

TRENDS IN SKILL RECOGNITION AND CERTIFICATION: THE ROLE OF COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING FRAMEWORKS FROM A CARIBBEAN PERSPECTIVE

George Gamerdinger

Honored guests, ladies and gentlemen and colleagues - Before sharing my thoughts on the topic at hand I wish to thank our host the Ministry of Labour and Employment of Brazil; SENAI; Mr. Munzo, the ILO Director for the Americas; Mr. Weinberg, the Director of ILO Cinterfor; and Mr. Aro, the Director the of ILO Skills Development Department in Geneva, for extending their kind invitation to participate in this week's meeting.

I have been asked this morning to describe some of the trends affecting skills recognition in the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean. You will also be hearing from Mr. Robert Gregory from the HEART Trust/NTA of Jamaica with specific information on a skills recognition system that is generally representative of the Caribbean. In addition you will receive country papers developed for this seminar from the representatives from Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago with specific details of their education and training delivery systems. Against this backdrop of information from specific countries, my presentation will identify some of the major trends and emerging issues that are shaping the development of the region's workforce.

Throughout my representation you will hear refer to the term TVET which stands for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)¹. In addition, references to the word "region" reflect the English and Dutch Speaking Caribbean while the term "private sector" is used to describe employers, trade unions and other relevant community representatives.

To talk about trends, especially in 21 countries, is quite a challenge. However, there are some common emerging trends and issues that are defining training frameworks in the Caribbean². While such trends provide indicators of direction they also offer opportunity for officials to use such data in future strategic planning. In the examination process that follows, attention will be

* Senior Specialist HRD/Vocational Training ILO Caribbean Office, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago

¹ It could be argued that the use of the term TVET no longer captures the knowledge and attitude components of vocational education. In the UK reference is now made to "Learning and Skills Councils" which take on the responsibilities of what in the Caribbean we call National Training Agencies and TVET Councils. The trends identified in this paper would suggest that the use of TVET will begin to wane as terms associated with vocational education and training still too often reflect a social perception that vocational training prepares people for low quality jobs - a perception that is no longer an absolute reality in the region. Learning and Skills Councils offer a new perspective in understanding the evolution of TVET.

² The identification and publication of current trends at regional levels seems to be overlooked in the work of international agencies. A coordinated approach by organization to correct this oversight would be useful in regional employment-related analysis.

given to the events related to TVET that have influenced four emerging trends since 1991 in the Caribbean³:

Trend 1. The increasing establishment of national TVET coordinating bodies.

Trend 2. The prevalence of sharing knowledge enriched TVET best practices.

Trend 3. The growth in TVET reform as a direct result of private sector acknowledgement of skill standards.

Trend 4. The growing acceptability of occupational skills as a career choice.

The region is feeling the challenges created through the decline of agricultural exports, especially in the sugar and banana industries, a struggling tourism sector, and the fact that competition for skill workers is becoming keener. Competition for a skilled workforce no longer comes only from the Caribbean but rather is a global pull that has caused the region to lose some of its best workers. As the region standardizes its training frameworks and national skill qualifications, its workforce will become even more susceptible to global competition. While the issue of workers leaving the region needs addressing it also demonstrates that the region is in the process of truly developing a valued world class workforce.

Issues like migration, a struggling tourism sector and declining agricultural outputs, have reinforced the need to revisit how best to develop the region's workforce and to strengthen the Caribbean's human resources⁴. An example of the importance of human resource development in the region is noted in Barbados and acknowledged by a quote from the Minister of Education (2000), The Honorable Mia Amor Mottley, "Curriculum 2000 encapsulates a vision for Barbados based on the premise that our people are critical for success in the new knowledge-based economy. As a small country our human capital development cannot be ignored, and it is through education that we are able to unlock the potential of all our people"

This statement is typical of the region's valuing of its human resources which has been applied in the establishment of coordinating TVET bodies, skill standards and competency-based frameworks. The trends and issues identified in this presentation offer a glimpse of how these forces are being used to broaden the efforts of TVET agencies even further.

For those not familiar with the Caribbean it should be noted that the nations in the region are heterogeneous. By that I mean they are unique while at the same time they share common challenges especially in regard to employment creation. Each country will quickly point out its unique cultural, social advantages and employment needs - issues which must be taken into account if national frameworks are to reflect a national context and drive employment policy. For this reason attention is given in this presentation to the importance of developing first national and then regional TVET frameworks.

³ Trends reflected in the presentation are estimations or measurements of economic and social issues measured over time. They reflect the past and present and give indication for future applications. In describing a trend attention has also been given to identifying its causes and implications.

⁴ Barbados' national strategy on human resources development is representative of the growing recognition of human resource development.

1. Trend: The increasing establishment of national TVET coordinating bodies.

The generally accepted view in the region is that national level apex agencies are critical in coordinating workforce creation⁵. As such the lack of such an agency at the national level hampers coordination and resource allocation.

National apex agencies:

Three national apex agencies exist within the CARICOM region. In Jamaica, the National Training Agency (NTA) as part of the Heart Trust was launched in 1991. The TVET council in Barbados was established in 1994 and the National Training Agency of Trinidad & Tobago in 1998. Indications are that Belize and St. Lucia will establish apex agencies by 2002-03⁶. The increase in the number of apex agencies being created since 1998 has happened in part to the positive recognition by the public and private sectors of the importance of apex agencies.

Countries with apex agencies have made great strides in coordinating, monitoring and promoting occupational standards when compared to countries without any national TVET agency. The lack of a central coordinating unit tends to be a negative factor in regard to a country's TVET development.

In light of these positive effects about established apex agencies why have not more national apex agencies been developed? I do not believe this lack of development is indicative of a lack of interest by other countries but rather a lack of national level resources and the need for policy change that would promote the development of the agency. The strongest influence on the establishment of national agencies has been the grassroots support by the social partners to integrate themselves into the national TVET systems. We have heard this mentioned throughout our meeting. The lesson being stressed is that we need to promote this type of investment more urgently if successful training systems are to develop in the region.

Each of the national apex agencies mentioned share a commonality of mission, founded on tripartitism, and the sharing of competency-based skills and standards. However, there are differences. For example, the uniqueness of each can be found in ministerial affiliation, funding arrangements and the broadness of their scope of work as outlined by national policy⁷.

- In Jamaica - the Heart Trust NTA, under the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, draws on a 3% payroll levy tax to fund training programs. The regulatory body is the National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) and as such is responsible for the development of occupational standards and accreditation of national TVET programs and institutions. It receives its technical support from the Heart Trust/NTA among others.

⁵ In the Caribbean, national TVET agencies may be referred to as TVET Councils, or national training agencies (NTAs). While names may be different their roles are to oversee the national interests of TVET. In this paper the term "apex agencies" is used to reference national TVET agencies.

⁶ An example of the valuing of apex agencies was indicated in a random survey of TVET instructors in Dominica in February 2002 (P. Payne-OECS/G. Gamedinger –ILO). When asked how best to use funds to strengthen TVET, the overwhelming response was to use the funds to establish a national TVET apex agency.

⁷ For a full description of each of the apex agencies please reference the seminar's country papers and the ILO Caribbean Office web site on HRD publications www.ilocarib.org.tt.

- In Barbados - The TVET Council operates under the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. The Council manages the employment and training fund, which provides among other things the financial assistance such as grants and loans for training and skills upgrading, and support to training programs for retrenched workers and self employed persons.⁸ The fund draws on a 1% levy tax drawn 0.5% from employees and 0.5% from employers.
- In Trinidad & Tobago the National Training Agency operates through the Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education. Through Industrial Training Organizations (ITOs), occupational standards are identified, and developed with technical support from the NTA. A proposal for a national training act is currently under review and will most probably include the establishment in some form of an employment and training fund.

A snapshot of the region finds that the majority of TVET portfolios are generally associated with ministries of education. It has been my experience that all ministries responsible for TVET activities in the Caribbean have expressed interest in establishing a national vocational qualification framework and are at some stage in making this a reality.

National TVET agencies as an enabling force in the development of public and private sector partnerships.

To talk in the year 2002 about technical and vocational education and training in the Caribbean in the context of the three national apex agencies is really to discuss human resources development (HRD). The fact is that national TVET agencies in the Caribbean are addressing policies and issues related to lifelong learning and the responsibility of the individual learner to engage in continuous education and training. In principle, defining TVET in the region as encompassing knowledge, skills and attitudes would be an accurate statement. A reflection of this is how TVET agencies are grappling with social issues pertaining to the fundamental rights at work, social protection and strengthening social dialogue.⁹ In other words, TVET agencies are doing more than addressing training delivery in the narrow sense. The traditional model built around skills only is proving to be outdated in the region.

A major output in this process has been the identification and support for skill standards both at the national level and as part of a regional qualification framework. Overall, the benefits from social partnership are building private sector trust, which finds a good deal of its synergy through knowledge sharing, which is our second regional trend.

Trend 2. The prevalence of sharing knowledge enriched TVET best practices.

Knowledge sharing continues to be an enabling process to facilitate the development of TVET in the Caribbean. It has directly led to the establishment of the current three national apex-training agencies and in the preparatory activities for the two proposed apex agencies in Belize and St. Lucia. Knowledge sharing and knowledge management is part of a trend that goes beyond passive information exchange. The impact has promoted a common regional framework for skill recognition. While I have been talking about the English and Dutch speaking Caribbean, I need also to mention the long exchange of good practices from Latin America, especially

⁸ Technical and Vocational Education & Training Council Act, 1993-11. P.7.

⁹ "Learning and training for work in the knowledge society" ILO-Geneva 2002.

SENAI. Other examples include experiences gained from INFOTEPA, the National Training Agency in the Dominican Republic and of course other TVET agencies and programmes from throughout the Americas, Asia and Africa.

We all recognize the fact that ideas that work well in one context may not work in another. Therefore, the importance of sharing lessons learned and following up among TVET agencies to see how the lessons have been applied and modified is critical in knowledge development. This follow-up process has been a critical element in the exchange of appropriate knowledge. In emerging economies this sharing of information and good practices is allowing nations with fewer resources to utilize good practices to maximize their human resources. A few examples to highlight my comments follow.

- The Heart Trust NTA is the longest established TVET agency among CARICOM members in the Caribbean region. This agency has served as an incubator for ideas and advisory support to the TVET Council in Barbados and the National Training agency in Trinidad & Tobago and also to other countries in the Caribbean. Special attention is given to their current support in the establishment of competency based training and a qualifications framework in St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This culture of knowledge sharing is typical in the region. The NTA in Trinidad & Tobago and the TVET Council in Barbados like the HEART TRUST/NTA are exchanging knowledge on a regular basis with countries initiating policy to help establish their national TVET agency. Specific countries making exceptional progress in this regard include St. Lucia, Guyana, Bahamas and Belize.
- The need to address costs and limited staff resources has promoted sharing in the development of competency-based training packages¹⁰. By having different training agencies in the Caribbean region take responsibility for specific curriculum packages and then sharing what each develops is a case in point. Such agreements not only cut costs but promote the exchange of knowledge between TVET agencies and the technical committees.
- My final example reflects the long established practice of articulation agreements between training agencies in the Caribbean and those in North America and Europe. The exchange of staff, curricula and knowledge has been strengthened by the rapid development of common occupational frameworks and recognized skill competencies.

The culture of knowledge exchange has long been established and recognized in the region. However, the process of knowledge management is still in its infancy and needs formal recognition and support if it is to be utilized more fully in managing TVET institutions.

Building on the growing credibility of apex agencies and the application of knowledge in quality employment education and training has helped create an environment for the establishment of skill standards which is identified as trend number 3.

¹⁰ The Heart Trust NTA in Jamaica and the National Training Agency in Trinidad & Tobago have taken the leadership role to date.

3. Trend: The growth in TVET reform as a direct result of private sector acknowledgement of skill standards.

Competency-based Curricula

The need for skill standards that are industry led and supported has long been acknowledged by private sector partners. It is only in the last decade that the movement to address these concerns has earnestly taken hold¹¹. The increased efforts in the development and application of skill standards based on competency-based curricula, is being actively promoted both at the national and regional level. Special attention to the value of skill competencies is being demonstrated more strongly in countries with national apex agencies than in countries without such agencies. The latter, without curricula development capacity, have still been able to participate in the process through the purchasing of skill competencies from Jamaica, and Trinidad & Tobago for their own national adaptation.¹² The availability of such curriculum packages in the region will increase as Barbados enters the field of curricula development in the coming months.

National vocational qualification frameworks.

Across the Caribbean, national vocational qualifications, where adopted, are based on standards set by industry in conjunction with the responsible TVET apex agency. All are based on skill competencies that learners must demonstrate in order to be recognized as having an established and formally recognized proficiency. Competencies include the linking of academic and technical skills as well as the human relation skills needed to be successful in the workplace. The phrase “knowledge, skills and attitudes” best describes the components of competency-based curricula and support training packages.

As national agencies focus on revamping the quality of vocational education, attention is given to infusing technical skills with practical work experience to establish national and eventually regionally-accepted standards, a process that is helping to establish a foundation for a Caribbean regional qualification framework¹³. The challenge however in mobilizing this exchange requires an administrative framework built first upon a national level framework. This seminar in many ways is promoting this work.

The central component in the growing recognition of national apex agencies has been the ability of such agencies to serve as a forum in bringing together government, trade unions, employers and other community players on issues pertaining to employment-related education and training. As these national apex agencies work with training providers and other public and private sector agencies such as training boards, community colleges, proprietary training agencies and

¹¹ Terms that reflect this thinking in the wider Caribbean and the Americas include: “school to work transition; narrowing the skill gap.

¹² Officials from the following countries have indicated interested in purchasing Caribbean benchmarked curriculum packages based on competency-based skill standards. Guyana, Belize, Bahamas, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Dominica. The spread of competency-based curriculum is gaining interest outside of traditional TVET training institutions. In Guyana the “Open Doors Centre” is using the national competencies developed by the Heart Trust NTA in Jamaica for training persons with disabilities in vocational occupations. Interest has been expressed by the National Centre for Persons with Disabilities in Trinidad & Tobago in regard to using CBC curricula developed by the National Training Agency of Trinidad & Tobago.

¹³ As similar frameworks from around the world develop, EU for example, they may some day link together to form a common sets of qualifications and in turn generate a global standard framework. Any examination of current national level skill competencies from any country will most likely lead the examiner to elements drawn from the Americas, Asia, Europe and Africa. It could be argued that global standards are currently in development.

others, they serve as catalysts for employment-related education and training. While the three national TVET agencies in the Caribbean are providing such an enabling environment for solutions to employment-driven concerns, it is evident that the individual effects of this process are only beginning to be acknowledged and promoted within the Americas and beyond.

The issues promoted in Trend 3 have also established standard setting as a regional issue. Like the European Union, CARICOM member states are seeking to develop a regional qualification framework. The current efforts toward a regional qualification framework reflect the positive acceptance of national level qualifications frameworks by private sector partners. Taking this acceptance process to the regional level is beginning to find success.

The promotion by the CARICOM Secretariat, with the support of the established TVET apex agencies is having an impact in moving the region to establish a Caribbean Qualification framework. The proposed action of making the Jamaican-based Caribbean Examination Council (CXC) as the regional qualifying body is under discussion.

The internal force operating within the Caribbean, which is having an impact on the regional qualification process, is the mandate to establish among CARICOM members a single market and economy. Protocol II which addresses the free migration of labour provides the mandate to establish a common skills standards or equivalency with implications for the training and certification of skilled workers. This recognition process is underway.

The impact of this protocol has promoted an urgency to create a qualification framework among TVET providers, an urgency that while mandated by senior political heads of state was not adequately implemented until TVET agencies encouraged companies, trade unions and community leaders to become national stakeholders in the work carried out by the national TVET centres. The support of the social partners has manifested itself through knowledgeable graduates and in turn is building private sector trust.

One of the results from the three trends described is the positive effect they have had on the social valuing of skilled occupations as a career choice, which is trend number 4.

4. Trend: The growing acceptability of occupational skills as a career choice.

Career counseling

The fact that the popularity of vocational education and training is gaining in positive social acceptance is based partly on the issues identified in the previously mentioned trends. An outcome of these trends is reflected by the growing interest in the public education system in regard to career education and development.¹⁴ While we as TVET professionals may accept the value of occupations as a career choice, there is still the traditional view in the minds of many youth and adults that vocational education is preparation for jobs that are still mainly labour intensive and that offer medium to low pay incentives. The entry of three national apex agencies into the area of career guidance and information systems offers an opportunity to tell the TVET story to youth making first time career choices. Drawing on knowledge exchange methods, including

¹⁴ Specific examples in 2001-02 include workshops for guidance officials and general education teachers on career information organized under the National Training Agency of Trinidad & Tobago. The Tobago Council carried out a similar workshop for community officials and the Heart Trust NTA in Jamaica has a long history of supporting career guidance activities. Currently under consideration by UNESCO is a joint ILO proposal to promote career guidance in general education in the Caribbean.

the greater use of information technology and working more closely with education officials provides options for a generation of new workers as they prepare to make career choices¹⁵.

In Conclusion:

While we have been focusing on the importance of skill recognition and frameworks, it is important to remember that they are only tools that must be updated and promoted. Each does not exist in isolation just as the four trends we have examined all inter-link with each other. If the social partnerships that establish these frameworks weaken or if the sharing of good practices diminishes, then skill frameworks as well as TVET systems will quickly lose their credibility.

Some reflections on possible issues to consider based on the trends identified include:

1. Greater involvement of apex agencies in the work of the ILO's social partners. One of our immediate challenges for professional organizations should be to promote the greater infusion of apex agencies into the mainstream of employment discussions. A first step in this process might include the greater involvement of TVET representation in meetings chaired by employers and trade unions as well as the involvement of employers and trade union representation in national TVET agencies activities. This partnership on a long-term permanent basis would certainly be beneficial to all parties.
2. Apex agencies as catalysts for social dialogue and decent work issues. One of the clear successes of national apex agencies has been their ability to bring together public and private sector partners to address employment-related skill issues in a practical way. The potential to expand on this partnership in areas related to social dialogue needs exploration¹⁶. Models in the region that should be explored as good practice examples in promoting partnerships include the National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) in Jamaica or the work of Industrial Training Councils in Trinidad & Tobago¹⁷.
3. The establishment of national TVET coordinating bodies and the projected range of responsibilities indicated during our discussion point to the need for new types of management systems for apex agencies. For example at the regional level a coordinating mechanism is needed to bring human, financial and technological resources together to promote knowledge exchange both at the regional and international level.

Much of this knowledge management role that apex agencies will have to handle could be enhanced by regional level supports. As apex agencies become responsible for gathering and disseminating labour market information and documenting and promoting skill recognition frameworks, their need for organizational support will also increase. Inputs by CARICOM and international agencies like the ILO in this area should be considered in future regional planning initiatives.

¹⁵ The ILO Caribbean Office in collaboration with the US Department of Labour is undertaking in 2002 a major strengthening of labour market information systems in the region. A component of the project will be the revision of the national occupational classification directories in Jamaica, Barbados and Trinidad & Tobago, materials that will be helpful in a career guidance information system.

¹⁶ The National Council on Technical and Vocational Education and Training (NCTVET) in Jamaica and the Industrial Training Councils in Trinidad & Tobago are examples of successful public and private sector partnerships addressing skill recognition and national TVET frameworks.

¹⁷ (NCTVET) operating in conjunction with the Heart Trust NTA in Jamaica while Industrial Training Organizations (ITO) are affiliated with the National Training Agency in Trinidad & Tobago.

4. Trend number 3 highlighted issues related to the value of knowledge exchange. Accelerating this process through the greater use of information technology both nationally and international is an area for not only apex agencies but international organizations like the ILO and UNESCO to address in their joint efforts on vocational and technical education and training. Career guidance and information systems are poised to have a positive impact in the Caribbean in light of the trends described.

In closing I am reminded that the most effective way to build on the forecasts identified by the study of trends requires that national apex agencies be responsive to the public and broader private sector. The experiences of apex agencies in the Caribbean demonstrate that the process is moving in the right direction. Whether we are successful or not will be a topic for our next ILO seminar. I look forward to continuing our discussions.