

A Review of Key Reports in TVET, Skills Development and Jobs – What do Global Trends Portend for Asia?

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Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Overview | 3 |
| <i>Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives</i> (OECD, 2012, pp.114); <i>Skills Development Pathways in Asia</i> (OECD / Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012, pp.216)..... | 8 |
| <i>Jobs. World Development Report 2013</i> (World Bank, 2012, pp.422)..... | 14 |
| <i>The World at Work: Jobs, Pay and Skills for 3.5 Billion People</i> (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012, pp.108) | 18 |
| <i>World of Work Report 2012, Better Jobs for a Better Economy</i> (ILO, 2012a, pp.128); <i>Global Employment Trends 2012. Preventing a Deeper Jobs Crisis</i> (ILO, 2012b, pp.121)..... | 22 |
| <i>Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work. EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012</i> (UNESCO, 2012a, pp.472) | 24 |
| <i>Global Trends and Issues in TVET: A World Report</i> (UNESCO, forthcoming 2013, pp.319; <i>Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Building Skills for Work and Life. Main Working Document</i> (UNESCO, 2012c, pp.28) | 31 |
| Final Thoughts on these Six Global Reports | 36 |
| References | 37 |

Overview

Introduction

2012 has certainly been a busy year for those interested in the links between skills and jobs, and we have seen the launch of a number of global reports on this topic. January saw the ILO's *Global Employment Trends 2012*. In May, came the ILO's *World of Work Report 2012*, the *Main Working Document* and *Shanghai Consensus* of UNESCO's Third International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training, and the new OECD skills strategy, *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives*. In June, the McKinsey Global Institute's *The World at Work* arrived, and October saw two more: the World Bank's *World Development Report 2013 on Jobs*, and the long-awaited EFA Global Monitoring Report 2012 on *Youth and Skills*. In addition, throughout much of 2012, there has been the development of UNESCO's *World Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, which is expected to be published early in 2013.

In this rare combination of global reports on different aspects of skills, work and jobs, there looked to be a unique opportunity for a consensus to emerge about the role of skills in international development.² This paper aims to highlight the key messages that have come from these global reports on skills and jobs, and – where possible – to flag up some of the implications there are for skills development policies in Asia.

Concepts of skill, and why definition matters

It is very clear these global reports cover 'skills' in a range of different ways. Clarity, therefore, about what type or range of 'skills' are referred to is an essential prerequisite for understanding what these reports have to offer, and what implications there may be for Asia.

- In the *World Development Report* (WDR), skills refers to cognitive, social and technical skills, as well as to 'entrepreneurship'.
- In the *OECD Skills Strategy*, skills refers to foundation skills' (problem solving, literacy, numeracy, reading), 'higher-order skills such as the "4 C's" (creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration), 'learning-to-learn' skills, 'vocational' skills and 'skills for entrepreneurship'.
- In the UNESCO *Global Trends and Issues in TVET*, skills refers principally to technical and vocational skills, but to different conceptualisations of this term.
- In the case of McKinsey's report on *Jobs, Pay and Skills*, 'skills' mostly just means education, and the Report uses educational levels of achievement as a 'rough proxy' for skill level.
- The UNESCO *EFA Global Monitoring Report* (GMR) 2012 did not follow its 2010 predecessor with a narrower focus on technical and vocational education; but covered foundation skills, life skills, transferable skills and technical and vocational skills. Of

² *NORRAG News No 48* will be largely dedicated to global skills reports, but with an angle on post-2015.

these four categories, the GMR chose primarily to emphasise foundation skills and, to a lesser extent, also transferable and technical and vocational skills.

The danger of the quantitative headline message

When there are multiple uses of the term ‘skills’ it can become confusing when simple messages related to ‘skills’ are promoted, e.g.: ‘skills pays dividends’ or ‘the key role of skills in fostering prosperity’ (UNESCO GMR, p.203), or ‘skills for 3.5 Billion People’ (McKinsey), or ‘Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century’ (OECD Skills Strategy, p.3).

Policy makers need a more nuanced understanding of in what sense skills development is a driver of economic growth, and what is the particular meaning of skill in these many claims. They generally do not need to be persuaded that skills are vital for reducing unemployment, inequality and poverty, and promoting growth.

What comes first: skills or jobs?

This was a key question addressed in the *World Development Report (WDR)*; and the WDR reminds the reader about the underlying assumption of the skills development agenda: that the provision of skills to people will somehow result in job creation and/or lead to increases in productivity. If unemployment levels are high or there is some skills mismatch, so the assumption goes, then this can be ‘fixed’ through reforms of education and training systems (p.36). However, unemployment and skill mismatches, the report goes on, are quite often a result of factors external to education and training systems. For example, jobs can stimulate demand for (sometimes new types of) skills, and hence ‘pull’ the creation of skills (WDR). For the GMR, the whole ‘question of whether creating jobs or developing skills comes first’ (p.203) is redundant, since ‘both need to be pursued in a coherent, integrated manner’ (ibid). Arguably, however, the GMR perhaps gives insufficient attention to the labour market, and to the wider macro-economic factors impacting on the very nature of work itself.

Developing skills

Since these reports adopt quite a range of definitions for ‘skill’, it can be assumed that their comprehension of where these ‘skills’ are developed also varies.

The WDR and the OECD Skills Strategy make it very clear that skills are developed throughout life, going back to early childhood, are not just acquired in formal settings in schools for example, but are picked up in the household and community. The WDR makes a particular effort, it seems, to remind us that a great deal of learning takes place on the job, not just via structured work-based learning, but also via experience and learning by doing.

The UNESCO *Global Trends and Issues in TVET*, which focuses on technical and vocational skills, as we noted above, highlights that such skills are acquired in formal, non-formal and informal environments, noting that:

across different phases and areas of education and training, as well as across different settings of working, community living and individual lifestyles, a great deal of TVET learning is already going on (p.21-22).

The UNESCO GMR is clear that both transferable and technical and vocational skills can be acquired in upper secondary schools or in the work place. But there is little or no recognition of the scope for technical and vocational skills to be acquired beyond schools in both public and private vocational (and agricultural) training centres, industrial training institutes, further education colleges, community colleges etc.

The WDR rightly notes that there needs to be a balance between institution-based supply-side pre-employment skill acquisition, and post-employment workplace learning, while warning against ‘excessively supply-side solutions’.

Sequencing

UNESCO’s GMR appears to make the case that certain types of skills can only be acquired at certain times (or in certain places), or when other types of skills have first been acquired. For example, foundations skills are said to be a prerequisite for acquiring the other two categories of skills, transferable and technical and vocational skills.

Meanwhile, the WDR stresses that skills beget skills, and that skills acquisition is a cumulative process.

Activating and using skills

A common message in all these reports on skills and jobs, which is made more explicit in some than others of course, is that skills strategies need to pay greater attention to what might be called the value chain of skills, ie we need to talk not just about how people access skills, or about the sequencing of skill acquisition, or about the context in which skills are learned, but also about how people then go about putting these skills to use in the labour market. The OECD Skills Strategy, in fact, distinguishes between *activating* skills and *utilizing* skills. The former refers to making sure that people – and their skills - are active in the labour market in the first place. The latter refers to making sure people who are active in the labour market can use the skills they bring to it.

While some of the global reports make it very clear that there ‘skills do not automatically convert into jobs and growth’ (OECD), other reports imply that there is a more direct connection between skills, jobs and growth. For example, in the McKinsey report there is clearly thought to be a powerful connection between different levels of education and different levels of productivity and growth; this may give the false impression that there is an almost semi-automatic relationship between the development of higher level manpower and increased growth and productivity. This said, the McKinsey report does comment at some point that ‘not all degrees are created equal’ and that, on their own, college degrees don't just turn into jobs (p.48).

Measuring skills

UNESCO's GMR (UNESCO, 2012a: 82-83) synthesises 'promising progress towards measuring skills development' globally. This refers to some of the initiatives concerned with the measurement of skills pursued by the G20, OECD, World Bank and European Union. But there are others like the key measurement of high and low skills through the OECD's Adult Skills Survey, which represents a significant improvement by measuring adults' skills directly. It assesses key skills (literacy, numeracy, problem solving in technology-rich environments) and the use of skills in the workplace, and collects information on the antecedents, outcomes and context of skills development and use (OECD, 2012: 12).

On the statistics of technical and vocational education (TVE), the GMR 2012 has continued the tradition of presenting just two dimensions of school-based TVE, in the form of the total number of students taking TVE in secondary, and the female percentage of that number. It has been hoped for some time to differentiate lower secondary TVE from upper secondary TVE (see for example, King and Palmer, 2010a)

TVET Debates and Issues

When we look specifically at what the series of global reports say about technical and vocational skills we might say that the UNESCO draft report on *Global Trends and Issues in TVET* manages to be thoughtful about many of the staples of the TVET debates of the last forty and more years, whether formalizing the informal sector, rates of return, or the contents of the current TVET toolkit.

But it also talks of the need to transform many aspects of traditional TVET, for example by: rethinking learning for broader human needs, and not just for immediate skills demand; making TVET more attractive; making quality TVET learning opportunities more available for **all** young people and adults. Indeed, one of the central messages of this UNESCO report is that too many learners are denied TVET opportunities from which they would profit.

Even though some of the global reports are more concerned with skills in general than with TVET, they do raise and discuss many of the classic dilemma for the TVET policy maker. How can TVET become a first choice destination for young people? What forms of progression from TVET to higher education work well? Are vocational tracks in schools really so much more expensive than general academic tracks? What is the experience of trying to make TVET the site of innovation and creativity? When there are so many exemplary projects and programmes mentioned in these reports, what is the experience of successful policy borrowing and policy learning?

Skills-and-Growth

The title of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) skills forum is, of course, 'Skills for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth', and the focus of the meeting is on TVET. In the introduction of the agenda of the ADB forum there appears to be a clear line drawn between TVET and growth:

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is now occupying a more influential place in development priorities because of the need for a highly skilled work force to drive growth. (ADB, 2012: 2)

However, international experience would caution against us suggesting that there is some kind of semi-automatic relationship between TVET and growth for any country or region. The enabling environment within which TVET is developed (access, equity, quality, relevance dimensions), and TVET is utilized (and indeed ‘activated’ – see the OECD distinction) are obviously critical determinants of the relationship between TVET and growth.

But almost all the reports being reviewed here do make claims or assumptions about the linkages, connections or relationships between skills and growth. It is therefore particularly rewarding to tease out in the pages that follow just a little of these different logics connecting skills and economic growth. Indeed, some of the most striking messages of several of these reports are about the impacts of increased skills and education on growth.

Implications for Asia or Asian Implications for the Rest of the World?

All the reports pay a good deal of attention to Asia, and not just to the Asian giants, China and India. Many smaller countries are frequently referred to, and perhaps none more than the Republic of Korea. Indeed, it must be satisfying to many policy makers in Asia to note that rather than their being urged to learn from other regions of the world, the world is being urged, for example in the WDR, to learn from Asia: ‘Much can be learned from comprehensive skill-building systems, especially from those of East Asia.’(WDR, 2012: 177).

This is not an isolated example. Hence it could be argued that in their illustrative materials, some of these reports are really as much about valuable Asian experience that could be studied by other regions as Asia learning from these other regions.

***Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives* (OECD, 2012, pp.114); *Skills Development Pathways in Asia* (OECD / Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012, pp.216)**

The OECD Skills Strategy, *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives*³ (OECD, 2012), released in May 2012, aims ‘to help countries build better skills policies and turn them into jobs, growth, and better lives’.⁴

Concept of Skills

The OECD Skills Strategy moves away ‘from traditional proxies of skills, such as years of formal education and training or qualifications/diplomas attained, to a much broader perspective that includes the skills people acquire, use and maintain – and also lose – over a whole lifetime’ (p.12). The concepts of ‘skill’ and ‘competence’, which the OECD report uses interchangeably, ‘are defined as the bundle of knowledge, attributes and capacities that can be learned and that enable individuals to successfully and consistently perform an activity or task and can be built upon and extended through learning’ (p.12). ‘Skills’ is used by the OECD refer to a wide range of skills acquired ‘from early childhood education through formal schooling to formal and informal learning throughout a lifetime’ (p.13); this includes both ‘foundation skills’ (problem solving, literacy, numeracy, reading),⁵ and ‘higher-order skills (“21st-Century Skills”), such as the “4 C’s” of Creativity, Critical thinking, Communication, Collaboration’ (p.27). It also covers ‘learning-to-learn’ skills (p.26), ‘vocational’ skills (p.27) and ‘skills for entrepreneurship’ (p.99).

Given that the concept of skills is very broad in the OECD report, the report is not a report specifically about technical and vocational skills, though these types of skills are obviously covered as part of the wider skills domain.

A critical issue must be whether the measurement of high and low skills through the Survey of Adult Skills (referred to above?) and the use of ‘high-skilled’ and ‘low-skilled’ throughout the report are concerned exclusively with the foundation skills that are defined here in the footnote. Unusually, foundation skills include an element of ‘problem-solving’. It is also intriguing to note that the OECD’s influential series of 17 policy reviews of Vocational Education and Training (VET), *Learning for Jobs*, are nowhere drawn upon in the main text of the Skills Strategy, and only referred to in a box of suggestions for ‘selected further reading and policy examples’ (OECD, 2012: 55). Three of the country studies refer to Asia: Australia, China and the Republic of Korea.

³ This is a powerful and attractive title, provided it doesn't suggest too easy a connection amongst the three key components.

⁴ <http://skills.oecd.org/documents/oecdskillsstrategy.html>

⁵ ‘Foundation skills are defined as problem solving in technology-rich environments (the ability to use technology to solve problems and accomplish complex tasks); literacy (the ability to understand and use information from written texts in a variety of contexts to achieve goals and further develop knowledge); numeracy (the ability to use, apply, interpret and communicate mathematical information and ideas); and reading components (including word recognition, decoding skills, vocabulary knowledge and fluency).’ (p.10 footnote 2.)

Global Skills Trends

The OECD Skills Strategy proposes general approaches that should be taken with regard to skill policy, based on global experience and trends. The strategy is based around three key issues that have implications for national skill systems: how skills can be developed; how skills can be activated (brought to the labour market); and, how skills can be best utilised.

How skills can be developed⁶

A country can develop relevant and quality skills, in sufficient quantities, by:

- **Encouraging and enabling lifelong learning.** This includes: gathering and using evidence about the changing demand for skills; promoting equitable access to quality school level education; removing barriers to investing in further learning; and, ensuring that the costs of education and training are shared.
- **Fostering international mobility of skilled people helps to ensure the supply of skills.** This includes: facilitating entry of skilled migrants; encouraging international students to remain after their studies; and making return migration to migrants' country of origin easier.
- **Promoting cross-border skills policies.** This includes, for example, the potential value to multi-national corporations of investing in the skills of people in other countries.

How skills can be activated⁷

A country can activate the supply of skills for the labour market by:

- **Encouraging people to offer their skills to the labour market.** This implies improving labour force participation rates so that more individuals' skills are "active". To do this, it is of course first necessary to identify under-represented groups (typically women, the youth) and the reasons for their labour force inactivity. Then policies need to be devised to encourage greater participation, which might include, for example: re-training; financial incentives that make it profitable to actually work (e.g. expensive childcare or tax systems may serve as disincentives to work); as well as promoting more flexible working conditions (e.g. part-time work).
- **Retaining skilled people in the labour market.** For example, retaining older workers for longer in the labour market might be promoted through re-training to improve their employability.

How skills can be best utilised⁸

The OECD Skills Strategy stresses the need to promote a conducive enabling environment to promote better utilisation of skills, and flags up the well worn reminder that 'skills do not automatically convert into jobs and growth' (OECD, 2012: 2). On the other hand, there is a very different message that policy makers can also find in the Strategy, suggesting an absolutely iconic impact on economic growth of 'improved skills':

⁶ See OECD (2012: 17-53).

⁷ See OECD (2012: 63-73).

⁸ See OECD (2012: 79-98).

Box 1.15 Relationship between education and economic growth

One estimate puts the long-term economic value of improving student performance in PISA by 25 score points, or around a half a year of formal schooling, over the next 20 years – which is what countries like Brazil, Chile, Indonesia, Israel, Mexico Poland, Portugal or Turkey have achieved, at least in selected subjects, over the past decade alone – at USD 115 trillion over the working life of individuals born this year. (p.39)

A country can put skills to effective use by:

- **Creating a better match between people’s skills and labour market demand.** Labour market demand, local and global, constantly changes and can result in a depreciation of the value of skills people have. Also, if the skills the individuals possess are not well matched to their current job, skills that are being under-utilised will be more likely to be lost.
- **Stimulating and shaping the demand for skills.** Policies can be put in place that can “shape” demand, rather than merely respond to it’ (OECD, 2012: 2). For example, efforts could be made to ‘stimulate the creation of more high-skilled and high value-added jobs’ (ibid). Collecting information and the changing demand for skills (possible future skill needs) is important in this regard.
- **Adopting a whole-of-government approach to skill policy development.** Education and training policies need to have clear links to other policies related to, for example, employment, science and technology, industrial and economic development, migration, social welfare and finance (ibid).

Technical and Vocational Skills in Asia

What does the OECD Skills Strategy say specifically about Asia? Obviously, being an OECD strategy its focus is OECD countries, and so only four Asian nations fall under this umbrella: Australia, Japan, S. Korea and New Zealand. Several other Asian nations get brief mentions in the report, including for example: China, India and Singapore. Also, we have noted that the OECD Skills Strategy covers a wide range of ‘skills’. Of more relevance to those interested in technical and vocational skills in Asia is another recent OECD publication, noted below (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012). Readers may also be aware of the OECD’s *Learning for Jobs* study (2007-2010):⁹ a thematic review of initial vocational education and training in 17 countries (including Australia, China and Korea from the Asian Region).

As part of the Employment and Skills Strategies in Southeast Asia (ESSSA) Initiative of OECD’s Local Economic and Employment Development (LEED) Programme, Martinez-Fernandez and Choi (2012) produced a report on *Skills Development Pathways in Asia* covering 15 countries and regions.¹⁰ It should be noted that *Skills Development Pathways in Asia* reverts to the more narrow conception of ‘skills’, to largely refer to technical and vocational education and training. Below we flag up some of the key messages from this report (as well as Asian examples noted in the OECD Skills Strategy) by using the framework of developing, activating and utilising skills (technical and vocational skills in this case) outlined in the OECD Skills Strategy.

⁹ www.oecd.org/edu/learningforjobs

¹⁰ Australia, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Developing technical and vocational skills

A good quality primary education is regarded as being a strong foundation for technical and vocational skills acquisition. Therefore, Asian countries that have not yet achieved universal primary education need to continue to expand coverage to all (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 26). At the same time, it is acknowledged that vocational education at the secondary school level is ‘one of the key elements in skills development strategies in Asian countries’ (ibid).

In many countries in the region TVET is seen as unattractive and a second choice to academic schooling; especially in countries like Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Mongolia, the Philippines and Viet Nam (ibid: 14). Many Asian nations are working hard to upgrade outdated training systems and train under-qualified instructors in order to make them function better and be more attractive. Public training systems in most developing Asian nations, remain largely supply-driven. Several approaches are being adopted, such as ‘creating additional training academies, imposing skill levies, and using apprenticeship models’ (ibid).

Australia and Singapore are cited as interesting cases of countries that use public funding systems to encourage TVET learning; in Australia’s case an income-contingent loan scheme is available for TVET students just as it is for university students; and, in Singapore’s case, the same amount of public funds are allocated for each student ‘regardless if he or she is a vocational student or a high school student going to the most prestigious university’ (OECD, 2012: 33).

Involving industry participation in, and ownership of, training remains ‘one of the major weaknesses in developing Asian countries’ (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 14). Most firms are small and medium enterprises (SME) and lack resources to invest in training. Some countries (e.g. Thailand, Mongolia) have introduced incentives to encourage training in these enterprises, including for example ‘tax exemptions for training costs to promote workplace training’ (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 28). However, the need to promote SME training is not only relevant in developing¹¹ Asian economies; Australia for example – where 2/3 of businesses have 1-4 employees, suffers from a problem of insufficient participation in workforce training. Australia has set up industry- and enterprise-driven financing models for training, whereby industry and enterprise receive co-funding from the government of Australia to purchase nationally accredited training in the market (as opposed to training providers being funded directly). This helps to encourage SME training.

For several Asian countries (Bangladesh, Indonesia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka), overseas employment is an important option. In order to encourage such international mobility ‘a skill development programme... is needed, with a systematic planning, foreign market surveys, knowledge of foreign employment systems, and identification of needed skills’ (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 27).

¹¹ In this paper, ‘developed’ Asian nations refers to the OECD Asian nations (Australia, Japan, S. Korea and New Zealand), plus Singapore and Hong Kong-China. In contrast, the term ‘developing Asian nations’ covers all other Asian countries.

Activating technical and vocational skills

In Asia, two key issues with regard to activating skills in the labour market include youth labour force participation rates and ageing populations. The first issue, which is not only an Asian issue, is that labour force participation rates among youth are much lower than for adults (Jagannathan in Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 46). From a skills activation perspective, this implies the need to promote more effective school to career transitions. The second issue noted here is the skill implications for a rapidly ageing population, especially in East Asia. Here skills activation policies should seek to retain these workers, and their skills, in the labour market for longer.

Utilising technical and vocational skills

Keeping track of the changing demands of different economic sectors of a country has important implications for skills. Agriculture remains an important part of many economies (especially in Cambodia, India, Myanmar, Nepal and Viet Nam which have over 50% of employment in this sector), while services are generally of more importance (employment creation-wise) than industry (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 16). The importance of agriculture is declining for Viet Nam and China, whereas the importance of manufacturing is increasing in the same countries. Service skills dominate in the more developed (OECD) Asian nations, including in Australia, Hong Kong-China, S. Korea and New Zealand. Meanwhile, the importance of manufacturing industry is declining in Australia, S. Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore.

In general terms, and as we would expect, the more developed Asian nations have higher demand for higher-level skills, whereas in the developing Asian countries, most demand is for lower-level skills;¹² due of course to the availability of higher- and lower-skilled occupations in different Asian nations. Nonetheless, due to rapid economic growth several Asian countries are experiencing shortages in some higher-skill areas, including manufacturing. In this case, one approach being used to reduce the (higher) skills gap, 'is to give subsidies to a leading technology company to provide training not only to their own workers but also to the unemployed or workers from other small to medium sized companies' (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 14).

Some Asian nations (e.g. Cambodia) are stuck in a low-skills equilibrium – where low-skill firms predominate, the dominant demand is for low-skills, which in turn discourages high-skill firms from operating in the area; the system therefore becomes 'stuck' at a low-skill level. Government policies can help break out of a low-skill equilibrium by creating incentives and stimulus for firms to move up the value-chain and increase technology usage.

Traditionally, Asian economies' export-oriented products have found large markets in Europe and North America. However, with the global economic slow-down affecting demand from these regions, the locus is shifting 'towards greater reliance on domestic and regional demand' (ibid: 13). This may have implications for skills.

¹² See, however, the earlier comment about the definitions of high-skilled and low-skilled by the Survey of Adult Skills.

More and more Asian nations (e.g. S. Korea, Singapore, Australia) are paying increased attention to skills and technologies for green growth. Even in the less-developed Asian economies (e.g. Thailand), there is recognition that skills for green growth need to be developed ‘because it could mean a widening knowledge gap and slowdown in growth as the introduction of mass production becomes harder’ (ibid: 34).

Emerging Themes

Martinez-Fernandez and Choi (2012) outline four areas of policy concern (see Box 1 below).

Box 1. Emerging Policy Themes

More investment in skills infrastructure and governance...

Asian countries face common challenges of building up skills infrastructure for creating a training market with quality suppliers, reducing skills mismatches, improving links between training and industry needs, upgrading outdated training systems and increasing industry participation.

...while addressing the composition of skills and jobs,

Not much attention has been devoted to the development of knowledge workers in economies like Cambodia, Pakistan and Viet Nam, whereas other countries (Cambodia, Mongolia, Pakistan, the Philippines and Viet Nam) are stuck in low-skill equilibriums.

...promoting more knowledge intensity in the workplace

Private sector development, both in the formal and informal sectors, strongly depends on raising the skills of the large share of unskilled and semi-skilled workforce. To move to higher value-added production and towards a sustained growth path, increasing the level of workplace training and the quality of training is becoming a key issue. A common problem in promoting workplace training is the low skill investment of the industries.

...and integrating skills strategies at the local level

Asian countries are developing skills plans as national statements and frameworks. In most cases there is little specification of how the plans will be implemented at the local level where they need to reach the workforce, firms and organisations. Some countries are now realising the advantages of developing local skills ecosystems¹³ and therefore integrating the local implementation into policies and programmes. However, this focus is more often stated in the most advanced countries.

Source: Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 36-37

¹³ ‘Local skills ecosystems include organisations, institutions and firms in a certain local area or labour market that constitute area-based partnerships for training and skills development’ (Martinez-Fernandez and Choi, 2012: 31).

Jobs. World Development Report 2013 (World Bank, 2012, pp.422)

The World Bank's *World Development Report 2013* (WDR) on *Jobs* (World Bank, 2012) highlights the importance of jobs as drivers of development, noting that some jobs do more for development than others.

The WDR notes that the global jobs challenges are huge, and that these challenges extend far beyond the need to tackle official unemployment numbers. The WDR cites figures from the latest ILO *Global Employment Trends* report (ILO, 2012b), that globally there are some 200 million people unemployed, including 75 million youth, and reminds us that these numbers represent only part of the jobs challenge. Millions remain outside of the formal labour market. Globally, 2 out of 10 men, and 5 out of 10 women are not participating in the labour market (ILO, 2012b). Meanwhile, about half of those that do work in developing countries work in small and micro enterprises – on and off-farm. Millions are working but not earning enough to keep them out of poverty; the ILO estimates that 900 million people are in 'working poverty' (ILO, 2012b). The jobs challenge, therefore, is not just about creating more jobs, but creating more jobs of good quality, and improving the quality and productivity of existing jobs.

The WDR argues that some jobs do more for development than others; e.g. jobs for women result in wider family and greater inter-generational benefits, and jobs for young men in fragile states can contribute to peace. 'Good jobs for development are those with the highest value for society' (World Bank, 2012: 15), including 'those that make cities function better, connect the economy to global markets, protect the environment, foster trust and civic engagement, or reduce poverty' (ibid: xiii). Of course, most people will not choose a job because it is good for development, but because it is good for personal income; so if 'jobs for development' are to be promoted then incentives would be required. Alternatively, governments could focus job creation strategies on these 'good jobs'.

With regard to skills, the WDR explores skills-jobs dynamics and asks 'which needs to come first in the development process – creating jobs or building skills?' (ibid), answered below.

Concept of skills in the WDR

The WDR's use of the term 'skill' is broad and refers to a whole range of cognitive, social and technical skills acquired throughout life and in multiple environments, including 'within the household and neighborhood, during the formative years of schooling, at work, and in training' (World Bank, 2012: 175). The glossary in the WDR describes in more detail what it means by cognitive, social and technical skills, and also includes 'entrepreneurship' as part of its wider 'skills' domain (Box 2). Interestingly, the WDR defines technical skills as knowledge rather than knowledge *and* practice, and appears to actually privilege cognitive and social skills above technical skills. Furthermore, the WDR tends to talk about manual and workplace skills as being *routine*, as compared to '*complex* capabilities, such as problem solving abilities' (p.175, emphasis added), again suggesting something of a bias against practical skills.

Box 2. Concept of ‘Skills’ used in the World Bank *World Development Report 2013*

Cognitive skills: They include verbal ability, working memory, numeracy, and problem solving abilities. They are the foundation for the acquisition and building of other skills throughout life.

Social skills: They facilitate interaction and communication with others. They are based on personality traits that underlie behaviors such as teamwork, reliability, discipline, or work effort.

Technical skills: They enable the performance of specific tasks. They take the form of knowledge that is specific to a particular occupation or group of occupations.

Entrepreneurship: It is the combination of innovative capacity to put new ideas into effect with managerial capacity to increase a firm’s efficiency within the limits of known technology.

Source: World Bank (2012: 329)

The WDR stresses that skills beget skills, and that skills acquisition is a cumulative process. In particular, the WDR notes the importance of acquiring basic generic skills that are ‘needed to learn and adapt to different tasks and problem solving environments’ (World Bank, 2012: 25); success in ‘more specialized skill-building’ (ibid), the WDR argues, depends on the extent to which these generic skills have been acquired. Interestingly, the WDR also suggests that ‘these general skills are especially important in more dynamic economic environments’ (ibid).

In relation to skills and jobs, the WDR covers several important issues. First, it discusses the question of what comes first: skills or jobs. Second, it argues that *productive* jobs need a certain level of skills in the first place, that jobs create demand for skills, and, that skills can be acquired on the job. Third, one of the WDR background papers gives some key messaging regarding vocational training and youth employment (Biavaschi et al., 2012).

What comes first: skills or jobs?

The WDR reminds the reader about the underlying assumption of the skills development agenda: that the provision of skills to people will somehow result in job creation and/or lead to increases in productivity. If unemployment levels are high or there is some skills mismatch, so the assumption goes, then this can be ‘fixed’ through reforms of education and training systems (p.36). However, unemployment and skill mismatches ‘can also result from market distortions, which send the wrong signals to the education system or lead to a lack of dynamism in private firms’ (p.36). Such market distortions can include, for example: poaching;¹⁴ information asymmetries (p.174);¹⁵ civil service jobs that are accessed on a semi-automatic basis;¹⁶ and, pay scales that do not reward employee investment in education and training. Other factors that may affect decisions to invest in skills or to take up job opportunities to make use of skills include, for

¹⁴ Ie. Where enterprises worry about their employees being poached by another firm, and so are less inclined to invest in their skills development.

¹⁵ Ie. Where the information available about the specific nature of skills gaps is not available equally to all. Hence judgments may be less based on information and more on hearsay and assumption.

¹⁶ In some countries, comparatively well-paying civil service jobs (which may also have better benefits) can be accessed by people who complete a certain level of education and then put their name on a waiting list for a government job.

example, transportation costs or housing market failures (p.176), or, for SMEs, inability to access credit to finance training (p.174). Where such factors and market distortions exist, ‘massive investments in training systems, as seen in many parts of the world, might show disappointing results as hoped-for job outcomes do not materialize’ (p.36).

‘Jobs need skills, pull skills, and build skills’ (p.178)

Jobs need skills: The WDR argues that for certain types of employment to come about in the first place, a certain minimum level of skills are required; specifically it argues that for ‘productive employment to emerge’ (p.178) basic literacy and numeracy skills are first required, as these ‘cannot be acquired on the job’ (ibid). The WDR also argues that it is a priority to help people to secure a foundation of basic skills ‘given that skill building is cumulative’ (p.178).

Jobs pull skills: Jobs can stimulate skill formation since ‘job opportunities can... create demand for education and training’ (p.36). But the downside is that there is sometimes privileged access to jobs, and with connections/corruption you can get jobs without the right level of training.

Jobs build skills: The WDR reminds us that a lot of learning takes place through jobs: ‘Many technical and social skills can be built through experience in the workplace’ (p.176), ‘especially at entry into the labour market’ (p.178). The WDR 2013 team estimates the average private return to work experience (in non-agricultural activities) as being half ‘the return to one additional year of education at the beginning of work life’ (p.176). In other words, an additional year of schooling may be more beneficial for new entrants into the labour market, but private income returns are also affected by experience, through what people learn on the job. The WDR stress on the importance of learning on the job complements UNESCO’s arguments in the forthcoming World TVET Report (McGrath, 2012).

Youth Unemployment and Vocational Training

One of the WDR background papers, on the topic of *Youth Unemployment and Vocational Training* (Biavaschi et al., 2012), is worth looking at briefly for its key messages, noted below:

- **Promote general education** – every young person needs to acquire basic skills at primary and secondary school levels. More focus is needed on getting children into school, and encouraging them to stay in school for longer.
- **Stimulate the creation of formal and sustainable jobs** – in countries with large informal economies, more policy effort is needed ‘to create more enterprises in the formal sector which offer formal jobs’ (ibid: ii).
- **Modernize vocational schooling** – countries need to strengthen their school-based vocational education offerings so that they are more aligned with market demand, including through offering more opportunities for practical work experience. Greater vertical mobility is needed to improve the image of TVET.
- **Bring academic education closer to the private sector** – university level academic training needs to be brought closer to the needs of the labour market.

- **Encourage existing sectoral or regional clusters of firms to get more involved in skills training** – ‘with sufficient support and interest from governments and employers regional or sectoral training clusters can be established’ (ibid: ii).
- **Upgrade vocational training in the informal sector** – upgrading the general and theoretical skills of apprentices, upgrading the skills of master-craftspeople, and increasing access to capital and technical equipment are regarded as ways to improve productivity.¹⁷
- **Improve data and evaluation** – Better data and monitoring are needed so that we can understand the effects of vocational training.

Concluding comments

The WDR’s recognition of the importance of jobs is welcome; the centrality of jobs for development was something that was missing in the MDG framework (McGrath, 2012).

The report rightly notes that there needs to be a balance between institution-based supply-side pre-employment skill acquisition, and post-employment workplace learning, while warning against ‘excessively supply-side solutions’ (McGrath, 2012). Though this is not really news to those working on skills issues in academic or policy circles (ibid).

Of particular interest to this paper, is that the WDR also contains some very positive messages about Asia, noting for example that:

Much can be learned from comprehensive skill-building systems, especially from those of East Asia... Perhaps the most valuable lesson from East Asian countries is that skills-development systems need to grow organically from below while being coordinated and fostered from above. (p.177)

However, there are issues that the WDR is less strong on with regard to skills. McGrath (2012), for example, points out that ‘the WDR is less strong on inequalities of access to vocational learning, whether before or during employment’.

¹⁷ Of course, anyone that has experience with informal apprenticeships will know that upgrading them is much easier said than done!

***The World at Work: Jobs, Pay and Skills for 3.5 Billion People* (McKinsey Global Institute, 2012, pp.108)**

Definition Matters

One of the challenges of running an ADB *Forum on Skills for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth* is that the term, skills, can mean so many different things, as has been seen in other global reports reviewed in this paper. In the case of *Jobs, Pay and Skills*, it turns out that *Skills mostly just means Education*. More precisely, ‘High-skill refers to workers with a tertiary education or more, medium-skill refers to workers with only a secondary education, and low-skill refers to workers with no more than a primary education’ (McKinsey, 2012: 13, footnote 5). In other words, the Report uses educational levels of achievement as a ‘rough proxy’ for skill level (13).¹⁸ There is, however, an added complication which is tucked away in a footnote: ‘Low-skill [is] defined in advanced economies as no post-secondary education; in developing, low-skill is primary education’ (3, fn.1 to Exhibit E1). This explanation doesn't completely sort out the different categories since it would appear in compulsory secondary school regimes, e.g. in OECD countries, that there is really therefore no difference between low-skill defined as having no post-secondary and medium-skill as only having a secondary education. It would seem, therefore, that low- and medium-skill are practically synonymous in developed economies.

With the benefit of hindsight, it would have been helpful to have included these crucial definitional matters in the main text of the first page or so of both the Executive Summary and of the Report itself. Otherwise, the very valuable discussion, for instance, about ‘a potential shortage of 90 million to 95 million low-skill workers around the world’ (2), and many other such estimates, may not be understood to include two very different levels of education. Arguably, it would have been preferable in fact to have avoided using the low-, medium- and high-skill terminology altogether and just to have used the categories of primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Given what we have said about the principal meaning of ‘skills’ being ‘education’, it might be expected that the term, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), would not appear at all. This is in fact the case. On the other hand, vocational school and vocational training are used a number of times, including with reference to countries in Asia, such as Korea, China, Australia and India; so it will be important to return to these examples once the Report’s position on the broader connections between education and jobs have been laid out.

The Bigger Picture: Education and Jobs

In a Report that is really working on a global canvas, and estimating for different categories of advanced and developing economies, the relations amongst education, pay and jobs, while factoring in such other key issues as demography, ageing, migration, and technological innovation, it will be crucial to tease out some of the working assumptions about education and productive work. There is clearly thought to be a powerful connection between different levels of education and different levels of productivity. On the very first page there is a calculation

¹⁸ From here on, page nos in brackets refer to the McKinsey Report.

suggesting that ‘there will be far too few workers with the advanced skills [i.e. tertiary education] needed to drive a high-productivity economy’. At the same time, there is a worry that ‘Developing economies could have too few medium-skill workers to fuel further growth of labour-intensive sectors, and far too many workers who lack the education and training to escape low-productivity, low-income work’ (1). These kinds of statements do point to a powerful assumed connection between particular levels of education (or skills), on the one hand, and growth, productivity and poverty alleviation, on the other.

The connection between education levels and ‘productivity improvements’ is specifically illustrated in China, with its dramatic rises in secondary and tertiary education (18), producing a situation where 56% of its workforce had secondary education, and only 35% had primary or lower. This is contrasted with India where in 2010 only 23% of its workforce had secondary education, while no less than 70% had primary or lower. One of the outcomes of this slower evolution in India’s labour force is said to be ‘reflected in its growth and productivity record...India’s productivity growth rate was about half of China’s during the 1990-2010 period (19).

We shall look in a moment at what are some of the other factors that might be driving jobs, productivity and growth. But the casual reader could well get the impression that there is almost a direct connection between low education and unemployment and between higher education and growth:

And, even as less-skilled workers struggle with unemployment and stagnating wages, employers face growing shortages of the types of high-skill workers who are needed to raise productivity and drive GDP growth. (1)

The mantra about the ‘high-skill workers needed to maintain high growth and productivity’ (57) or the metaphor about ‘the intensifying global war for talent’ (66) may give the false impression that there is an almost semi-automatic relationship between the development of higher level manpower and increased growth and productivity. The reality is of course rather different.

Quality Counts and So Do Courses

A more careful reading of our text will come across health warnings about the belief that years of schooling alone, whether at primary, secondary or tertiary, have direct impacts on jobs and growth. It is acknowledged here and there in the text that ‘Not all degrees are created equal’ and that, on their own, college degrees don’t just turn into jobs (48). Having said so, it does then appear that degrees in science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) can have much more powerful impacts on accessing jobs and higher income than degrees in humanities (48). So, again, a particular education-job-income connection is being forged. But beyond the impact of particular courses, the issue of quality and job readiness is also stressed.

The Case of Vocational Education and Vocational Training

Even though the Report is principally concerned with the three main levels of education (also termed skill), it does very occasionally acknowledge that just as all degrees are not equal, so also there is some differentiation within the secondary education level. There are in fact a few

illustrations to be found in the text which relate to vocational training. One particular example argues that in India the wages of workers in the construction industry ‘with formal vocational training’ grew 1.5 times faster than those ‘without vocational training’ (48). This is of course an intriguing claim, but we are told nothing about whether this formal training is school-based or institute-based. More importantly, we are not told about the wider construction industry labour market which runs on massive numbers of casual and unskilled labour (King, 2012).

Right towards the end of the Report, there is a surprising one-page entitled ‘Comprehensive thrust on vocational education’ (59). This suddenly turns to a series of short references to vocational training, including vocational tracks within secondary education which have been popular as in Australia; to the merits of the German dual system; to the public-private partnership in the National Skills Development Corporation of India; to a private for-profit automobile training school in China; and to the ‘para-schools’ for adult workers in South Korea. The lessons of this for the more general messages of the Report are not drawn out.

Iconic Global Figures and National Realities

From its very title, with the mention of 3.5 billion as the world labour force by 2030, we are made aware of a whole set of iconic numbers, some relating to the world, some to advanced economies and some to developing economies. Asia’s giants, India and China, are given a great deal of attention (referred to 172 and 160 times respectively in 108 pages, as compared to Brazil just 14). There is a single, private vocational school referred to in China, but the reader would not realize from the Report that almost half the entire upper secondary school population of China is in vocational schools. For South Korea, it is mentioned that 25% are in vocational secondary, but the figure is much higher according to the *World TVET Report* (40%).

The McKinsey Report does concern itself with migration, skilled and unskilled, particularly to advanced economies, but not with the specifics of massive labour migration from South and South East Asia to the Gulf and elsewhere. The term remittances does not appear in the Report, but yet these bring back billions of dollars to many economies in the Asian region. Whole ministries in the region are organized around this export of both skilled and unskilled labour. In the case of India, its own set of iconic figures about the production of 500 million skilled workers by 2020 includes a calculation that it could produce a surplus of 47 million workers to meet the estimated global manpower shortage of 56 million, making it possible that ‘within a decade we can become a global reservoir of skilled person power’ (King, 2012: 669). This example from India’s Planning Commission is doubtless just one illustration of how nations do engage with the world of global labour requirements that the Report has so powerfully sketched. It would have been fascinating to have learnt more about national manpower plans do engage with these global calculations.

In Conclusion

The Report gives policy makers a language with which to interrogate global manpower planning in terms such as ‘skill dividend’, ‘global war for talent’, ‘demographic tide’ and of course ‘demographic dividend’. It does also refer to the possibilities of ‘a lost generation’ through youth unemployment. But it might have been helpful if other terms such as ‘informal economy’ had

been utilized to point up the realities of so many national labour markets, instead of being used just once to refer to the ‘‘marketisation’’ of home services such as child care’, and also if terms such as ‘demographic nightmare’ could have been employed, as in India, to alert readers to the potential downside of the rhetoric of democratic dividend. Finally, with the term ‘skills’ itself, we would suggest the Report would have been more powerful if it had connected this term to the way that skills are actually used in the national skills development policies of so many nations, including in Asia.

World of Work Report 2012, Better Jobs for a Better Economy (ILO, 2012a, pp.128); *Global Employment Trends 2012. Preventing a Deeper Jobs Crisis* (ILO, 2012b, pp.121)

The ILO *World of Work Report 2012* ‘examines the performance of different countries since the start of the global crisis through the prism of the quantity and quality of jobs’.¹⁹

The report flags up that, globally, ‘50 million jobs are missing relative to the pre-crisis situation’ (p.1), but that the employment picture varies greatly across regions. In developing and emerging countries, employment rates have recovered fast and now exceed pre-crisis levels (ibid). In contrast, in many advanced economies ‘employment rates remain subdued’ (ibid). In most countries, the report notes, the young and the long-term unemployed face particular employment challenges.

The *World of Work* report pays a significant amount of attention to the demand side of the skills equation by noting the structural nature of the current jobs crisis. It also comments that ‘for a growing proportion of workers who do have a job, employment has become more unstable or precarious’ (p. vii). It then goes on to note that this job instability can result in a loss of skills; long periods of inactivity or unemployment, as well as rotating between a series of jobs without staying long in any of them, can result in skills being lost (p.viii). However, what kind of skills are lost we are not told.

When it comes to employment programs, the report notes that skills training has a role to play. Unemployed workers need assistance to be able to take up new jobs that might be created, and skills training has a role to play in facilitating this transition (p.70). The focus should be on the youth ‘for whom skills erosion is a particular challenge’ (ibid).

Lastly, with regard to skills acquisition via education, we are told that as a result of the global financial crisis, ‘inequalities have also widened in terms of access to education’ (p.2).

While the focus of the *World of Work* report is very much on the demand side, it should be noted that there is very little *direct* mention of skills, *of any sort*, in the ILO *World of Work Report* (ILO, 2012a). As an illustration of this, in the 128 page, 55,000 word document, the word ‘education’ appears in the text only ten times, ‘skills’ five times, ‘vocational training’ once, ‘human capital’ twice, and well-known acronyms like ‘TVET’ and ‘VET’ don’t appear at all.

Of note also, however, is the ILO’s *Global Employment Trends 2012. Preventing a Deeper Jobs Crisis* (ILO, 2012b), which was released in January 2012. This reports flags up several issues directly or indirectly skill-related to the three Asia-Pacific sub-regions: East Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia.

South Asia faces the greatest challenge with regard to skill activation, especially with regard to women and the youth. The report notes that the labour force participation rates (LFPR) for East Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific, and South Asia are 73%, 70% and 57% respectively (p.96). From a skills activation lens, therefore, we can say that South Asia has a

¹⁹ <http://www.ilo.org/global/research/global-reports/world-of-work/lang--en/index.htm>

significantly greater challenge ahead of itself than the other two sub-regions. It should be noted that the average LFPR for the developed economies and the EU is in fact 60%, meaning that East Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific are – overall - actually doing quite well comparatively, while South Asia remains a little behind (but still some way ahead of the Middle East and North Africa which have LFPRs of just under 50%). However, looking at the male-female LFPRs for the Asia-Pacific region, we can see that there remains a serious problem with regard to the female LFPR in South Asia, which stands at 32%; this compares to the female LFPR for East Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific of 67%, 59% and 51% respectively. South Asia’s female LFPR is closest to that of North Africa in fact (female LFPR of 24%). Activating the skills of females in South Asia is therefore a particular issue. South Asia’s low youth LFPR (41%) relative to other Asia sub-regions (60% for East Asia, 52% for South East Asia and the Pacific) and the world average (49%) is also clear (p.97).

East Asia faces the greatest challenge with regard to developing appropriate ‘skills policies for a greying population’ (p.62). As labour force participation rates decline in East Asia on the back of the steadily greying population, countries need to consider a number of policy priorities, including those that relate to skills (ibid).

Sectoral shifts are broadly in the same directions across the Asia-Pacific region. Since 2000, in all three Asia-Pacific sub-regions the proportion of the population employed in agriculture has declined, while the proportion of people employed in both the industry and services sectors has increased (p.98). This obviously has implications for skills policies.

The extent of vulnerable (informal) employment remains high in Asia-Pacific, especially in South Asia and South-East Asia and the Pacific. The proportion of people in vulnerable employment, defined by the ILO as the sum of own-account workers and contributing family workers (so broadly comparable to what others term informal employment), is 78% in South Asia, 62% in South-East Asia and the Pacific, and 48% in East Asia (the latter being just below the global average of 49%, but well above the developed economies and the EU rate of 10%). **The rate of vulnerable employment is particularly grave for women in South Asia;** here 84% of women work in vulnerable employment (almost the same rate as in Sub-Saharan Africa, and well above the global average of 51%) (p.100).

The degree of working poverty remains high in South Asia, and similar in magnitude to Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The proportion of people working and earning US\$1.25 per day or less is 36% in South Asia, compared to 38% in SSA and a global average of 15%. East Asia and South East Asia and the Pacific have working poverty rates of 8% and 11% respectively (p.102). When the US\$2 a day benchmark is used instead, over two-thirds of South Asia’s working population are classified as being in working poverty – the highest rate in the world. From a skills utilization perspective, therefore, South Asia faces great challenges.

For South-East Asia and the Pacific, the ILO’s *Global Employment Trends 2012* report makes the specific comment that

the youth employment challenge in the region is explained in part by the inability of education and training systems in the region to keep pace with the rapid structural transformation taking place and hence the changing skills requirements. (p.66)

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Introduction and Summary

The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) of 2012 inherited a very particular challenge in focusing on the topic of skills which most of the previous nine reports in the series had judged to be methodologically and conceptually problematic. There was, firstly, the challenge of the way the original Goal 3 from the Dakar World Education Forum of 2000 was specified in terms of ‘appropriate learning and life skills’. This led directly to the on-going conceptual challenge of how learning and skills should be analysed in ways that policy makers and planners would find useful, including the relations of skills with jobs and growth. The decisions taken in this GMR of 2012 about the selected meanings of skills, in turn, had implications for both the statistical data collected for the Report, as well as the data on unemployment, innovations and best practice in skills development. Finally, these conceptual decisions also had implications for which institutions would need to be involved in providing any wider skills data and contributing to the debate about skills, including for post-2015.

These four dimensions presented the GMR team with an analytical task which has a special history going back to Dakar, and ten years earlier to the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) at Jomtien (King, 2011). In addition, the timing of the writing and production of the Report in 2011-2012 meant that there was a sharper awareness of the position of young people in the labour markets of many OECD countries than would have been the case several years earlier. Equally, by the time the Report appeared in October 2012, there was emerging a very lively debate about the possibility that education and skills might possibly figure in the post-2015 development agenda, after the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), or in any continuation of the six Education for All (EFA) Goals.

This section will review the contribution of the GMR 2012 to the global dialogue about skills development. It will seek to draw out some of the implications for policy as it proceeds.

The Problematic Legacy of Dakar for Skills

Every GMR, from the beginning of the series ten years ago, has inherited and commented upon the problem of misspecification in Dakar Goal 3. Its rather vague formulation was as follows:

Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes (UNESCO, 2000: 8).

This was not really an improvement on what the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) had suggested as an EFA target ten years earlier. That initial framing did at least use the word ‘training’ as well as education and there was an expected link to employment, but it too was aspirational:

Expansion of provision of basic education and training in other essential skills required by youth and adults, with programme effectiveness assessed in terms of behavioural

change and impact on health, employment and productivity. (UNESCO. WCEFA, *Framework*. 1990: 3)

However, from the very first GMR in 2002, it was remarked that: ‘The monitoring of this Dakar goal presents major conceptual and methodological challenges which this Report is in no position to address’ (UNESCO, 2002: 56). And six years later, in 2008, a former Director of the GMR, Nick Burnett, remarked: ‘We do not really know how we are doing on skills, because we have not figured out properly how to define them and measure them’ (Burnett, 2008).

As late as the 2010 GMR, it seemed that the situation would remain unchanged: ‘Rather than agree to quantifiable benchmarks, governments signed up to a third EFA goal that amounts to a vague aspiration. One consequence has been a protracted and unresolved debate over what, if anything, that aspiration means in terms of policy commitments’ (UNESCO, 2010: 76). Despite this challenge to meanings, the 2010 Report decided it was time to focus the debate down to some recognizable area of work:

Narrowing the wide-angle lens of goal 3, the focus [in this GMR 2010] is on skills and learning opportunities for young people provided *through technical and vocational education programmes*. (ibid. emphasis added)

The following 18 pages of the GMR 2010 covered a very wide range of technical and vocational education, school-based, institution-based, and work-based, both formal and informal. Interestingly, the informal sector was seen as being both an urban and a rural phenomenon, and as responsible for the bulk of total employment in many countries. The rationale for the GMR apparently breaking the methodological logjam in 2010 was clear: that learning and skills play an increasingly important part internationally in shaping opportunities for economic growth and poverty reduction.

Implications for Policy

Understanding the essential history of the incoherence of Goal 3 is vital to understanding the severe analytical challenge faced by the GMR 2012 team in its approach to the global monitoring of skills. One additional reason for the seeming incoherence of Goal 3 is that the five other Goals were aimed at *all* young or adults. It was not possible to use ‘TVET’ as that would not appear to be universal and rights-based. Hence the more vague use of ‘learning and life skills’.

The GMR 2012’s Lens on Skills

The GMR 2012 did not follow its 2010 predecessor with a narrower focus on technical and vocational education; it was more ambitious, but perhaps also somewhat more school-centric. As just mentioned, it may have been concerned that its conception of skills should fall squarely within EFA. With its very powerful concerns for the millions still out of primary school, the larger numbers of those not completing and not learning to be literate in primary and lower secondary, and the 775 million adult illiterates, it chose primarily to emphasise what it called **foundation skills**. Arguably, over a billion young people and adults do not have these core skills of numeracy and literacy which it is claimed would make them more effective in their working

lives. This concern for the massive numbers of marginalized and excluded led directly to the GMR 2012's focus on both first time and second chance access to foundation skills, through schools and non-formal education. These could truly be seen as central to the Education for All agenda.

To a lesser extent, the GMR 2012 also underlined the crucial role of **transferable skills**. These skills are often called soft or interpersonal skills in the literature, and they may be illustrated in capacities like problem-solving. They are said to be acquired in upper secondary schools as well as in the work place and are felt to be crucially important in the eyes of employers.

A third category, **technical and vocational skills (TVS)**, is also emphasized. In the diagrammatic representation of skills acquisition in a skills pyramid (273),²⁰ it is clear that both transferable and technical and vocational skills can be acquired in upper secondary schools or in the work place. But there is little or no recognition of the scope for TVS to be acquired beyond schools in both public and private vocational training centres, industrial training institutes, further education colleges, community colleges etc.

A further category, **life skills**, is also treated at some length, and particularly in respect of its relationship to the threat of HIV and AIDS.

Implications for Policy

The GMR 2012's preference for a wide-angle lens for skills is perfectly understandable in terms of the political obligation to deliver on EFA or on foundation skills for all. But the multiple meanings for skills may prove confusing when simple messages such as 'skills pays dividends' are promoted (203). The international and national community of vocational educators and trainers who are associated with Vocational Education and Training (VET) or with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) may fail to identify with the many diverse messages of the Report which relate to foundation skills. For them, the acquisition of skills (in the skills pyramid) may be portrayed in too school-centric a vision; the reality is that all four categories of skills under discussion may be acquired in schools, in firms, in farms, in families and through social networks. Arguably for these educators, the multiple roles of public **post-school** technical, vocational (and agricultural) training may have been substantially neglected in the Report.

Skills and Growth: Advocacy and Complexity

One of the greatest challenges in a world mired in rising youth unemployment (in many OECD countries) and in jobless growth in many others is to explore the possible relationships between investing in skills and securing economic growth (King and Palmer, 2010b). Not surprisingly, the GMR 2012 takes up this challenge and makes a number of compelling claims about 'the key role of skills in fostering prosperity' (203), and about how the 'rate of economic growth' is 'intimately connected with skills development' (Ibid.). Given that the GMR is operating, however, with four very different categories of 'skills' (see above), it is not always clear what

²⁰ Numbers in brackets refer to the page numbers of the full report of the GMR 2012.

specific skill or combination of skills lie behind these powerful and attractive claims. The claims include maths' skills and even 'education' more generally (203, 205).

Examples of such iconic claims would include the massive 'return' on education, since 'funds spent on education generate ten to fifteen times as much in economic growth over a person's lifetime' (i). Another claim would be that 'Korea's investment in skills development has contributed to its impressive economic growth' (205). While the headline claim is compelling, a closer reading of the text demonstrates that many different sequences of skills' investments were involved in S. Korea, from universal foundation skills, to technical and vocational secondary, to higher skills linked to knowledge intensive industries, but all these in a wider environment of government investment in agricultural and export-oriented industrial transformation (207).

Implications for Policy

In very many countries, developed and developing, policy-makers do not need persuasion to believe, in the words of the GMR 2012's Overview that 'Skills development is vital in reducing unemployment, inequality and poverty, and promoting growth' (18). What they do need is a more nuanced understanding of in what sense skills development is a driver of economic growth, and what is the particular meaning of skill in these many claims. In addition, many policy makers continue to think principally of skills development as meaning VET and TVET; so they will be tempted to interpret what they see as GMR skills development headline messages about skills & growth in this light. The danger is always that the iconic, quantitative claims about education, skills and growth may drive out the other more balanced assertions in the Report such as 'there should be no question of whether creating jobs or developing skills comes first: both need to be pursued in a coherent, integrated manner' (203).

Data Dilemmas on Skills, Youth Unemployment and Innovations

There are three comments under the broad heading of data dilemmas; one on the statistical coverage of 'skills'; one on the youth unemployment vs low-paid work data; and a third on the use of multiple illustrations of best practice in skills development.

Given the several different meanings of skills in the Report, there are clearly some opportunities and challenges for the data dimensions of the GMR 2012. Of course, the inclusion of foundation skills in the working definition of skills requires few new statistics, as there is already comprehensive coverage of primary and lower secondary, if not of second chance provision. However, the World Inequality Database on Education (WIDE) adds a new element of concern about the scale of educational inequality within countries.

Some transferable skills are already in the process of being covered in OECD data for 25 countries, and through the World Bank's Skills Toward Employment and Productivity (STEP) survey, currently expected to cover 13 countries by 2013. These initiatives are very far from being implemented across the UN family of countries.

On the statistics of technical and vocational education (TVE), the GMR 2012 has continued the tradition of presenting just two dimensions of school-based TVE, in the form of the total number

of students taking TVE in secondary, and the female percentage of that number. It has been hoped for some time to differentiate lower secondary TVE from upper secondary TVE, since most countries offer these subjects only in upper secondary. Differentiation would have provided a more accurate representation of the proportion of TVE in upper and lower secondary. More generally, the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) is the source for much of the GMR data, but UIS is in turn dependent on Ministries of Education. However, information on the vast majority of skills does not derive from such ministries but from other sectoral ministries and specialist institutions.

Equally, the G20 Multi-year Action Plan on Development has been working on proposed indicators of skills acquisition, such as participation of youth in apprenticeships, but the view of the GMR 2012 is that new useful data on skills development are unlikely to be available before the 2015 deadline (82-3). This has meant that apart from suggesting a target of lower secondary for all, the GMR 2012 does not any wider case for a skills goal for the post-2015 agenda (31, 300).

The GMR data on the critical scale of youth unemployment in both OECD and less developed countries gives the impression that countries such as Greece, Italy and Spain can be put in the same table as South Africa, Indonesia, Philippines or Malaysia (193). Comparisons can of course be striking, suggesting a one-world problem, but as the Report admits elsewhere the absence of state support for unemployment in many countries means that ‘Many young people do not have the luxury of remaining unemployed’ (197). In other words, the extent of precarious jobs or low-paid work may be a more accurate indicator in low and middle income countries than levels of open youth unemployment. Similarly, it would have been valuable to have referred to the prominence of the informal economy and informal apprenticeship not just in respect of urban youth and their search for skills, but also for rural youth.

The last example of the use of data involves the GMR’s presentation of very large numbers of illustrative projects, initiatives and innovations. These bring vividly to light the particular point being made in a specific context, but many of these projects are presented quite briefly and they involve relatively small numbers (2-3,000 participants). Many of them are presented as success stories, and many are also aid-dependent. These illustrations of good or best practice perhaps need to be located in a wider discussion about policy transfer versus policy learning, and of sustainability and scaling up. This is not to say that there is not some very balanced, and research-based analysis of some innovations such as national qualification frameworks, or of specific aid-dependent initiatives. But some of these many project illustrations might profit from some further evidenced-based review.

Implications for Policy

The policymaker interested in youth unemployment will find a good deal more about this topic than about low-paid work. But a careful reading of the Report will reveal that the extent of working poverty is a better indicator in many low and middle income countries while levels of youth unemployment may be a better indicator in rich countries (190). The policymaker will not find much evidence of public or private post-school technical, vocational or agricultural training. Indeed, agricultural extension is scarcely visible at all, though it is presumably one of largest

types of vocational training in rural areas. By contrast, national and international NGOs are connected to many of the selected innovative projects. Finally, on the data side, there are numerous insightful comments on education, training and on work made by young people visited in some eight countries, including India and Viet Nam, but there could perhaps have been a few parallel qualitative comments from those actually running small or micro-enterprises.

Global Reports on Skills, Work and Jobs: Cooperation or Competition

One of the crucial boxes in the GMR 2012 reflects on the range of other global reports on skills and on jobs being developed or published during 2012-13, to most of which we referred in the introduction of this paper (204). What would have been extremely relevant is if there could have been an analysis, however brief, of whether the approach to the concept of ‘skills’ of the OECD, World Development Report (WDR) 2013, ILO and *African Economic Outlook* differed to that taken by the GMR 2012. Moreover, the box could usefully included one of the global reports not mentioned there, but perhaps closer to the theme of the GMR than any other: *The World Report on Technical and Vocational Education and Training*, also developed under the umbrella of UNESCO, Paris.

The other key illustration is from Panel 1.6 (82-83) which synthesises ‘promising progress towards measuring skills development’ globally. As already mentioned, this refers to some of the initiatives concerned with the measurement of skills pursued by the G20, OECD, World Bank and European Union.

In combination, these two sets of references could have been developed into a small methodological section which could have set the unfinished work on indicators against the background of how skills were actually analysed and used in these several key global reports. This could have been a very fitting prelude to the categorisation of skills in the GMR 2012 (171-172).

Implications for Policy

These two short sections, referred to above, of some three pages in total underline the challenge for the policy community of absorbing reports like the GMR 2012, which is 480 pages in length, or the WDR (which is 422 pages). There need to be summaries such as that provided by the GMR (44 pages) and by the other global reports, but beyond that there need to be summaries of summaries which capture critically the main messages of the particular report, but without undue generalisation or simplification. We have already noted the danger of the quantitative headline message.

A World Crisis in the Relationships amongst Education, Skills, Work and the Economy.

The GMR portrays a growing crisis for the young, where many millions are currently unemployed despite having much more than foundation skills, and where many millions more are working at subsistence levels in the developing countries both with and without adequate foundation skills. There is a special political appeal of technical and vocational skills in these critical times, and India is just one of several countries which has made dramatic forecasts of the

numbers that will be skilled in the next decade (King, 2012b). But in the face of the aspirations to provide foundation skills for all, or even technical and vocational skills for half the nation (as in India), there is the question of the labour market, and of the wider macro-economic factors impacting on the very nature of work itself. Arguably, these factors are given insufficient attention in the GMR 2012, and it is perhaps no accident that the term ‘demand-led’ does not appear in the Report. An outstanding policy research question must be what the pursuit of foundation or technical & vocational skills development can secure for both poorer and richer countries when there is a very fragile labour market demand for young people even with more or less full basic education.

Perspectives on Asia

We have already mentioned the iconic references to South Korea and to India. But there are well over 200 further references to Asian countries, - to government initiatives, bilateral and multilateral donor agency projects, and activities of international and national NGOs. There are, overall, more references to South Asia than to either South East or East Asia. But there is very considerable diversity. Illustrative boxes afford some particular visibility to India (4), Bangladesh (2), Pakistan (1), Philippines (1) and South Korea (1). There are examples of internationally known projects such as BRAC, TREE, and FFS,²¹ but also many more localised or regional initiatives. We have referred above to the pros and cons of innovative projects, especially when aid dependent. But even some heavily aid dependent projects can have a major national impact, despite not being funded locally or going to scale. With others, the key challenge over time is policy learning and ownership, supported by careful research and evaluation.

It will be salutary to hear from the policy community in Manila, how the range of initiatives, whether headlined or just illustrated in the GMR 2012, fit into their own national skills strategies. Furthermore, it would be interesting, in the light our mention right at the outset about the post-2015 option for skills to figure on a future development agenda, whether there is yet much traction in the region around skills development to be linked with youth employment, jobs and growth in such an agenda.



²¹ Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, Training for Rural Economic Empowerment, Farmer Field Schools.

Global Trends and Issues in TVET : A World Report (UNESCO, forthcoming 2013, pp.319 ; Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training : Building Skills for Work and Life. Main Working Document (UNESCO, 2012c, pp.28)

There was a tantalising foretaste of the *World Report*²² at the Shanghai Third International Congress. Its *Main Working Document* was entitled *Transforming Technical and Vocational Education and Training: Building Skills for Work and Life*. It had only 18 pages of full text, and while it faithfully summarised the three parts and most of the main sections of the *World Report*, it was essentially an abstract and only here and there captured the richness of the 300+ page document.²³ Unlike the GMR 2012 where only 144 pages are substantially concerned with the theme of *Youth and Skills*, but skills of many different kinds, the entire *World Report* is concerned with TVET. The decision by UNESCO to develop its own position on TVET was taken as far back as late early 2009 when it was still proving difficult for the series of GMR volumes to break the methodological logjam over the definition of ‘appropriate learning and life skills’ for all from the Dakar Goal 3.

The UNESCO World Report would not be ‘stymied by problems of definition and lack of data’ (UNESCO, 2009: 91); rather it would take the high ground and seek to be both a laboratory of transformative ideas about TVET as well as critically analysing a whole range of policy areas and policy options. It would not be an advocacy document for any particular policy borrowing, however.

But the Report would certainly concern itself with meanings. Indeed, definitional and conceptual clarification of the myriad terms associated with TVET would be a priority initial issue. So, definition does matter (65). In particular, a decision was taken to stay with the term, TVET, which for all its problems, particularly of translation to other languages, does emphasise a close link with the worlds of work, and a fairly close historical link with the two earlier UNESCO World Congresses, with Delors (UNESCO, 1996), and with the UNESCO *Revised Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education (TVE)* (2001).²⁴ This last is very little known outside specialist UNESCO circles but arguably the *World Report* has taken the *Recommendation*’s concerns that TVE is a key part of general education; a crucial link to occupation and to work; a modality of lifelong learning; an instrument for sustainable development; and a means of poverty reduction. And it has lifted them out of the dry text of the *Recommendation*, and brought them to life. Where Delors saw TVET as having to reconcile two divergent goals, preparation for current versus future jobs (Delors, 1996: 127), the *World Report* celebrates the essential inseparability of preparing for now and for the whole of later life.

If the *Report* has retained the terminology of TVET for reasons of institutional continuity, it is aware that skills development and even technical and vocational skills development have been

²² The *World Report* will not be published till 2013. Any quotations here are from the Shanghai Congress *Main Working Document*.

²³ See three comments by Castro, Mehrotra and King on the Shanghai *Main Working Document*, NORRAG Special Session 4: Building research and policy development. http://www.norrag.org/fileadmin/Events/NORRAG.3_Comments_on_Main_Working_Document.Shanghai.pdf

²⁴ The earlier two congresses in East Berlin (1987) and in Seoul (1999) both referred to Technical and Vocational Education, as did the *Revised Recommendation*.

adopted in some agencies (e.g. World Bank, DFID, ADEA and IIEP) as having a supposedly wider reach to non-formal and informal settings than TVET. However, the very flexibility of the term skills (high, low, core, soft, life and work) also has had its challenges, as can be seen from the decade of uncertainty around life skills in Dakar Goal 3. Indeed, the very lack of specific institutional connections for the term skills is what has made it feasible and compelling for the GMR 2012 to prioritise foundation, transferable and life skills, while also acknowledging the role of technical and vocational skills (King, 2012a). It may well be that the GMR saw foundation and life skills as closer to its conception of Education for All (EFA). Significantly, however, the focus on the crucial foundation skills for youth and adults gave the GMR a concern both for the billion young and old who currently lack these²⁵ but also for those who have achieved them. Arguably, therefore, foundation skills are genuinely part of Education for All.

By contrast, TVET has had a specific institutional and workplace resonance in different contexts and cultures, and the challenge, as we shall shortly see, is to expand this traditional reach so that it connects with both present and future worlds of work and concepts of work, but also with the vast domains of non-formal and informal work, paid and unpaid. Unlike skills development, TVET contains two crucial elements: Vocation and Training. These really do suggest a calling to, and a preparation for, occupational cultures. But if TVET is to reach out effectively, this will entail a revisiting and a remarking of its frontiers and boundaries. It is in these new domains that the *World Report* has sought to make a unique contribution, building on the Delors' pillars of learning to know, do, be and live together.

The Transformation of TVET's Meanings and Constituencies

The *World Report* has taken seriously the UNESCO TVET Strategy (2009) that states 'UNESCO is uniquely placed to reconceptualise the changing domain of skills and TVET and to propose interpretations of these concepts' and that 'it will prepare a state-of-the-art publication on world trends and issues in TVET.' This reconceptualisation has gone beyond the dry debates about re-definitions of skill, and instead has engaged directly with how TVET should not just be an illustration of learning to do and of learning to know, but also of learning to be and to live. This is the major challenge for the wider TVET community.

Moving TVET out of a traditional concern only with school-to-work transitions and with the politics of youth unemployment has therefore been the ambition of the *World Report*. Hence its aim has been to re-theorise TVET so that it is not judged only by its success in preparing young people for paid work, or for higher technical education. Not for life skills or work skills but for life and for work. The idea that TVET could be about more than employability and productivity but could encompass the centrality of work itself, paid or unpaid, in human well-being, and the realm of vocation, whether skilfully to care for children and the community or to minister to the elderly, is worth serious consideration. The idea too that there could be vocational capabilities as there are professional capabilities, cutting across many attitudes and values, is highly suggestive.

The three lenses proposed for rethinking TVET in the *World Report*, - transformative, equity, and economic – cover a vast terrain, but at their core is the challenge of TVET transformation.

²⁵ The billion are those still out of primary, those in primary and lower secondary who are failing to acquire foundation skills, and the 775 million adult illiterates.

However, a central question in the remaking of the reach of TVET is not just with illustrating the pursuit of excellence in all the now acknowledged TVET constituencies, whether formal, non-formal or informal, but with whether TVET can claim new ground, in new vocations, and in new communities with potential for training. In other words, is the transformation within the recognised TVET communities or is its potential to go far beyond these? Are the drivers of TVET's transformation expanding the skill needs of established congregations to meet new demands, for example from information technology or from more sustainably green economies? Or are these and other global trends creating many quite new vocations and new TVET populations?

The equity lens in particular suggests not only improving the quality of TVET for existing communities who are poorly served because of their status, class or structures of provision, but also of making quality TVET learning opportunities more available, as a right, to those communities or individuals currently excluded. The equity lens speaks directly therefore of increasing the numbers of TVET consumers. Ensuring fairer and non-discriminatory national and global access to TVET will undoubtedly increase TVET numbers.

The lifelong aspect of TVET's transformation also has major implications for dramatic increases in learning by individuals and of numbers of new learners. It could shift the focus from the acknowledged importance of apprenticeship as a key form of initial learning to the recognition that successful learning to learn will need to be implemented throughout life, and that new communities of learners may want to take up new skills-for-leisure or indeed skills-for-work in later years. Both these latter constituencies are large and growing larger in many OECD countries, and may often not be counted in regular TVET statistics.

The economic lens, too, may have implications for reaching beyond traditional TVET audiences. Attractiveness is just one of this lens' many dimensions but it can illustrate the trade-off between making work skills and work-ready attitudes more attractive, on the one hand, and embracing and making appealing a broader educative and well-being version and vision of TVET, on the other.

Many of the TVET reform policies reviewed in the *World Report* are seen to lead to a drive to make TVET available to wider publics. Again, the intriguing issue here is whether these increases are in traditional TVET skill areas, hitherto unreached or excluded, or whether they constitute new communities of learners, under reconceptualised TVET banners.

At one level, and in those countries where secondary and post-secondary still have small proportions of school age students, it can be anticipated that traditional TVET areas will recruit new participants in parallel with students in general education. Some of these 'new' TVET students would have acquired their skills in less formal settings in earlier years. This 'substitution effect' will certainly be the case, for example, if India seeks to make good its desire to skill 500 million people in the next decade (King, 2012b).

But what of the claim that 'Ensuring access to TVET for all' should be a compelling policy purpose (UNESCO, 2012c: 21)? Does this perhaps not build on the challenging EFA Dakar Goal 3, 'ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable

access to appropriate learning and life- skills programmes’? This was perhaps the crux of the Goal 3 logjam – that the five other EFA goals were **for all, either for young or for old**. But it was known that TVET, at least in regular parlance, was not for all. Hence Goal 3 ended up being framed in a rights-based approach to learning and life-skills, and not to technical or vocational skills.

There is a sense in the Shanghai *Main Working Document*, that, with the expanded meanings of TVET mentioned above there is already a much larger, almost hidden, ‘TVET’ community out there which policy needs to relate to:

Policy-makers and stakeholders, including donors, need to recognize that across different phases and areas of education and training, as well as across different settings of working, community living and individual lifestyles, a great deal of TVET learning is already going on. Once the extent of existing TVET learning is understood better, policies can potentially become more relevant and equitable. ‘TVET for all’ implies, among other issues, ensuring that historical socio-economic divisions are overcome. (UNESCO, 2012c: 21-2)

Thus the Shanghai *Document* and the *World Report*, especially with the equity lens, are very clearly arguing for ensuring fair access to skills development for work and for life for **all** young people and adults. This is what could be called their expanded TVET agenda. It can also be termed their entitlement to skills development. This latter is explicitly concerned with expanding TVET opportunities; otherwise economic growth, poverty reduction and human development could be limited.

Rethinking learning for broader human needs, and not just for immediate skills demand, is just one illustration of a whole series of compelling debates that runs through the *World Report*. We have selected this one, of TVET for some, for more, or for all, as it is at the core of TVET’s transformation. One of the central messages of the *World Report* is that too many learners are denied TVET opportunities from which they would profit, but equally the message is that the TVET curriculum planners need to go beyond Delors’ learning to do. If they adopt the learning for well-being approach, as encouraged by the transformative lens, they will find themselves innovating with wider capabilities and competencies. One further illustration of this tension between old TVET and new TVET can be taken from the vocationalisation of secondary. Here it is claimed that some of the traditional patterns of school-based TVET are in decline but at the same time newer hybrid forms, drawing upon broader, soft skills as well as work skills, are on the rise. In different senses, the vocationalisation of the general and the generalisation of the vocational are underway in upper secondary schools.

We have said enough to suggest that the transformation of many aspects of traditional TVET is on the *World Report*’s agenda, along with its encouragement to expand TVET learning for both young and old. But what is being called for in this expansion is not of course more exposure to traditional forms of TVET but that all audiences and participants should become aware of and draw from the rich diversity and complexity of newer TVET learning. The conclusion of the *Main Working Document* puts the challenge concisely:

While economic and equity perspectives are still valid, a transformative perspective now seems essential for TVET to move from mainly addressing the short-term needs of certain groups to addressing the long-term skills needs of all young people and adults and subsequent generations. (UNESCO, 2012c: 28)

Successful TVET reform and transformation may engage with a selection of ten TVET policy areas: (1) Governance; (2) Demand-driven TVET; (3) Social goals; (4) Inclusive TVET; (5) Empowering learners; (6) Modernizing TVET provision; (7) Improving work-based learning; (8) TVET teachers and trainers; (9) ICT in TVET; and (10) Financing TVET (Ibid.15). Even though each of these selected policy areas is examined at some length with the benefit of the three lenses, there is deliberately no single recipe emerging from the detailed analysis of options. This is not to say that the terms success and successful are not found in the *Main Working Document* or the *World Report*. They are found frequently but equally frequent are terms such as context, culture and environment. These make the point that whatever the lessons learned in these valuable evidence-based debates about policy, there is no toolkit, no menu of best practices that can transform TVET nationally or internationally. The only advice is policy learning which works through developing and owning, often over a long period, context-specific and context-relevant approaches to reform.

There is therefore a health warning in general about best practice. Yet there are many suggestive examples of TVET reform drawn from Asia and the Pacific. More references are made to Australia, China, India and South Korea than to others in the region, but some ten further countries are referred to for particular TVET approaches, often innovative. Given the overall message of the *World Report*, it should not be surprising, however, that some of the examples don't even mention TVET, but illustrate human resource development more generally as a path to lifelong learning, or pick out broader social and creative competencies rather than just technical or technological.

In Conclusion

The *World Report* celebrates being in the tradition of Delors. That Commission's views of human development went far 'beyond any narrow utilitarian idea of education' (UNESCO, 1996: 80). Similarly, the *World Report* manages to be more thoughtful than most literature about many of the staples of the TVET debates of the last forty and more years, whether formalizing the informal sector, rates of return, or the contents of the current TVET toolkit. But at the same time, its use of a transformative lens 'helps stakeholders create a vision of TVET that is more responsive to contextual factors and long-term development trends. The transformative lens widens the conceptualisation of TVET to encompass 'learning to be' and 'learning to live together', as well as the more traditional 'learning to know' and 'learning to do' (UNESCO, 2012c: 15). In a word, the *World Report* speaks the language well-known to the national and international TVET communities. It also draws new research to their attention, much of it from beyond the specialist training journals. But if they read the volume carefully, they will recognize that there are major challenges, even dangers, to some of their regular ways of thinking about TVET if they embrace Technical and Vocational Training.

Concluding Thoughts on These Six Sets of Global Reports²⁶

The almost 2000 pages of analysis in these reports cover a very rich terrain. Our particular angle has been with their treatment of skills development and in particular of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), given the acknowledgement by this International Forum that ‘TVET is now occupying a more influential place in development priorities because of the need for a highly skilled work force to drive growth’ (ADB, 2012: 1). As one of the Forum’s foci has been with inclusive growth, it may be valuable, in conclusion, to examine how inclusive different conceptions of skills development and TVET have been in the two main reports we have examined in this background paper.

The World TVET Report (WTR) and the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) offer contrasting approaches to inclusion. The GMR, we have argued above, may have fore-grounded the role of foundation skills precisely because these can be seen as the right of **all** people, young and old, whether through first-chance or second-chance education, whether formal, non-formal or informal. Hence their concern is with the out-of-school, the illiterate, and the millions not catching the spark of learning the basics despite being in school. The GMR offers, therefore, a compelling version of skills-for-all at the foundation level. It positions transferable and technical and vocational skills on top of these. Both these latter are regarded as crucial in their own ways, but though there is a rich diversity of technical and vocational skills discussed in the GMR, - school-based, work-based, rural and urban, there is no attempt to argue that technical and vocational skills are for all.

The WTR takes a conceptually contrasting approach to inclusion. Its preoccupation is with TVET, as it has developed in UNESCO over the last 25 years from the Berlin Congress of 1987 on Technical and Vocational Education. As the WTR examines TVET through its selected lenses, transformative, equity and economic, it recognizes that, though its ten key policy areas all treat some of the latest debates on TVET, the transformative lens in particular acknowledges that vocational capabilities should become much more inclusive, and that all human beings are called to work, whether in the home, factory or farm. Multiple skills are required in child-care, house-work and household enterprise. Often these are not collected in national accounts. Skills are acquired and utilized before the age of adult work is reached, and they continue to be activated and deployed for years after the artificial barrier of ‘retirement’ has been reached. The WTR thus has a lifelong perspective on skill. But with its transformative lens, it challenges people to think beyond the vocational track, school or institute, and to recognize the vocational elements in the general curricula and the general elements in the vocational. This is not just a play on words, but hybridity characterizes many of the developments in TVET system reform.

In other words, the GMR starts with EFA, with foundation-skills-for-all, and then builds outwards to embrace transferable and vocational capabilities. The WTR starts with the apparently narrower world of TVET, but goes on to embrace much wider visions of work, much of it highly skilled and a great deal of it unpaid. In this sense, transformed TVET is also for all, just like foundation skills in the GMR.

²⁶ Though we have called these six reports, they are really six sets of reports. Thus the World TVET Report is referred to along with the Main Working Document from the Shanghai Congress, and the ILO’s *World of Work Report 2012* is considered along with the ILO’s *Global Employment Trends 2012*.

In their many different ways, all these reports challenge us to rethink our approaches to Work, to Pay, to Jobs, to Skills, and to Education. They throw up many measurement and evaluation issues, and not least about the relations of skill to sustainable growth. But they also raise fundamental questions about universal rights to work and to skills – once we have decided what they mean in particular contexts and cultures.

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