



*Making Skills Development Work for the Future*

**Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training**

*Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 3-5 August 2015*

# CONFERENCE REPORT



Ministers and senior government officials from the Asia and Pacific region

## Overview

In response to transnational trends and in light of the emerging global development agenda, there is a need for a fundamental rethink of education and training across the globe. In the Asia-Pacific, this is driven by factors such as changing labour market structures, demographic changes, political instability and environmental degradation among others. To respond to these challenges, governments in the region are increasingly looking to education and training as an enabler for economic growth and social well-being. In particular, some countries in the region are increasingly paying attention to technical and vocational education and training (TVET) with the aim to bridge the middle-income trap. In addition, TVET continues to be regarded as key for equal access to opportunities and a decent life and work for all.

To facilitate policy debate on these key issues, the Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training (ACET) was held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 3 to 5 August 2015. The Conference was jointly organized by UNESCO and the Ministries of Education and Higher Education of Malaysia. As a follow up to the 3rd International Congress on TVET

(Shanghai, China, 2012) and the World Education Forum (Incheon, Republic of Korea, 2015), ACET brought together representatives of governments, development agencies, academia, the private sector, civil society as well as youth and employer organizations to discuss key issues in technical/vocational education and training in the Asia-Pacific region. A total of 766 participants, including 47 government representatives from across the Asia-Pacific region, attended the Conference.<sup>1</sup>

To review progress since the Shanghai Congress, UNESCO conducted a regional study based on a survey of ministries, employer and youth organizations in the Asia-Pacific region. The findings of this milestone report were presented in a keynote speech on the first day of the Conference setting the direction for discussions in the following two days. The report focused on the issue of 'relevance of TVET', the first recommendation of the Shanghai Consensus,<sup>2</sup> which is considered key for tackling regional challenges through TVET. The findings of the regional report formed the basis of the outcome statement of the Conference – the Kuala Lumpur Declaration – which is expected to set the direction for TVET and skills development in the Asia-Pacific region.

1 Government representatives participated from the following countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Brunei, Cambodia, Fiji Islands, India, Iran, Japan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Nepal, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Singapore, Solomon Islands, Thailand, Tonga, Turkmenistan, Tuvalu, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, and Vietnam.

2 The Shanghai Consensus is the outcome document from the 3rd International Congress on TVET (China, 2012) and can be found at [www.unevoc.unesco.org/fileadmin/up/217683e.pdf](http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/fileadmin/up/217683e.pdf)

## Conference Structure

Two plenary sessions took place on 3 and 4 August 2015, each featuring a panel of speakers who addressed a key question based on their expertise:

### 3 August 2015

1. Where are the jobs in Asia-Pacific?
2. Which skills for existing and emerging jobs?

### 4 August 2015

1. How to bridge the gap through ICT?
2. How to strengthen partnerships and coordination?

To allow for more in-depth discussions, a total of 10 concurrent sessions also took place on the following critical themes identified in collaboration with key partners<sup>3</sup>:

### 3 August 2015

1. The Economy and the Informal Sector: Opportunities and Challenges in TVET (BRAC);
2. Empowering Youth through Relevant Education and Training for Employment;
3. Greening TVET and Skills: Responses from the Asia-Pacific Region (UNESCO-UNEVOC);
4. How can Public-Private-Partnerships (PPP) Improve the Delivery of Relevant, Effective, and Quality TVET for Employment? (PEARSON);
5. Transversal Skills and Entrepreneurship: From Theory to Practice in the Workplace;

### 4 August 2015

1. Progress in Delivering Relevant Skills in Asia-Pacific: Sub-Regional Differences and the Way Forward;
2. ICT-Enhanced Innovative Pedagogy in TVET;
3. Quality Assurance Mechanisms in TVET (KRIVET);
4. Challenges and Prospects for TVET Teacher Training in the Asia-Pacific Region (GIZ).
5. TVET Networks- How International and Regional Networks can Contribute to the Development of National TVET Systems (RAVTE)



Cultural Performance during the Conference



Plenary session

<sup>3</sup> Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), UNEVOC International Centre for TVET, PEARSON, Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education & Training (KRIVET), Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and the Regional Association for Vocational Teacher Education in East and Southeast Asia (RAVTE).

## Plenary Sessions: Discussion Overview

### Plenary I

#### Where are the jobs in Asia Pacific?

**Background:** The Asia-Pacific region is constantly changing. These multifaceted changes are creating a reality in which many governments are faced with an 11 per cent youth unemployment rate<sup>4</sup>. At the same time, companies are struggling to fill jobs with adequately skilled workers. An understanding of labour market trends and their implications on skills development policies is necessary to be able to adequately tackle this growing problem.

This session invited three speakers to discuss the employment landscape in the Asia-Pacific region. Firstly, Ms. Makiko Matsumoto from the International Labour Organization (ILO) in Asia and the Pacific stated that the global and regional slowdown in employment growth is disproportionately affecting youth. In addition, she emphasized the persisting challenge of low job quality.

Mr. Jonathan Barr from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) pointed out that the key to increasing quality employment lies in building capacity at the local level. He explained that low oil prices since mid-2014 have influenced job growth, but mostly related to 'vulnerable employment', particularly in Cambodia, Vietnam and Myanmar. Mr. Phil Loveder from the National Center of Education Research (NCER) in Australia looked beyond labour market trends and emphasized the importance of Return on Investment (ROI), where returns support the case for investment in TVET. Lastly, Mr. Pang Chau Leong, from the Ministry of Human Resources Malaysia gave examples of how Malaysia is focusing on human capital development (with emphasis on youth and women) as a way to mainstream growth, mobility and marketability.

#### Key messages:

- Better understand the causes of 'mismatch' between skills and jobs which goes beyond skills and qualifications;
- Make national employment and training policy frameworks adjustable to the local context;
- Convince different social partners of the benefits of investing in training.

### Plenary II

#### Which Skills for Existing and Emerging Jobs?

**Background:** The nature of work and the workforce is changing rapidly in today's technology and innovation-driven world. Skills needs are therefore also evolving and putting pressure on TVET systems to respond adequately by providing well-prepared graduates. However, there are inefficiencies in skills acquisition and usage by entire TVET ecosystems. Hence governments are looking at new innovative models in TVET to ensure employability of graduates.

To demonstrate existing skills shortages in the region, Mr. Sam Haggag from the Manpower Group presented a 2014 survey which found that 36 per cent of employers in the Asia-Pacific are struggling to fill jobs, mainly due to applicants' lack of technical competencies (34 per cent) and so called

'soft skills' (32 per cent). To fill the skill gaps, he argued that employers must foster a learning culture and encourage employees to own their careers. Ms. Ishita Joshi, a representative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in India, explained that in order to facilitate the development of requisite skills, governments should consider developing awareness campaigns and 'skills' universities, linking the curriculum with industry requirements and setting up community service centers for career guidance. Lastly on this topic, Ms. Prapai Numthavaj from the Petroleum Institute of Thailand (PTIT) explained that there is need for collaboration between governments and industries to identify these skills gaps and create a basis for company-led innovative skill development programmes.

#### Key messages:

- Create a culture of talent development;
- Increase awareness and the aspirational value of skills training;
- Support research into current and future skills needs.

<sup>4</sup> Regional Overview: Youth in Asia Pacific, United Nations World Population Prospects <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-regional-escap.pdf>

### Plenary III How to bridge the gap through ICT?

**Background:** The expansion of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) continues in the Asia-Pacific. In 2014 for instance, 44 per cent of the world's Internet users resided in the region. Additionally, the rate at which Internet is used through mobile phones is expected to increase by 10 per cent between 2015 and 2018<sup>5</sup>. It is therefore critical to consider how this potential can be harnessed to develop the skills needed in the world of work.

In relation to the overarching question, Dr. Theresa Thang Tze Yian from the Institute of Technical Education in Singapore conducted a study identifying five "areas of readiness" to be considered

to effectively integrate ICTs into teaching, namely (1) strategic, (2) organizational, (3) technical, (4) pedagogical and (5) operational. Mr. Amir Omar from the Economic Planning Unit in the Prime Minister's Department of Malaysia explained that the Government's strategy to transform TVET is embedded in enhancing quality, delivery and strengthening governance, through use of ICTs. Mr. Pascal Mabilie from the TVET Academy in Cambodia discussed how ICTs in TVET provide significant opportunities to disadvantaged youth in places where offline learning is prevalent. He demonstrated one of the tools engineered by the TVET Academy - a projector with USB-saved tutorials that does not require Internet connection.

#### Key messages:

- Set up an inspiring vision and long term strategy for ICT in TVET;
- Use technology to support teachers, not to replace them;
- Consider less resource intensive and offline ICT solutions for greater coverage.

### Plenary IV How to Strengthen Partnership and Coordination?

**Background:** As recognized by the Shanghai Consensus (2012), partnerships and coordination are key for improving TVET quality and relevance. Growing economic integration in the Asia-Pacific region provides opportunities for the mobility of industries, workers and learners within and across borders. Consequently, partnerships and cooperation at all levels are becoming even more critical and require further policy debates.

To advance the debate on partnerships, Ms. Irene Isaac from the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in Philippines discussed the role of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) in bringing together countries to agree on values, mandates and structures for a sub-regional qualifications framework. As part of the AQRF development process, initiatives were set up to establish the Mutual Recognition Agreements

(MRA) and Mutual Recognition of Skills (MRS) to standardize a partnership process based on mutual trust and respect between the public and private sectors. Mr. Simon Song of BOSCH pointed out that there are three driving forces of TVET partnerships, namely (1) governments, (2) educational institutions and (3) the private sector. Governments need good policies and must provide funding; educational institutions need industry-focused curricula; and the private sector must provide youth with opportunities to acquire skills. Mr. Song gave an example of a programme run in partnership between BOSCH and the German Chamber of Commerce (GCC) entitled Technical Industrial Apprenticeship Programme (TGA). This 3.5-year programme is designed to combine both theory and on-the-job-training in a setting where trainees are remunerated for their work and obtain a certification from GCC.

#### Key messages:

- Build trust among partners by focusing on common goals and interests to sustain strong relationships;
- Explore funding options at the earliest stages of partnership development to increase chances of success;
- Create cross-border partnerships to share good practices.

## Concurrent Sessions: Key Discussion Points

The following key points emerged from the 10 concurrent sessions on 3 and 4 August:

- (1) quality assurance,
- (2) youth,
- (3) TVET teachers,
- (4) greening TVET,
- (5) partnerships and networks,
- (6) ICTs.

(1) **Quality assurance** of TVET certifications has been identified as key for creating trust between academic institutions, host enterprises and governmental bodies. Furthermore, it was agreed that public and private sector organizations as well as TVET institutions need to work together in developing practical assessments, theoretical examinations and accreditation for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

To increase quality, participants agreed that (2) **youth** need work practice through hands-on practical experiences such as internships, apprenticeships and entrepreneurship opportunities. In addition, curricula should include transversal skills, small business skills and ICT competencies. Related to the theme of (6) **ICTs**, it was discussed that students and teachers must learn to use ICTs to improve learning outcomes. Since ICT is becoming ever more prevalent in the Asia-Pacific, there is a shift in discourse away from ICT as a tool to increase access to education and training, to

ICTs for improving quality of learning. It was also voiced that ICTs should be seen as a tool to enhance teaching and learning instead of a ready-made solution to existing challenges.

In relation to (3) **TVET teachers**, the concurrent session revealed the importance of pre- and in-service teacher education and pointed to flexible curricula and integration of ICTs as a way to instill the spirit of lifelong learning in teachers. Within the (4) **greening TVET** theme, it was discussed that greening skills in TVET is essential for ensuring that the next generation can develop skills for emerging green economies and societies. It was argued that topping-up of existing skills to include green skills is a viable option for TVET to meet labour market demands for green skills. In an effort to reduce poverty and create sustainable development, greening skills can contribute to closing the income inequality gap through TVET. These efforts can be enhanced through (5) **partnerships and networks** that link the private and public sectors.

In terms of networks, it was discussed that there needs to be a top-down and bottom-up approach to ensure that they are strong and can support each other. In general, networks can benefit from:

- (1) teaching and learning from each others' experiences,
- (2) promoting regional and inter-regional dialogue,
- (3) and the pooling of resources.



Side session related to TVET networks

"We are calling for stronger collaborative efforts among Asia-Pacific countries to establish a participatory framework for TVET programmes, strengthen governance, create sound policies and coordinated partnerships at all levels and across sectors."

Keynote Speech, Dato' Seri Idris Jusoh, Minister of Higher Education, Malaysia,  
4 August 2015

## Conference Outcome: Kuala Lumpur Declaration

The Conference culminated in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration, a landmark outcome statement endorsed by 27 UNESCO Member States, which outlines eight recommendations<sup>6</sup> and actions for the development of TVET. The Declaration was conceived through a consultative process that included government representatives from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Uzbekistan, China, Malaysia and Thailand as well as members from the private sector and civil society – namely Intel and Action Aid.



Senior officials holding the Kuala Lumpur Declaration  
Photo by Saddam Yusoff

The draft Declaration was prepared based on findings from the TVET progress review conducted by UNESCO and discussed in drafting committee meetings before and during the Conference. The draft was presented to Ministers and senior government officials in a closed-door ministerial meeting on 4 August 2015. While there was broad support for the Declaration among ministers in the meeting, discussions focused on enhancing TVET quality, particularly through reforming teacher training curriculum. In addition, increased advocacy was recognized as necessary to address the low level of TVET attractiveness among young people and parents which is a continuous challenge for TVET. In relation to attractiveness and relevance, the role of governments and the public was mentioned, as well as the importance of life and green skills. Besides quality and relevance, equity within TVET was flagged as a key aspect to tackle challenges affecting women/girls and ethnic minorities. Finally, ministers highlighted the importance of performance indicators as well as monitoring and evaluation to advance the development of TVET in the region.

The Declaration was adopted by Ministers and other Conference participants in a plenary session led by Mr. Gwang-Jo Kim, Director of UNESCO Bangkok on 5 August 2015. In the following plenary session, discussions focused on ways to turn the recommendations into concrete actions.

“We need to move beyond the limits of current approaches, to sharpen the impact of education and training for all members of societies. Skills development cannot just be for some – it must happen in multiple settings and be accessible to all women and men.”

Keynote Address, Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Secretary General for Education, UNESCO  
4 August 2015

<sup>6</sup> The 8 recommendations read as follows:  
1. Enhance the quality of TVET and its relevance to the changing needs of the world of work;  
2. Ensure inclusive and equitable TVET;  
3. Expand lifelong learning opportunities through TVET;  
4. Integrate greening skills for sustainable development in TVET programmes;  
5. Adapt qualification systems to facilitate learning and career pathways;  
6. Strengthen governance and increase investment in TVET;  
7. Leverage the potential of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) for TVET;  
8. Foster regional integration and labour mobility.

## Next Steps and Action Plan

Speaking on behalf of UNESCO, Mr. Gwang-Jo Kim pledged continued support to Member States in making the vision and recommendations of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration a reality in the coming years. To assist in monitoring progress, UNESCO will produce regular reports on TVET in the region and conduct in-depth thematic research, including on quality assurance of TVET certifications and TVET leadership, among others. To advance policy dialogue on TVET, UNESCO will organize the 2nd Asia Pacific Conference on Education and Training in 2018.

Through its UNEVOC Network in the Asia-Pacific, UNESCO will scale-up TVET activities in the region to assist in the implementation of the recommendations. More specifically, UNEVOC will conduct several research and capacity building activities in the areas of greening TVET and ICT between 2016 and 2017.

To emphasize the importance of these activities, Mr. Shyamal Majumdar, Director of UNESCO-UNEVOC International Centre for TVET said that “the world is not hungry for words but for action” and highlighted the key role of UNEVOC Network members in bringing about positive change.

To provide a government perspective, Dr. Mahendra Reddy, Minister of Education of Fiji gave stirring remarks calling all Member States to consider creating a national movement, one that includes the media, to change the image of TVET to be more attractive to the public. When TVET is presented in a more positive light, he argued, increase in demand is predictable. To echo what was stated in the ministerial discussions, Dr. Reddy also suggested that the term “technical education” be used instead of vocational education to help remove the negative stereotypes associated with TVET.

“The measure of success is what is best for young people according to their talents and abilities. The measure of success is not just to get a university education. A university degree may be the path to success for some but there are other paths to success for others.”

Mr. Simon Bartley, President, World Skills International,  
5 August 2015

Speaking on behalf of development partners, Mr. Simon Bartley from World Skills International, demonstrated a clear link between his organization’s aims and the call to action in the Kuala Lumpur Declaration. Among others, he reemphasized Dr. Reddy’s call to reverse the negative stereotypes

associated with TVET by ensuring communities understand that university is not the only route to a prosperous life. He called on all Conference participants to go back to their countries to share the success stories and good practices in TVET with their families, friends and colleagues.

For further information on the Conference, please visit:

<http://www.unescobkk.org/education/tvet/asia-pacific-conference-on-education-and-training/>

You can also email us at [ap.tvet@unesco.org](mailto:ap.tvet@unesco.org)

**We look forward to hearing from you!**

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