

Book Review: Skills Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Developing Asia-Pacific

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Springer, London, 2013, pp. 380, ISBN 978-94-007-5937-4

(Available in Open Access at <http://goo.gl/7dG56F>)

In the Foreword to this publication, Bindu Lohani, Asian Development Bank Vice President for Knowledge Management and Sustainable Development asserts, “ADB attaches great importance to education and skills training, not just for their own merit, but also as enablers to fully realize gains from other key developmental areas, including infrastructure, environment, and finance sector.” This assertion sets the tone for the articles included in the publication, *Skills Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Developing Asia-Pacific*.

This publication is a collection of articles compiled from papers presented at a forum convened by the Asia Development Bank in Manila in December 2011. The forum brought together a diverse group of international experts, CEOs of companies and institutions engaged in skills and workforce development, and representatives of multilateral agencies, government, and the private sector to address the challenges of skills development in South Asian and Pacific countries. The targets of the publication include educators, employers and policy makers in the developing Asia-Pacific countries.

The strength of the collection lies in the diversity of perspectives. However, it should be noted that much of the information contained in the articles relies mostly on data from 2009 to 2010 or earlier, and needs to be updated. From a historical perspective many of the articles may be of interest to the target audiences, but skills requirements and countries’ attitudes toward training provision in some skills areas change quickly; therefore, data that are five years old are not compelling – and certainly should not be the basis for government decision making in isolation.

The publication comprises 20 articles that cover a plethora of topics from theoretical and historical articles on the current status of, and issues related to, TVET in Asia-Pacific countries, to projected directions for TVET in “greening” economies.

The organisation of the articles, divides the publication into four sections. The first section provides an introduction to major trends and concerns relating to skills development and TVET. The second section addresses significant issues and strategies that are emerging in the TVET and the skills development sector. The third section examines the link between TVET and the imperatives of greening economies and how education and training are responding to “green” growth. The fourth



and final section draws together prominent trends to articulate an emerging framework for policy and action in the skills and training sector and suggests how development partners might organise their future activities and investments.

While there are certain articles that could be extremely useful to TVET policy makers and educational administrators, in general, the articles present approaches and challenges faced by TVET educators and policy makers in countries across the world, not just in the Asia-Pacific region. Articles address various issues such as:

- The rationale for the “vocationalisation” of secondary and higher education
- The comparatively higher cost of offering TVET programmes over academic courses with little evidence of resultant economic growth justifying the additional cost
- The relative lack of student interest in pursuing TVET programmes
- The necessity for government policy to encourage students to pursue TVET and provide the rationale and support for increased TVET offerings in formal education
- The importance of providing quality instructor training to enhance TVET programmes
- The importance of “soft skills” or “employability skills” in functional education for workplace success and employer interest in graduates
- The importance of employer/private sector engagement in TVET programmes – design, curriculum, training and assessment of learning and public-private partnerships
- TVET as a strategy for addressing poverty and addressing rural-urban migration
- Comparisons of TVET programme success in differing economies in the Asia-Pacific Region in comparison with countries in other parts of the world.

The most compelling chapters of the publication are those that link TVET and “greening” economies. UNEP defines a green economy as “... one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities... a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive.” (UNEP, 2011)

Fien and Guevara in Chapter 14 describe the concept of “greening economy,” which they claim has replaced sustainable development, as reflecting four interconnected and mutually dependent goals: “...increasing economic growth, alleviating poverty by reducing unemployment, increasing social inclusion and equity, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions.” They emphasise that reaching these goals will demand strengthening existing TVET systems so that they can “... [equip] all individuals with the requisite breadth of competencies needed to take full advantage of the opportunities being generated by the ‘green economy’.” Whilst the case studies by Fien and Guevara outline the general requirements to “green” an economy, the case studies reflect that, the implementation of skills is still at a conceptual level. Moving from theory to practice will require financial investment and a policy support framework.

Shanti Jagannathan in Chapter 15 observes that, “The transition to green economy will require new indicators that go beyond income poverty and GDP to a broader way of tracking economic, social, and environment progress and well-being.” (p. 266) and anticipates that the new Millennium Development Goals introduced in 2015 will establish these new indicators. Jagannathan asserts that, “Developing countries need to increase their enrolment in technical tertiary education and improve the quality and relevance of such education. Such an increase would accelerate growth and help with skill limitations created by green policies” (p. 277).

Namchul Lee (Chapter 16, “Redesigning of Curriculum and Training for Skills for Green Jobs in the Republic of Korea”) focuses on key initiatives and the financing of activities that have been undertaken to re-engineer government policy and, subsequently, TVET curriculum and training, to support the government’s espoused policies for a greener economy. Lee, asserts that the Republic of Korea has been “...presenting low-carbon green growth as a new paradigm of national development” (p. 282), and observes that after the government had developed a policy framework for green growth, it was necessary to stimulate the redesign of TVET. This chapter provides considerable detail about the breadth and scope of the Republic of Korea’s policy framework and plans for developing the country into a green economy. There is less detail about the changes necessary to curriculum and skills training, unfortunately, although the system for making the changes is presented in diagrammatic form. Most importantly, this chapter is the connection the author makes between government policy, the provision of financing, restructured planning and systems design to achieve the intended changes and overall training modification, including the revision of TVET standards to meet the demands of the green jobs. It is clear that The Republic of Korea’s success is a result of the firm foundation of government policy supplemented by sufficient financing and its implementation and collaboration with the employment sector in carrying out the policies.

Maclean, Tsang, and Fien in Chapter 17 present an analysis of interviews conducted with employers in various sectors of the Hong Kong business environment with a focus on where the future lies in greening economies. The authors note that:

...current efforts to reduce firms’ carbon footprint are focused largely on energy reduction and waste minimisation, which may stem from a ‘business-as-usual’ approach that makes a few concessions to sustainability through the use of energy-saving technologies. There is little to be seen that is radical, with the arguable exception of the engineering sector in which designers, who are not specifically trained in environmental management, are actively designing buildings to maximise energy efficiency and using these designs as a selling point” (p. 323).

They further note that, employers did not seem to be concerned about the “green” knowledge of new recruits, because few green jobs exists at the present time, and the employers were willing to train their employees when the need arose. While some of the interview material was interesting, this chapter did not seem to contribute much to the overall premise of the publication, except to point out that employers are rather naive about what the greening of the economy may mean for their workforce.

Pavlova and Chun (Chandler) in Chapter 18 explore the “green” skills they perceive as necessary to support future greening economies. With the exception of one, “environmental awareness and attitude and willingness to learn about sustainable development, [and] the issues and challenges of sustainable development,” the skills listed reflect those defined at present in the various lists of employability skills. This chapter, echoes the content of earlier chapters that discuss “soft skills.” The authors make a connection between core Chinese values and the values they assert will be necessary in future educational directions. They offer a case study of the Zhejiang Technical Institute of Economics, which is known for the incorporation of Chinese cultural values into their curriculum. The authors argue that “...the ways moral values are addressed in TVET in the People’s Republic of China ...provide a mechanism to incorporate values associated with generic green skills in technical education and training” (p. 340).

In the final section of the publication, “Going Forward: Possible Next Steps for a Skills Framework,” Jagannathan lists a number of strategies that will enable Developing Asia-Pacific economies to prepare for the future and strengthen the skills of their human resources for sustainable growth and these include:

- Aligning skills training policies with economic and industrial policies
- Ensuring industry-led systems for skills training with a conducive regulatory framework
- Supporting Qualification Frameworks and quality assurance
- Increasing the prestige of skills training and rebranding TVET
- Strengthening foundational skills and direct measurement of skills
- Mainstreaming soft skills into TVET, and
- Integrating career guidance and placement into skills training.

The above list is not exclusive to the Developing Asia-Pacific Region; it applies to all countries, no matter their level of development.

In summary, the publication is a useful document of the ADB Manila Forum (2011), but much of the content is already dated. It is a useful record of proceedings, but it is a struggle to read from cover to cover because of the repetition in some chapters, and the uneven editing of the publication. The case studies offer the most useful signs for the future of inclusive and sustainable development.

Reference

UNEP. (2011). *Green economy pathways to sustainable development and poverty eradication: A synthesis for policy makers*. Nairobi: UNEP.

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