand better why no formal UNESCO strategy paper was ever developed from the Seoul process. A very obvious reason was that within a year of Seoul, in April 2000, there was the Dakar World Forum on Education for All (EFA), with its six EFA Goals. This refocusing of the world's and UNESCO's attention on basic education ten years after Jomtien was one explanation for a possible shift of emphasis towards Education for All. Indeed, UNESCO was eventually assigned by the World Education Forum a clear leadership role and mandate in respect of the huge ambitions of the EFA agenda: 'UNESCO will serve as the Secretariat. It will refocus its education programme in order to place the outcomes and priorities of Dakar at the heart of its work' (WEF 2000). But the new administration in UNESCO⁴ had to fight hard in the international community to try and maintain the expanded Dakar vision of basic education when there was strong pressure to reduce the vision to primary education and gender parity. This narrowing actually happened outside UNESCO in September 2000 when the Millennium

² There were some 10 expert papers submitted to Bonn, as well as a Headquarters commissioned paper on 'UNESCO's historical roles in the area of TVET provision'. These will all be available on the UNEVOC website in due course.

³ The role of East Germany and the Soviet Union in promoting the Convention needs to be recalled.

⁴ Both UNESCO's Director General and the Assistant Director General (Education) changed around the time of the Dakar World Forum.

Summit and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) focused merely on primary education and gender parity in education within the education sector.⁵ In this context of restructuring education at UNESCO around EFA, the Seoul vision and related initiatives were temporarily lost, though the UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) was set up in Bonn with the strong support of a united Germany in 1992.

Another explanation could be that compared to the six short, goals associated with Dakar, which could be captured in a single paragraph, there were no less than 8 detailed pages of recommendations from Seoul. These too were organised around six themes, but they covered a massive if very relevant canvas: Challenges to TVE in the changing knowledge economy; Reforming TVE systems for life-long learning; Innovating the education and training systems; Technical vocational education for all; Changing roles of government and other stakeholders; and international cooperation in TVE. It was a persuasive and comprehensive vision, but in a world that was increasingly driven by the politics of target-setting and time-bound goals, Seoul did not translate into anything remotely like an immediate agenda for action.

If the pressing demands of implementing and monitoring the EFA Dakar Goals did indeed contribute to reducing the impact and follow-up to Seoul, UNESCO was not alone amongst agencies in focusing on the immense challenges of keeping the world on track to reach the Goals by the agreed target dates. But there had in fact been an opportunity in Dakar itself for the TVE/Skills agenda from Seoul and the EFA agenda to come closer together, since Dakar had sought to restate in 2000 the 6 suggested targets from Jomtien in 1990. One of these targets at Jomtien had been ‘provisions of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults’, which in Dakar became ‘equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes’ (Goal 3). With the benefit of hindsight, Goal 3 in Dakar could have benefited from the Seoul recommendations, and not least from Seoul’s strong emphasis on making access to TVE open to all, thus linking skills centrally to the refocused, rights-based EFA agenda. The Bonn Declaration, five years after Seoul, sought to do this, in part, by affirming that ‘It is especially important to integrate skills development in Education for All (EFA) programmes and to satisfy TVET demand created by learners completing basic education.’ We shall see below that the explicit integration of TVET into EFA programming would not fully happen in UNESCO till 2009, in its Draft Programme and Budget for 2010-2011.

The new global drivers for TVET and skills development⁶

Almost ten years after Seoul and Dakar, there is a new opportunity and a new global context that is refocusing on TVET and skills development. This is clear both in country priorities as well as in the changing priorities of development agencies. The new drivers of skills’ policies and strategies are many, but they include the following. The very success of the last decade of supporting universal primary education is translating into huge political pressures to expand both general and technical secondary education. Secondly, good quality skills are increasingly seen as being critical to labour market productivity and competitiveness. Despite the depth of the current economic crisis, skills are also claimed to be at the centre of the new

⁵ For more detail on the narrowing of the Jomtien and Dakar visions, see King and Palmer 2008.

⁶ Skills development is a term that has been increasingly adopted by development agencies to cover a wider range of skills than are associated with formal school-based technical and vocational education.

challenge of sustaining, accelerating and sharing the signs of economic growth across many parts of the developing world (DFID 2008). It should be added, however, that knock-on pressure from primary education expansion, and the urgings of member states are important but not sufficient reasons for the development of a TVET strategy by UNESCO. The organisation must also value the intrinsic importance of a TVET strategy, given the vital contribution of skills development in both education and training. For this reason, the organisation needs to caution against drivers of TVET that are politically opportune, such as the mantra of skills-for-employment-creation, or skills-for-security. High quality skills are a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the creation of decent work or secure livelihoods.

PHASE 1. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION. UNESCO'S COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE IN TVET AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

We should not simply agree that a country should promote TVET, but should clarify the global debate about the role of vocational skills, indeed their very definition.
(Burnett 2008)

In the consultation process for this background paper, most institutions and individual TVET experts were aware of what UNESCO can and cannot be expected to do for this particular domain. They acknowledge UNESCO as the only UN agency, with universal world membership, charged with responsibility for the whole of the education sector, but equally they are aware that it is not a donor agency in the usual sense of a body funding projects, sector programmes, or general budget support. It is supremely a knowledge agency, generating innovative ideas, as well as norms and standards, critically synthesising 'best practice',⁷ and doing so, ideally, not just for the developing world, but for all its five regions.

Unlike the World Bank (1991; 2004) or the Asian Development Bank (2008) whose policies on vocational and technical education and training or skills development are directly related to their investment programmes, UNESCO has an unique obligation to conceptualise and continually to reconceptualise the changing domain of skills and of technical and vocational education (TVE). Some of this conceptual clarification has been captured in the *Recommendation concerning technical and vocational education* (1962), and the subsequent revisions of 1974 and 2001 point to exactly this need regularly to revisit the conceptual landscape of this large and complex domain. Mapping the conceptual terrain of skills and of TVE is as urgent a concern today as it was in these earlier explorations.

For instance, the *Revised Recommendation* (2001) treats technical vocational education in three ways, - as part of general education, as a preparation for an occupation, and as part of lifelong learning. But it does not consider TVE or skills development as part of the EFA Dakar framework, nor does it relate skills to competencies, nor treat of life skills and work skills. It does, from time to time, refer to practical skills, soft skills, generic skills and entrepreneurial skills, but the preferred term throughout the *Recommendation* and indeed the *Convention* is technical and vocational education. Which is appropriate since the documents are aimed at member states, and TVE is the preferred discourse of Ministries of Education.

⁷ For a critique of the widespread, casual use of 'best practice', see *NORRAG NEWS No. 39*

This is not to say that the *Revised Recommendation* takes a narrow approach to TVE. Quite the opposite. It considers, for instance, that TVE can even ‘permit the harmonious development of personality and character, and foster spiritual and human values, the capacity for understanding, judgment, critical thinking and self-expression’ (8). Indeed, it has a broad vision of the capacities and qualities associated with TVE whether in life, in work or in the community. TVE is certainly not seen as a dead end but is conceived to be part of a ‘learning culture that permits individuals to expand their intellectual horizons’ (10). Such bold characterization is essential to a vision statement for TVE that sees it contributing to the societal goals of greater democratization, to a critical understanding of the environmental implications of technological change, and through horizontal and vertical articulation within education, and between education and work, contributing to the elimination of discrimination and exclusion. This is precisely the role that UNESCO can uniquely play in the international community, by positioning TVE as a full part of a liberal education, but also arguing powerfully that it is an investment with significant returns, including the well-being of workers, enhanced productivity and international competitiveness (13).

A strategic global conceptual approach to TVE and skills

But there is a level of conceptual analysis beneath this broad vision of TVE that is strategically important for situating skills in relation to the Jomtien and Dakar frameworks, for presenting the ways in which skills can be globally monitored, and for analysing their specific roles in relation to job creation, economic growth and poverty reduction. These have become pressing issues for countries and for the international community since the time of the *Revised Recommendation* (2001). For example, for the last seven years, the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) has judged Dakar Goal 3, on appropriate learning and life skills, the hardest to define, and as a result this very influential report has provided virtually no coverage of TVE or skills development over that period. The strategic challenge is to translate the wide vision for TVE into categories of skills that can be readily assessed and monitored because they can be identified in different learning environments whether school-based or work-based, formal or informal. For this purpose, the term skills is more useful than TVE because it is broader and can be used in a range of situations where education policy-makers have identified an important capacity.

Thus, Jomtien and Dakar both used the term skills rather than TVE for their suggested targets and goals. And arguably the case for what may be termed a ‘Skills GMR’ will be easier to make than a TVE GMR.⁸ A skills matrix can cover at least three, and possibly four, conceptually different if related domains.

First are the **core, essential or communication skills** which are now routinely measured at basic levels of literacy, numeracy and IT, but also at higher levels of analysing, interpreting and manipulating text and number.

Second, there are the so-called **soft skills or new skills**. These refer to crucial capacities such as team-work, decision-making, problem-solving, learning to

⁸ The Global Monitoring Report team is located within UNESCO, and its publications are by UNESCO, but it is institutionally independent of UNESCO, with its own ‘editorial board’ and funding sources. The decision to undertake a Skills GMR would not be UNESCO’s.

learn, adaptability and negotiating, as well as using the core skills interactively. The influential Delors Report termed these ‘personal competence’ and ‘social skills’ (1996). These soft skills are widely regarded as crucial to work and to successful living, and hence are also termed work skills and life skills, and some elements are beginning to be regularly assessed, for example by the OECD. Terms such as employability and trainability may also be considered here.

Thirdly, there are the more **occupationally-related technical and vocational skills**. These too cover a range from basic levels of craft, design and technology to higher knowledge-based skills, and they span commercial, industrial, agricultural and service occupations. Surprisingly, the major student assessment programmes such as IEA and PISA have not yet tackled these, though there has been talk of a ‘Vocational PISA’. Clearly, terms such as employable skills are also relevant in this category.

Fourthly, some analysts argue for **behavioural or attitudinal skills**, such as discipline, perseverance, tolerance, enterprise and self-confidence.

The strategic importance of some such conceptual clarification is that it becomes possible to argue that the occupationally-specific technical and vocational skills also require core skills, soft skills and behavioural skills, if they are to be done well. These sets of skills are not in silos. This kind of analysis becomes highly relevant when there is discussion of integrating or articulating technical and vocational secondary with general, academic secondary, as we shall see below. Equally, when discussing the possible coverage of a Skills GMR, it can be seen that core skills and some soft skills are already covered within the treatment of primary education of good quality and also of adult literacy, as are many of the behavioural skills. What has not been covered are the crucially important practical, work- and employment-related skills which are so clearly anticipated in the wider background text of the Jomtien and Dakar goals. One of the longstanding problems caused by those who framed the Dakar Goal 3 with its use of ‘life skills’ is that it distracted attention from **the distinctive goal of skills development or of TVE** – which is preparation for the world of work.⁹

The multiple locations of technical and vocational skills development (TVSD)

The case for a strategic rethinking by UNESCO of the skills domain in relation to TVE is not restricted to sifting out the key meanings of skills in relation to educational outcomes, though such conceptual analysis is particularly appropriate to UNESCO. There is also the crucially important clarification of the domains in which skills and TVE, at different levels, are acquired. Technical and vocational skills development (TVSD) is a new term covering both TVE and skills development, and it may be used to refer to the specifically work-oriented skills acquisition, taking place in multiple locations. The principal ones are i) school- and college-based TVSD, both public and private; ii) work- and enterprise-based TVSD, whether in the formal or informal sector; and iii) TVSD in post-school training centres in the public, private-for-profit, and non-profit spheres. The first of these normally falls under the direct

⁹ For detail on the crucial framing of this goal 3, see King and Palmer 2008. Also Lauglo’s paper to Bonn expert meeting (2009).

responsibility of ministries of education, or under their oversight in the case of private provision. The second and third are under a multiplicity of sector ministries (including education), employers, NGOs and private sector concerns. In all of these different locations, the successful acquisition of the technical and vocational skills will be dependent on accompanying core skills, soft skills and behavioural skills.

UNESCO's conceptual and programmatic niche within the skills' domains

Although it is vital for UNESCO to lay out the complete landscape of skills and of TVSD, it is equally important, in any strategic approach, to identify where UNESCO's comparative advantage might lie. In other words, UNESCO's *conceptual* niche should boldly be with the whole of the complex domain of skills, but its *programmatic* niche may need to be much more focused. While it may be the case in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa and Asia that the very great bulk of all jobs and of the training that accompanies them takes place in the informal or unorganized sector, UNESCO's programmatic niche lies with such skills development as falls directly or indirectly under the ministry of education. The same would be true of any assistance UNESCO might give to a GMR on skills, and not least because the core data on TVE would come from ministries of education via the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). This would suggest a primary focus on school- and college-based technical and vocational skills, but a secondary focus on non-formal TVSD under the ministry of education. This latter is of course only a small part of the whole landscape of non-formal education (NFE), and even this is by no means exclusively concerned with technical and vocational skills; the UNESCO definition of NFE, for instance, covers 'adult literacy, basic education programmes for out-of- school children, life skills, work skills, and general culture' (1997). For this reason, monitoring the learning and life skills components of NFE has proved to be statistically very challenging, including for the GMR (GMR 2009).

Rights-based supply or demand-led skills?

Thus far, in making the case for a crucial role for UNESCO in the strategic clarification of the landscape of TVET, the focus has been on the need for clarity in the meanings of skills, and in their multiple locations. But this proposed strategic objective of conceptual clarification also covers other dimensions of what the Delors' Report termed 'Learning to Do'. A further conceptual challenge which was also not discussed in the *Revised Recommendation* (2001) is the widespread current claim that technical and vocational skills should not be supply-led but be demand-driven. In other words, educational institutions should not merely turn out graduates by virtue of the number of places, teachers and courses, but rather the supply should be conditioned by the labour market demand for such and such skills. Again, this is a debate or a trade-off where UNESCO, with its tradition of rights-based approaches to education (as illustrated in the Theme 4 of the Seoul Congress: 'Technical and vocational education for All'), would question the generalization about the need *solely* for a demand-led determination of skills. The rights of particular widely excluded groups to access skills development is a natural concern for UNESCO (and indeed of ILO). In addition, the requirement for skills provision to be demand-driven is at least conceivable in industrialized countries where the formal sector of the economy is dominant. But where 85% to 95% of the new jobs are in the informal sector, translating this into a specific demand for particular skills would be

methodologically and statistically improbable, and not least as the informal sector maintains a preference for its own enterprise-based training or apprenticeship.¹⁰

Skills versus competencies

Another variation of the supply-led versus demand-led discourse is that concerning skills versus competencies. Again, this domain is one where there is an urgent need for conceptual clarity of the kind that is being prioritised in this strategic background paper. Very often competency-based approaches are associated with the desire to have specific occupational standards set for the educational suppliers by the relevant industry or employers' organisation. In other words, the competencies are frequently claimed to be demand-driven, and their mastery is often secured in a series of modules linked to specific tasks and targets. By contrast, as we have seen, the discourse of skills is much more open-ended. Indeed, technical and vocational skills are often associated with a 'feel', a 'flair', or a degree of creativity which may be impossible to translate easily into a measurable learning outcome.

Skills in the languages of the UN system

The discussion of skills versus competencies in English suggests the importance of a series of parallel conceptual clarifications in the six languages of the UN, Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish. Many of the English terms that have been used in this background paper such as 'skills development', 'life skills' or 'technical vocational skills' do not translate readily into the romance languages of Europe, let alone into other world languages. There are also crucially different terms for the skills domain in languages such as German and Norwegian. This is as much a conceptual and contextual issue as anything else, but there is also a political concern about the dominance of Anglophone usage of skills terminology. Hence a key element in any first phase of strategic clarification would be a series of regional conferences. How this terminology is actually applied, in different language blocs, to such key areas as the different conceptions of secondary technical education will be an obvious outcome.

Levels of skill and of qualification

Closely linked to the context and meanings of skill is the current interest in developing national and regional qualifications frameworks which seek to sort certification in the whole education and training system into different levels. Again, the conceptual assumptions about skill and knowledge that lie behind, and are embedded in these initiatives, and the present evidence base of their influence and value would be a crucial element in this first phase of skills conceptualisation.

Skills for employment, growth and for poverty reduction

A large challenge for this phase of conceptual clarification must relate to the discourses about the relationships between skills development on the one hand and employment, growth and poverty reduction on the other. It was mentioned above that skills are claimed to be 'at the centre of this new challenge' about sustaining and accelerating growth. This is a very promising new interest but is uniquely an area where hard-nosed critique of the logic and of the evidence is now vital. Again, conceptual and definitional issues are at the heart of this debate. See the definitions in

¹⁰ For a thoughtful discussion of the dilemmas around demand-driven training, see de Moura Castro's paper to the UNESCO Bonn meeting (2009).

a key skills-and-growth paper by DFID from 2008.¹¹ There are many similar claims about the connections between skills provision and the creation of jobs, much of this based on ‘a false belief that unemployment is because of a lack of skills on the supply side rather than a lack of demand’ (Burnett 2008). Skills-for-poverty-reduction is a third very current claim, and yet here too the evidence might suggest that skills systems, if left to the market, will favour the non-poor. It is precisely this awareness of the growing inequality of most education and training systems (see GMR 2009) that has led both UNESCO and ILO to consider how skills can also be accessed by rural communities, disadvantaged youth, migrants and persons with disabilities.

TVE or TVET for UNESCO?

The burden of the case for the holistic conceptualisation of the skill domain by UNESCO is that it is an international agency for which this is a natural element in its normative mandate. For most of its 60 years it has been concerned with the concept technical and vocational education (TVE). The term TVET does not appear at all in either the *Convention* (1989) or the *Revised Recommendation* (2001). The Seoul Congress (1999) used the term technical and vocational education almost exclusively, except in its final recommendation that UNESCO, in collaboration with ILO, should develop ‘a common concept of **Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)**, to guide the UNESCO strategy for the twenty-first century.’ When UNESCO and ILO produced a joint booklet under the title *Technical and vocational education and training for the twenty-first century* in 2002, the UNESCO portion simply reproduced the *Revised Recommendation* (2001) with its exclusive use of the term TVE. The foreword noted: ‘As the titles of these statements suggest, UNESCO’s concern is centred on technical and vocational *education*, which the Organization considers an integral part of the global *Education for All* initiative’ (UNESCO/ILO 2002).

This particular terminology, like the wider use of language mentioned above, is another key element in the conceptual architecture of skills development. Arguably, the terminology should encompass the primary activities and primary documents of the organization rather than its aspirations for collaboration. For this reason, some organizations have adopted ‘skills development’, others particularly in Europe have preferred ‘VET’, and there has been some exploration of technical vocational skills development (TVSD). What is clear from this brief outline is that ‘skills’ is a broader concept than TVE or TVET, and captures many dimensions of the cognitive and conative domain that UNESCO regards as important.

Skills, international cooperation and the One UN

One of the reasons that TVE has at times changed to TVET in this past decade has, in part, been the expectation of cooperation with other bodies, and notably the ILO. Thus the UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (UNEVOC) and the UNESCO International Programme for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (mentioned earlier) were launched ‘in close cooperation with ILO and other international partners’ (HCA 2000). We have already noted the adoption of TVET at the end of the Seoul Congress and in the disseminating of the joint recommendations of UNESCO and ILO. But more generally across the

¹¹ Definitions for the purposes of this paper: schooling = school attendance; education = activities undertaken while at school; skills and knowledge = learning outcomes. (DFID 2008)

specialized agencies of the UN, and with regard to the One UN process, the discourse of skills might commend itself more than either TVE or TVET to the life skills interests of UNICEF, the work skills of ILO, the agricultural skills of FAO, and the technological and industrial skills of UNIDO.

Outcomes of the phase of reconceptualisation and reflection – A Commission on Skills

Whatever the preferred terminology, this process of conceptual rethinking of the skills landscape is supremely germane to UNESCO's normative mandate. Such reflection is **the** appropriate scope of skills development in the context of UNESCO's mandate. It puts flesh on to the Delors' challenge of 'Learning to Do'. This phase should also contribute valuably to the GMR process, if the GMR team decides on the importance of monitoring skills within the expanding EFA framework. Consideration of the many different substantive aspects of this reflection should provide the organisation with its own considered policies on qualifications, levels of competency, supply vs demand-led approaches, as well as the critical relationship of skills to employment, growth and poverty. It will also provide a targeted priority focus for the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) in the realm of developing statistics for skills. The timing of such a reflection will fit in well with the planned re-ordering of the *International standard classification of education (ISCED)*. But it will need in the short term a refocusing of the existing professional resources on skills development in UNESCO, and a convening of expert external advice.

One possible modality for this reflective phase would be a Consultative Group on Skills or a Commission on Skills. It could review the impact of UNESCO's existing skills mandate and the existing normative instruments, but crucially it could draw together insights and conclusions from the conceptual and methodological challenges sketched above. Such a 'flagship' project could have many programmatic outcomes, but its essential contribution would be at the conceptual level. It could well lead to a revised or new Convention. See further below in UNESCO's planned activities for the biennium of 2010-2011.

PHASE 2. POLICY REVIEW AND ADVICE IN SELECTIVE SKILLS' DOMAINS

Whatever mechanism is used for this first phase, such as a Commission or a Consultative Group on Skills, with a series of regional consultations to capture linguistic and cultural diversity, there will emerge selected areas of work where UNESCO perceives it has a particular niche or comparative advantage. It is important to underline the fact that the skills landscape is very wide, and there are certainly fields such as enterprise-based training or training for the informal sector where UNESCO may not have any institutional advantage. Possible areas where a niche could be developed will be briefly highlighted now, but they will need to be turned into a possible programme of work after further reaction and discussion.

The challenge of articulating general, academic and technical secondary

One of the areas that is going to grow hugely in country priority over the next 5-10 years is the expansion of secondary, and within that a great deal of attention will focus on varieties of technical secondary education. In terms of massive system expansion this is a developing world phenomenon, but in almost every industrialised country, too, technical upper secondary education is on the agenda, whether for

reasons of coherence of new qualifications, links to the labour market, or new approaches to access and status. It is a prime theatre where the results of the above conceptual phase could provide UNESCO with some particular advantage in terms of policy review and advice to selected countries.

A possible model for such reviews in the developing world would be the OECD's 'Learning for Jobs: the country policy reviews' on the responsiveness of VET systems to labour market needs. These are being carried out by a small team in a whole series of OECD countries with a focus on upper secondary technical education. Within UNESCO Bangkok, an exploratory set of country studies of secondary technical education has been underway since 2007.

If UNESCO were to be able to respond professionally and selectively to country requests in this area, it would need to build its own capacity about policy learning as the European Training Foundation (ETF) has demonstrated in recent years. Such TVE policy reviews as UNESCO might engage in would not be about policy borrowing or policy copying of 'best practice' from some particular country or region. Rather they would encourage the sharing of relevant experience but this would be based on a critical understanding of the country's own TVE traditions, skills terminology, and the articulation of technical with general secondary (ETF 2008).

In the shorter term, until capacity and resources were more built up within UNESCO, there would need to be external support assembled to help execute and finance these policy reviews of technical secondary education. Doubtless, as now with the OECD, middle-income countries might be able to finance these reviews themselves. But with the financially weaker developing countries, a major methodological challenge would be the statistical capacity within the ministry of education to provide the relevant data for the review team. However, here is precisely where there could be synergy with the UIS. In the GMR 2009, it is anticipated that there will be a treatment of these precise 'problems of definition and lack of data' for Dakar Goal 3 and part of Goal 4 by the GMR, which have been discussed above (UNESCO 2008).¹²

It cannot be emphasised too strongly that if UNESCO is to rebuild its reputation as a knowledge agency in the domain of skills development, it is essential that such policy reviews are carried out initially in a very small number of carefully selected countries by a very experienced small team. Clearly countries such as Indonesia, Ghana and several other states in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia where the articulation of secondary technical and academic has achieved a very high policy priority could be candidates.

Modalities and options in college-based higher technical education

This domain is obviously another one that falls squarely within UNESCO's comparative advantage, though for many developing countries it will, for a time, be a less pressing priority than the expansion of secondary academic and technical education. Nevertheless, this is a skills' domain that has suffered severely from lack of both international and national policy attention, squeezed between the EFA agenda (which now routinely includes general secondary education) and university

¹² 'A future *EFA Global Monitoring Report* will examine these issues as part of an overarching theme' (GMR 2008: 91)

expansion. Again, it will be a policy arena that may require some new statistical coverage from UIS. At the moment, the GMR volumes actually report on detailed fields of study in higher education at the university level in their statistical tables, but they provide no data on post-secondary technical education. In due course, it can be anticipated that there could be country pressure for policy reviews and advice in this important area.

The challenge of policy reviews of non-formal technical and vocational education

Non-formal education (NFE) is a policy arena where UNESCO has long felt it had some comparative advantage, right back to the invention of the term, NFE, by the former first director of the IIEP in the early 1970s. But the technical and vocational dimensions of NFE are very frequently mixed up with every kind of short, structured course, for example, on mother and child health, HIV AIDS prevention, adult literacy, and income generation, as well as alternative provision to formal primary and secondary education. Thus, even though many ministries of education have non-formal education units or departments, their coverage is nowhere the same. As the GMR process has found to its cost, in exploring possible dimensions of Dakar Goal 3, the search to identify sources of non-formal education for out-of-school and/or disadvantaged youth has proved hugely problematic. Identifying the technical and vocational sub-sector of NFE is additionally complicated by the fact that this takes place also under the aegis of at least ten other sector ministries in many countries, as well as a welter of civil society and private organisations. This makes comprehensive national reporting of NFE to the UIS extremely demanding if not impossible.

Nevertheless, like many of the other fields of skills development noted above, this is an area where UNESCO could make a valuable initial contribution primarily **at the conceptual level**, almost 40 years after the term NFE was first used. Repositioning non-formal technical and vocational education within UNESCO, and more widely, would be enormously valuable. Arguably, understanding non-formal skills development, and its relations with formal and informal skills development, could have important programmatic implications later on.

The statistical challenge to policy reviews and advice

There is a dearth of good statistical data on TVET/skills development. In part this derives from the fact that TVET usually does not have a regular length like primary or secondary education. And even where there is an institutionally distinct TVET focus at the upper secondary level, as in China, there is also provision of skills under the ministry of labour. The value of the proposed conceptual phase is that it would become clearer that certain skills sets which we have analysed may be acquired across several different levels of education – e.g. core skills, soft skills, attitudinal skills. By contrast, occupationally-related technical and vocational skills are acquired in specific settings, such as upper secondary technical schools, or in separate technical streams of general upper secondary schools.¹³

We have referred throughout this background paper to the different statistical demands on the UIS and on their counterpart statistical units in the ministries of education. Any expectation of the ministries reporting across the many skills domains

¹³ The lack of a direct connection between most skill terms (e.g. core skills or social skills) and particular years or levels of schooling is of course what bedevilled the use of the term ‘life skills’ in Dakar Goal 3. This is much less true of technical and vocational skills.

discussed above would not be feasible. But it would be entirely possible to improve upon the currently minimal reporting to the GMR on technical and vocational secondary education (now just total numbers and percentage female). Precisely what additional data could be asked for would derive from the conceptual phase one and from feasibility work on the policy reviews of technical secondary education. But the improvement of the current tables on technical and vocational secondary education is a high priority that could be carried out at relatively little additional cost.

Equally, the country-level statistical units in ministries of education could, in due course, provide valuable data on post-secondary technical and vocational education.

Though there remain major challenges to data analysis and monitoring of non-formal skills provision, UNESCO has also made much progress towards developing a framework of indicators to monitor non-formal education (and has developed a methodology for setting up a Non-Formal Education Management Information System). Several of the indicators within the framework do relate directly to skills training.

As far as enterprise-based training and private-for-profit and non-profit training are concerned, a great deal of that does not routinely fall under ministries of education, even if the ministry may notionally be responsible for registering private provision.

Overall, it is suggested that the conceptual analysis of the skills arena and the requirements for data related to the proposed policy reviews of secondary technical education would make very valuable a new edition of the UNESCO-UNEVOC/UIS (2006) *Participation in Formal TVET Worldwide. An Initial Statistical Study*, UNESCO-UIS/UNEVOC, Bonn.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT, CRITICAL MASS AND INSTITUTIONAL COHERENCE

Currently UNESCO's personnel with responsibilities for skills development are fragmented, with individual research and analytic capacity in skills development in 2-3 units (IIEP, UNEVOC and UIL), networking and publication capacity in a different unit (UNEVOC), while very varying degrees of TVE responsibility and analytic capacity reside in all the regional bureaux and at headquarters. More than 10 individuals have full or partial portfolios for TVE in UNESCO, but these are institutionally dispersed and do not presently constitute anything approaching a critical mass of expertise which they potentially could. By contrast, several agencies with very much larger financial resources have very few or no staff with professional skills development expertise. Consequently, as skills development has begun to return strongly to both bilateral and multilateral agency agendas, UNESCO has a powerful opportunity to build a skills development 'community of practice', and to strengthen that through its convening capacity of external expertise. Building merely an email constituency amongst the existing expertise in the regional offices, institutes, centres and HQ will not be sufficient to create a critical mass.

To the outside world, UNEVOC has constituted, first in Berlin and then in Bonn, the best-known focus of UNESCO's capacity in skills development. And as far as our priority for conceptual clarification of the landscape of skills is concerned, UNEVOC is making a major contribution through the *International Handbook* which is focused

on *Bridging academic and vocational learning* (forthcoming 2009), and on our specific focus for the articulation of general and technical secondary education through its work on the *Vocationalisation of secondary education revisited* (2005). UNEVOC has also made an important public contribution to the understanding of training for work in - and meeting the basic learning needs of, the informal sector (Singh 2005; Haan 2006), and skills development in relation to sustainable development.

Other individuals in UNESCO institutes have made distinct contributions to the public understanding of private training, rural training, training finance, training in the informal sector, and training of disadvantaged youth, amongst many other topics. Others again in regional bureaux have made signal contributions to skills development policies in their regions. But with just two regular UNESCO staff with expertise on skills development in UNEVOC at the moment, two more staff with some skills development focus in headquarters, (and a chief of section with TVET expertise being appointed in HQ), single individuals with skills development expertise in IIEP Paris, and Buenos Aires, and in UIL, Hamburg, and further individual expertise on skills development in Dakar, Beirut, Bangkok and Santiago, there are no less than ten professionals with full or partial portfolios on skills development (and two more being appointed imminently). This is a larger professional base than any other agency apart from the ETF which has over 100 professionals, and GTZ (Germany). But they do not presently constitute anything approaching a single professional ‘community of practice’, even if they are individually responsible for a wide range of skills development and other activities.

For the proposed work in phases one and two, the existing staff will need to be selectively refocused around upstream policy work and conceptual standard-setting that is outlined here, and supplemented, for the short-term, by targeted high quality external resources in skills research and policy analysis.

UNESCO’S CURRENT AND PLANNED PORTFOLIO FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES, 2010-2011

Though this review has briefly analysed the policy history of TVE in UNESCO, the proposals for major conceptual work on skills development, followed by high quality policy reviews, require to be set against the current skills development activities of UNESCO and its current and planned resources. Through deliberate planning the proposed UNESCO TVET strategy is being developed at very time when the detailed planning of programme and budget (35 C/5 for 2010-2011) makes space for dramatically expanded attention to TVET and skills development. We shall briefly comment on the different options for skills development to become a coherent and integrated component across the current plans for the four Main Lines of Action (MLAs) which UNESCO now uses for all its forward planning.

A refocusing on upstream policy work and a review of normative standard setting

UNESCO has been criticised in the past for operating too much like an NGO, developing an innovative project in skills for marginalised girls here, or developing a small curriculum for non-formal skills development in community learning centres there. By contrast, this background paper has argued that UNESCO needs to take the high ground and lay out new normative work across the whole skills domain. The last

seven GMRs have shown just how ‘woefully undocumented’ and ‘particularly neglected’ this whole area of skills and life skills is. A new normative instrument on skills and competencies across the education and training sector would be extremely welcome, and could complement current 35C/5 proposals for the monitoring and reporting of selected normative instruments (see MLA 4 below). Indeed, in this context, it would be appropriate to consider why the 20 year-old *Convention concerning technical and vocational education* (1989) has only been signed by 17 member states, and not a single OECD country, and also review the influence and impact of the *Revised Recommendation*. The current *Convention*, for example, may have attracted little support because it is very much concerned with the right to access TVE for all those with the educational level for admission, and the employment equity for all those teaching in TVE (articles 2, 5). In other words, it has a very rights-based approach to TVE, and is not at all concerned with the demand from employers for those actually trained.

Skills as one of the three ‘EFA Building Blocks’ for 2010-2011 (MLA 1)

Through good forward planning, ‘skills’ have been included as one of the three EFA building blocks for the next UNESCO biennium (2010-1), and it is noted that individuals need ‘practical skills for the world of work’. The recognition that skills are a full and legitimate component of EFA has been a long time coming, we have noted earlier. But it will be important to argue the case for what skills, from those discussed above, are central to EFA. Certainly as secondary education becomes routinely part of the EFA framework in UNESCO’s wider EFA leadership as well as in the GMRs, the core skills, ‘personal competencies’ (or soft skills), and the practical technical and vocational skills will come to be included as preparation for the world of work and for continuation to further and higher education. Whether, as the 35C/5 suggests, it will be possible in the first instance to cover both formal secondary and post-secondary, formal and non-formal will need to be considered in the light of human and financial resources. But the targeting of a smaller number of countries (20) for MLA 1 seems realistic. Whether these targeted countries should all be those in danger of NOT reaching the Dakar Goals or the MDGs is a moot question; it would perhaps be also valuable to include at least one or two countries that are ‘on track’ to reach these EFA Goals. Otherwise, the TVE systems of the target countries may prove to be very rudimentary. It was argued above that it is precisely the successful achievement of universal primary education that is encouraging member states to address general and technical secondary education.

The international cooperation proposed in the 35C/5 with the ETF and the OECD could fit in well with the suggestion above that OECD-style country policy reviews of the articulation of technical with academic secondary become a possible model for UNESCO’s upstream TVET work. It was also suggested that ETF’s five year experience of policy learning would be invaluable to UNESCO’s entry into policy sharing of relevant experience in technical secondary reform. Equally, if the proposal for a phase one of conceptual and normative work around the skills landscape is agreed, then it would be crucial to coordinate with ILO’s latest work on ‘*Skills for improved productivity, employment growth and development*’ (2008). ILO’s new conceptualisation of skills development as covering ‘basic education, initial training and lifelong learning’ would appropriately complement an holistic approach to skills by UNESCO. Unlike earlier collaboration where their joint recommendations on TVET (2002) covered two completely separate policies on education and training, a

new collaboration around skills for life, skills for employability and work, and skills for growth would commend itself to both organisations, and would share much common ground and language.

As to joint advocacy proposed for the next biennium, in ‘promoting international cooperation around TVET’, UNESCO could well join with ETF, as it extends world-wide its current regional and substantive mandate as well as with others such as the British Council, in order to advocate for the fulfilment of a Skills GMR,¹⁴ and to collaborate in support of the (donor) Working Group for International Cooperation in Skills Development.¹⁵ On the 35C/5 proposal for an international conference on skills development, UNEVOC’s convening capacity could be invaluable in drawing together a second five-year assessment of Seoul.¹⁶ A series of regional conferences on the local contexts, meanings, and language of skills and competencies has been suggested earlier in this paper. But it would be invaluable to adopt the mechanism of CONFINTEA (the International Conference on Adult Education) with its regular reporting at global meetings. These are important not just for raising the status of skills development, but they can also act as a powerful impetus for the improvement of national statistical data and monitoring. Such flagship conferences have been too infrequent in the case of skills development.

From early childhood to adult years: policy reviews of secondary education (MLA 2)

At the current time, the Second Main Line of Action covers several dimensions of secondary including ‘the acquisition of generic competencies such as problem-solving skills’ but makes no reference to secondary technical education which in many OECD and developing countries covers at least half of the secondary school population, especially in upper secondary. The research and policy papers referred to in MLA 2 for the secondary sector could well encompass the policy reviews of secondary technical in its articulation with academic, and of both with the labour market.

In the same spirit, higher education is currently discussed for this MLA2 but there is no acknowledgement of the key role of post-secondary further and higher technical education.

Leading the education agenda: the role of the GMR and other global education reports (MLA 4)

As mentioned above, the GMR 2009 has already mentioned that it intends to deal with the definitional and data challenges of Goal 3 (appropriate learning and life skills) in the future. It also intends to give more coverage to skills development in the regular section of the next report that assesses progress on all six EFA Goals. It would certainly provide synergy with any such forthcoming Skills GMR that UNESCO was making skills one of the three key building blocks for EFA, for its own programming, from 2010. In addition, all the three planned world conferences for 2009, on

¹⁴ See the British Council’s support to King and Palmer’s (2008) *Skills for Work, Growth and Poverty Reduction. Challenges and Opportunities in the Global Analysis and Monitoring of Skills*, at http://www.unesco.org.uk/Skills_Seminar.htm There is also a Report of the meeting on the Skills for Work, Growth and Poverty Reduction conference, available from February 2009.

¹⁵ See www.norrag.org/wg

¹⁶ The first five-year assessment of Seoul was in October 2004, but the second might need to be in 2010 given the number of world conferences already planned by UNESCO for 2009.

sustainable development, adult education, and higher education could provide opportunities for different dimensions and levels of technical vocational skills development to be discussed.

Normative and standard setting instruments: the case of skills and competencies (MLA 4)

UNESCO's next biennial draft programme and budget has already proposed the review of three of UNESCO's normative instruments. But as part of the suggested normative work on the landscape of skills and competencies, it would be valuable, as was said earlier, to review the apparently minimal take-up of the *Convention* concerning technical and vocational education, and of the influence of the *Revised Recommendation*. UNESCO's regional bureaux have regularly arranged meetings around these two instruments, and can already assess their current impact. It is possible that a new instrument covering *knowledge, skills, competencies and qualifications* would prove very relevant to the ongoing reform of national skills development systems in many developing and developed countries.

Skills development activities by field, cluster and regional offices

Beyond these larger activities linked directly or potentially to the Main Lines of Action, there have been of course a whole series of much smaller, and in some cases quite large activities carried on within the devolved budgets to the regional bureaux. Some of these are supported by substantial extra-budgetary resources, as earlier with the Pakistan earthquake, the Tsunami in Indonesia, or currently youth skills training in Rwanda. Some mapping of the technical and vocational activities of selected countries in the Asia-Pacific region has already been carried out, in 2007 (King 2007), just before the organisational switch in UNESCO's Education sector from over twenty to only four Main Lines of Action. How this has affected the many small projects within the remit of field offices or of the participation programme of National Commissions is not known, but the expectation was that the reform of the MLAs would lead to larger and more coordinated activity within the regions.

It would be a very high priority to capture the sheer range of TVET/skills development activity that has been carried on at the level of field, cluster and regional office, during the current biennium, 2008-2009. Doubtless this will already differ from the days, prior to this biennium, when TVET could constitute a discreet budget line. But before the impact of TVET becoming one of the three EFA building blocks in the next biennium, it would be essential to understand, in detail, what has been the pattern of field-level support to TVET/skills development at the current time.

The regional bureaux and field offices of UNESCO's Education programme are expected to receive some 70% of the total budget for Education in the next biennium, with the largest part of the proposed decentralised budget going to Africa. The field offices might participate in the rethinking of skills development through the mechanism of the regional conferences proposed for the conceptual phase. As for the new emphasis on upstream policy advisory work proposed for the organisation, it needs to be recalled that good policy advice is inseparable from the expertise and authority that come from projects, even if these are increasingly pilot projects related to some of the areas of UNESCO's comparative advantage.

Conclusion

This outline summary of issues for the UNESCO TVET strategy has covered the crucial normative dimension; the role of new upstream policy analytic work; the concerns with capacity, critical mass and a skills development community of practice; the statistical challenge; and the relation of these proposals to the draft of the Programme and Budget for 2010-2011. In the resulting UNESCO TVET Strategy, it will be valuable to provide the financial data to illustrate shifts in the skills development budget over the last two biennia and into the next biennium. It may also be possible for the TVET Strategy to review what pattern of TVET/Skills activities and priorities may be revealed either by the UNESS data or the regional meetings of national commissions of UNESCO.

The purpose of this document, in its earlier form, was to afford an opportunity for comment, reaction and critique at the international consultative meeting on technical and vocational education in Bonn in January 2009. The present version has been enriched by commentary at that meeting from individual experts located in development agencies, in academia, in think-tanks and in UNESCO itself. The meeting profited greatly from the experts nominated by member states in UNESCO's Executive Board, and from the particular member state, Germany, that took the initiative in proposing the development of a UNESCO TVET Strategy, - a proposal that generated such widespread support from UNESCO's member states, in both developing and industrialised regions of the world.

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