

Dr. Rolf Burghardt Gennrich
Advisory Board Member
Regional Association of Vocational Teacher Education in SEA (RAVTE)

**Regional Development, Harmonisation and Internationalisation of TVET
in the wake of AECSEAN Economic Community (AEC)**

**Excellences,
Honourable Guest,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

First of all I would like to thank SEAMEO secretariat Bangkok and OVEC Thailand as well as all organizers for inviting RAVTE to this important High Official Meeting on SEA-TVET. Based on the concept of today's meeting our contribution is structured into three parts, in order to:

- I. Determine the importance of TVET,
- II. Highlight challenges to be mastered, and
- III. Suggest measures to unleash potentials of TVTE in the regional and global context.

I. Determine the importance of TVET¹

(Key question: What shall we keep in mind about the importance of TVET in the wake of AEC?)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one of the most diverse and dynamic regions in the world. The transformation of ASEAN into "a single market and production base, highly competitive, equitable economic development and fully integrated into the global economy and the global marketplace" affects more than 600 million people of the 10 member states and is beyond doubt one of the most outstanding and challenging events in the history of the region. Chaired by the sense of a new ownership, "One Vision, One Caring and One Sharing Community", the community of states is called upon to act politically and economically at an equal level in order to launch ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by the end of 2015.

In 2013, the ASEAN Heads of State created a "Post-2015 Vision." The Leaders' goal is to realize a community that is "politically cohesive, economically integrated, socially responsible and a truly people-centered and rules-based ASEAN." AEC will establish ASEAN as a single market and production base with the goal of making ASEAN more dynamic and competitive.

May I draw your attention to – one general and one specific consideration regarding the given TVET context in the ASEAN region:

The general consideration is that worldwide, vocational education and training has become a top political priority in order to strengthen national economies and social cohesion by

¹ Technical Vocational Education and Training is used in a comprehensive sentence and in order to determine a labour market oriented and inclusive vocational education and training system for all.

enhancing employability and reducing educational inequality. We all are contemporary witnesses to this trend.

ASEAN's leading industrial nations like Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and Thailand are competing fiercely to find effective answers to the question of how to deal with the challenges resulting from globalisation and rapid technological advancement in order to supply a competent workforce at the right time with the necessary qualifications.

ASEAN's economically *less* advanced nations, meanwhile, are searching for answers to the question of what today's workforce is expected to offer in order to meet the many challenges: attract local and foreign investments, satisfy the economic and social needs, fight poverty and achieve the development goals of each respective country.

The more specific consideration is that vocational education and training in ASEAN is embedded in different development contexts and thereby subject to different national and regional policies and modes of delivery. Quality and efficiency of vocational training are still low and sometimes do not meet the labour market needs. Consequently private training providers are growing in number and large companies are putting more efforts into their personnel management, trying to cooperate with the most advanced training institutions and universities in order to compensate the lack of qualified workforce.

Furthermore, non-formal and inclusive education and training plays an increasing role in all ASEAN countries as a crosscutting issue especially when it comes to provide vocational training to all and as the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Conference (SEAMEO) has exhorted us to "reach the unreached". [compare SEAMEO EFA-SEA, 2011]

Summing up this part we can say:

Focussing on the ASEAN region, we realise there is a large gap in quality, efficiency and demand orientation of TVET and – as consequence – we take note to step up efforts in further improving national policies on TVET and to progress equalisation and harmonisation in ASEAN.

Consequently the actual development status in the vocational education and training sector shows that there is no uniform picture and consequently not a single answer to the question of how to identify and implement regional development priorities for vocational education and training. For many ASEAN countries, raising skill levels and attract young people for TVET in order to improve economic competitiveness will require structural reforms in their TVET systems to provide the skills and attitudes that are relevant to each country's industry or labour market's.

II. Highlight challenges to be mastered

(Key question: What are the challenges for TVET - and is the sector ready to meet these challenges in an appropriate manner?)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

ASEAN member countries agreed upon free flow of goods and services, free flow of capital and skilled labour within the economic community. Consequently ASEAN people are the most crucial factor – and the main challenge hereby is to find adequate policies and concepts of TVET in order to ensure the highest mobility and capability of work force in the region as a whole.

But various studies shows that some developments in this sector tend to further widen differences instead to adjust them. Some examples shall shortly be highlighted in order to

characterise how far ASEAN is from a coherent regional TVET framework and a mutual consent in this sector:

1. The process of establishing ASEAN Regional Qualification Reference Framework (AQRf) has been pending for many years, mostly caused by the situation that NQF's in five of ten member states couldn't be achieved until now.
2. From the perspective of the employers some TVET systems and models are far a way to be labour market demand-driven. Labour market demand oriented training models should address employers demand and the technological requirements of the future world of work.
3. Vocational teacher education (VTE) systems and programs in Asia have been revised many times even with international assistance (Hangzhou 2004, Bandung 2008/12, HCM 2009) but without leaving a remarkable breakthrough towards quality improvement and harmonisation in the regional context.
4. Public spending of TVET in ASEAN member countries shows significant differences and is in some countries in a critical stage. "TVET institutions are largely underfinanced as reflected in the relatively low level of direct budget allocations made by governments." [UNESCO: Research No.5, 2014]
5. TVET, "continues to be "unpopular" by young people. Trends in TVET enrolment rates vary across the ASEAN+6 countries. In many countries the share of TVET students has tended to decrease over the past decade."

The above-mentioned facts show how intensively vocational education and training impacts the targets of AEC integration [UNESCO: Research No.5, 2014]. The entry into AEC on the eve of 2016 provides many chances and opportunities but it also demands new thinking and it requires the introduction of innovative solutions and good governance. In other words, the expectations regarding the performance and flexibility of vocational education and training are very high and ***top-to-bottom reforms and innovations*** in this sector are immense and essential for progress and integration. ASEAN remains committed to find its own immediate answers to those questions while also connecting to the global and regional markets.

III. Suggest measures to unleash potentials of TVTE in the context of AEC

(Key question: What would it take to unleash the potential of TVET systems – within the context of AEC?)

Ladies and gentlemen,

"It is through skilful work that the foundations of a society are established. And these foundations are the indispensable core of any society." [Loose & Spoettl 2015] That means there is no alternative solution to a well-performing TVET development in the context of AEC. Vocational education and training needs to be as dynamic as the economies and communities it serves.

RAVTE, as regional association and think tank in vocational teacher education and research, is well committed to the process of ASEAN integration and internationalisation on all levels, and therefore we call to initiate the establishment of a mutual and permanent government and stakeholder initiative in TVET in the ASEAN region. This initiative should finally lead to establish an ASEAN policy on TVET post-2015 for the improved wellbeing of all ASEAN people. In achieving these goals, the following priority recommendations should be addressed:

1. Enhance regional ownership, cooperation and internationalisation

ASEAN need a common ASEAN ownership and a clear policy vision on TVET-post 2015. This is necessary to solidify a joint platform for a new regional identity in vocational education and training. The following ideas should be considered in order to deliver significant results and progress:

- a) Initiate the **1st ASEAN Summit on TVET** – aiming to establish regional identity and harmonisation in vocational education and training policy and governance. The summit should result in establishing a mutual and coherent “**ASEAN Agenda on TVET post-2015**”.
- b) Create a **Policy Dialog and Round Table Process on TVET**– in order to forge a permanent regional partnership between governments, regional organisations (ASEAN bodies SOM-ED, SLOM, SEAMEO, UNESCO etc.) and all stakeholders.
- c) Promote **Regional network structures and international cooperation initiatives** – aiming to enhance transnational dialog and exchange of relevant experiences in TVET ASEAN wide. (Reference: RECOTVET and the first Regional Association of Vocational Teacher Education - RAVTE)
- d) Successfully implementing the **ASEAN qualification reference framework (AQRF)** - aiming to ensure a wider transnational frame for accreditation and certification of occupational qualifications. Because AEC is functioning as a common market each set of national vocational qualifications must be calibrated to the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework.

2. Reduce high complexity and increase alignment and consistency of TVET

As mentioned above, vocational education and training needs to be fundamentally reformed and supported in order to meet the needs of the upcoming single market and production base. The sustainable way forward would be to significantly reduce the complexity and diversion of national TVET systems. The following ideas should be considered:

- a) Introducing **Structural reforms** –in order to reduce overlapping policies and to eliminate inconsistencies on national and regional level.
- b) Implementing **Systemic administrative reforms** - reducing bureaucracies and ensuring the highest level of national and regional comparability, permeability and mobility in TVET.
- c) Promote an **Integrated and inclusive vocational education and training policy** – and by that, eliminating exclusion of disadvantaged people.

3. Promote capacity development, innovation and research in TVET

There is an overwhelming consensus that vocational teachers are the cornerstones of quality and efficiency of TVET. Capacity development, innovation and research in TVET will be a real challenge as ASEAN move into AEC 2016 and beyond. The following ideas should be considered:

- a) Increasing relevance and recognition of **Vocational personnel development**.
- b) Increase **Quality and reliability of vocational teacher education** studies and programs -in particular to excellent practical competences and technical knowledge.
- c) Establish **Regional standards for vocational teacher education** - ensuring comparability and recognition of study programs, qualifications and certifications in the region.

- d) Further develop ***Cross-regional Research and Development Capacities***.

4. Secure labour demand-driven policies and partnership in TVET:

Excellence in training is based on a participative approach and assessment. It starts from the design of occupational standards and curricula, includes the organisation and implementation of work process related training in schools and companies and leads up to the assessment, certification and finally the employment of graduates. In order to apply to this principles the following ideas should be considered:

- a) Encourage ***Public Private Dialog and Partnership*** - comprising representatives from the government as well as from the business sector and the civil society.
- b) Support ***Quality breakthrough initiatives*** as an overarching issue within the national and regional contexts –in the search for greater economic relevance and responsiveness of VET.
- c) Promote ***Image and attractiveness of TVET*** by introducing appropriate media campaigns and incentive mechanisms for providers and users.

5. Sustain TVET budgeting, financial structures and mechanism

Financing TVET is of increasing concern to all governments and, in some countries, to the business sector too. The expansion of TVET systems due to population growth and the increasing demand for a highly skilled workforce caused a growth in financial requirements for governments and all stakeholders. Therefore governments and stakeholders in the member countries are called upon:

- a) To significantly ***increase public expenditures*** in TVET,
- b) To ***introduce training funds*** with a sound legal basis to TVET and increase relevance and transparency of public and private budgeting,
- c) To ***allocate investments*** from the private sector and to manage financial matters in a cooperative and transparent way.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The previously mentioned reflections should finally lead to a mutual ***“Government and Stakeholder Initiative in the ASEAN region (GSI-TVET)”*** and we hope that this will contribute to a harmonized regional ***ASEAN Agenda on TVET post-2015*** for the improved wellbeing of all ASEAN people.

I’m convinced that this extraordinary meeting today will produce great outcomes and finally successfully initiate a recognized dialog forum for politicians, researchers and practitioners, supporting AEC integration in the TVET sector.

Our Association RAVTE will be very honoured to assist you in the exercise of this challenging and responsible tasks and thereby to support AEC on its way to successfully implement what its founders solemnly stated: that ASEAN will become a: “politically cohesive, economically integrated, socially responsible and a truly people-centered and rules-based community”.