

Paper for WorldSkills Leadership Forum

European Support for Human Resources for Sustainable

Development: an example from the Mediterranean Region

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. May I begin by thanking the organisers of this event for inviting me to speak to you and allowing me the opportunity to highlight an example of a very recent initiative by the European Union of sustainable human resource development in the region of the southern Mediterranean.

Before I start however, I am aware that some of you many not be familiar with the work of the European Training Foundation and so I would like to take a few minutes to tell you about my organisation.

The ETF is an agency of the European Union, funded by the European Union, with a remit to support countries which border the Union by advising them on the reform of their vocational education and training and labour market systems. That means that we work with Ministries of Education and Ministries of Employment in

countries which aspire to EU membership, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Turkey, as well as the Balkan countries; we also work with Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, the countries of the southern Caucasus, i.e. Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia and across the Middle East and North Africa, from Syria, Jordan and Lebanon right across to Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco. And we work with 4 countries of Central Asia: Kazakhstan, Kyrgistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The work we do in creating conditions to develop and maintain a better educated workforce is part of a wider effort by the EU to make more secure its borders with the countries which surround it. It is recognised that if these neighbouring countries have a healthy labour market, if they can attract inward investment, create jobs and become good trading partners, then the problems of crime, illegal migration and civil unrest will diminish. It has been said that the EU wishes to create a ‘ring of friends’ around itself and the role which human resource development can play in sustaining the economic and social development of these neighbouring countries and in the reduction of poverty is now well understood.

So the ETF, with a staff of just over 100, advises education and training stakeholders in each of our 30 partner countries, we provide capacity-building opportunities for government officials, educators, NGOs and others, we advise the EC delegation in each country on suitable targets for interventions in the form of HRD projects and programmes, often designing, implementing, monitoring or evaluating these, and we work with other donors to try to get coherence between our various efforts.

As with all donors, the European Commission, and therefore the ETF, wishes to design interventions which will be sustainable in the long term; which the government of the country in question will be able to continue to operate and which will become embedded in their education and training systems.

In May 2001 the European Union established a strategy for sustainable development. The EU took as its starting point the idea

that globalisation acts as a powerful force for sustaining global growth and providing ways of dealing with international problems such as education, health and the environment. However, left to develop unchecked, market forces cause and exacerbate inequality and exclusion and therefore globalisation must go hand in hand with measures designed to prevent or mitigate these effects. The series of actions which the EU puts in place includes, and here I am selecting only those related to education and training, investing more in the fields of health, education and communicable diseases, focussing EU development policy on poverty reduction, mainstreaming the gender perspective in EU policies, combating the negative effects of emigration, strengthening public institutions and civil society in developing countries, stepping up the fight against discrimination against women.

A Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament in March 2002 stressed the vital importance of education and training in reducing poverty in developing countries. This is

coherent with various initiatives undertaken at international level, such as the Dakar Forum in April 2000 which gave us the ‘Education for All’ initiative, reaffirming and broadening the international community’s commitment in this field; and the Millenium Development Goals highlighted the importance of education, particularly education for girls and basic education.

In its Communication, the European Commission set out 3 priorities:

- **Basic education, in particular primary education and teacher training;**
- **Work-related training;**
- **Higher education, in particular at regional level.**

I shall look in more depth at the second of these, as being the one most relevant to WorldSkills. The Communication stated that priority should be given to work-related training, in other words consideration should be given to education demand. To this end 4 priority actions were identified:

- **Establishing an education system which provides an opportunity to learn more technical skills through vocational training.**
- **Supporting educational strategies, systems and processes that promote the demand for education and the acquisition of qualifications needed to pave the way for the country's economic growth.**
- **Introducing innovative approaches that go beyond the formal education sector, focusing on women in particular.**
- **Introducing active policies to ensure a closer link between training and employment.**

These policies could integrate job-seeking aid and direct assistance for job creation.

At the same time as these sectoral priorities for sustainable development were being identified, the European Union has also been working on a Sustainable Development Strategy, a review of which

has recently been published. The Review is still under discussion but major subjects being identified relate to:

- **Changing the way we make policies**
- **Climate change and clean energy**
- **Public health**
- **Poverty and social exclusion**
- **Ageing society**
- **Management of natural resources**
- **Transport and land use**
- **Harnessing globalisation**
- **Better governance at global level**
- **Financing for development**

These are rather global in orientation, but they reflect world literature which emphasises the need for the following conditions for sustainable development to occur:

- **Good governance, including resource management and accountability in decision-making;**

- **Democracy;**
- **Participation;**
- **Social and economic development for poverty reduction and protection/maintenance of the environment;**
- **Stability and peace.**

In our field of education and training, the literature and our experience from project and programme evaluation suggests that while these aspects all undoubtedly play a part, sustainable development is sensitive to local conditions. Where development and reform involve the transfer of programmes and policies, sustainability is dependent on how these programmes and policies are integrated into the local environment. Therefore, sustainability in the context of education development arises from processes which:

- **Focus on local priorities and conditions**
- **Aim at the identification of problems/issues/solutions through local engagement**

- **Promote ownership of policy and strategy development**
- **Facilitate collective interpretation of options and actions e.g. stakeholder feedback**
- **Generate information about programmes and policies**
- **Encourage stakeholders to assume responsibility for dissemination, consultation and feedback.**

Having established from what I have already said that, firstly, education and training is a valid instrument for sustainable development and that, secondly, to design sustainable interventions there are these conditions which should be met, let us now turn to a recent example in the southern Mediterranean which the ETF is implementing on behalf of EuropeAid – the directorate of the European Commission which delivers aid to third countries.

The programme which I thought I would take as an example is called the Regional Programme for Education and Training for

Employment and covers Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, the Palestinian Territories, Tunisia and Turkey. It has a budget of 5 million euro and will run for 5 years. In its Regional Indicative Programme for 2002-2004, the European Commission recognised that with 40% of the total population in the Mediterranean partner countries under the age of 15 in 1996 the potential impact of reforms in the field of education, training and labour market systems is very large, in the short as well as the medium and long term. Despite the heterogeneity of countries in that region in terms of size, population, religion, culture, economic development, education and training systems, some common concerns on education, training and labour market systems could be broadly identified:

- **Analysis and monitoring of the quality and relevance of education, training and labour market systems;**
- **Access to finance;**
- **Occupational certification and training standards;**

- **Analysis and role of education and training institutions;**
- **Definition of relationship between employment and labour market measures.**

It was felt that this commonality of problems and challenges confirmed the need for comprehensive reforms and action plans to be discussed at regional level, with a view to reforms being implemented nationally. In particular, it was felt, reform policies should enhance:

- **Cost-effectiveness, efficiency, quality and relevance of education and training systems, with a view to providing relevant skills and competences to young and adult job seekers for rapid occupational integration and to promote equal access of special groups exposed to social exclusion.**
- **Relevance and coherence of active labour market measures for employment, including measures for more effective transition from school/university to work, strongly integrated into overall**

strategies for economic development and based on a partnership model.

In the 2004 Regional Indicative Programme of the European Commission, the aims of this project were given as:

- **To combat and prevent unemployment**
- **To support the occupational integration of young people**
- **To promote the emergence of shared understanding at regional level on strategies for training and labour market systems reforms, with a view to supporting partners' authorities in their design and implementation of reforms and action plans at the national level;**
- **To assist the educational institutions of the countries involved in the project to reinforce and improve their educational capacities;**
- **To increase co-operation between Euro-Mediterranean education and training institutions.**

The expected results from the project, which was launched earlier this year and so is still in its very early stages, are:

- **The creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Observatory network of relevant institutions involved in training and employment policies acting as a strategic forum for discussion and dissemination of information and good practice.**
- **Progress towards regional systems for mutual diploma recognition and coherence between higher education programmes.**
- **Increased shared understanding and convergence at regional level of policies aimed to link training to job opportunities.**
- **Implementation of national reform programmes on education, employment and training to improve the effectiveness of strategies to cope with unemployment.**

We can see then that, in the design of the project, several of the sustainability issues which I talked about earlier are included:

- **The contribution of human resource development to strengthening social and economic development in countries neighbouring the EU.**
- **The strengthening of public institutions in neighbouring countries.**
- **The development of an alternative to illegal migration through both supporting the creation of employment locally and through supporting systems for skills development for people to enable them to migrate legally.**
- **Linking education and training directly to economic growth.**
- **Creating a closer link between training and employment.**

Of course we don't know at this stage what degree of success we will have in the project as it still has over 4 years to run, but it will be evaluated in due course and the results of that evaluation will be available. What we can look at however is the way in which a bottom-up approach was used to specify and prepare for this Regional

Programme as a means of incorporating into it some of the sustainability criteria for educational development contexts which I listed earlier. The process which was used to bring local ownership and accountability to the programme was one which involved delegates from the partner countries along the shores of the southern Mediterranean. During 2003 these delegates met four times in conferences and workshops with representatives of EU member states to:

- **Facilitate the exchange of experiences and good practices;**
- **Reach a common assessment of the current situation and challenges of common interest;**
- **Design an Education & Training for Employment Regional Programme on a consensual basis;**
- **Obtain true ownership of this Regional Programme from the EuroMed delegates, as well as their commitment in the follow-up actions.**

This four-stage process comprised:

- **An opening conference which allowed the delegates to meet, to exchange experiences and good practices and to identify a first list of regional initiatives.**
- **A first workshop which allowed delegates to continue their exchanges of experiences and good practices, as well as to identify specific proposals for regional projects.**
- **A second workshop at which delegates examined these proposals in greater depth, to suggest further initiatives and to summarise all of these into project fiches.**
- **A final conference at which all of the Euro-Med partners reviewed and gave final approval to the four components of the Regional Programme and the activities of which they would be comprised.**

The conclusions of the delegates who participated were that this bottom-up, participative approach was appreciated and that the conferences and workshops allowed them to:

- **Meet together for the first time within the MEDA regional framework;**
- **Develop extensive and fruitful exchanges of experiences and good practices.**
- **Jointly analyse the current situation and trends in TVET and employment sectors and identify common characteristics, issues and challenges.**
- **Formulate, within the framework of a participative approach, a set of operational proposals of common interest.**
- **Jointly identify, select and define – within the framework of an interactive process – the components to be included in the ETE Regional Programme, in accordance with the priorities defined.**

In light of the common characteristics and trends identified, the delegates considered it crucial to promote programmes aimed at:

- **Defining and implementing more market-driven TVET strategies and policies, in order to improve their quality, relevance and performance.**
- **Improving the identification of current and future labour market skills needs.**
- **Providing better assistance to job-seekers, in order to facilitate their access to the labour market through self-employment and creation of micro-enterprises.**
- **Raising awareness and use of ICT and e-learning for VET.**

As a result of these conclusions, we have now a regional programme, to which all participants have signed up, which has four components:

- **Component 1: a yearly EuroMed Forum aimed at:**
 - **Exchanging experiences and good practices in TVET**
 - **Developing synergies with other projects, networks and institutions**
 - **Reporting progress of the Programme**

- **Suggesting any relevant improvement or new initiatives.**
- **Component 2: A TVET for Employment EuroMed network aimed at:**
 - **Developing a EuroMed observatory function**
 - **Carrying out comparative analysis and thematic studies**
 - **Promoting regional co-operation in domains of common interest**
- **Component 3: reinforce the capacities of service providers in the partner countries working for young unemployed people in the areas of self-employment and creation of micro-enterprises.**
- **Component 4: assisting partner countries in meeting the increasing demands for new types of qualifications that are prerequisites to social and economic development through the further development and use of eLearning in education and training.**

One important factor which is hinted at in Component 1 is the need to complement projects already launched in the region with EC and EU

Member States' support, by creating synergy with them. We consider that this ETE project represents an opportunity to share significant progress and good practice, avoiding redundancy and developing transferable methodologies.

The project should provide a framework for co-operation between the EU and the southern Mediterranean partners in the field of TVET. It could contribute towards the development of long-lasting partnerships among the participating institutions, in all fields of common interest, such as improvement in teachers' and trainers' training, recognition of qualifications, vocational guidance, apprenticeship, quality of training, labour market and employment of young people, among others. The project will be open to all kinds of contributions from EU Member States, from giving ideas and recommendations, providing technical expertise, to contributing to projects financially; if they want to sustain activities after the end of the project and/or in case of shortage of resources in certain types of co-operation activities.

Although the project is still only in the inception phase of its implementation, I hope, from what I have said, that you will appreciate the considerable amount of work which has already gone into the design and methodology to make it a project which will deliver sustainable results. Europe Aid has been the leader of the process from the beginning and the ETF role has evolved during the identification process. Following the series of conferences and workshops, the delegates recommended to Europe Aid that the implementation of the ETE Regional Programme be delegated to ETF, on the grounds of its extensive knowledge of the region and of VET.

Ladies and gentlemen, as I cannot see into the future, I cannot say whether or not we will have been successful in designing a sustainable project, nor whether by choosing to invest in HRD, the EU and the countries involved will be able to have an appreciable impact on the sustainable development of their countries. But a good start has been made, with sustainability as a priority, and I look forward to being

back at WorldSkills in a few years time, to report on the completion of a successful project.

Dr. Muriel Dunbar

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