

THE ROLE OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING IN HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT AND SOCIAL EQUITY ASSURANCE

Human resource development comprises the two most important aspects of education and training. Education consists in learning activities that help to transfer knowledge and skills from one generation to the next enabling people to take a job or to move to a more appropriate job in the future. Training consists in vocational or practical skills and knowledge relating to specific useful competencies that help to improve people's capabilities, capacity, productivity and performance. The literature as well as the reality of the development in many catching-up economies show that the key to success lies in the adequate investment in education and training designed to create a high quality human resource pool. In addition, it is also equally important to note that parallel to economic growth, countries in transition need to pay due attention to social welfare to prevent socio-economic negative outcomes in the long run. The level of education and training as well as the accessibility to education and training opportunities are among the major determinants of social equity. Accordingly, the development of comprehensive and accessible education for all people is a top priority in the current context.

I. Education and training in human resource development

I.1. Role of education in human resource development

According to the concept of the United Nations, human resource development covers education, training and the use of human potentials to promote socio-economic development and improve the quality of life. From a national perspective, HRD is the process of creating and utilizing a dynamic and skillful workforce efficiently. From a personal perspective, HRD generally consists in all learning activities that are organized in certain time periods aimed to change the career behavior of employees on the basis of their improved professional skills, thus enabling employees to make better job choices.

Accordingly, the key to improving HRD naturally lies in higher quality education and training. Theory and practice both confirm that education and training are "the core elements" and "the basis" in building higher quality human resources. In this regard, it is obvious that education, training and HRD are closely interrelated. Education and training are among the most fundamental measures to improve the quality of human resources; at the same time, human resource quality is set as a prime target in developing adequate education and training measures.

I.2. The role of education in human resource development in Vietnam

In term of quantity, Vietnam has abundant human resources with a population of 88.53 million people in 2012. Vietnam ranks 3rd in the region and 13th in the world. The number of people aged 15 and above was 76.1 million in 2012 and the number of people at working age was 51.6 million. In terms of quality, however, the human resources of Vietnam suffer from the following number of limitations and shortcomings: (i) low level of technical and professional skills of the labor force - which is considered as a 'bottleneck'; (ii) low labor productivity; (iii) unskilled labors remains overwhelmingly popular; lack of experts, senior managers and technical workers in all industries and sectors, especially in key sectors and industries; and (iv) the human resource structure is still inappropriate.

Thus, despite significant achievements with remarkable contributions to the cause of national construction in general and human resource development in particular, the quality and efficiency of the education and training sector remains lower than required to achieve the goal of developing and improving the quality of human resources, especially with regard to higher education and vocational training.

II. Education and training in social equity assurance

II.1. The role of education and training in social equity assurance

The role of education and training in social equity assurance is derived from individual benefits. When individuals invest or are invested in education and training in order to accumulate knowledge and professional skills, those factors can bring long-term benefits afterwards and these are the basic factors for sustainable development. Thus, an investment in education and training is actually an investment for each individual. In terms of its social perspective, it creates human resources with different "tiers" of quality. The result is in not only a number of national economic benefits but the investment also to social equity assurance.

One of the basic principles of social security is to perform vertical and horizontal redistribution. The principle of social security is the foundation contributing to social equity, the narrowing of the income gap and the reduction of disparities in living conditions between population groups and regions. However, for this distribution to happen, employees must earn higher incomes and the proportion of high-income earners must increase. In the context of a market economy, high income can only be sustainable when employees are equipped with suitable knowledge, professional skills and adaptive skills (soft skills). This again confirms the role of education and training in ensuring social equity and social security in Vietnam. The State, as the manager of

society, needs to make sure that many people get access to education and training services, especially rural workers and the poor laborers. The result of this improved access would be an increase in the income of these groups and thus their better participation in the distribution process. Thus, the state and the society have better conditions to extend their assistance and other forms of social protection, especially with regard to disadvantaged groups, contributing to ensure equitable social security.

II.2. The role of education and training in social equity assurance in Vietnam

Learning from the lessons of countries both regionally and globally in crafting development policies, Vietnam has recognized human development both as a goal and a driving force for social development. Generally speaking, Vietnam has attained substantial progress in human resource development towards achieving Vietnam's Millennium Development Goals in spite of the fact that the country's income is still low. However, it is noted that the social stratification in living standards is quite widespread in Vietnamese society today, which is partly caused by limited access to quality educational services to meet labor needs in vulnerable and disadvantaged areas. In that sense, it is clear that education plays an important role in fostering human resource development and ensuring social equity.

The current workforce in Vietnam is unable to meet the requirements of socio-economic development and international integration. The quality of human resources is not sufficient to make substantial contributions to improve labor productivity and competitiveness and thereby help the country to get out of the "middle income trap". Hence, the quality of human resources does not truly reflect individuals' position in the society, thus resulting in a lack of social equity assurance. Accordingly, the weakness of human resources is considered one of the "bottlenecks" for rapid and sustainable economic development and social equity assurance. Major reasons include: (i) the science and technology level is backward and outdated; (ii) the education and training system is slow to be reformed; and (iii) the quality of education and training fails to meet development needs, particularly with regard to the training of high quality human resources.

III. Status of the quality of education and training in meeting requirements of human resource development and social equity assurance

III.1. Education and training development policies for human resource development and social equity assurance

As mentioned above, human resource development in Vietnam is seen as a key factor for successful industrialization and modernization towards reaching the

objectives of a more prosperous people, a strong nation and an equitable, democratic and civilized society. In term of orientation, the importance of education and training development polices has been stipulated in the approved strategy on education development in the 2011-2020 period. The overall objective of the strategy is to fundamentally and comprehensively reform national education towards standardization, modernization, socialization, democratization and international integration. This is supposed to improve the quality of education substantially, including the education of morals, the level of life skills, creative abilities, practical abilities and foreign language and information technology proficiency. These policies are also intended to meet the demand for human resources, especially high-quality ones, for national industrialization and modernization as well as the formation of a knowledge-based economy. The achievement of the latter goal comprises the step by step formation of a learning society that assures social equity in education and lifelong learning opportunities for everyone.

In addition, the 2011-2020 socio-economic development strategy has stated that “by 2020, human development index (HDI) ranks in the high average country group in the world, ... the proportion of trained laborers reaches over 70%, the proportion of laborers with vocational training accounts for 55% of all laborers in the society; the proportion of poor households is reduced by 1.5-2% per year; social welfare and social security are ensured,, and income gaps between regions and people groups are narrowed...”

Recently, additional important policies for further education and training development include: (i) Directive No. 02/CT-TTg on the organization of the implementation of Conclusion No.51-KL/TW dated 29/10/2012 of the 6th Congress of the Party Central Committee XI on the radical and comprehensive renovation of education and training to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization in the context of the socialist-oriented market economy and extensive international integration; and (ii) Resolution No.29-NQ/TW of the 8th Congress of the Party Central Committee XI dated 04/11/2013 on the radical and comprehensive renovation of education and training to meet the requirements of industrialization and modernization in the context of the socialist-oriented market economy and extensive international integration. These are the very fundamental policy directions, forming a strong foundation for developing education and training. They contribute to improving the quality of human resources and help to fulfill the objective of ensuring equity and social welfare of the country. This in turn reflects the strong political will of the Government to revitalize the education and training system.

III. 2. Status of quality of education and training in Vietnam

• Achievements

Generally speaking, after 25 years of implementing the views on education and training, science and technology as the top national policy, Vietnam's education system has made a great number of advances: the education system has been substantially expanded in scope and scale. Now, it better meets the learning needs of the society; the quality of education at all levels and the level of training has improved; targets of anti-literacy and universal primary education have been met in all provinces and cities; universal secondary education is underway; the socialization and mobilization of resources for education have achieved initial positive results; social equity in education has improved, particularly creating more education opportunities for girls, ethnic minority children, children from poor families and children with disabilities; educational management has improved as well.

• Constraints

Despite obtaining substantial achievements, the education and training sector is still unable to act as a powerful leverage in improving the quality of human resources and ensuring social equity to effectively meet the requirements of economic development of the country. Major gaps and weaknesses in the current education and training system are reflected in the following: (i) the education index of Vietnam is still in the average group; (ii) the quality of education and training fails to meet the requirements of development, especially training of high quality human resources is limited; (iii) the transformation of the education and training system towards demand-driven training needs of the society is still low; (iv) increase in the quantity and scale of education and training fails to be accompanied by a corresponding quality enhancement; (v) programs, contents and teaching methods are outdated and slowly renovated, failing to match reality; (vi) state management of education and training is still inadequate; and (vii) overcoming of disadvantages derived from commercialization and declined morals in education remains much lower than expected and becomes an increasing pressure facing society.

IV. International experience in the development of education and training for human resource development and social equity assurance

IV.1. Experience from education development in Finland

• *Overview of human resources and social equity in Finland*

Occupying an equivalent area than Vietnam and having a population of 5.3 million people, Finland is a highly developed economy in the world following freedom

market economy with output per capita equivalent to Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Finland is the typical example in northern Europe for a competitive and successful society, providing basic social services to all citizens at reasonable prices or free of charge for all groups of people. Finland is one of the countries having the social security system with the widest coverage in the areas of education, health and welfare in the world. A central objective in the Finnish education system is to provide all citizens with equal opportunities. This is to ensure that all people have equal access to high-quality education and training.

Through implementation of reforms to promote full employment, the intention of the Finnish government is to train and to coach job seekers to adapt to new advances of science and technology so that the professional level of its employees is always updated. Education is considered to be the most useful tool to improve peoples' professional levels and living conditions.

- *Promoting the role of education reform in Finland*

Finland has spent nearly 40 years of education reform with a strong determination focusing on education and using it as a powerful tool to change the country in all aspects. Accordingly, the education system in Finland is the decisive factor in creating the intelligentsia with the mind to build education. This awareness draws on the historical knowledge about the importance of education. Finland develops the education system and society on the basis of three main pillars: skills, knowledge and creativity. Finland always strives to maintain a high-quality education and a lifelong learning society. Both are reflected in a variety of factors including equal educational opportunities for all people, a philosophy of holistic education, highly responsible and talented teachers, civilized assessment of students' learning achievements, a very high awareness in society of the importance of education and a much higher level of educational attainment of the people compared to the rest of the world. Furthermore, Finland's education system is based on decentralization, cooperation and effective coordination of all societal activities in relation to education.

IV.2. Experience from education reforms in South Korea

- *Overview*

Taken together the successful economic development and industrialization of South Korea is attributed to the country having promoted the role of education and training in human resource development and having created a flourishing education system. The role of education reforms in South Korea is to fully address the most

urgent tasks and objectives that the education system has to face at each step of the development process. The system is designed such that it helps to train human resources and contributes to raising people's awareness as well as improves their cultural and social development. Through the promotion of science and technological development, education has contributed to improving the economic and industrial structure connecting theories with practices of production and business.

- *Experience of education reforms in South Korea's industrialization period*

Education reforms in South Korea's industrialization period are characterized by three main features:

- * *Successful development of an open education system*

From very early on, South Korea has promoted education development and education reform towards open and gradual improvement for perfection. Throughout the process of education reform in the period of industrialization, the South Korean government has successfully built an "open education" system, noticeably seen in the following: (i) rapid growth in the number of learners and gradual improvement of ensuring equality in education for all groups, (ii) ensuring that all citizens have lifelong learning opportunities, (iii) the open education system is designed to enhance "self-governance"; and (iv) the open education in South Korea is also reflected in the strengthening of international cooperation in education.

- * *Education reforms with efficient linkages to human resource development strategies*

To ensure efficient linkages between education reforms and human resource development strategies, the South Korean government has focused on a number of duties such as the development and improvement of the quality of the vocational training system and the enhancement of the quality of science and technology in education. In addition, to ensure the quality of science and technology in education, the South Korean government has also promoted the establishment of scientific institutions and scientific research to support the education sector. Even during the "take-off" period, many scientific institutes were established to support reforms.

- * *Education reforms with assurance and development of ethnic traditions*

Education reforms that take into account the preservation and promoting of ethnic traditions is a unique feature in the success of education reforms in South Korea during the industrialization period. With regard to later reforms, the needs to ensure and promote traditional features of South Korean culture have continued to be addressed with a broader and more comprehensive coverage, emphasizing education

in the context of a reunified country to prepare students with knowledge and attitudes needed to live peacefully in a democratic and united country.

V. Selected recommendations for Vietnam

V.1 Challenges to education and training in the context of industrialization and modernization

Reality has confirmed that education today is not the same as it was in the previous period. In the context of increased renovation and integration, Vietnam's education and training system has to carry out a vital mission to improve peoples' intellectual level, train the manpower and foster talents, enable people to promote their talents and create a potential for successful industrialization and modernization. It is an undeniable fact that Vietnam's education system has lagged behind and is subject to the risk of further lagging far behind other countries in the region. In order to fulfill the goal of becoming a basically industrialized and modernized country, Vietnam should have a sufficiently high quality and reasonably structured human resources meeting diverse requirements for effective development of all sectors and industries. Accordingly, requirements for the education and training system with regard to the training of human resources consist in the following: (i) first, to build a healthy educational environment to be able to ensure honesty and equity and overcome disadvantages derived from commercialization of education through the current unclear socialization policies; (ii) second, to focus on improving the quality of education at all levels of education, especially at higher education and at the college level; (iii) third, to reform mechanisms of management, education and development of teachers and administrators; and (iv) fourth, to prioritize investment in the development of education and training in line with the recognition of education development as a top national priority.

V.2. Recommended actions to meet requirements of education and training

Reform and overhaul of the education system is a complex and difficult transitional process. So, first of all, it is necessary to overcome the old thinking and old ways of doing education in the subsidy period. Education should be recognized to play a critical role to the success of the renovation process. To overcome limitations and to meet the above-mentioned requirements of education and training in the context of industrialization and modernization, seven actions are recommended as follows:

First, transformation of the current 'rigid' education system to an open education system, which is flexible, where the elements of the system are inter-connected

(contents, program, method, modality, time, space, subjects of education, etc.) as well as connected to the external environment. This ensures creativity in the development and the organization of the content and the form of education. The purpose of this approach is to create equal access to education opportunities for all people, taking advantages of educational resources and ensuring effective and sustainable development of the system.

Second, accountability in the field of education and training needs to be improved, especially with regard to the higher education system. In this regard, the reality shows that the Ministry of Education and Training has limited only capacities to monitor the higher education system and thus there is limited oversight of higher education and limited capacity to enforce standards as well. For example, only half of universities and colleges complied with reporting requirements in academic years of 2008 and 2009. At the university level, a self-accreditation process has been established, while a national council on quality assurance has been established to provide an independent accreditation system. Furthermore, around 100 universities have established internal quality assurance centers, and around half have undertaken self-evaluations; however, only 20 universities have been assessed independently to date. So there is a general consensus that a strong, independent accreditation agency is required to ensure that the process is meaningful and effective.

Third, review and revision of the socialization policy as well as the improvement of the involvement and awareness of the general public in the monitoring of education and training services. This is now urgent to ensure compliance with the renewed commitment to universal provision of quality social services and social protection. Accordingly, a more enabling environment for non-state, not-for-profit service delivery needs to be addressed as a key priority; much greater engagement of citizens in planning for and monitoring of social services—rather than just paying for them—is also essential. Furthermore, other mechanisms for providing direct feedback to service management and staff are also required.

Fourth, overcoming of disadvantages of the market mechanism by enhancing professional ethics in the field of education and training. This includes clear performance management frameworks, dismissal policies for staff not adhering to performance and ethical standards, training on the expected standards and what to do when they are breached. It also requires a supportive environment within the service delivery organization, the broader community and finally individual responsibility, accountability and ethical behavior. This measure is essential given the fact that powerful market incentives significantly undermine professional behavior and affect

the staff of service delivery organizations in a way which is not in the interests of human development. There is significant pressure on staff to prioritize teaching of those who can pay, and provide a second-tier service to those who cannot, which undermines principles of non-discrimination on the basis of income and socio-economic status. In this regard, informal payments are widely accepted in education, which is a direct result of the inadequate wages available to teachers in public service delivery organizations.

Five, it is necessary to take actions to make more equitable sharing of funding burden between the state and the people and between the rich and the poor parallel to prioritized investment in social services and social security. This measure is needed due to the fact that the current funding system of education in Vietnam is heavily dependent on the contribution of households which suffer from rising prices and that the quality of education services accessible to the poor lacks due attention and adequate investment;

Six, strengthening governance and improving quality of education and training services. In light of increased decentralization of funding and management of education and training services, stronger governance is more critical, helping to improve oversight and accountability of public services, and to support strengthening of the management practices, workplace culture and professional standards of public service delivery organizations. In this regard, it is noted that financial incentives must be put in place alongside professional and normative ones so as to assist in creating adequate incentives for service providers to act in the best interests of clients. Also, complex and entrenched vested interests need to be recognized, challenged and addressed.

Seven, vocational training needs increased investment both through the state budget and the private sector to assist in creating a knowledgeable, skillful and professional workforce, which is a driving force for successful industrialization and modernization. In this aspect, it is vital that Vietnam needs more skilled workers to pursue its development goal as a globally competitive industrialized country.