The Asia-Pacific region is experiencing HIV/AIDS epidemics that are diverse and require multiple responses. At the same time, the TVET sub-sector is increasingly recognised as a critical training institution for the future development of the labour-force and economy in developing countries around the world, and enrollments in TVET institutions are on the rise. In this context, UNESCO UNEVOC has developed “TVET and HIV/AIDS” into one of its areas of work and is exploring better ways to implement HIV prevention initiatives into TVET institutions throughout its member states.

In June 2011, UNESCO UNEVOC, in partnership with UNESCO Hanoi and the Vietnam Ministry of Education and Training (MoET), hosted a consultation meeting providing a platform for national UNEVOC Centres from 7 countries across the Asia-Pacific Region to develop a better understanding of HIV and AIDS issues in the region, share their experiences and consider how to better mainstream HIV and AIDS education into the TVET curriculum. 45 participants from Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Mongolia, including directors and policy makers, curriculum specialists, teacher-trainers, development partners, civil society organisations and representatives from UNEVOC Centres, gathered in Ha Long Bay, Vietnam for an intense and productive four-day meeting.

The meeting was officially opened by His Excellency Tran Quang Quy, Vice-Minister of Education and Training. The Minister stressed that HIV and AIDs is not only a health but also a social issue. In the Asia Pacific Region, HIV has an impact on young people’s livelihood and development and secondary impacts on communities. In this context, every opportunity should be taken to invest in prevention initiatives.

“*It is not enough to train in specific vocations, young people also need the life-skills to face the challenges that are characteristic of their time.*”

**MEETING OBJECTIVES**

- Collect the most up-to-date information and lessons learned on successful approaches to integrating HIV & AIDS issues into National TVET planning and management
- Identify best practices which show-case innovative experiences on how TVET has been effectively engaged in national responses to prevent HIV & AIDS
- Establish a framework for future work of the UNEVOC Network aimed at improving the availability of learning and teaching resources and innovatory tools
- Review and clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of UNEVOC Centres in the region and update information.
**HIV & AIDS IN THE ASIA PACIFIC REGION**

Overall, HIV prevalence in the Asia-Pacific Region is not as high as in other parts of the world. However, given its large population, there is a high number of people living with HIV. Some countries have managed to reduce the prevalence but in most countries prevalence is either stabilizing or still increasing – particularly among identified ‘high risk’ populations. This is particularly true of migrant workers and other categories of trans-border populations. Therefore HIV prevention and response efforts remain critical and need to look at geographical and social patterns of labour.

With regard to young people (15-24), 95% of new infections in young people are concentrated in Young Key Affected Populations, a group which makes up only 5% of young people. Therefore, prevention efforts need to focus on these populations in particular.

The TVET sector is a key player in HIV prevention and response, especially as a means to reach adolescents and young people, getting trained to enter the world of work. There is increasing evidence available about what works in HIV education to effectively increase knowledge but also impact behavior. There is also a building supply of resources that can be drawn on and implemented in different contexts. The TVET Sector can thus be seen as a strategic place in which to implement HIV and other life-skills education to young people who might otherwise miss out on information that every young person needs to protect themselves.

**BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS & SHARING GOOD PRACTICE**

The sub-regional meeting provided a valuable opportunity for the participants from the 7 countries to build partnerships, strengthen existing networks, and share experiences. Each country participant presented the current national HIV and AIDS policy status, including policy on HIV education and whether HIV is incorporated into the TVET curriculum. While all countries recognised a strong need for HIV education within TVET programmes, few countries have made progress in this area. Lack of partnerships between health and education ministries, over-crowded curriculum and lack of health expertise within the TVET sector were all identified as barriers to moving forward with this agenda.

Two countries – Vietnam and Mongolia shared stories of promising programmes in which HIV education has successfully been integrated into TVET programmes. In this context, countries looked at how TVET institutions, Government and Development partners can work together to make progress in this area. Countries considered national plans but also plans to work together to advocate for greater attention and resourcing to be given to this area.

*Young Key Affected Populations (YKAPs) are defined as young people aged 10-24 who are engaging in (a combination of) behaviours including: unprotected sex in context of sex work, unprotected sex between men and unsafe injecting drug users.*
STRENGTHENING THE UNEVOC NETWORK

The meeting provided a platform for countries to reflect on the role of the UNEVOC Network Centres in the Asia Pacific Region. Mr Teeluck Bhuwanee, Head of UNEVOC Network, made a presentation on the current state of the network. Currently with 283 UNEVOC TVET institution members in 167 countries, the UNEVOC network facilitates TVET institutions to share knowledge and strengthen the TVET sector at a policy and practice level through partnerships and collaboration.

Meeting participants were updated on current and future initiatives of the UNEVOC network. Two additional points are worth a special mention here. One is the message that a network cannot work without active, committed members, who are prepared to sacrifice some of their precious time to its activities. Members were reminded to make the most of the network and to utilize its resources to strengthen their work. Secondly, UNEVOC Centres need to engage in national and sub-regional activities, especially at policy level, to demonstrate that TVET institutions have a crucial and strategic role to play in changing people’s attitudes to technical and vocational education and training. In many countries, TVET is still seen by potential students and their parents as an inferior choice or a ‘last resort’, despite providing critical skills for the future labour force. In order to build the profile of TVET, this image needs to be challenged.

“As a UNEVOC centre, you must not work alone, you must see yourself as a national entity and you must engage the national partners. If we create the synergy, it is going to work much, much better.”

OUTCOMES & FUTURE ACTIONS

Participants agreed that the four-day meeting was successful in building partnerships between colleagues working in TVET throughout the region, reinforcing the role of UNEVOC Centres throughout the region and making commitments to the incorporation of HIV education in TVET. They also developed and endorsed a range of strategies to increase performance and effectiveness of UNEVOC Centres in the region.

With regard to the HIV agenda, participants jointly drafted and endorsed a Commitment to Action on Strengthening the HIV and AIDS response through TVET. This included commitments to:

• Enhance the visibility of UNEVOC TVET Centres;
• Strengthen communication and collaboration with relevant stakeholders at national, regional and global levels;
• Organise and actively participate in national and sub-regional network activities on TVET issues;
• Show leadership at a sub-regional level of specific themes; and
• Identify and share good practice through various UNEVOC Network portals.

The Commitment to Action will be finalized and distributed in the coming week. Participants look forward to continuing to work together to strengthen the visibility and effectiveness of UNEVOC TVET Centres in the Region, an important step in strengthening and developing the TVET sector as a whole.