Technical and Vocational Education and Training in the ASEAN Region

Sustainable Growth through Regional Networking
Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 3

2. CHALLENGES FOR TVET COOPERATION IN THE REGION 4

3. NETWORKING WITH AND WITHIN THE REGION 5
   3.1. Instruments and cooperation models of German development cooperation 5
   3.2. Cooperation with ASEAN and with international donors 7

4. THEMATIC PRIORITIES 10
1. Executive Summary

One important economic area in Southeast Asia is the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The ASEAN region, with its rapid growth and vast potential, is an important trade and business partner for Germany. This is reflected in the BMZ’s policy on Asia. Sustainable growth requires a reliable environment. That is why Germany, through its development cooperation, seeks to help the region to achieve further progress on economic, environmental and social development in the region and to improve people’s living conditions. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) can make a great difference in this regard by fostering human resource development in the region, as well as labor mobility throughout the region.

Accordingly, TVET has been included as an important element in international political agendas such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). SDGs 4, 5 and 8 are directly related to vocational education. The Education for All (EFA) goals, too, form an important frame of reference for our development policy. TVET modules also have the potential to address key issues such as core labor standards and occupational health and safety, which means that they play a significant role in the effort to build sustainable value chains.

Germany’s development cooperation programs rely on a broad set of instruments to foster TVET. One special asset is Germany’s ability to run regional programs with multiple countries in addition to its bilateral cooperation with individual countries (such as Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar and Viet Nam). This can help address national challenges and regional challenges at the same time. Accordingly, the players and programs of German development cooperation are in close contact with each other. The BMZ attaches great importance to its regional cooperation with ASEAN, with the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), with China, and with other donors and our implementing partners.

The regional developments triggered by the formation of ASEAN, for example the creation of a common economic area, have far-reaching impacts on the reform efforts that individual countries are pursuing in the field of TVET. So far, TVET strategies and policies have primarily been developed at the national level, and there has been insufficient alignment of vocational education systems with the labor market in the region, which is becoming increasingly integrated.

That is why we want to work with our partners to address four issues in the TVET sector. First, we believe that structural reforms are needed to make it easier to access the TVET system and to transfer within and from that system, to align TVET systems more with the labor market, and to make TVET programs more comparable in terms of uniform standards. Second, we want to help provide even more targeted and demand-oriented training to TVET personnel in various fields of work. Third, we want to help increase labor mobility in the ASEAN region. And fourth, we want to assist the region in engaging more closely with the private sector when it comes to designing and implementing TVET programs.

In that way, we are helping to improve people’s opportunities in our partner countries. Only if people feel that they have a future in their home region will they be ready to remain involved in shaping that future.

We will also be working to ensure that economic development is as environmentally sound as possible, by including green skills in vocational education. And we will be advocating for gender equality in the TVET sector, in line with the goal of the G7 countries to increase, by 2030, the number of women and girls by one third who receive vocational education in developing countries through G7 programs.

The present BMZ paper forms the framework for managing and giving direction to the entire TVET portfolio under German development cooperation in the ASEAN region.
2. Challenges for TVET cooperation in the region

In the past few years, the countries of Southeast Asia have seen very rapid economic development on the whole, even if the pace of development has varied from country to country. Generally speaking, there is a constantly growing need for skilled labor and, thus, for systematic labor training programs in the region.

In future, Asian countries and their business communities want to make TVET a stronger focus of their efforts. In the past few years, stakeholders have become much more aware of the political importance of quality training for skilled workers. This has accordingly been included in national and regional policies.

Even though TVET systems differ a great deal from one ASEAN member to another, challenges throughout the region are similar when it comes to the quality of TVET programs. As a rule, TVET programs are school-based, take very little account of the world of work and usually do not give sufficient attention to industry needs. Young people who receive training that does not reflect the needs of the labor market will not find good jobs. Moreover, businesses cannot find the skilled workers they
need, which hampers economic development in the region. There is also a lack of systematic involvement of local, national and regional industry players in demand-based, practice-oriented programs for vocational education.

Governments rarely carry out systematic surveys to find out what the private sector needs, and usually their data on the labor market and on the relevance of TVET systems for industry are inadequate. There are only few instances in which countries engage in systematic TVET research in order to take evidence-based political decisions.

Traditionally, education is highly valued in Asian countries. But unlike academic education, vocational education is usually held in low regard. Most countries’ education policies focus on academic careers and not so much on practice-oriented training for modern jobs. In many cases, TVET has a poor image, is not integrated in the education system, and is severely underfinanced.

There are hardly any vocational teachers who have appropriate training in vocational pedagogy, general didactics or vocation-specific didactics. Most TVET teachers have an academic degree and no industry experience whatsoever. Moreover, there are hardly any programs for the systematic education (or in-service education) of TVET teachers.

From a regional perspective, the TVET systems of ASEAN countries and their TVET strategies and policies have not yet been aligned sufficiently with the ASEAN economic area and labor market, which are becoming increasingly integrated.

The regional policy fields and institutions that are concerned with TVET do not yet have the quantitative or qualitative capacity to deal with a labor market that is beginning to integrate throughout the region.

The system of “dual” (school-based and industry-based) vocational education that is used in Germany is a high-quality reference model for reforms in the sector. This system is held in high regard in Asia, and our partners’ demand for related advice has reached an all-time high. The key characteristics of the dual system are: cooperation between the two sides of industry, industry federations and the government; learning through a work process-oriented approach; mutual recognition of national standards; specifically trained TVET teachers; and an established system of career guidance. TVET institutions in countries such as Singapore, Thailand and Malaysia that used to receive support under German development cooperation enjoy great regional and international recognition.

3. Networking with and within the region

3.1. INSTRUMENTS AND COOPERATION MODELS OF GERMAN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Germany is supporting its partner countries in Asia through a unique combination of bilateral and regional development cooperation programs. Bilateral cooperation, which often goes back many years, is characterized by mutual trust and a sense of valuing each other. Our partners particularly appreciate the multi-level approach that enables us to provide support by working with people, institutions, and political players. Germany also has a flexible mix of instruments for its development cooperation that it can use in line with needs. Needs are assessed, discussed and documented on the basis of appraisals. Valuable input is also provided by numerous alumni who have already received training with German support and who are now disseminating what they have learned.
PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: BILATERAL COOPERATION WITH VIET NAM (TVET REFORM)

Together with its Vietnamese partners, Germany is working on a comprehensive reform of the TVET system. Partners receive advice on policy and system issues, as well as support for individual TVET institutions as they improve the quality of training and develop a network of centers of excellence in the field of TVET.

Strategies for vocational education systems that are compatible with the regional context are being developed and implemented with industry participation. This also includes the introduction of forms of education that are based on government-industry cooperation and the establishment of an independent examination system.

German support for Vietnamese TVET institutions is focused on further developing education programs for dynamic industries. The program is in line with Viet Nam’s green growth strategy. Activities include practice-oriented in-service training for teachers and industry instructors, advice on school management, the adaptation of existing training programs and the development of new training programs, and the modernization of equipment. A center of excellence for green TVET is currently being established. To that end, the Vocational College of Mechanics and Irrigation is being developed to become a center of excellence for green training and education.
In order to foster regional convergence in the field of TVET in Asia and in order to improve the quality of TVET in each country, Germany is using its full set of development cooperation instruments. This includes Technical and Financial Cooperation, short-term and long-term experts, development workers, Integrated Experts, human capacity development, financing and equipment. These instruments are used with a focus on the following formats:

- Dialogue meetings on policy and technical issues (with a view to building a consensus and preparing joint decisions)
- Support for replicable models of effective and relevant TVET programs within the education system
- Maximum industry involvement in all instruments
- Exploring the further potential for standardizing or combining project delivery activities in order to enhance efficiency and compatibility
- Intensive capacity development and quality improvement efforts at the system, organization and individual levels, including through longer-term formats such as scholarships
- Creation of networks on policy and technical issues (in order to improve communication and facilitate joint learning)
- Assistance in the field of knowledge management
- Utilization, development and operation of alumni networks
- Using the results of multi-country expert working groups in order to facilitate coordination and the exchange of experience, especially in the context of the priority issues mentioned above

All instruments focus on building the capacity of stakeholders, that is, political decision-makers at ministries and regional bodies, the staff of specialized institutions (both national and regional), and experts and executives from TVET institutions of all kinds and from businesses and industry federations.

3.2. COOPERATION WITH ASEAN AND WITH INTERNATIONAL DONORS

ASEAN focuses its work on three thematic pillars: economic issues, sociocultural issues and security issues. Through the well-coordinated use of a mix of bilateral and regional development cooperation instruments, Germany wants to help ASEAN members to prepare joint decisions and take coordinated action, especially in the area of vocational education. Together, the ASEAN members and the German Development Ministry want to pursue the following goals:

- Improve workers’ qualifications
- Improve the quality and relevance of vocational education
- Foster competency standards for the TVET sector in order to make diplomas and certificates more transparent and comparable and in order to foster labor mobility

To that end, Germany supports ASEAN in four thematic areas: TVET reform and policy; education of TVET teachers and instructors; labor mobility; and cooperation with industry (see section 4).

Human resource development and the promotion of labor mobility have been laid down in the ASEAN Charter and are also addressed in the ASEAN Blueprints and by the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI).

Numerous ASEAN statements and declarations make reference to TVET reform and policy, especially the 2009 ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community
PRACTICAL EXAMPLE: REGIONAL COOPERATION PROGRAM TO IMPROVE THE TRAINING OF TVET PERSONNEL (RECOTVET)

In order to achieve a comparable level of performance throughout all ASEAN TVET systems, the RECOTVET program seeks to intensify regional cooperation. Multi-country networking formats such as conferences, dialogue fora and seminars help to facilitate regional exchange, political dialogue and cooperation between decision-makers. This brings together the various national perspectives, which can then inform proposals for reforms at the regional level. The resulting reform proposals, in their turn, are used as input for the political process at the national level in each member country, which fosters harmonization.

The program also addresses education and in-service training for TVET staff outside the tertiary education sector. Experts and executives from government departments, TVET institutions and industry federations and businesses receive training on issues of regional relevance, enabling them to design, implement and evaluate training programs that meet industry requirements.
Blueprint and the ASEAN summit statements and the work programs of the ministerial meetings on labor and education.

The importance of training TVET staff and working together with industry is also highlighted in documents across all ASEAN pillars.

Generally, ASEAN’s regional cooperation is based on joint agreements and decisions that are reached on the basis of a consensus procedure but are not binding on members. This means for all policy fields – including TVET – that very great importance is being given to joint decision-making, with a view to increasing the harmonization of national TVET systems.

There are many bilateral and multilateral donor organizations that are active in the region. The ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) has started a donor mapping exercise in order to make the cooperation portfolio, which is highly diversified, more structured and, thus, more manageable.

Most international donors’ activities focus on bilateral support for individual countries. There are only few donors that have regional projects on TVET integration. Multilateral organizations with relevant regional activities include the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with its TVET programs in the Greater Mekong Subregion and the International Labour Organization (ILO) with its programs on labor market research and qualification research, the recognition of vocational qualifications, and qualifications frameworks.

Bilateral donors with regional programs include Australia and New Zealand, which have activities related to the introduction of qualifications frameworks (both at the national and the regional level).

In order to improve coordination with other donors, Germany and its development organizations are planning to take the following actions:
In order to make Germany’s development cooperation portfolio in the TVET sector in Asia more visible, effective and efficient, it is absolutely crucial to focus Germany’s programming and portfolio development on specific thematic priorities. Germany also wants to significantly increase the cooperation between regional and bilateral projects. Based on an effort to align its work with the ASEAN processes and declarations outlined above and with the needs of its bilateral partners, Germany has identified four issues on which it will focus more in the future.

**TVET reform and policy.** As TVET systems in the region are characterized by a number of fundamental structural deficits, the interventions needed to improve them have to address very fundamental and systematic aspects. Interventions need to be designed in such a way that it becomes easier to access the TVET system and to transfer within and from that system, including from and to the tertiary education system; that industry plays a bigger role in the TVET system; and that the quality of training becomes better, more reliable and more comparable. Not least, it is vital to strengthen the legal and financial basis of the TVET system.

**Labor mobility.** The creation of a common market with increasing labor mobility is an important step with a view to the further integration of the ASEAN area. However, this, too, entails...
specific challenges, partly due to the very diverse design and quality of TVET and TVET certificates in the individual countries. The first step to address this is the conclusion of mutual recognition arrangements (MRAs). However, this is not enough to resolve the underlying problem of insufficient comparability and transparency. In the medium term, it will be vital to foster comparability and transparency through increasingly uniform standards for education regulations and certificates, and through reference frameworks.

**Cooperation with industry.** Reliable cooperation between the government and industry is considered the number one success factor for making TVET systems sustainable. Such cooperation makes it possible for vocational education to meet labor market requirements on a continuous basis, and it is the basis for broad-based public confidence in the quality of vocational training.

**Education of vocational teachers and instructors.** In school-based TVET systems (and this is the predominant type of TVET system in the ASEAN region), it is particularly important to have excellent teachers and excellent school management. Only then will quality education really reach students and trainees. TVET personnel constitute a heterogeneous group with diverse needs. This group includes management staff at various levels, instructors (especially in enterprises) and teachers at various levels and from various disciplines. Then there are teachers for special needs who play an important role for the successful inclusion of persons with disabilities. Generally, the right environment needs to be put in place for their inclusion. This relates to the organization of training facilities, education regulations and curricula, examinations, training of teachers and instructors, and – not least – financial aspects.

The teaching of **green skills** is becoming an increasingly important issue. Developments in this field require close attention. Supporting green skills helps to attain SDG 7 (“Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all”). Skilled personnel with “green” knowledge are a crucial factor for sustainable, environmentally sound development. At present, resource efficiency in the ASEAN region is still low. Air, water and soil pollution is high, reaching hazardous levels in some cases. There are increasing calls for a Green Economy, but that will only be feasible with a workforce that has the relevant skills. Thus, the definition of occupations and curricula in the areas of energy (including renewable energy) and resource conservation will need to be expanded and updated. This requires teachers and instructors with the right qualifications, close cooperation with industry, and a TVET infrastructure that is in line with needs. Within its development cooperation portfolio, Germany wants to further enhance the green skills sector (based on its bilateral portfolio in Viet Nam) in order to find out how relevant this can be for ASEAN processes. Throughout the four priority areas (TVET reform and policy, education of vocational teachers and instructors, labor mobility and cooperation with industry), Germany will make green skills a cross-cutting issue.
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ADRESSES OF THE BMZ OFFICES
→ BMZ Bonn
   Dahlmannstraße 4
   53113 Bonn
   Germany
   Tel. +49 (0) 228 99 535 - 0
   Fax +49 (0) 228 99 535 - 3500
→ BMZ Berlin im Europahaus
   Stresemannstraße 94
   10963 Berlin
   Germany
   Tel. +49 (0) 30 18 535 - 0
   Fax +49 (0) 30 18 535 - 2501

CONTACT
poststelle@bmz.bund.de
www.bmz.de