

**Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and
Training**
On “Transforming TVET: Building skills for work and life”
Shanghai, People’s Republic of China
14 to 16 May 2012
GENERAL REPORT

More than 700 participants from over 100 of UNESCO’s Member States met 14-16 May 2012 to discuss “Transforming TVET: Building skills for work and life” at the Shanghai International Convention Centre. The occasion was the Third International Congress on Technical Vocational Education and Training.

The opening ceremony was moderated by the Minister of Education of the People’s Republic of China. There were three speakers: the Mayor of Shanghai, the Director-General of UNESCO and the State Councillor of the People’s Republic of China. The Minister of Education of the People’s Republic of China was elected President. The Provisional Rules and Procedure as well as the Provisional Agenda and Annotated Agenda were adopted. Five vice-presidents were elected, as well as a General-Rapporteur and a Drafting Group.

Six plenaries, six parallel sessions, six roundtables and seven special sessions later, we can now report on the outcomes of our discussions.

The first plenary examined the role of TVET in inclusive and sustainable development. The second plenary looked at the transformation of TVET for better work, life and lifelong learning.

A changing global context

The acceleration of processes of change at the global level is challenging our approaches to education in general, and to technical and vocational education and training in particular. Indeed, socio-demographic changes, growing youth unemployment, persistent and widening inequalities both across and within countries, the increased interdependency of all countries in a context of intensified economic integration, pressures on natural resources and associated climate change, as well as the pace of development of new information and communication technologies and the consequent production and circulation of knowledge, all pose important challenges to technical and vocational education and training.

Moreover, crises such as the food, fuel and financial crises, as well as natural and technological disasters, are forcing us to re-examine how we conceive of progress and the dominant models of human development. In doing so, we must necessarily re-examine the relevance of current models of, and approaches to, technical and vocational education in an increasingly complex, interdependent and unpredictable world.

Transforming TVET to respond to our changing world

A rethinking of the nature and roles of TVET in contributing to more equitable and sustainable patterns of human development is now underway. This rethinking marks a shift in focus from short-term to longer-term development needs, from expansion of systems to their

transformation, and from on contributing to economic growth to an added concern for social equity.

Scaling up existing models of TVET provision to include more young people and adults is not the solution. However, profound transformations are needed in the conceptualisation, governance, funding and organisation of TVET. There is therefore a call to transform TVET in an integrated manner, with policies and practices that are capable of responding effectively to the many economic, equity and transformational challenges. In acknowledging the need for TVET to contribute to economic growth, social equity and inclusion, as well as to sustainable transformation, participants examined how to combine the relevance of TVET with its necessary transformation.

During the parallel sessions and round tables, the participants were able to work on fundamental concerns on TVET such as: “enhancing the responsiveness of TVET in a lifelong perspective”; “improving governance and widening stakeholders’ engagement in TVET”; “financing the transformation of TVET for lifelong learning”; “beyond talk: what actions for TVET in ‘least developed countries’”; “the role of TVET in development for middle-income countries”; “skills measurement and monitoring”; “technology and skills development”; “skills for sustainable development: transforming TVET for green economies and green societies”; and “skills development for fast-growing sectors”.

The need for a paradigm shift regarding skills development

In the current context of global change, the contours of TVET need to be more clearly defined in relation to the broader concept of skills development. If we are to transform TVET, there is a need for a paradigm shift and a change of mindset concerning the conceptualisation and implementation of education and training systems. The new paradigm of TVET should be conceived of in such a way that training systems can respond to the demands of the labour market, while at the same time helping citizens achieve skills required for work and for lifelong learning.

Policy coherence and governance

TVET reform therefore requires a new policy orientation. It implies changes in the roles and responsibilities of the various stakeholders. It also involves a paradigm shift that includes the active involvement of relevant actors, such as industry. Indeed, there is a trend towards enlarged stakeholder involvement that brings ministries of education, workers’ associations, civil society and private industry together in the planning, design, delivery and governance of TVET. In such a context, the role of government is changing. While it used to be seen as a provider of TVET, it is now acting as a regulator, setting standards for training and employment.

Participants acknowledged that new modalities of TVET delivery must involve a broader partnership with multiple stakeholders. This in turn calls for greater coordination. Participants acknowledged the crucial role of national, regional and international coordination and cooperation between partners, as well as linkages with social partners and industries, in order for TVET to become accessible and efficient in various and alternative ways linked to lifelong learning. Effective stakeholder dialogue for curriculum development, program design, delivery and governance is needed.

Responsiveness of TVET in an increasingly unpredictable world

In order to improve the responsiveness of TVET to emerging social needs and demands, there is a need for systems to be more flexible in their capacity to anticipate and forecast skills needs. Anticipating the evolution of labour market demand is essential if we are to transform skills into better jobs and improve well-being throughout life.

There also needs to be a proper balance between generic learning and social skills, and specific vocational skills. Indeed, an increasingly important task for TVET is preparing to learn *how* to learn and how to adapt, rather than simply preparing for specific occupations. This is particularly true in the current context, where modes of production are rapidly changing and therefore increasingly difficult to forecast. Given the need for hard and soft skills for a sustainable future, TVET programmes should include multicultural and ethical dimensions for sustainable growth. TVET can also contribute to global citizenship to avoid human-made and natural disasters. Having said this, the transition to greener economies and greener societies calls for even more policy coherence and coordinated implementation of education and training.

Sustainable development

Pressures on the planet's resources and environmental degradation require that we move away from energy and emissions-intensive economies to energy-saving and cleaner production and service patterns. How could TVET take on a catalytic role in addressing urgent sustainability challenges? There is increasing demand for skills for green jobs. In response to this need, regional and local skills anticipation and forecasting is essential. Greening of both existing and emerging jobs is needed. Green skills are just as important.

Social equity and inclusion

Given that participation in TVET programmes is a form of social engagement that generates social capital in civic, political and professional lives, how can TVET promote equity? The individuals and groups most excluded from TVET include girls and women, the disabled, rural populations, the poor and young people, who, in some contexts represent up to 75% of the unemployed. Marginalization of young people in work starts with marginalization in education.

Moreover, in the case of young women, gendered divisions of labour related to the reproduction of stereotypes are an additional obstacle. Perpetuation of gender stereotypes requires dealing with broader social and cultural issues. Measures include awareness-raising campaigns on gender equality, incentives to private business to hire qualified skilled female workers, encouraging the media and advertising to show positive female role models, and encouraging men to take up occupations traditionally occupied by women. Labour market information and gender-sensitive career guidance and counselling are also important.

The need for integrated policy approaches to skills development

Countries should consider developing an integrated policy approach within a broad context of lifelong learning strategies. There should be a seamless transition from the early years of education and training to higher levels of learning and training, with linkages between general and vocational education. This strategy should reduce the age-old gap between general and vocational education. TVET should cater not only to the needs of the labour market, but also to the holistic development of individuals. There is therefore a need to assess and improve existing methodologies and frameworks for skills measurement, available skills data and indicators and their use in guiding policies, particularly in developing countries and at both the national and international levels.

National and regional qualification frameworks for lifelong learning

A well-designed qualifications framework can be an important tool in facilitating an integrated approach to skills development, by recognizing prior learning and facilitating lifelong learning approaches. The growing acknowledgement of the diversification of education and training pathways is translating into greater interest for National and Regional Qualification Frameworks, or 'NQF/RQFs', for the certification and validation of skills regardless of how they are acquired. In this regard, the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning has just published the *UNESCO Guidelines for the recognition, validation and Accreditation of the Outcomes of Non formal and Informal learning*. The process itself of developing NQFs – that not only include vocational/technical competencies, but also social skills, values and attitudes – is of particular interest in supporting social dialogue and the sharing of information among all interested stakeholders.

Multiple pathways to ensure effective transition of youth from school to work

There is a growing understanding that global youth unemployment must be approached from an innovative and comprehensive perspective. Given the scale of global youth unemployment and vulnerable employment, entrepreneurship education is a necessary component for a more successful transition from school to work. Similarly, career guidance and counseling is a central element for effective integration of young people in the world of work. Learners also need to be able to switch between general and vocational education, with open pathways for higher education and training through the use of formal, non-formal and informal approaches within a framework of lifelong learning.

Financing of TVET

While the role of government is crucial in the provision of TVET and in ensuring that it enhances social equity and inclusion, resource constraints remain a real challenge in the face of rising demand. Beyond the involvement of the private sector, and given the limited funding for education and training, there is a need to consider more efficient use of existing infrastructure. Finally, alternative delivery modes such as open schools need to be seriously considered as a way to meet rising demand for TVET that can no longer be met through traditional “brick and mortar” approaches alone.

Bridging the gap between research and policy development

There is also a need to assess the current state of TVET research in a given country or region. Given the popularly-perceived close link between TVET and youth unemployment, TVET

policy has the potential to be more politicised than some other sub-sectors of educational policy. There is a need to foster or strengthen a culture of TVET policy learning within government, so that decision-makers increasingly base their decisions on evidence. Moreover, if TVET research is to influence policy *in strategic ways*, we must invest in the development of TVET and labour market information systems, as well as in the capacity building of individuals and institutions to be able to design instruments and collect and analyse data.