

## **Suggestions for Revamping Vocational Training and Education in Malaysia (TVET).**

### Positives

- New Government is committed to institutional reform and has a political will to reform one of the most challenging aspects of labor market policies in Malaysia.
- The open dialogues it has undertaken means that the clients of the training system can meaningfully engage with the reformers to set the tone for a sustainable TVET strategy.
- The ongoing reforms in the last decade with the enactment of Skills Development Act, setting up of the Malaysian Qualification Agency, the new government's initiatives to reform the Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) are other positives in the reform process.
- There will not be a good TVET system without an effective educational system and the ongoing reforms on education will further link the TVET system in Malaysia to its goals on economic and social development.
- Funding. Unlike other countries, funding has not been a problem for TVET in Malaysia given the allocation made in the 11<sup>th</sup> Malaysia Plan and the growing Human Resources Development Fund. However the objectives of HRDF need to be aligned to create greater synergy between the fund's objective of stimulating enterprise level training and TVET.
- In the past 50 over years, there has been a number of initiatives taken to revitalize the TVET system and we can build on these but the single biggest obstacle has been lack of political will to create an autonomous Technical And Vocational Training Authority by bringing all TVET institutions under one roof to align human resources Development policies and strategies in line with National social and economic development goals.

- **The Challenges and Options**

### **Create an autonomous Technical And Vocational Training Authority Reporting Directly to the Prime Minister.**

Revamp the Skill Development Act to place the technical/ vocational institutions, polytechnics under a single agency by an Act of Parliament to facilitate institutional coordination and to transform it into a world-class institution. South Korea was in a similar position 24 years ago when faced with multiple agencies with little synergy between those involved in TVET and it needed a Presidential Decree to bring them under a single agency. There will be much resistance from bureaucrats with vested interest who may opt for greater coordination among the 8 agencies particularly resistance among the four heavy weights in the Government (MOE, MOHR, MYS Youth & Sports, and MRRD Rural/Regional development. Coordination has been very elusive and did not happen in the last 50 years! This is why an Act of Parliament is the only way to end years of training for the sake of training without any direction by the various training agencies. The Technical and Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) must be an autonomous body outside the civil service to attract talented experts on technical and vocational education both locally and abroad.

With greater autonomy and flexibility, it will be in a better position to coordinate, strengthen and develop a system of more specialized education focusing on technical skills as against general vocational education and focus on the introduction of a technical /vocational baccalaureate degree as an alternative pathway. The key to this is exploring a unique lane that allows vocational training graduates mobility in the labor market the key to this enabling the (TEVTA) **to introduce the best curricula and standards into the country's vocational education system and attract the foremost training providers in the world.**

Managing TVET is a specialized Job and should not be left to MOE and MOHR who have their core mandates cut out for them (MOE -curriculum development, higher education, accreditation, teacher training, religious / vernacular education and MOHR minimum wage, foreign workers, law enforcement, harmonious Industrial relations, safety & health, social security .

### **Developing a TEVD strategy**

In the evolution of TVET in Malaysia, the noticeable lacuna was the lack of a holistic strategy linking the training to the needs of the labour market and national educational objectives. The main obstacles in this challenge being the absence of an effective and reliable manpower planning and close monitoring of the labour market to fine tune curriculum and facilitate enrollment guidance to training institutes. The result was obvious ... evidenced by stories of thousands of stranded, unqualified youths, awaiting placement and promises of a better future. The tracer studies if undertaken by independent agencies could have been provided the early warning signals.

Further , the lack of reliable manpower planning ensured there was no explicit criteria for funding allocation in the Technical/Vocational education system .It is therefore important to revisit the responsibilities for manpower planning within government agencies and look critically at greater private sector partnership and vest this responsibility to an independent Think Tank in the country like in the case with Korean Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET).

### **Repositioning Human Resources Development Fund (HRDF) to support TEVT.**

An effective HRDF focused on encouraging enterprise level training was the original objective of establishment of HRDF. Modeled on the Skill Development Fund in Singapore, it was a tool for stimulating firms to help design and implement vocational-training schemes that produce skills they actually want, increase labour productivity in the process and retool workers with the skills needed as a result of changes taking place in the labour market. Unlike Singapore's 500 training providers who had assisted the government to produce the **skills security** the country needed in a world of changing technology , their Malaysian counterparts were busy focusing on profits from training... many of the completed training which were never ever evaluated. In the absence of this critical management oversight, where independent evaluation could have been sourced from the both public/private sector evaluators, the fund became a playground for scrupulous training providers some of whom were former senior officials in the HRDF.

For HRDF to be effective, it must be positioned under the autonomous Technical And Vocational Training Authority (TEVTA) away from the Ministry Of Human Resources under whose auspices a number of abuses have come to light. HRDF has an outdated and bureaucratic board with the Employers Federation Malaysia (MEF) in the driving seat. without this agency having expertise in this area and unable to understand the implications changing skill needs in industry .MEF has some superficial industrial relations expertise nothing close to the diagnostic skills needed on labour market intelligence needed for this task . Its counterpart in the HRDF Board , the National Trade Union Congress has done nothing to push enterprise training at the enterprise level as their Singapore NTUC had succeeded in doing over the years and one its experts Halima is the President of Singapore today..... What is needed is for captains of Industry to drive this organization and influence board with minimal government interference on the criteria for approved training. And designing the curricula. Furthermore, HRDF needs to develop a database of experienced industry trainers who can be utilized as part time trainers in Government run training institutes/polytechnics and serve at the Curriculum Advisory Committee at the local level where these institutions exist. .It has to invest in a strong team of leaders and staff who are professionally qualified and dedicated to the cause enhancing enterprise level training and tilt its energy to building synergy with vocational and technical education in reviving apprenticeship training .Last but not least , **it should aim at building a coherent system of national standards and qualifications with strong linkages between the vocational educational system and industry, particularly with the major international companies which remains relatively weak today.**

### **Change the public perception of TEVT.**

After independence on 1957, Malaysia followed the Anglo-Saxon education model with steep preference for academic education over TVET. Vocational education has a stigma and is regarded as an avenue for those who do poorly in school. The dilemma has always been on how to raise the status of Technical and Vocational education particularly as an option for young people in terms of prestige and outcomes relative to university. The issue was compounded by the absence of strong traditions of apprenticeship in Malaysia and developing skilled trades which are the equivalent of a TAFE system. This is the challenge TEVTA needs to address urgently in building alternative pathways to university.

There will have to be campaigns to create interest and promote the importance of technical skills among the young in the early years. This will take time and sustained efforts will be needed in communications, marketing and branding. This is all the more reason for a single authority and for an autonomous Technical and Vocational Training Authority with a mandate to create a unique brand of an TVET Education for those who are less academically inclined. The new initiative should be supported by sub-committees with stakeholder representation, which will serve as the forum for stakeholder communication. Information gathering by these sub-committees, including public discussion, will permit further input from civil society in the policy reform processes.

The strategy to achieve this must include multiple avenues for movement between tracks in academic and Vocational tracts. Taking Switzerland as an example, 35 per cent of youths go to universities, while two-thirds of youths enroll in upper-secondary vocational and apprenticeship training.

The Swiss system allows the students together with their parents, to be able to make those choices at a fairly young age, based on their talents and interests. In Switzerland, there with little or no stigma associated with any of the choices.

The Swiss society respects everyone both in the academic and vocational training fields. Along with Switzerland, countries such as Germany, Austria and Denmark also combine school and work-based education. These countries are far better in getting young people into jobs, but we must be careful to ensure that our early training efforts are not turned into a disadvantage by the age of 50 when the skills many of them learnt in vocational training become obsolete at a faster rate. Whilst it's true that the Swiss / German / Austrian systems have ensured low youth unemployment, they must not come at the cost of higher old-age unemployment tomorrow.

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