



**Third International Congress on TVET (May 2012)
“Building Skills for Work and Life”
Regional Expert Meeting for the Arab States
Muscat, Sultanate of Oman, 17-19 March 2012
Concept Note**

Background

1. The demographic profile of the Arab region is exerting a major pressure on the region's education and training systems. The youth bulge is making youth unemployment a major issue. In addition to weak employment job openings, a mismatch between the demand and supply of skills is a factor in high unemployment rates. There is a major challenge in creating the required jobs for millions of people entering the labour market. In the economic domain, the region is recovering from the recent financial crisis, and its expected growth rate is 3.6% for 2011. In general, the regional economy is not very diversified, and it comprises large number of small, medium and micro firms.
2. This contextual scene helps to understand the three main roles the TVET sector is seen as playing in the Arab region. First, the sector is viewed as an instrument to overcome the social exclusion that results from the low performance of formal general education (manifested in features such as high repetition and dropout rates among basic and secondary school students). It provides an alternative route for those who “fail” academically and for those who cannot continue into higher education. Second, TVET has been used as a tool for combating high youth unemployment and, to a lesser extent, to help workers' skills development. The third role of promoting economic development by meeting skills needs of enterprises is a more recent one. Its aim is to help enterprise to integrate and successfully compete in world markets.
3. The region shares international concerns with making TVET more labour markets relevant. As noted earlier, the status of TVET in the Arab region is one of offering a second class pathway. Part of the difficulty relates to the low quality of provision, which weakens employment opportunities in the labour market and does not open higher learning pathways. Quality improvement is therefore a high priority for long term improvement of sector status. Much reform has been contemplated towards these ends. The progress across the region is varied as each country is proceeding at its own pace and giving specific shape to its own TVET system. What seems to be common to all countries, however, is growing focus on relevance to labour market and learners' needs.
4. The challenge today for TVET in the region can be formulated as one of transforming and expanding the provision of quality and relevant learning opportunities and shifting the current imbalance from second choice alternative to the more prominent role of TVET for work and life.

Because of these challenges which are not unique to Arab region, UNESCO has been actively informing the global debate and serving as a clearinghouse for TVET.

Global dialogue on TVET

The 1999 Second International Congress on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) held in Seoul, Republic of Korea, constituted a pivotal moment for the TVET community. The Congress demonstrated the significant contribution of TVET to economic and social development. Congress deliberations gave directions for reforming TVET to meet the challenges brought about by increasingly globalised economies, labour markets and societies. Progress has been made toward implementing recommendations of the Congress, including the articulation of the UNESCO TVET Strategy.

A decade since the Seoul Congress, the time is ripe to take stock of progress and to chart new directions for the next decade. To this end, UNESCO will hold the Third International Congress on TVET in Shanghai, China (**13 - 16 May, 2012**). The Third Congress will create space and a platform to review achievements and challenges in the TVET sub-sector; not only at the global level, but also at the regional and national levels. A pre-Congress regional consultation would greatly enhance the facility and effectiveness with which the Arab States can present their achievements and challenges, and ensure that their views are well reflected in the Congress outcome document. A pre-Congress regional consultation will therefore enable the Arab States to collectively influence not only the debates at the Congress, but also future directions of TVET as adopted by the Congress. UNESCO therefore strongly recommends that such a regional consultation be held prior to the Congress.

Objectives of the Regional Expert Meeting

- Review the state of the development of TVET across Arab States; noting past achievements and underscoring current and future challenges that still require focused attention
- Begin to chart a future strategic approach to developing TVET in the region and to effectively using TVET to support national and regional development
- Identify key points that the Arab States need to carry into the World Congress and identify future directions that the region would like to see reflected in the Congress
- Outline a strategy for effective regional participation in the Congress

Themes (TVET Congress and Regional Expert Meeting)

1. ***Skills development for youth employment***: Youth unemployment can be traced back to a number of economic, political and social factors. It is now commonly accepted that youth unemployment is a structural concern that requires long-term solutions. In the skills development field, a mismatch between demand for skills and the lack of appropriately skilled young workers has often been a root problem.

2. ***Building the responsiveness of TVET systems***: It is generally accepted that quality TVET must be responsive to changes in the demand for skills, whether these are economically, socially or politically generated. Growing attention is given to responsiveness to employers. There are also questions regarding the extent to which TVET responds to the needs of individuals and communities, as well as for self-employment, complex livelihoods and non-wage work.

3. ***Revisiting TVET funding and enhancing efficiency***: TVET is under heightened pressure to demonstrate value for money. Recent years have seen increasing use of a diverse range of funding mechanisms and diversification of sources of financing for TVET, as well as a growing emphasis on relating payment for provision more closely to learning and outcomes in the world of work.

4. ***Tackling social inequities and exclusion:*** TVET should promote the skills of all learners, irrespective of gender, class, ethnicity, age or other social characteristics. While TVET can empower excluded individuals and groups both economically and socially, skills are only one aspect in promoting social inclusion, so TVET policies need to be located within wider public policies.

5. ***Changing governance and widening stakeholders' engagement in TVET:*** Many TVET reforms have resulted in the development of new national organizations and new coordination and oversight structures. Attention is often given to the involvement of employers, while at the same time there is growing emphasis on the importance of making TVET more accountable to other stakeholders such as learners, parents, unions, communities and elected representatives.

6. ***Promoting innovation and entrepreneurship education:*** TVET has a valuable role in contributing to economic and social innovation. The rise of the sustainable development agenda suggests that TVET must engage more systemically with social, cultural and environmental issues, in terms of its own ways of working, its contribution to sustainable development, and in response to new skills needs.

7. ***Achieving better quality teaching and learning:*** The multiplicity of learning sites and modes in TVET brings policy challenges for achieving better outcomes of teaching and learning. There are very wide differences in TVET learning opportunities across sectors and occupations. In the formal TVET sector, there is a growing awareness of the changing role of teachers and trainers and the need for a systemic view of staff development needs, qualifications, career paths and remuneration.

8. ***Qualifications systems for connecting skills development and lifelong learning:*** There is a growing realization that learning takes place in multiple settings that go far beyond formal TVET. This requires establishing flexible and open learning and qualifications systems able to reduce the barriers between education, training and work, and to increase access and progression in initial and continuing TVET.

Expected Outcomes

Effective participation in the Congress, enhanced readiness to influence the course of global debate on TVET, and enhanced relevance of the Congress outcome document and follow-on actions to the reality of the Arab States.

The expert meeting will reflect on national and regional priorities in relation to the implementation of *TVET Strategy (2010-2015)*, with focus on its three Core Areas:

Core Area 1: provision of upstream policy advice and related capacity development;

Core Area 2: conceptual clarification of skills development and improvement of monitoring and;

Core Area 3: acting as a clearinghouse and informing the global TVET debate.

The text of the strategy can found at the following link:

<http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/education-building-blocks/tvet/strategy/>

Participants

It is desirable that country delegations (2 participants) would include leaders and senior level participants from: key government policy agencies; TVET institutions; and relevant social partners and civil society organisations. Representatives from international and regional organizations (ILO, ETF, World Bank, Islamic Development Bank, ALECSO, ISESCO, ALO, and ABEGS) will be also invited.

Venue

The proposed date for the Expert Meeting is **17-19 March 2012** in Muscat, Oman. The National Commission for UNESCO in Oman will be consulted regarding the logistics and other technical arrangements.

Organizing Committee

- Mr. Borhene Chakroun, Chief, ED/BHL/TVET, UNESCO HQ-Paris;
- Mr. Mohammad Al-Yaqoubi, Deputy Secretary General, Nat. Com. for UNESCO-Oman;
- Mr. Sulieman Sulieman, Programme Specialist: STV, UNESCO Regional Bureau-Beirut;
- Ms. Faryal Khan, Programme Specialist: Education, UNESCO Office-Doha;
- Ms. Nadia Makeen, Coordinator of Education, Permanent Delegation of Oman to UNESCO

Mailing Addresses

UNESCO Regional Bureau-Beirut

P.O. Box 11-5244

Beirut-Lebanon

Tel.: +961-1-850013

Fax: +961-1-824854

E-mail: beirut@unesco.org; s.sulieman@unesco.org

The National Commission for UNESCO-Oman

P.O. Box 3, Postal Code 100 Muscat,

Sultanate of Oman

Tel.: +968 783666 / +968 782082

Fax: +968 785550

E.mail: onc@moe.gov.om; badarharthy@moe.om