

VIETNAM FORUM ON LIFELONG LEARNING: BUILDING A LEARNING SOCIETY

**ILO Director
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Deputy Prime Minister Nguyen Thien Nhan, cum Chairman of the National Steering Committee on Building a Learning Society, Vietnam;

Vice Minister Nguyen Vinh Hien, MOET, cum Vice - Chairman of the National Steering Committee on Building a Learning Society, Vietnam;

Gwang-Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education;

Dear participants, Good Afternoon to you all;

It is my pleasure to be with you all today. I thank the Ministry of Education and Training and UNESCO for giving the ILO the opportunity to join you. The perspective I wish to emphasize in my speech is that of Lifelong Learning and Workforce Development.

My time will hence focus on how education, skills training and lifelong learning can help economies achieve a dynamic growth with quality jobs; significantly promote the interests of its people; make enterprises competitive as well as be important tools for reducing poverty and social exclusion.

First and foremost, I want to take my departure point in the very strong strategic priorities coming out of the Socio-Economic Development Strategy 2020 and the draft Socio-Economic Development Plan for 2011-2016 as well as what is emphasized time and again by the President and the Premier Minister: the essential place that human resource development plays for Viet Nam the coming years. In addition to further reforming and modernizing the institutions and infrastructure development, the Government of Viet Nam has clearly identified the human resource development as the third strategic priority area.

The Forum we open today is centrally placed within that overall context. But let us also be clear that the philosophy of learning is already – and has been for the longest time – a corner stone of Vietnamese culture and thinking.

Let us recall Uncle Ho's clear points on this:

The overarching value is:

“Love other human beings as you would love yourself”

And who of us would not like to learn, to be healthy, have a good job, have enough money, be happy, loved and cared for? We all want this, we should all wish this for each other.

“For 10-year's benefit, plant trees, for 100-year's benefit, plant people”

That statement captures so perfectly that investment in human resource development is and must be the foundation for any society. And this is further explain in his next statement:

“Without learning, without knowledge, it is impossible to learn techniques. Without learning techniques, it is impossible to catch up with the country’s economic demand.”

It is a global reality that the world of work is changing rapidly and skills development has been an important competitive advantage. Viewed within the ILO’s perspective of DECENT WORK, education, vocational training and lifelong learning are central pillars to employability, employment of workers and sustainability of enterprises. ILO’s comprehensive and dynamic framework in this area--- the ILO Recommendation No. 195- focuses on education, training and lifelong learning and addresses the challenges we all face in acquiring knowledge and skills and developing the employability of the workforce. It places people at the core of economic and social development and policies are developed through a process of social dialogue. Cooperation among government, workers and employers organizations and training institutions is important for no government can provide all the training needed by the country’s workforce.

According to the ILO, lifelong learning ensures that the individual’s skills and competencies are maintained and improved as work, technology and skills requirements change, ensures the personal and career development of workers and results in increases in productivity and income and improves social equity.¹ The learning process occurs during the course of the individual’s life and for a worker, this can be through the formal and informal learning processes and most of it can be at the workplace. It is our working age period, from 18 to around 60, that most of us would have the majority of our living years and hence that period must also be lived under the guidance of LLL.

Skills have become increasingly important in determining an individual’s ability to secure a job and retain employment and move flexibly in the labour market.

The Viet Nam Competitiveness Report 2010 prepared together with Michael Porter (presented one week back) clearly identifies the importance of education and work force skills for the development of a higher value-adding economy. During the Viet Nam Business Forum conducted last week the lack for skilled labour and the inadequacy of the right skills set at the right time at the right place were highlighted as businesses’ key constraint in being competitive.

What is then the LLL concept with respect to the labour market?

The Government of Viet Nam expresses its vision as follows:

.....”creating a breakthrough in vocational training quality to provide skilled workers for industry, manufacturing, and services, who have professional competency, ethics, integrity, working style, and can satisfy the demand of domestic and international labour markets, vocational training institutions can train national, ASEAN regional and international standardized skills in some occupations; increasing the capacity of vocational training system so that by 2020, the percentage of trained workforce will reach 55%; and ensuring an appropriate structure of training levels and across occupations;

¹ ILO 2000a *Conclusions concerning human resources training and development, International Labour Conference, 88th Session, Geneva*

and building the linkage between vocational training institutions and enterprises”².....

Lifelong learning for work means focusing on critical policy objectives (i) that ensures the matching of skills demand and supply; (ii) that helps maintain the employability and adaptability of the workers through re-skilling and upgrading skills; (iii) that promotes social inclusiveness by expanding access to lifelong learning opportunities across all sectors of society; (iv) that encourages partnerships in lifelong learning for work; (v) that creates lifelong learning opportunities for small enterprises; and (vi) that enhances workplace learning as a source of lifelong learning.

Or as Uncle Ho emphasized:

“Any jobs require learning and the purpose of learning is to enhance capacity for economy development, for victory and for a better life of people”.

Skills policies should lead to developing skills that are needed by employers and they must ensure the quality as well as the quantity of training. Preparing young people to enter the labour market is specially important so that they land in genuine jobs. Their training must be demand –driven. School-to-work transition surveys are needed in building a knowledge base on youth employment that helps for better informed policy-making.

Creating the quality of employment for youth and women will be essential in the coming years. From MOLISA figures it is projected that 8.9 million economically active will represent the youth population in 2015. These youths will demand special assistance in regards to the school-to-work transition and ensuring the dynamism and potential of youth are not squandered. Furthermore, this will require enhancing their access to practical career guidance, sound labour market information and market-driven vocational and technical training. ILO is implementing a Labour Market Information Project in Viet Nam which addresses these concerns.

Lifelong learning helps maintain the employability of workers and adaptability through re-skilling and upgrading skills. Enterprises must adjust to changes in the labour market and workers therefore should learn new skills. Adjusting to changes requires a strong foundation in basic education and core skills like teamwork, communication, literacy which provides the workers the capacity to continue to learn to respond to new challenges and opportunities throughout their working lives. Raising labour productivity and enhancing the competitiveness of Vietnamese products will continue to be a priority during the next five years.³

Skills must be inclusive and therefore, access to skills development must be provided to all sectors of society—rural communities, disadvantaged women and youth, persons with disabilities and persons in the informal economy and to other socially exclusive groups. In connection with this, the Prime Minister has approved a project on vocational training in the rural areas focusing on poor people, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities and farmers who are able to claim back their agricultural land. An example is our current work in assisting rural communities in Ha Tinh gain skills and livelihoods through its Training for Rural Economic Empowerment (TREE). In some countries where TREE was implemented, it was seen as a key response to employment promotion, increased

² Department of Vocational Skills, General Department of Vocational Training, Vocational Skill Development Plan in VietNam, 2009.

³ Institute of Labour Science and Social Affairs and the International Labour Organization, Viet Nam Labour and Social Trends report, 2010.

economic opportunities, empowering rural communities and laying the foundation for poverty reduction and pro-poor growth. TREE has been an important ILO tool for poverty reduction and restoration of livelihoods. The example I want to show you now needs to be seen in an appreciation of the fact that as much 60% or more of the entire working population in Viet Nam is making income and salary from the Informal Economy and hence having work places similar to what the movie is about.

Skills for Decent Work!

Because of pressures on rapid changes in Viet Nam's economy, partnership approaches to training and lifelong learning have become important. Partnerships promote programmes that are relevant to economic and social needs. These call for programmes that are currently aligned to industry and individuals needs. Private enterprises have been the main initiators of partnerships together with training institutions, local governments, development agencies and others. Employers and trade unions have recognized the importance of lifelong learning for maintaining employability and managing change in the workplace.

Many innovative programmes have emerged which cater to assisting small enterprises acquire knowledge and upgrade the skills of their workers. Some significant initiatives have been more sector-focused and have involved third parties that provide and organize training and capacity building activities.

Finally, the workplace is becoming a major source of lifelong learning. Workplace learning has expanded rapidly in enterprises and even boosted by online learning opportunities made available to the employees. Many of the soft skills or core skills are learned better in the workplace often informally than in formal education and training settings. These can include team-work, initiative, communication skills, etc. In Viet Nam, many of the employers' have organized informal training in-house.

More recently, a more important factor for the use of workplace learning is the spread of high performance work in enterprises and organizations. These are used systematically to improve productivity and competitiveness while boosting employees' motivation and job satisfaction. Education, training and lifelong learning can be drivers of change specially as there is continued use new technologies, domestic and foreign investment and diversification and competitiveness of economic activities and job growth. To be able to sustain a dynamic development process, economies need to anticipate the right skills to encourage new investments and the adoption of new technologies.

Engaging the government, workers and employers organizations through social dialogue is the driving force behind the legal, policy and institutional developments in the area of lifelong learning in many countries in the region, specially in ASEAN. As host to the ALMM and ASEAN HR Conference, Viet Nam has strongly supported the ASEAN Charter which sets out the purposes of ASEAN, in particular to develop human resources through closer cooperation in education and life-long learning, in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for strengthening of the ASEAN Community. The ASEAN Leaders' Statement on Human resources and skills development has clearly stated the importance of lifelong learning and must be promoted:

- Promote the sharing of experiences in the development and implementation of national lifelong learning systems among ASEAN Member States;

- Urge the creation of opportunities to improve the quantity and quality of jobs through lifelong learning;
- Encourage enterprises to support the development of vocational training and continuing education institutions as part of a national system and infrastructure for lifelong learning;
- Encourage workers to practice lifelong learning through appropriate policies and frameworks in order to improve their productivity.

Viet Nam continues to be active in the lifelong learning process as it moves towards its goal of becoming an industrialized economy.

Before ending I would like to ensure – on behalf of the One UN (of with UNESCO and the ILO are very engaged members) – that we are ready and available for any support and collaboration in these areas that could be useful for Viet Nam. And let me then end by another great quote from Uncle Ho. To my mind it captures it all in a crystal clear manner:

.....”If you learn, you will make progress. The more you learn the more progress you get!”.....

May the Forum be very productive, fruitful and learning! I wish you all health, happiness and prosperity. Thank you very much for your attention.