

ILO/SKILLS-AP/Japan/Regional Technical Meeting
Skills development in the Pacific: the special skills development needs
of small island economies

at Tanoa International Hotel, Nadi, Fiji
26 – 28 March, 2008

Background Note

1. Introduction

Many countries in the Pacific have identified skills development as a key priority. But they are finding it a growing challenge to respond to the employment needs of their people and the skills needs of their workforce in a time of increasing globalization, new technology and changing patterns of work. Many Pacific Island Countries are also facing the challenge of high youth unemployment with many young people forced into looking for work in the informal economy. At the same time, however, these countries are also facing skills shortages in some of the emerging growth areas such as mining and tourism. The emigration of skilled workers exacerbates this problem. A key factor in dealing with these challenges is the development of an inclusive and effective national skills strategy. But this is not a simple matter to get right as shown in the difficulties faced by many developing economies as they attempt to reform their national policies and systems. For many of the Pacific Island Countries, with a large informal economy, the development of effective national skills strategies, which include approaches for developing skills in the informal economy, will be essential for helping people find new jobs and create livelihoods.

A critical challenge for small Pacific Island Countries is to coordinate closely on the development of the national skills policies and systems. It is extremely expensive to develop quality training systems, competency standards and national qualifications frameworks. Countries in the Caribbean provide a good model here with collaboration on qualifications frameworks and competency standards so that it has not been necessary for each country to develop its own separate system.

This sub-regional workshop was requested by Pacific Island Countries during the 1st Technical Meeting of the Regional Skills Network Partner Organizations held in Korea in November 2005. In that meeting, the participants identified the special skills needs of small island economies as one of the key issues facing countries in the Pacific. This reinforced an earlier request by ILO Pacific Island member States in July 2005. In particular, this workshop will focus on identifying the ways and means in which Pacific Island countries can work together more effectively to develop common mechanisms to plan and deliver skills development programmes. Good practices from within the sub-region, or from other similar groups of countries, would be presented for discussion.

2. Objectives of the Meeting

The overall objective is to discuss the key issues and major challenges for skills development in the Pacific Island countries in developing national skills strategies and explore how some of the recent successful examples of good practice can be used to

assist countries as they go through the process of developing their national and possibly regional skills strategies.

3. Specific outputs and outcomes of the Meeting

It is expected that this process will assist countries to reorient national skills policies and systems to focus on the needs of working people, to promote learning and ensure that skills are constantly renewed and adapted for a wide variety of potential jobs. It is expected that specific discussions on youth employment, skills in the informal economy, and the development of competency standards and qualification frameworks will facilitate this process.

4. Workshop structure and methodology

The workshop will consist of a number of technical sessions, comprising introduction of materials, panel discussion and technical Working Group sessions. Chairing responsibilities for technical sessions will be shared among participants. The ILO will provide facilitators for the Working Group Sessions to ensure a participatory approach

5. Participation:

Participants from Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu will be invited. Government participants should be senior level staff of the national vocational education and training organizations involved in the planning and development of the national skills policies and systems. Workers and employers organizations dealing with this subject will also be invited to participate and share their experience. Participation of women in the meeting is strongly encouraged.

6. Country Paper

Government participants are requested to prepare a brief paper for the meeting and, where appropriate, in collaboration with social partners. The length of the paper should be no more than 12-15 pages, A4 and single-spaced.

The paper should very briefly describe the main social, demographic and economic situation in the country. There should also be a brief section on the background of the agency/institution (a short outline) and data on the existing training system, including, where available, numbers trained, in what fields, and the employment outcomes of the training. The paper should include a more detailed discussion of the existing national training policy and the status of the process of reform, including the consultation process with the main stakeholders, the major objectives of the policy or strategy, and the roles and responsibilities of the various actors. The major challenges for skills development in the country and the constraints faced should be part of this explanation. If a national policy or strategy exists, please attach it as an annex to the Country Paper.

The country papers should be sent by e-mail to ILO Suva, attention Ms Margaret Reade Rounds at [mreaderounds@ilo.org] by Monday 17 March 2008 at the latest. Please direct any queries to Ms Reade Rounds at phone + 3313 866, fax + 3300 248.

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