



Asian and Pacific
Skill Development
Programme (APSDEP)

FINAL REPORT

Technical Meeting on ILO/APSDEP Activities
Bangkok, Thailand
8 – 9 October 2001

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE MEETING

Since its establishment (with UNDP assistance) in 1979, APSDEP (the Asian and Pacific Skill Development Programme) has provided a valuable vehicle for technical cooperation and information exchange in vocational training. Historically, a perceived strength of APSDEP has been its relative autonomy within the ILO regional structure and, as a consequence, its ability to respond flexibly and promptly to the expressed needs of its member countries. However, although its scope and outreach have expanded, its funding base has remained narrow. This has significantly constrained APSDEP's ability to respond effectively to a growing demand for its services and to develop new programmes that reflect the rapidly changing skill development environment.

The need to reform APSDEP and to broaden its funding and support base has been recognized for several years. In an effort to bring a new focus and renewed emphasis to the reform process, a meeting of government delegates from member countries attending the 88th Session of the International Labour Conference took place in Geneva on 19 June 2001. The Chief Technical Adviser of the ILO/Japan Multi-bilateral Programme described the APSDEP reform process, highlighting a questionnaire, which would be sent to member countries seeking views on APSDEP's past performance and its future direction and priorities. Feedback obtained from the questionnaire would form the basis for a meeting on the reform of APSDEP to be held in Bangkok. The opinions expressed at this meeting would, it was hoped, lead to firm proposals for reform.

2. OBJECTIVES AND COMPOSITION OF THE MEETING

The overall objective of the meeting was to arrive at a consensus, expressed as a number of agreed proposals, on

- (i) the future direction and programme priorities of APSDEP
- (ii) APSDEP's future working arrangements, including the issue of funding.

This objective would be reached by:

- (i) discussing APSDEP's role as an ILO programme and its linkages with other ILO activities
- (ii) examining and discussing the analysis of questionnaire responses on reform of APSDEP
- (iii) discussing the future direction and working arrangements for APSDEP and arriving at a number of firm conclusions.

APSDEP focal point representatives from China, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam (12 countries) attended the meeting, together with employers' representatives from Australia, Malaysia and Pakistan and workers' representatives from Australia and Sri Lanka. A representative from OVTA, Japan (APSDEP's principal operational partner) also participated.

The meeting was chaired by Ms. Areeya Rojvithee (Thailand), with Mr. Harry Sandrasekera (Worker representative, Sri Lanka) and Mr. Nik Sinluddin bin Haji Nik Mustapha (Employer representative, Malaysia) acting as vice-chairpersons.

Officials from the APSDEP secretariat, supported by resource persons from ILO/EASMAT; IFP/Skills, ILO Geneva; and the ILO Turin Centre facilitated the meeting.

A full list of participants, observers and resource persons is given at *Annex 1*.

3. THE MEETING

There were four main components to the meeting:

- (i) information sessions: the context within which APSDEP operates;
- (ii) a report and discussion on feedback to the questionnaire (member country responses);
- (iii) two major discussions:
 - 1. the future direction of APSDEP
 - 2. future working arrangements for APSDEP
- (iv) conclusions and follow-up action.

The programme (which was modified slightly as the meeting progressed) is given at *Annex 2*.

3.1 The Context for APSDEP

- (i) Opening address: Mr. Yasuyuki Nodera (ILO Regional Director – Asia Pacific Region) welcomed participants. He touched on APSDEP’s record of achievement but underlined the need for it to change to reflect the current realities of globalization, international competitiveness and the changing nature of work. He also laid emphasis on the ILO’s commitment to Decent Work. He stressed that the meeting was the “final step in the reform process” and that it needed to reach firm conclusions if the objective of a renewed and revitalized APSDEP was to be achieved (see *Annex 3* for the full text).
- (ii) Introduction to ILO/APSDEP: Mr. Naoki Hamada (Chief Technical Adviser of APSDEP) gave a brief history of APSDEP, outlined its structure and organizational links, and summarized its activities since 1991. He pinpointed some of APSDEP’s current problems and resource constraints and underlined the importance of the reform process and the factors influencing the direction of that change. He stressed the significance of the meeting in agreeing on concrete measures for reforming APSDEP to respond to the challenges of globalization and the opportunities provided by information technology in facilitating inter-country and technical cooperation and the exchange of information (see *Annex 4* for the full text).

- (iii) APSDEP's role as an ILO programme and its linkages with other ILO activities: Mr. Ian Cummings (ILO/EASMAT) and Mr. Alex Gorham (ILO Turin Centre) summarized the priorities and parameters of the programmes for which they were responsible.

Mr. Cummings set out the linkages between the technical specialists in the ILO's multi-disciplinary teams (EASMAT, SEAPAT and SAAT) in the Asia Pacific region and APSDEP's activities; identified a number of complementarities; and showed how APSDEP – as a regional programme of the ILO – operated within the ILO's strategic objectives. He went on to give some examples of joint APSDEP/EASMAT activities (e.g. the development of new Regional Model Competency Standards – RMCS) and drew attention to the support received from Japan (OVTA), Korea (KOICA) and the Turin Centre in implementing APSDEP activities. He concluded by demonstrating how APSDEP's regional/sub-regional activities could be a springboard for EASMAT advisory services at the national level (see *Annex 5* for the full text).

Mr. Gorham outlined the activities of the ILO Turin Centre in terms of its resources, types of training services, clients and partners. He then looked at linkages between the Turin Centre and APSDEP, focusing on similarities and areas of common interest (e.g. both have a regional focus), related activities and present collaboration. He then offered certain suggestions for overcoming what Turin felt were APSDEP's current weakness (e.g. inadequate follow-up and lack of impact evaluation) and identified a number of pre-requisites for improving the effectiveness of APSDEP's activities (e.g. regular consultation with member countries on training needs and priorities). He concluded by proposing "areas of collaboration" between APSDEP and the ILO Turin Centre, notably:

- Co-financing support for specific training activities through RBTC/Asia/Turin resources
- Assistance in the planning and design of specific training activities
- Collaboration in additional resource mobilization efforts
- Technical inputs to training and training-related activities
- Assistance in the organization and management of APSDEP training activities
- Support to and reinforcing of APSDEP's institutional networking activities, including links with institutions in other regions
- Support to the tripartite objectives of APSDEP through the Centre's Workers' Education and EMP/ACT training programmes.

(see *Annex 6* for the full text)

(iv) Key issues in skill development: Mr. Trevor Riordan (IFP/Skills, ILO Geneva) gave an overview of the objectives and guiding principles of the ILO's programmes in human resources development and training. He drew attention, in particular, to the concept of 'decent work' and showed how this concept helped define the ILO's skill development policy and practice. He then examined a number of key issues in skill development, drawing attention to some key policy challenges faced by national governments and the social partners. Among the more important of these challenges were:

- Investment in education and training
 - Critical need for greater investment in education and training; shared responsibility between governments, enterprises, the social partners, and the individual.
- Basic education, literacy and core skills
 - Urgent reforms needed to improve basic education and literacy of people in the poorest countries.
 - Development of "core work skills" to prepare individuals for the knowledge and skills-based society.
- Reforming vocational education and training systems
 - To make lifelong learning for all a reality, major reforms of VET needed
 - Training systems need to become more flexible and responsive to the rapidly changing skill requirements
 - Reforms should focus on learning, not just on training.
- Recognizing an individual's skills
 - It is critical that people should be able to have their skills recognized, as part of a national qualification framework, irrespective of where the skills were obtained.
- Social dialogue on training
 - Urgent need to involve the social partners more closely in discussions on training policy and skills development, if the desired reforms and increased investment are to become a reality
 - Clear that governments can no longer be the sole voice on education and training
 - The more successful training systems are underpinned by a strong social dialogue process.

(see *Annex 7* for the full text)

3.2 Questionnaire Feedback (member country responses)

Mr. Derek Bowland (ILO/APSDEP Consultant) summarized the analysis of responses to the questionnaire on APSDEP's future directions and activities. The questionnaire was sent to 24 APSDEP participating countries (to focal points). Eighteen countries (75%) completed and returned the questionnaire; two further countries made comments. Twelve (12) countries rated APSDEP's activities 'good' (two 'excellent').

APSDEP's principal means of action were considered effective but suffered from insufficient budget and lack of follow-up. Training linked to rapid industrial change was a high priority amongst areas to be addressed, but APSDEP should also renew its focus on planning and management of skill development. There was no overall consensus on the route to performance improvement, but the responses suggested that APSDEP should revisit its intervention strategies with a view to strengthening its role as a promoter and facilitator of regional technical cooperation.

Although 14 countries were 'aware of the APSDEP website', they rarely visited it. Nevertheless most felt that it could be a powerful tool if it were improved. Information on skill development in other member countries and on meetings in the region, as well as links to other skill development websites, should be posted. Overall, the website should be "the centrepiece of a regional network of information exchange on skill development".

Seven (7) countries offered "voluntary financial support" to APSDEP in various forms, while two offered facilities and other in-kind contributions. Overall, although some of the responses were encouraging, they did not suggest that the cost of directly supporting APSDEP was about to be more evenly spread to any substantial degree. (see *Annex 8* for the full Analysis Report).

3.3 The Main Discussion: the Future of APSDEP

3.3.1 The Future Direction of APSDEP: A wide range of suggestions were received, including:

- evaluating what had proved useful in the past
- establishing a governing body for APSDEP
- need to identify new/emerging skill areas
- identifying common interests and strengthening information activities (APSDEP Website)
- more technology-specific programmes
- need for a strategic framework
- fewer national meetings balanced by more use of e-conferencing

To provide some structure to the inputs, the moderator (Mr. Trevor Riordan) then proposed a matrix which would focus on Key Issues (Themes), APSDEP means of action within each Key Issue, and who should participate in APSDEP activities. The matrix is given in full as *Table 1*. In summary, it shows that five Key Issues and five main means of action were identified.

Participation should be guided by the principle of tripartism, but specific groups could be targeted depending on the nature of the activity to be undertaken. Care should be taken to select workshop/programme participants of the right level to ensure effective country level follow-up and a multiplier effect. The matrix was subsequently expanded to include "expressions of interest" by participating countries, employers (E) and workers (W) in collaborating with APSDEP on aspects or components of Key Issues. This matrix forms *Table 2* below.

TABLE 1

Key Issues (Themes)	Means of Action	Who should participate?
1. Skill Recognition - RMCS - Comparability - Recognition of Prior Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product Development • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops 	Tripartite as the guiding principle BUT depending on the activity specific constituents may be targeted.
2. Reforms in VET - Workplace Learning & Training - Core Skills - New Skill Requirements - Productivity - Assessment & Validation (including quality) - Learning & Training Methodology (including e-learning) - Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops • Training Programmes • Advisory Services • Product Development 	
3. Financing Training (resourcing) - Roles & Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops 	
4. Lifelong Learning - Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops • Product Development 	
5. Access & Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops • Training Programmes 	

TABLE 2

Key Issues (Themes)	Means of Action	Expressions of Interest?
1. Skill Recognition - RMCS - Comparability - Recognition of Prior Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product Development • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops 	Japan*, Fiji, Australia (E/W), Pakistan (E), Malaysia, China (info sharing), Philippines, Sri Lanka (W)
2. Reforms in VET - Workplace Learning & Training - Core Skills - New Skill Requirements - Productivity - Assessment & Validation (including quality) - Learning & Training Methodology (including e-learning) - Entrepreneurship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops • Training Programmes • Advisory Services • Product Development 	Thailand, Korea, Pakistan (E), Nepal, China (new skills), India (new skills), Vietnam
3. Financing Training (resourcing) - Roles & Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops 	
4. Lifelong Learning - Responsibilities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops • Product Development 	China
5. Access & Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research & Info Sharing • Seminars / Workshops • Training Programmes 	China (disability gender), Philippines (Gender)

*Note: Japan to support info sharing.

3.3.2 Future Working Arrangements for APSDEP: This discussion, moderated by Mr. Derek Bowland, followed the 'Key Points for Discussion' included in participants' documentation kit. Topics covered were:

- (i) the APSDEP structure
 - effectiveness
 - need for strengthening and/or modification
- (ii) involving member countries
 - influencing the operation and activities of APSDEP
 - re-establishing the APSDEP Technical Committee (or similar forum)
- (iii) in fulfilling its role in providing and exchanging information and expertise, should APSDEP give priority to redesigning and expanding its website?
- (iv) financial and other forms of support
 - broadening the support base
 - membership fees or similar mechanisms
 - encouraging in-kind contributions

(see *Annex 9* for the full list of 'Key Points for Discussion')

Several participants felt that the system of lead institutions was worth revisiting, however there should be criteria for an institution to be so designated, notably access to resources to undertake a particular component of the APSDEP work programme. There should be a survey, based on established criteria, to identify candidate institutions. Others felt that "lead institutions" as such were no longer needed, given the potential for networking among several organizations. The idea of 'partner institutions' interested in working with APSDEP on particular topics, in line with their experience, was suggested and was broadened to include boards, committees and, of course, worker and employer organizations.

The role of 'focal points' was discussed (particularly as a conduit for information and ideas to and from national governments and the social partners). It was felt that the subject might need to be reviewed in order to better involve members in planning and monitoring APSDEP activities. In this connection, some participants felt that the APSDEP Technical Committee, or a similar "formal forum", should be re-established, while others were concerned that this would deflect resources from core technical activities: more joint work could perhaps be done through informal means (e.g. 'e-groups').

Japan believed there was a consensus on the need to develop the APSDEP website and announced that it was organizing a technical consultation on the APSDEP website in March 2002. Participants felt that member countries should be encouraged to post information on the website, however there was a warning on excessive reliance on the website as an information channel given that not all areas within a country had ready access to information technology.

A range of views on the resourcing of APSDEP activities was expressed. One view was that APSDEP should “move forward” to offering specialized programmes on a ‘fee for service’ basis, while other participants reminded the meeting that APSDEP should not lose sight of its social function by becoming commercially orientated. A resource mobilization strategy for APSDEP should be multi-faceted and be based on ‘having a good product’. Advice would be needed on the legal position regarding the establishment of a ‘trust fund’ to receive contributions: in this connection, the CINTERFOR model should be examined.

At this point, several participants indicated their willingness in principle to make in-kind contributions to various APSDEP activities (research projects, seminars and training courses) held in their country. These “expressions of interest” were added to the last column in *Table 2* (above).

4. CONCLUSIONS AND AGREEMENTS

The Meeting was reminded that it was important to arrive at clear agreements on the Key Issues raised during the discussions, and in particular on:

- ◆ the Future Direction of APSDEP (Discussion 1)
- ◆ Future Working Arrangements for APSDEP (Discussion 2)

The following agreements were reached:

Discussion 1: Future Direction

The meeting agreed on the five key themes for APSDEP to use as a basis for planning its medium/long term programme. These are:

- Skill recognition
- Reforms in VET
- Financing training
- Lifelong learning
- Access and equity

The meeting also agreed on the means of action that APSDEP should use in implementing activities. These include:

- Seminars/workshops
- Research
- Information sharing (networks)
- Training programmes
- Advisory services
- Facilitating technical cooperation between member states
- Product development

The meeting identified the means of action for each of the major technical themes. The meeting also agreed that the guiding principle for participation in APSDEP activities should be tripartism.

It was agreed, however, that specific activities may be targeted towards a particular constituent group.

Discussion 2: Future Working Arrangements

- It was agreed, given the diversity of the Key Issues/Themes identified by the meeting, that the mechanism of 'lead institutions' was no longer appropriate.
- A more appropriate mechanism was that of 'partner organizations' which would collaborate with APSDEP – and possibly other partners – in undertaking components of the agreed work programme.
- The meeting agreed that the role of 'focal points' should be reviewed and that communications should also be channeled to the social partners.
- The meeting agreed on the need for a mechanism to support APSDEP in planning and monitoring its activities and in determining priorities. This could include a formal forum (for example, a technical committee), informal communications (e.g. via the Internet) and 'e-groups' on certain topics.
- The meeting agreed on the need to develop and expand the APSDEP website as one of APSDEP's principal means of action and information exchange. Guidance on what needs to be done would emerge from the Technical Consultation on the APSDEP Information Network (to be held at OVTA, Chiba, Japan, in March 2002).
- The meeting agreed that APSDEP should balance the imperative to generate sufficient resources for its programme against its wider social responsibilities; for example, for promoting technical cooperation in skill development in the region.
- The meeting heard a number of offers from participating countries to host meetings and provide in-kind support.
- It also received expressions of interest from participating countries in collaborating with APSDEP in carrying out activities in particular thematic areas (as already discussed).

5. CLOSING REMARKS

In his closing remarks, Mr. Katsuya Enomoto (Director, Overseas Cooperation Division, Human Resources Development Bureau, Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, Japan) thanked the APSDEP secretariat and the various resource persons for organizing the meeting. He also thanked his fellow participants for their contribution to the discussion. He stressed the importance of APSDEP's role in promoting and facilitating technical cooperation, but underlined its current difficulties in meeting the needs of its member countries.

He concluded by expressing his belief that a "small but firm step" had been taken towards reforming APSDEP and ensuring its future. He hoped that what had been agreed would be properly followed-up.