Introduction

An Inter-agency Panel of TVET experts, drawn from seven United Nations and other international agencies, was one of the highlights in the programme of UNESCO’s International Experts Meeting ‘Learning for Work, Citizenship and Sustainability’ (Bonn, Germany, 25–28 October 2004). The Panel was chaired by Jane Stewart, Director of the Skills and Employability Department at the International Labour Organization (ILO). Panel members comprised:

- Arvil Van Adams, World Bank;
- Ulrich Hillenkamp, European Training Foundation (ETF);
- Wataru Iwamoto, UNESCO;
- Günter Klein, World Health Organization (WHO);
- Akpezi Ogbuiwe, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP)
- Juan Carlos Villagrán De León, United Nations University.

The Chairperson asked the panellists to discuss the following questions:

1. What would a TVET system for sustainable development look like?

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2. Where is this on the agenda? What priority are agencies giving the issue of TVET for sustainable development?

3. What outcomes are the agencies’ trying to achieve over the United Nations Decade for Sustainable Development?

The following article is based on the discussion of these three questions during the panel, as well as on concept papers provided by the presenters prior to the event.²

**The agencies’ perspectives**

**The ILO: Skills Development for Sustainable Livelihoods**

Ms Stewart, representing the ILO, stated that her Organisation seeks to promote social justice and internationally recognized human and labour rights. Among other things, the ILO provides technical assistance in the field of vocational training and vocational rehabilitation. The idea behind this is that training can play a crucial role in improving productivity, incomes and equitable access to employment opportunities and thereby contribute to processes of poverty reduction.

Through its InFocus Programme on Skills, Knowledge and Employability, the ILO assists individuals to become employable through training, skills development and education. It also promotes the improvement of training policies and programmes worldwide, especially in developing countries, where substantial reforms of training systems are necessary in order to transform training from a one-time investment at the beginning of working life into a process of lifelong learning where skills are constantly renewed and adapted. Consequently, the ILO works on two levels: first, the policy level where it aims to ensure, in co-operation with its partners, that expansion and reform of training systems are linked to a strategy for improving the skills needed for a productive working life; and, second, on the ground in several countries to develop new delivery techniques focused on the needs of the working poor.

With regard to promoting TVET reform, several aspects should be considered:

- investment in training is the responsibility of the government, but has to be shared with enterprises and social partners;
- the development of core work skills (such as communication and problem-solving) is an important part of a reform package to prepare individuals for the knowledge- and skills-based society;
- training systems need to become more flexible and responsive to rapidly changing skill requirements;
- social partners must be more closely involved in discussions on training policy and skills development, if the desired reforms and increased investment are to become a reality;
- recognition of prior learning and existing skills as part of a national qualifications framework – this is particularly important in developing countries, where many of the ‘unskilled’ have in fact learnt skills but do not have the certificates that many employers require.

The aim of the ILO is to make it easier for working people, especially the economically vulnerable and socially excluded, to take up decent work opportunities and refresh their skills throughout their working lives and thereby contribute to creating sustainable livelihoods.