

CHAPTER II

The integrated approach to vocational training in its labour, technological and educational dimensions

(...) education, training and lifelong learning contribute significantly to promoting the interests of individuals, enterprises, the economy and society as a whole, especially considering the critical challenge of attaining full employment, poverty eradication, social inclusion and sustained economic growth in the global economy... (Second paragraph of the preamble to ILO Recommendation 195 concerning Human Resources Development: education, training and lifelong learning).

It has been stated in Cinterfor/ILO papers presented at Technical Committee Meetings and other events, that vocational training is simultaneously of a labour, technological and educational nature. This assumption is not only based on conceptual reflection about the nature of this field but also on the concrete expression of these aspects in experiences in different countries and regions.

There is no doubt that training activity geared to developing personal and collective capabilities, involving pedagogic strategies and a variety of didactic resources, is educational in nature. But training has also a definite orientation; it is closely linked to the world of work and production. In short, it is an educational field that has to satisfy the demand for labour competencies in the labour market and in society in general.

All productive and labour situations, at any time and in any place, have a technological dimension. The productive structures in our societies involve technologies that may be traditional or modern, simple or complex, and hard or soft. There is no way to develop knowledge and capabilities for work without direct and close reference to the techniques, equipment, materials or programmes that are essential to be able to manufacture a product or to render a service.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Decades of tripartite or multipartite management in several of the vocational training institutions of the region have made this field one of the most stable scenarios for social dialogue. Besides this important fact, during the last fifteen years there has been a great expansion and diversification of the social dialogue spaces involving training or that include it as a strategic matter.

Firstly, in several vocational training institutions instances of participation and social dialogue have been created, linked both to sectors and productive chains, and to states, regions or provinces.

Secondly, many of the employment and training policies promoted by the Ministries of Labour are under tripartite management, either at the national level, or in states, provinces or municipalities

Thirdly, collective bargaining linked both to productive branches and to enterprises, have increasingly been incorporating contents referring to vocational training and skills development, linking it to subjects such as career development, safety and health and strategies for the enhancement of productivity and competitiveness. In some cases training has even been linked directly to wages received by workers.

Fourth, and as a result of agreements recorded within the collective bargaining process itself and to other specific agreements between employers and workers, bipartite management entities have been created aimed at either providing skills development, or at orienting existing supply, in order to address the demand for qualifications in various sectors.

Fifth, on a local level, and besides what has been mentioned regarding vocational training institutions and policies promoted by the Ministries of Labour, diverse experiences of different institutional arrangements continuously arise on training matters. They generally seek to dovetail resources and capacities in place in the territories regarding training, with the purpose of linking supply more efficiently with demand for qualifications, as well as to coherently insert vocational training policies in economic and social development strategies at the local level.

Sixth, social dialogue on vocational training has also reached the supranational level. Despite different degrees of advancement, in the regional integration processes taking place in the continent specific instances are created that deal with this subject and, in some cases, instruments have been approved that contain guidance and recommendations on vocational training policies.

From the above one can conclude that social dialogue in the vocational training field is not only stable but also has tended to expand, diversify, and increase its depth.

Moreover, as both Latin American and extra-regional experiences show, dialogue on training can become a sort of “learning space” for social players that allows for dialogue on subjects that are usually more conflictive. Indeed, dialoguing in vocational training has in several cases permitted its expansion to subjects such as productivity, employment or wages.

These nexus are reinforced in function of changes that are both internal and external to the world of work. New approaches in how work is managed and administered call for new competencies from the workers, which is why lifelong learning is more and more important, and these approaches themselves constitute technological innovations that have an impact on production spaces, materials and equipment. The introduction of technological innovations in machinery for example, or in new materials, demands that new knowledge be developed or old knowledge updated, and very probably brings about changes in the way that work is organized and in the structure and content of labour relations.

This aspect is present in each of the three dimensions, alongside the need for quality, relevance and equity, as will be seen in the sections below.

1. Quality, relevance and equity in the labour dimension of vocational training

The fact that **vocational training has to do with work** is one of the main reasons why it is different from other kinds of education. This labour dimension is present both in connections to the different areas of labour relations, and in the fact that vocational training is itself an element in negotiations between employers and workers. Proposals about training have been increasingly coming into collective bargaining, which typically involves workers’ and employers’ organizations and Ministries of Labour, and training now figures in various tripartite national or sectoral pacts and agreements about employment, productivity and labour relations. These days an increasing number of collective agreements explicitly include clauses about training. Labour legislation is moving in the same direction, there are stipulations about the right to training and how this can be

put into practice, and there are bipartite and tripartite talks and agreements about this whole question.

These trends were recently recognized and explicitly promoted when ILO Recommendation 195 was passed. One example of this is Article 5.f which is a call to “*strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining on training at international, national, region, local and sectoral and enterprise levels as a basic principle for systems development, programme relevance, quality and cost-effectiveness.*” And in Article 9.c members are called upon to “*support initiatives by the social partners in the field of training in bipartite dialogue, including collective bargaining.*”

In addition, there are clear conceptual and empirical links between training and fields like productivity, competitiveness, wages, occupational health, work conditions, work environment, social security, employment and social equity, and these make training even more important in current labour systems in the region.

In this context it can be said that *education and training are the cornerstone of decent work* (Paragraph 3 of the Resolution Concerning Training and Human Resources Development, 88th International Labour Conference, 2000). Training that is of good quality and is relevant is part of the very foundations of productive work, good working conditions and job safety. What is more, good quality training is not limited to what goes on in the classroom or the workshop, rather it serves to complete and unite what takes place in the process insofar as it is combined with workplace training, and this is always linked to good quality work. In Recommendation 195, Article 9.f, it is stated that the members should “*...promote the expansion of workplace learning and training through (i) the utilization of high-performance workplace practices that improve skills.*”

It follows from the above that relevance should not be understood as a non-critical reading and acceptance of any demand. Although relevance is invariably tied to the notion of demand, training, in the correct sense of the term, should not function in such a way as to replicate ways and conditions of working that run counter to respect for basic and fundamental human rights. Quite the contrary in fact, training should always be geared to improving the quality of such ways of working and job content.

Vocational training has an important role to play in changing labour markets where there is inequity in access to employment, or in wages, or in decent working and living conditions. Inequity has a direct negative impact on social and economic development, and it ultimately undermines the foundations of

genuine competitiveness. This is probably the greatest challenge that vocational training has to face at the present time, and there is no doubt that inequity is the most important area where relevance must be pursued in public training policies and the institutions that put them into practice.

This point is dealt with in Article 3 of Recommendation 195: *“Members should identify human resources development, education, training and lifelong learning policies which:*

a) facilitate lifelong learning and employability as part of a range of policy measures designed to create decent jobs, as well as to achieve sustainable economic and social development;

b) give equal consideration to economic and social objectives, emphasize sustainable economic development in the context of the globalizing economy and the knowledge- and skills-based society, as well as the development of competencies, promotion of decent work, job retention, social development, social inclusion and poverty reduction;”

The degree and the ways in which vocational training (and therefore the guiding principles of quality, relevance and equity) has been brought explicitly into labour relations can be considered on at least four basic levels: first, in how employers' and workers' organizations and Ministries of Labour are becoming more interested in training; second, in how it is assuming greater importance, and yielding concrete results, in collective bargaining; third, in the increase in the number and scope of labour legislation standards about training; and fourth, in the importance that vocational training has assumed in active labour market policies.

- When it comes to interest and participation on the part of actors in the labour ambit, what stands out is **the fact that Ministries of Labour have been emphasizing vocational training since the beginning of the last decade**. Their previous role was limited to intermediation in the relation between capital and labour, and the topics of negotiation were wages, job stability and working conditions. But now ministries are expanding their role and tackling the training dimension from the perspective of active employment policies. This change is apparent in the fact that there are more regulations, and also in the institutional structure of the public bodies themselves, which now have a variety of secretariats, boards and services that have been set up to cater specifically to vocational training and its relation to other aspects of labour.

- **Interest in training on the part of the entrepreneurial sector** has gone beyond the old idea that it was nothing more than a tool to be used to enhance workers' skills. The situation now is quite the reverse; training is seen as an instrument which can also play a part in improving the skills of middle- and high-level personnel, and even of the entrepreneurs themselves.
But the influence of entrepreneurs as actors in training goes beyond aspects that are directly connected to how it should be managed, financed and executed. Employers' organizations have also been able to make their own conceptions and ideas about training felt in a very wide range of ambits where the subject is discussed, ambits that include national and sectoral agreements, bipartite and tripartite talks, and negotiations at the enterprise level.
- In addition, **workers' organizations are very much more committed to vocational training**, and they play a more active role in this area than they did twenty years ago. This is clear from the effort and seriousness of their approach to matters of training, and also from the increase in modalities and spaces where workers participate in training. This increased involvement of union organizations in the institutional spaces connected to training and skills can be seen in the progress that has been made not only conceptually but also in concrete action. There has been a great increase in specialized training-related bodies in many different union organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean. There is research and diagnosis, and studies analyzing union plans in this field are being produced. There are more and more workshops, forums and union seminars about training and its links to other subjects that are strategically important for workers' organizations. Labour education activities also include the subject of vocational training, and another dimension of the discussion is what the link between the two types of training should be.
There have been a wide range of experiences of union participation in decision-making about training and in the actual training itself. Some of these are just in their initial stages and others are further developed, but whatever their situation they are a clear sign that the unions have resolved to play an important role in training.
- The trend for vocational training to become increasingly incorporated into collective bargaining is another aspect of the growing "labourization" of training. Because training is a subjective right for the worker and an obliga-

tion on the part of the employer, and because it directly impinges on other labour rights and conditions of work, it could be, and indeed should be, regulated autonomously. For example, numerous collective agreements have been made at the level of enterprises or branches or sectors, and these agreements not only acknowledge this right but include dispositions about questions like paid study leave, on-the-job training, guarantees of equal access to training opportunities, and even collective agreements that (alongside traditional subjects like pay, holidays and labour career) include a bipartite commitment to set up continuing training mechanisms in function of the strategic objectives of developing production in a specific sector.

- **Vocational training is also figuring more and more in labour legislation.** This can be with a view to obtaining guaranteed access to training opportunities or to regulate how the training offer functions (whether this offer is public or private). As a consequence the different roles of the actors who are involved in this field are being re-defined and re-assigned. However, headway in the training aspects of labour legislation is not limited just to what happens inside countries. Progress is also being made in setting standards and in the declarations, recommendations and practical measures adopted in the framework of setting up regional trade blocs and also in international agreements and standards. The clearest and most recent example of this international aspect is ILO Recommendation 195.
- To the extent that ministries of labour **have active labour market policies** and can participate in defining broad national guidelines they can make strategies for development and productive change. When they also start to operate in the area of strengthening and modernizing the training offer they have the possibility to act in a coordinated way to tackle the various main facets of the problem all at the same time.

There are different reasons for intervening in the labour market through active policies. One is to cope with problems that arise from the transition when a country's economy is opened up to foreign trade, another is to respond to situations of social risk by implementing re-distribution policies, and a third is to correct maladjustments in the market both with regard to the link between the supply of and the demand for labour, and also with regard to training. Within the new concept of active labour market policies, the areas where Ministries of Labour have made, and are making, their biggest and most wide-ranging impact include training programmes and

projects geared to employment for the young, re-training programmes for unemployed workers, technical support and training for workers and entrepreneurs in small scale productive units, mainstreaming the gender approach, training for low income women heads of households, and the ongoing training of active workers.

To sum up, the fact that labour actors are participating more and more in training, and the consequent impact this is having on collective bargaining about vocational training, is making a big contribution to clarifying the diverse range of interests that those actors represent in fields such as collective bargaining, labour legislation, and active labour market policies. And there is no doubt that collective bargaining is one of the most powerful tools available when it comes to tackling questions like quality in the development of vocational training, adjusting vocational training to the social and productive environment, responding to the demands and needs of individuals, enterprises, sectors and specific regions, and contributing to greater economic and social equity.

2. Guiding principles in the technological dimension of vocational training

Training is a crucial and strategically important component in innovation, development and the transfer of technology. Many vocational training institutions, and many other similar organizations that have come into being more recently and operate in the same field, do not restrict themselves just to training.

Throughout Latin America and the Caribbean there are many different experiences in centres or technological providers that these organizations themselves have set up to offer a wider and more integrated range of services not only to enterprises but to the community in general. There are materials testing laboratories, certification services for products and processes, technology trade fairs and the like, specialised publications, data banks with technological resources, consultants in various fields, technical support services, etc. Besides this, some technological institutes have shifted their approach onto research, developing and adapting “hard” technology like materials, tools and equipment, and “soft” technology like information and computer programmes, not to mention all that has to do with management, development and training of human resources.

Two of the most important and innovative ways of reinforcing this move by training institutions to render technological services are, first, the development of specialized technological centres, which are very often located in industrial or technological estates or areas with some production speciality, and second, the creation of enterprise incubators, in particular those that have a technological base.

The former are training centres that have been converted so they can cater in a focalized way to specific sectors or productive chains. This changeover favours technological specialization in these organizations, both as regards facilities, equipment and materials, and as regards the skills of the personnel. These centres still run training courses, but their offer has widened and diversified in a number of ways. First, they have become centres for technological services such as information and diffusion, consultancy, technical and technological support, the development of prototypes and moulds, or applied research such as materials testing, environmental impact studies, ergonomic studies, etc. Second, they have turned out to be excellent spaces for specialized training, so much so in fact that many universities use their facilities and capabilities to run postgraduate courses, and different enterprises send their professional personnel to be brought up to date on the latest technology in a particular sector. Third, they are also innovation centres in areas like pedagogy and training materials, and this has developed to the point that they now serve as sources of pedagogic, curricular and didactic innovation for other teaching centres. In most cases these technology centres are to be found in geographical areas or spaces where production is specialized in one particular field, and when centres are located in technological parks they complement the other types of services that are available there.

A second kind of experience that is relatively more recent than the one described above is that training institutions are including enterprise incubation services as part of their offer. In some cases these are virtual incubators, and in others there is actual physical space and resources available for the enterprises to be set up. But whatever the situation, the offer includes general services to identify opportunities, to analyse feasibility and to train management, and also technical services like market analysis, design, sales strategies, technical and technological support, applied research and entrepreneurial information. Some of the most advanced experiences are approached on incubating technology-based enterprises, and this usually presupposes having highly trained partners and staff, and high added value for these products and services. The enterprises in

the incubator are usually expected to have a close connection with the productive fabric of the geographical region where they are located so that they can contribute to developing and strengthening the added value chains that are already in operation there. Financial support for these incubated undertakings may come from public funds, international bodies or private sources.

However, it is no accident that vocational training has drawn closer to innovation, development and technology transfer services. In the productive sphere it is now just common sense that “human capital” is a critical and defining component in the productivity and competitiveness strategies of enterprises and economic sectors. Therefore, training is seen as a vital tool both for developing some or other new technology and for taking advantage of a particular technological innovation and utilizing it efficaciously.

It follows that one of the most direct connections is between technological updating and the quality, extent and relevance of the offer of training. In the first place, students on a training course can become familiar with equipment, materials and programmes that are in use or that are coming into use in different productive or service sectors. Secondly, the approach on quality in processes and in products is increasingly tending to spread into areas beyond training, and into the rendering of technological services on the part of the training institutions.

The demands that are made of training services as regards opportunity and utility also apply to the technological services that are coordinated with and that strengthen those services. These technological services also have to strive for relevance.

The guiding principle of equity (and the challenge that this involves) is also very important in the technological dimension of training. In a context in which many productive units, and particularly small scale units, find it difficult to access new technologies or information services that are suitable and timely, the role that training institutions play in providing technological services is an important factor in combating inequities in this area. In addition, we should not lose sight of the fact that training is in itself a technological activity. It operates with the principles of equity both on the level of people, especially those who are most vulnerable due to their age, sex, race or socio-economic situation, and on the level of the productive units that have the greatest difficulty in recruiting qualified personnel to promote or strengthen their technological development.

Another related point is that action is urgently needed to narrow the digital gap. The concept of the “digital gap” has to do with the inequalities which stem

TOWARDS QUALITY STANDARDS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING SECTOR

Together with the trend towards quality management, it is being demonstrated that the continuous improvement in vocational training requires the same principles needed to improve any process in industry or services.

In several countries of the region, versions of standard ISO 9000 have been or are being adapted for their application in education and in the vocational training process. By way of example the following may be mentioned: ISO IWA 2 (*International Workshop Agreement*) a working group that produced the standard ISO 9001 version for education, the Argentine standard IRAM 30000 "*Guide for the interpretation of standard ISO-IRAM for education*", the Chilean standard NCh-2728, the certification of which is necessary for any skills development executing agency that seeks to submit its candidacy for public funds assigned to training programmes; as well as the "*Guide for application of NTP-ISO 9001:2001 in the educational sector*" of Peru.

The advantages of initiating and sustaining processes to assure quality are increasingly known and understood. A brief review of the eight basic principles of quality standards reveals their full coverage of the training process.

1. Focus on users, referring to knowledge and care of their needs.
2. Leadership, to create and maintain an internal environment inclined towards quality management.
3. Staff participation at all levels.
4. Processes based approach, requiring the definition and application of processes in training.
5. System approach to management, conceiving and relating the processes as a system.
6. Continuous improvement.
7. Approach based on facts for decision-making.
8. Mutually beneficial relations with the supplier.

from some sectors of the population having limited access to technologies, and it reflects the patterns of inequity and inequality in society. New terms have evolved: the "techno rich" and the "techno poor". The former are people who have access to the infrastructure and education that are needed to be able to take advantage

of the new technologies, while the “techno poor” are people who cannot share the benefits of these technologies for reasons that are economic, education, cultural, and so on.

As the General Director of the ILO has said, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) revolution has opened up genuine possibilities, but it brings with it the risk that a significant proportion of the population of the world will “come out losing”.

Therefore we must increase our knowledge about the potential opportunities for countries that ICT might open up, and about the real impact of these technologies on different local situations and social groups. It should be borne in mind that access to ICTs is closely linked to social inclusion, and increasingly to the handling of community and citizens’ affairs. For everybody, women as well as men, the old as well as the young, the rural population as well as city-dwellers, in the current world situation being unable to manage ICTs is equivalent to being illiterate.

3. Training as an educational fact and the need for quality, relevance and equity

It is clear that the current trend in training organizations in Latin America is towards developing a wide and flexible training offer. These institutions offer training that ranges from beginner’s courses through middle and high level training to the top levels where even university professionals can be brought up to date on the latest developments in a given field. Moreover, there are countless cases of cooperation between institutions and other public bodies like Ministries of Education in fields as varied as secondary technical education, non-university technology teaching, adult education, and work with enterprises, with unions, with non-governmental organizations, and so many other areas that they simply cannot be listed here.

We must acknowledge that **an element of training that has always been part of education is being reinforced** not only through the offer from specialized institutions themselves but also as a result of the search for improved coordination and cooperation with other bodies, organizations and teaching modalities that are working in this field.

It follows that in this dimension of education the challenge of adopting an

integrated quality, relevance and equity approach is greater. It is clear that in all our countries the educational systems are facing this same challenge, and it is also evident that, because of its specific area of action, vocational training can make a special contribution to educational efforts in different countries.

There are important historical antecedents to vocational training making a contribution to greater equity in education. For example, past campaigns to combat illiteracy were sometimes supported by vocational training institutions that made their infrastructure, capabilities and experience available. Another example is the fact that vocational training has usually been the main, if not the only, educational alternative for disadvantaged sectors of the population.

At the moment, the vocational training institutions are working on ensuring quality in their products and processes in a way that is wider and goes deeper than what is taking place in the systems and organizations of general education. This trend is gaining momentum, and it could spread from vocational training to general education. In fact, this is already happening and the quality approach is being adopted more and more in technical and technological secondary education.

Vocational training has also made progress and gained experience in promoting the relevance of the training and technological services it offers, and this has made it a shining example and a paradigm for education and even for the university system.

However, a full picture of the strategic importance of developing and consolidating an integrated approach in vocational training based on the principles of quality, relevance and equity would not be understood unless it is seen in the light of a conception of what a fair proportion of societies today expect from education in general and vocational training in particular, namely **lifelong learning and the concomitant challenge of providing quality basic education for everyone**.

It is less than twenty years since vocational training institutions first took note of the challenge posed by the progressive erosion of the permanent employment pattern (the model of people staying in the same job all their lives). Nowadays the world of work is being transformed by accelerating technological change and by increasing exposure to the competitive conditions of a global economy. In response to this challenge the training institutions have structured their offer in such a way that they are no longer rendering services to train people during a limited period before active economic life begins (qualifications that, in the past,

had a more delayed useful life). Instead, they are rendering services that are flexible enough to cater to a demand that is not only wider and more diverse but also in a permanent change.

There is general consensus on the political level and in society as a whole, that the offer of education and training should be re-structured to make it flexible enough to respond to a demand for learning that is diverse and ever-changing. Nowadays nobody expects the initial stock of knowledge they build up in their youth to serve them for the rest of their lives. The rapid changes in the world of work and production mean that knowledge has to be continually brought up to date, at a time when the basic education of young people is tending to get longer. In fact education and training are mutating, the learning possibilities on offer outside the school ambit are multiplying, and the traditional notion of specialization is being replaced in many modern sectors by the notion of evolving and adaptable competencies.

This is basically a qualitative change. In the past it was enough to teach specific technical knowledge and certain manual skills so that people would be able to go into a job that was there waiting for them. But all that has changed and in the modern world it is essential to develop a whole range of competencies that were never sufficiently emphasized before such as initiative, creativity, the capacity to initiate an enterprise, and patterns of relating to and cooperating with others. Besides these, there are new generic competencies that are relatively less specific than in the past such as languages, computer skills, logical reasoning, the capacity to analyze and interpret different codes, and so on.

Therefore it is essential to provide people with the means to manage their own labour careers and vocational development trajectories. This involves finding a first job, changing jobs, starting a business, taking courses to improve specific skills, and being trained all the time, whether they are employed or unemployed, and whether this takes place at home or in the workplace. This concept of lifelong learning is very clearly summed up in Article 2.a of Recommendation 195: *“The term “lifelong learning” encompasses all learning activities undertaken throughout life for the development of competencies and qualifications.”* This turnaround in training is both conceptual and practical, and it has a series of consequences that should be made explicit, namely:

- First, while in the past the dominant trend was to specialize, **today it is necessary to have a series of basic and general competencies that serve not only to be able to perform more autonomously in a job and to cope with**

unforeseen situations that have to be handled as they come up, but also to be able to “navigate” in a labour market that is difficult and competitive.

Training of the specific kind is still necessary but the trend is now to acquire skills on the job, and enterprises are becoming aware of the advantages of taking responsibility for this. Training institutions and many specific programmes are starting to move closer to the sphere of general or regular education, both in content and as regards their institutional setup. General education is also being reformed and re-structured, and it is benefiting from this closer connection to vocational training to the extent that it can take advantage of the experience that vocational training has in the area of relating to the productive sector. In other words, there is a beneficial synergy for both parties.

- **Second, responsibility for training is now being shared much more: it has necessarily become an area of coordinated action and cooperation.** Now that people are not trained only in study centres but learn at home or at work, responsibility for training is shared among training organizations, entrepreneurs, governments, and individuals themselves (and the organizations they belong to and that represent them). This has revitalized bipartite and tripartite systems, and new forms of managing training have emerged. These do not conform to one single model. For example, there are social and political agreements that have led to alternating or dual training modalities, there are training and production centres that are co-managed by employers' organizations or by unions, there are foundations managed by unions but co-financed by the entrepreneurial sector, and there are national tripartite management systems. But whatever form of management pertains, one thing is certain: the trend is towards making alliances that allow resources that different actors in society control to be taken advantage of so they can be used more efficiently and be put at the service of lifelong and holistic training for the people who make up society.
- **Third, by its very nature, for lifelong learning to be possible at all the offer of training services must be flexible and dynamic.** The progressive blurring of the frontiers between the basic competencies needed in different branches of the productive structure means there are countless ways in which individuals can accede to the same kind of work. These people's demands for training are difficult to standardize. In order to cater to this wide range of requirements the training offer ought to be a sort of self-service menu

from which each individual would be able to choose items to meet his or her individual training needs in a wide variety of circumstances, at different times, in different subjects, and at different levels of study. Another dimension here is that the demands on training have also expanded and diversified in function of factors like the greater importance that information and knowledge now have in production processes, the fact that large numbers of young people are coming into economically active life particularly in the less industrialized countries, employment in the public sector is shrinking everywhere, workers have been made redundant from firms that are undergoing conversion or have disappeared, and new modalities of employment and self-employment have been emerging. The challenge is to cater to the whole of the active population, the employed as well as the unemployed, in modern sectors as well as in backward ones, in the formal and in the informal economy, and to adults as well as to young people. But this challenge cannot be met efficiently by one single actor, even in those rare cases when sufficient financial resources are available. Hence, yet again, there is no alternative to trying to coordinate the efforts of a range of actors who, each in his own specific sphere and with his own specific resources, can contribute to constructing a training system that is wide-ranging, flexible and diversified enough to cater to the increasingly heterogeneous demand for continuing education.

It is clear that the possibility for the large disadvantaged sectors of the population to have access to lifelong learning depends on two key factors. First, as was mentioned above, the offer of training services should be flexible, diverse, up-to-date and equitable. Second, **these people themselves should be provided with the basic competencies that are essential as a base for subsequent learning.**

Hence lifelong learning presupposes coordination and inter-dependence between the different levels and forms of education and vocational training, and this includes the key area of basic education. This is made very clear in Article 6.2 of ILO Recommendation 195: *“Education and pre-employment training include compulsory basic education incorporating basic knowledge, literacy and numeracy skills and the appropriate use of information and communication technology.”*

In general, the countries of the region have made considerable progress in basic education coverage. This has enabled a number of national institutions to approach on their most specific task: training for work. In the past, this was not

the case because much of vocational training was necessarily geared to remedying the deficiencies in literacy and basic schooling that afflicted large sectors of the population.

Good progress has been made across the board, but at least two basic problems are still with us. First, there are many backward rural and urban population sectors that still do not have access to basic education, or if they do, a large proportion of children do not complete the primary education phase. Second, there are great differences between the quality of the education offered to social groups that are at different socio-economic levels.

This segmentation in access to good quality basic education is a factor in the perpetuation of a two-level society in which one level is disadvantaged in terms of training, labour market insertion, social and political participation, and therefore ultimately in terms of income. It follows that all efforts to build an education and training offer that seeks to meet the challenge of lifelong learning with quality, relevance and social equity will necessarily have to include investment in basic education for those people who are currently excluded from it, who delay in completing it, or who are generally being denied basic educational services of reasonable quality.

