



MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

**Address by the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor MP, at the
Pan African TVET and FET conference, BMW Pavilion, Cape Town,
20 August 2008**

The conference host and officials of the International Association of
Colleges (IAC)

Distinguished delegates

Ladies and Gentlemen

It's an honour and a pleasure to address you at this very first Pan
African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and
Further Education and Training (FET) Conference.

This conference is important for three reasons.

It responds to the second Decade Plan for Education in Africa.

It allows for focused discussion on strategies and models for enhancing
technical and vocational education.

It provides policy makers an opportunity to identify interventions for
practical action.

South Africa launched a major R1.9 billion 3-year programme in 2006
to recapitalise technical colleges, tackle vital and long neglected
curriculum reform, and invest in staff training and development,
infrastructure and equipment.

The process began with the restructuring of technical colleges into further education and training colleges. Small and very diverse colleges were transformed into multi-campus FET colleges with the facilities policy mandates, and resources to implement a skills revolution in South Africa.

The conference takes place at a time when countries around the world are trying very hard to find appropriate and workable models to educate and train people for employment and entrepreneurship in rapidly changing and increasingly sophisticated economies.

This is evident across a range of sectors and sub-sectors - technology, engineering, banking, marketing media, management, and entrepreneurship.

In Africa we face two huge challenges:

The first is to be able to re-skill the existing workforce to meet new workplace needs.

The second is to educate and train young people to meet new and high-level skills demands.

It's these challenges that place technical and vocational education at the centre of the skills-development agenda.

Vocational education, and indeed all education in Africa, must respond to the totality of the needs of the continent. Vocational education must also take on the added responsibilities of addressing the more serious issues of unemployment.

Vocational education is often associated with school dropouts and academic underperformance, a provider of cheap labour and entry-level job opportunities.

These perceptions have led to under-funding of TVET in many countries.

If we are to get the people we need for the 21st century economy and for the 21st century labour market, we must clarify our understanding of vocational education: what defines it, how we provide it, how we fund it, and how we ensure the quality of providing it.

Recent thinking on TVET, reflected in the UNEVOC report, “An Initial Statistical Study”, published in 2006 by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics states:

“Education cannot be separated from training. Basic and secondary education is the foundation on which an effective vocational education and training system should be built. Good quality basic education and initial training, availability of adult and second-chance education, together with a learning culture, ensure high levels of participation in continuous education and training.”

The divide between academic and vocational training is not what it used to be. Artisans and technicians no longer need basic physical skills alone. They need to know how to adapt as products and production methods change, and as services across commerce, retail industry and the hospitality sector become specialized and sophisticated.

The thin line between education and training is even thinner in diverse TVET systems, such as the “dual system” in Germany, England’s modern apprenticeships and Botswana’s brigades.

As we deliberate over what truly defines vocational education, we must remember the shifts that have taken place over time: from the industrial age, to the manufacturing age, to the information age.

We are now firmly in the information age. This means there can't be any justification in preparing young people for the workplace with a 'watered-down' education that in any way limits the need and potential for thinking and analytical skills.

Traditionally, vocational education has been a simpler, if not inferior, version of the general academic pathway - this approach must be interrogated, given the challenges we face.

The inference that TVET is limited to just simple, manual demonstrations of skill or competence has seriously dented its reputation and undervalued its worth. Mathematics and science are routinely included as 'add ons' providing only context or occupation specific, knowledge.

For these very reasons, TVET doesn't have "parity of esteem" with the general academic stream.

Any revision of TVET must ensure that high-level cognitive skills are combined with practical training skills.

Qualifications and curricula must aim to address these requirements. If we fail to achieve this, TVET will remain an option only for poorly performing and poorly motivated individuals. This by itself translates into poor work practice, reinforcing the belief that vocational education is indeed inferior.

The demand for relevant and appropriate skills for the workplace must be matched by the commitment of employers to make work placements available to TVET learners. Strong and sustainable public-private

partnerships can only emanate from complementary responsibilities shared between providers (education) and employers (labour).

In some EU countries, the involvement of industry is backed by legislation. The rationale is that employers get the people they deserve. The model, such as the one used in Switzerland, holds much appeal.

The dynamic nature of national and global economies requires greater coordination between stakeholders in the provision of good quality vocational education. Government organs - such as trade, industry and economics - and private entities - such as industry, retail and commerce - have to find ways of synchronizing efforts.

In TVET, obsolete equipment, maintenance, health and safety requirements, and high volumes of consumables render vocational education and training either unsustainable or of poor quality.

Perhaps we need to look at whether in all of our countries, we all need to be investing in trying to do the same thing - and ending up at best with mediocrity. Shared efforts and resources could help address quality provision.

The efforts at revitalizing FET are often expedient, uncoordinated, inadequately planned and resourced and ultimately not sustainable. These are the realities of how vocational provision is dealt with, not only in Africa but also in other parts of the world.

We must take a longer-term view of how we are going to deal with the skills issue to achieve real benefit over much longer periods. This means that we don't only concentrate on identifying the skills needed. We must also establish mechanisms to effect changes in shorter turnaround times.

Once training needs are identified, it usually takes several years for design and implementation to take place. More comprehensive and systemic changes can take up to ten years.

It's important that we work on developing efficient systems that will allow us to adapt and change curricula as soon as the needs are signaled.

It's important that we put in place good quality learning materials within short periods of time.

It's important that we train and provide high performing teachers and instructors quickly.

It's critical that we conduct new or revised exams and assessments within much shorter periods.

In vocational education, to be able to do all of this is probably the most significant response to a skills deficit or skills shortage.

If the time taken between identifying what must be done, and the time it actually takes to plan and deliver quality education and training, is too long, then either the need has changed or the target shifted. Much effort and resources can be squandered with little end benefit.

However, the status of TVET in Africa is not all gloom and doom.

TVET systems in a growing number of countries are undergoing, or have undergone, promising reforms that are designed to build on the inherent strengths of the system.

The major reforms involve the setting up of national training bodies, and the enactment of laws to strengthen national vocational training programmes. The need to link training to employment (either self or

paid employment) is at the root of all best practices and strategies observed worldwide.

National training authorities have been set up in many countries, including South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Tanzania.

Here in South Africa we have the South African Qualifications Framework that allows for accumulation of credits and recognition of prior learning to promote the culture of lifelong learning.

Most recently we introduced a quality assurance mechanism for all trade-related occupations, called the Quality Council for Trade and Occupations (QCTO).

The broader and high-end vocational pathway is catered for by the National Certificates (Vocational) introduced for the first time in January 2007.

Benin introduced the Bureau d' Appui aux Artisans (BAA), which is an innovative system of complementing the skills of traditional apprentices and master artisans. A similar support system for the Jua Kali informal sector in Kenya is rated as very successful.

From outside Africa, two training models stand out for mention: the centralized Singaporean model and the 'dual system' practised in Germany.

The Singaporean model links directly with training in the labour market, including the inculcation of shared cultural values and attitude development.

The dual vocational training system in Germany captures approximately 70% of all school-leavers between the ages of 15-19 for concurrent training in school and in an enterprise. Or so we are told.

The UNESCO International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training, in its April 2008 UNEVOC supplement states,

“Just about everywhere, vocational training is the underdog of education, even in industrial economies. But in developing countries, this is much more so.”

A recent survey among 18 African countries, point to a number of priority areas for vocational training in Africa.

The general recommendations, following the survey included compulsory implementation of TVET programmes for students in strategic fields such as entrepreneurship, computer literacy, and agriculture and building construction.

The highest priorities were, however, in public health and water resources, energy and environmental management, information and communication technologies, construction and maintenance, and good governance - clearly reflecting the developmental agenda of the continent.

Although the primary objective of technical and vocational training in Africa is to provide valuable employment for our young people, a strategic approach to skills development on the continent cannot ignore the effects of globalization.

The vast skills needs of Africa mean that African countries must pursue the development of skills at all levels of the spectrum: basic, secondary and tertiary levels, with each country emphasizing the skills levels that correspond best to their stage of economic development and the needs of the local labour market.

We cannot be left to play catch-up. We must compete.

COMEDAF II, the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union held in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) last year, agreed to spearhead the development of a TVET strategy for Africa. The objectives of the strategy are to

- Revitalize, modernize and harmonize TVET in Africa
- position TVET programmes and TVET institutions in Africa as vehicles for regional co-operation and integration as well as socio-economic development related to improvements in infrastructure, technological progress, energy, trade, tourism, agriculture and good governance.
- Mobilize all stakeholders in a concerted effort to create synergies and share responsibilities for the renewal and harmonization of TVET programmes and strategies in Africa.

The challenges to meet these objectives remain huge. It is with conferences like these that we are able to share good practices, share our common dreams, and commit our collective will to make this a reality.

I thank you