In late September 2015, a special summit of the United Nations in New York agreed on a new agenda to make the world a better place over the next 15 years. The 2030 Agenda, which includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is a plan of action for people, the planet and prosperity. "We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind" it says.

The new agenda is universal – for developing and developed countries alike – and it takes a far more holistic, joined-up view of the world’s most pressing problems than the previous international development agenda.

A second difference is who is in the driving seat. "The Millennium Development Goals were seen as a UN initiative which Member States had to follow," said Qian Tang, UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Education, at an Inter-Agency cooperation workshop held in Paris in October 2015 on skills in the new sustainable development agenda, "this agenda is Member State-driven."

It has also seen TVET move from the sidelines to centre stage. SDG 4 is “to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” and has three TVET targets, on access, outcomes and equality respectively. TVET is also key to achieving other SDGs, especially SDG 8 on inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full employment and decent work.

UNESCO will play a lead role in helping countries deliver on their SDG promises. It has been making significant progress in preparing a new Strategy for TVET, building on past experience – including an evaluation of the current strategy – and making sure it is fully aligned with the new 2030 Agenda. UNESCO-UNEVOC helped gather valuable input from TVET experts worldwide with a virtual conference on the strategy last September.

The new Strategy (2016-2021) is expected to address emerging issues such as youth unemployment, sustainability, mobility and the international recognition of qualifications. The draft Strategy will be presented to UNESCO’s Executive Board in the early months of 2016.
Editorial
Celebrating the adoption of the 2030 Agenda

The international TVET community has every cause to celebrate the adoption of the new 2030 Agenda as it places education and, in particular, TVET at the centre of the sustainable development debate.

While keeping a measure of continuity with the work on the Millennium Development Goals and Education for All, the Agenda recognizes the need for a more holistic approach to education and the connections between technical, vocational and tertiary education and the broader agenda for positive change.

Quality education and opportunities for lifelong learning for all have intrinsic value. But learning and skills are also a means to achieving our goals in other areas such as climate, gender equality and youth. As this edition of Shanghai Update shows, UNESCO and UNEVOC are already active in these areas and the momentum supplied by the 2030 Agenda will push us to do even more.

Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals will oblige all of us to forge strong partnerships and involve a broad range of actors. UNESCO will continue to work with the Inter-Agency Group on TVET and we will build our relationships within the UN family and further afield. We salute the recent decision of the International Labour Organization to become a co-convenor of the Education 2030 Framework for Action, the operational guidelines for how countries can put the Incheon Declaration of the World Education Forum into practice.

UNESCO’s new Strategy for TVET, still in the making, will be a fundamental aid. It will boost UNESCO’s ability to provide support with making policy and building capacity; with the central position of TVET in the new 2030 Agenda, we foresee substantially more demand from Member States for this kind of work.

Please join us and together we can make the world a better place for everyone by 2030.

David Atchoarena
Director
Division for Policies and Lifelong Learning Systems
UNESCO

World Youth Skills Day signals new emphasis on skills development

More and more young people are getting access to an education but for many this does not lead to a decent job. Two-thirds of youth in some developing countries were neither working nor studying or were engaged in irregular or informal jobs in 2013, according to a report by the International Labour Organization. For Ahmad Alhendawi, the UN Secretary-General’s Envoy for Youth, skills development could be the way to bridge the gap between the worlds of education and work. This is why he was happy to see the UN organize the first annual World Youth Skills Day (WYSD) on 15 July this year.

“It used to be that if you went to university or vocational training for four years, you could work for the whole of your life. Now a degree is more like a visa to enter the labour market but one which soon expires,” said Alhendawi, “investment in skills development is not a one-time event, it is a lifetime investment.”

You cannot foster economic growth by keeping education and employment in separate silos, he believes.

“What could help to join up the dots is to focus on individuals and build up their capacity so they can decide for themselves if they want to be employed or an entrepreneur. For this we need to invest in skills development,” he said. Many countries are giving more attention to this issue and Alhendawi pays tribute to the Government of India’s decision to use the youth skills day to launch Skill India, a major initiative on skills development.

UNESCO-UNEVOC celebrated 15 July at the United Nations Campus in Bonn, Germany, together with guests from Bonn University, WorldSkills competitors, the German UN Youth Delegate and UN Bonn colleagues for a panel discussion on youth skills in the post-2015 agenda. The UN also organized WYSD events in New York and Addis Ababa while UNESCO-UNEVOC Centres around the world marked the day with their own celebrations.

ICT can boost TVET but how matters too

Information and communication technologies or ICTs are a major driving force for change in TVET. This covers the skills required in the labour market, the content of curricula and qualifications and the way TVET is delivered and managed.

As the Qingdao Declaration, adopted in May 2015 at the International Conference on ICTs and Post-2015 Education in Qingdao City, China, makes clear, they can also help the world achieve the new sustainable development goal on education.

However, in many cases teachers have not been trained how to use ICTs. Moreover while technology has the potential to improve student performance, very heavy use of computers in the classroom can actually lead to poorer learning outcomes, according to a recent report by the OECD.

“ICTs don’t automatically contribute to any of the SDGs, it depends on how they are being used,” said Max Ehlers, IT Officer at UNESCO-UNEVOC. “Our goal is to make sure that they are applied effectively and in the most positive way.”

Two events show how UNESCO-UNEVOC is going about this.

A UNESCO-UNEVOC workshop and panel discussion on how teachers can be trained to use digital media in their work shared promising practices from the UNEVOC Network at
Asia-Pacific conference highlights TVET quality for sustainability

With growing regional inequalities, TVET is seen as essential to equipping all youth and adults for the world of work. The Asia-Pacific Conference on Education and Training – Making Skills Development Work for the Future was organized to see how TVET can provide quality skills development to support transitions to employment. "The overarching aim of this conference is to leverage the tremendous potential of TVET policies and practices to better link the skills acquired by learners with those needed in the labour markets," said Gwang-Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok.

The event brought 766 participants including government ministers and officials from 26 countries across the region to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 3 to 5 August 2015 and was a regional follow-up to the 2012 Third International Congress on TVET. Organized by UNESCO with support from the Government of Malaysia, it also illustrated how TVET can contribute to environmental protection, and how integrating sustainability in jobs can in turn lead to more decent employment and reduced inequalities. UNESCO-UNEVOC organized a special session to strengthen the UNEVOC Network in the region.

Speakers and delegates discussed trends in the region’s labour markets and which skills will be needed for tomorrow’s jobs. How information and communication technologies can help bridge the gap was a third topic. In line with the Shanghai Consensus, delegates looked at ways in which partnerships, such as those pioneered through the establishment of the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), can make TVET more relevant.

The conference closed with the adoption of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration "Quality Education and Skills Development for a Sustainable Future", which aims to set the course in the Asia-Pacific region for TVET in the coming years.

Skills for heritage are important for all

Try imagining Egypt without pyramids or India without monuments and no doubt you would agree – something important is missing. Yet 46 of the world’s most significant sites are currently in danger; keeping these and the 1000 or so others on UNESCO’s World Heritage List in a good state of repair is a gargantuan task that calls for a unique blend of skills.

The irony is that just as demand for such skills is growing, the social eco-systems that produce them are fast disappearing, according to TVET experts invited by UNESCO-UNEVOC to the 39th session of the World Heritage Committee in Bonn last June and July. Many countries do not have the capacity or resources to train the people they need to preserve their heritage.

In India, maintaining sites is largely the preserve of traditional community-based skills or TCBS. But acquiring these skills typically takes place in informal settings and is in decline. “Reviving TCBS is crucial for preserving heritage sites,” Biswajit Som from Kolkata’s Jadavpur University, told the audience at the UNEVOC panel discussion. He recommended using an innovative model combining formal and informal learning as “the key to fast track the skill shortage in heritage preservation in India.”
North-South cooperation also has a role to play. The joint master’s degree in heritage conservation and site management presented at the event, pioneered by Germany’s Brandenburg University of Technology and Egypt’s Helwan University, is a good example.

Developing skills for the heritage sector is as much an issue for the economy, employment, entrepreneurship and for sustainable development as it is a cultural or social issue, said Shyamal Majumdar, Head of UNESCO-UNEVOC. It is also a perfect illustration of how TVET can contribute to several of the sustainable development goals, as well as the goal on education.

Recent and upcoming events

Inception workshop for the Platform for Expertise in Vocational Training (PEFOP), 2–3 November 2015, Dakar, Senegal

This workshop, organized by the International Institute for Educational Planning of UNESCO in Dakar, will launch the Platform for Expertise in Vocational Training (PEFOP). With support from the French Agency for Development, the platform will promote innovation in TVET in Sub-Saharan Africa. www.iipe-ppfalakar.org/en/news/gpe-fund-iiep-work-education-financing-0

UNESCO 38th Session of the General Conference 3–18 November 2015, Paris, France

The General Conference takes place every two years and sets the policies and main lines of work of UNESCO as well as deciding on programmes and budget. One item on the agenda is the revision of the 2001 Recommendation concerning Technical and Vocational Education. www.unesco.org/new/en/general-conference

Special High-level Meeting on the Education 2030 Framework for Action, 4 November 2015, Paris, France

This high-level meeting will formally adopt the Education 2030 Framework for Action (FFA) which will provide guidance to countries for the implementation of the Education 2030 agenda. http://en.unesco.org/events/special-high-level-meeting-education-2030-framework-action

OEB (Online Educa Berlin), 2–4 December 2015, Berlin, Germany

The theme of this year’s OEB, a major cross-sector conference on technology and learning, will be “Accelerating the Shift”. UNESCO-UNEVOC is organizing a pre-conference workshop on how digital media is changing the world of TVET teachers and trainers. This will be followed by a panel discussion in the main conference on using technology to reduce the learning divide. www.online-educa.com

Third Experts Meeting on World Reference Levels of Learning Outcomes, 14–15 December 2015, Paris, France

In response to the call of the Shanghai Consensus, this meeting will explore how international guidelines around issues of qualifications’ referencing and levelling could facilitate the comparison and recognition of qualifications among countries – and how these could be underpinned by international guidelines on quality assurance.

Events relating to COP21 (21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change)

Virtual conference: Greening TVET in the context of climate change policy developments 2–13 November 2015 on the UNEVOC e-forum

In the run-up to COP21, which aims to achieve a legally binding and universal agreement on climate, UNESCO-UNEVOC will host an online debate on the role of greening TVET in keeping climate change below 2°C. Sign up here: www.unevoc.unesco.org/l/106

Greening Skills and Jobs for COP21 and the post-2015 Transformation 3 December 2015, Paris, France

The discussion to take place in cooperation with development partners and the French government during COP21 in the Negotiators’ zone aims to present to negotiators and national experts the main ways to mobilize employment, training and education stakeholders to prepare and facilitate the implementation of national objectives in the fight against change climate. http://newsroom.unfccc.int/paris

Inter-Agency Working Group (IAWG) on Greening TVET and Skills at COP21, 4 December, Paris, France

At COP21, UNESCO-UNEVOC organizes a panel discussion featuring IAWG members ADB, CEDEFOP, ETF, ILO, UNESCO and UNITAR, to debate policy issues and initiatives on demand for jobs and skills, and opportunities for education and training. http://newsroom.unfccc.int/paris

First Global Forum on Green Economy Learning 16–18 December 2015, Paris, France

Organized by the Partnership for Action on Green Economy, the Green Growth Knowledge Platform, the OECD and UNESCO-UNEVOC, this forum will bring together policy-makers, development partners and representatives from education and training institutions, NGOs and business associations to find ways of improving green economy learning. www.unevoc.unesco.org/l/108

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