



ISESE Asia Regional Skills Symposium



9-10 January 2013 | India Habitat Centre | New Delhi, India

MEETING SUMMARY

The Innovative Secondary Education for Skills Enhancement (ISESE) project aims to identify the skills secondary students in developing countries need in order best to position them for employment opportunities, and explore paths to scale up the most effective models to deliver these skills in Africa and Asia. On January 9-10, 2013, Results for Development (R4D) and the National University for Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) convened the Asia Regional Skills Symposium in New Delhi, India to explore innovative models of skills delivery in South and Southeast Asia with a mix of stakeholders from the region, including policymakers, employers, researchers and educators.

The symposium had three goals: (i) identify gaps and opportunities for scaling promising approaches to skills delivery; (ii) explore policy recommendations that strengthen the quality and relevance of skills delivered at the secondary level; and (iii) develop an action plan to test promising ideas at the country and regional levels. Participants included ISESE Reference Group members and a mix of policymakers, researchers, employers, and educators from India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Vietnam, and Thailand.

Two days of presentations, discussion and debate included three panels on key underlying topics for skills delivery (TVET Programming, Public Private Partnerships, and National Qualifications Frameworks), two panels introducing successful case studies of skills delivery models, and two small group discussions that offered participants from the same country or region the opportunity to discuss how these issues and examples apply in individual contexts.

OVERARCHING THEMES AND FINDINGS

Some key themes emerged throughout the symposium that point to important lessons and ideas for how to effectively structure and support successful and sustainable skills delivery models in Asia.

- 1. Industry involvement and incentives.** The link between employer demand and training supply is now a widely assumed and accepted crucial component to effective skill development, but creating partnerships with industry is often more difficult in practice than in theory. Participants highlighted the need for government to create incentives such as tax breaks or national recognition for employers to participate in programs that integrate industry needs with training provision to ensure that students are getting the correct skills and workplace training to lead to

jobs. This applies to industry involvement on a number of levels, whether it be through consulting on qualification frameworks, conducting training of trainers at skill development programs, providing in-kind equipment donation, or offering internships/apprenticeships to students alongside classroom training.

2. **Public-private partnerships.** Effective PPPs, particularly when introduced into an existing system to build upon and improve the efficiency of established institutions, provide the opportunity for innovative models to have high impact and sustainability. However, participants urged that a clear mandate for both the public and private sector is a crucial component to these partnerships; each side must have a clearly defined set of both responsibilities and benefits to make the partnership effective. The public sector must provide the regulatory framework, infrastructure, and a long-term commitment of support. The private sector must provide managerial support and technical expertise and be responsive to government needs. Both sides must be flexible and participatory in collaborations.
3. **Countering TVET stigma.** All countries present at the symposium struggle with how to counter the negative stigma associated with technical and vocational education and training. In India, the stigma seems to be even greater than in Southeast Asian countries. Ideas for countering this stigma included increasing articulation between academic and vocational streams, and reassuring prospective TVET students that there is the possibility of transfer between the two streams. Participants also agreed that the choice should be more informed, and that public relations campaigns must highlight the most important demonstrated benefit of vocational training: getting a reliable, long-term job that pays well.
4. **Inclusive education and training.** Participants pointed out that while many skills development programs focus on industries that are common to urban areas, it is critical to ensure that rural communities are not neglected. Skills programs should focus on how to contextualize training for different communities, making the skills students acquire responsive to those communities' specific needs. An idea was put forth that while TVET is generally industry-specific, perhaps it should be geographically specific instead. Programs should also plan for equalizing foundational skills by potentially providing remedial training, in order to level the playing field for those from disadvantaged backgrounds who may not have had access to basic education and skills. Those working in the informal sector must also not be forgotten, and skills training programs should be developed to boost their productivity and income.
5. **Curriculum articulation and flexibility.** To ensure that students at the secondary level acquire the foundational skills needed to succeed in any field of employment, a re-thinking of the general education curriculum is needed. Specifically, participants suggested that integrating the general and vocational curricula rather than specializing at an early age may provide a stronger set of employable competencies that would then lead to stronger job-related training. In some countries, such as Vietnam, this would help to counter the surplus of low-skilled workers, by increasing mobility among those who ultimately choose the vocational stream. In addition, creating flexibility in vocational training programs to allow for the possibility of entry and exits along the work spectrum would ensure that programs are demand-driven and responsive to the fluctuating needs of the workforce.
6. **Work-integrated learning.** Interesting models from Thailand that integrate general education with vocational and workplace learning provided an example of how to prepare students for the workplace and ensure that the transition from school to work is smooth. This "earn while you learn" approach helps to counter financial constraints faced by many students who cannot afford to take time away from the workplace in order to pursue education. These successful models of public-private partnership also demonstrate the varied ways that industry can promote skills

development while also benefiting from the program long term by acquiring well trained employees.

- 7. Job placement and retention.** Several participants highlighted the importance of focusing not only on how to effectively deliver relevant education and skills, but also on ensuring that students receive the support they need to find, and keep, quality jobs. Many of the successful models presented included a component of job search assistance, whether it is providing information on available jobs or advisory services for application and interview skills. This is another area where partnership between training providers and employers proves critical, as recruiters can form direct associations with trainers or non-profits who are assisting students with job placement to ensure that the link is made between supply and demand.
- 8. Teacher and trainer quality.** General and vocational education programs alike are encountering the problem of poorly prepared teachers and trainers, raising the importance of focusing not only on the structure and content of training programs, but also the knowledge and preparedness of teachers and trainers delivering the content. Participants voiced the importance of the government's role in ensuring that teachers in public institutions are held to a high standard. Employers and industry leaders can both play a role in strengthening the capacity of vocational programs, whether via lending employees to serve as temporary trainers or training outside trainers to effectively deliver the curriculum. New ICT can also be used to enhance teacher training and effectiveness.
- 9. Innovative technology to enhance access, delivery and learning.** New technologies are helping to enhance not only the way educators and trainers deliver skills but also the way students are absorbing, learning, and sharing the content as well. New ICTs have enabled effective curricula to be shared across programs, increasing the capacity and expertise of programs with limited resources to deliver skills to those who cannot travel to big cities to access the most renowned training. New technology is also enhancing the capacity of teachers to demonstrate skills and competencies in multiple formats and learning experiences, helping students build multi-faceted skills. Making learning interactive not only enhances knowledge building but motivates students to become self-learners.
- 10. Communication and information sharing.** One of the most important outcomes from the symposium was the recognition that communication and the sharing of information needs to increase at all levels if skills development programs are to be effective and responsive. This theme was repeated in many different panels and contexts: between industry and the public sector; between different ministries seeking to streamline competency frameworks; between trainers and employers; between the government and the public at large. The complexity of the skills development question cannot be solved within one ministry or one training provider; it must be discussed in depth and as often as possible to ensure that innovative ideas are shared and implemented. Participants agreed that fostering the types of conversations started at the symposium (for instance, between stakeholders who normally do not interact with one another) should be continued in the future.

ACTION PLANS

In the closing session of the symposium, India and Southeast Asia small groups discussed lessons from the symposium and devised action plans or areas to focus on moving forward separately.

Southeast Asia Group. The participants from Thailand, Cambodia, Vietnam and Bangladesh identified four priority areas for skill development in the region:

1. Encourage **industry involvement** in national TVET and NQF efforts, including creating policies to incentivize participation;
2. Build on **proven learning methods**, particularly work-based “earn while you learn” programs, and encourage employer partnerships with training programs;
3. Reform curricula **to integrate elements of general and vocational education** and train competent teachers to deliver the content, so that foundational skills are strongly developed at the secondary level;
4. Explore ways to **strengthen non-formal or continuing education** to ensure that those who have dropped out of school and are already in the labor force have the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills for upward mobility.

India Group. Indian participants identified three priority areas for skills development in the country:

1. A systematic **skills gap analysis** is necessary to ensure that Indian skills development is moving in the right direction;
2. Increased focus on programs that train **trainers and teachers**, as delivery in the classroom has not kept up with the changing curriculum;
3. Incentivizing **proactive industry involvement** in skills development initiatives by creating strong linkages between industry engagement and the success of the programs.

The India group also identified several potential solutions to some of these challenges, including:

- Contractual/guest faculty drawn from industry leaders;
- Mandatory internships/apprenticeships;
- Contextualization of training programs to different geographies;
- Using ICT to improve pedagogy;
- Accreditation of training providers and courses, including assessment methods;
- Student waivers and subsidies, particularly for marginalized groups;
- Facilitating national and international mobility;
- Quality assurance framework for transparency and comparability within and across the country.

WHAT NEXT?

Continuing to build upon findings from the Phase I research and feedback from the symposium in Delhi, R4D is now conducting an in-depth analysis of a selection of innovative models to better understand the opportunities and constraints of scaling up programs that effectively deliver the skills necessary for employability. R4D will also convene a similar group of stakeholders in Africa to discuss models for skills delivery in the African context, including a session on comparisons and potential lessons between Africa and Asia. A final report consisting of our findings and recommendations will be published and disseminated in mid-2013.

CONTACT

- More information on the ISESE project, and the body of ISESE research, can be found on the R4D website: <http://resultsfordevelopment.org/focus-areas/innovative-secondary-education-skills-enhancement>
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