



# ***Spotlight with NRI***

## **Development Issues, Policies, and Trends**

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### **VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: A CHALLENGE FOR PAPUA NEW GUINEA**

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#### **Introduction**

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is rich in natural resources with extensive reserves of natural gas and oil. Mineral deposits of gold, copper and cobalt are equally in abundance. The surrounding waters are rich in marine life and its share of resources.

Equally, forest products are major exports and vast timber resource remains to be sustainably tapped. Agricultural commodities have been the country's backbone to economic development. PNG's culture and traditions are diverse and richly colorful, contributing to its tourism potential. All these are a perfect recipe for huge and varied economic developments.

However, despite the availability of these raw materials and favourable reporting (Pacific Economic Bulletin, Vol.25 No.1, 2010) for economic development, the country is still far from rich, in technically

skilled human capital. Law and order, unemployment, urban drift, corruption, HIV/AIDS, an unskilled workforce, the economy, unequal distribution of wealth, and so on, are the overarching concerns. The Government has outlined its main policies for economic recovery and development including human resource development, and has set new targets to reach under its Vision 2050 and the National Development Strategy, 2030.

#### **Challenges for Skill Training and Development**

The need for change varies in contemporary Papua New Guinean society considering the many different cultures and traditions. However, change is not possible without a complete change of attitudes and a level of commitment from the people and the government to strive for effective and sustainable development of PNG's human resources, who will then in turn develop its natural resources.

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good governance, and more informed decision making**

Throughout the world, the output of the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector makes up the majority of the workforce for a given country. Unfortunately, in PNG this category of human capital is in critical short supply.

There is an urgent need to develop the TVET sector which will play a very central role for PNG's future economic development. The TVET Division of the Department of Education (DoE) developed a TVET Policy in 2005 to address these issues. PNG needs to develop its human resource because this resource is essential for driving forward PNG's economic development agenda.

Donors have seen that there is fundamental fragmentation in governance and coordination in the TVET system, with disparate responsibilities resting with several government bodies and agencies. These include the:

- Department of Education;
- National Training Council;
- National Apprenticeship and Trade Testing Board; and
- Office of Higher Education.

None of these bodies are responsible for overall coordination. An issues paper commissioned by AusAID noted that technical colleges and vocational training centres lack effective leadership and management skills, including:

- financial and asset management;
- maintenance scheduling and costs;
- personnel management;
- planning and business ethics; and
- leadership and relationship building skills.

Infrastructure and equipment in many of these institutions are inadequate for training to meet current industry standards. There is very little connection between the skills and

knowledge of graduates from institutions and workforce demands. The TVET system therefore needs to expand to provide more graduates with higher level skills to counter the demands in the future.

### **The Challenge of Implementing the TVET Policy**

The development of the 2005 TVET Policy is a step towards enhancing commitment to change and to providing continuous direction for growth and progress in the development of the technical and vocational education sector that is consistent with the National Education Plan for 2005 to 2014. However, the DoE through the TVET Division has not implemented the 2005 TVET Policy in any way large enough to see impacts in this sector.

The Department of National Planning and Monitoring and the Office of Higher Education have recognised this and thus have taken out full-page advertisements in one of the local newspapers seeking expressions of interest for technical skills scholarships from aspiring Papua New Guineans. This scholarship is linked to the human capital needs of Papua New Guinea's Vision 2050. The government has determined that technical and vocational training is important to attain this vision.

There needs to be a lot more coordination and collaboration between departments and agencies to implement the TVET Policy with any success.

The DoE will continue to work with the Department of Labour and Industrial Relations, specifically the National Apprenticeship and Trade Testing Board, the National Training Council and the Office of Higher Education, to develop the essential components of a functional and coordinated TVET system.

This should eventually see the coordination

of a functional TVET system that recognises the alignment of efforts towards PNG's economic directions and national training priorities.

The development and ownership of curriculum content for technical colleges and vocational centres is to be seen as a result of participation by all stakeholders. This should lead to effective directions for developing a national qualification framework, and quality regulatory systems in place for all TVET providers.

In order for TVET institutions to become more effective and efficient, large improvements need to take place. This will include among others:

- curriculum development;
- better administrative systems;
- human and physical resources; and
- infrastructure development and maintenance.

This must be done in collaboration with a change in organisational structure and culture, with particular emphasis on the development of leaders.

The TVET curriculum reform needs to be strengthened through the establishment of a greater partnership from business, industry and community and by the establishment of a coordinating body. The TVET Curriculum Branch must also now work towards the establishment and formal endorsement of a National Qualifying Framework, national standards, better processes and above all, greater involvement by, and ownership of, business, industry and community.

The DoE's TVET Division, Office of Higher Education, The National Training Council and the National Apprenticeship and Trade Testing Board must work together to ensure that quality standards and processes are in place.

## **Conclusion**

Under the Government's Medium Term Development Strategy, the Vision 2050 and the National Strategic Development Plan 2030, development of an export driven economy with greater emphasis on skills development and training can only become a reality with a strong performing training system. Also, a greater cultural change for the development of lifelong learning will focus PNG's capacity to compete regionally and globally.

The Government's Medium Term Development Strategy affords TVET its second priority; this is significant, as until now, TVET has not been given the attention needed to perform to PNG's requirements and the expectations of its stakeholders. Skills and capacity development have also now been captured in the Vision 2050 and the National Strategic Development Plan 2030.

There is a dysfunctional system of vocational education and training in PNG which has existed since independence. A national training plan, a national qualifications framework, a clear leading role for business and industry as well as quality standards in curriculum and delivery are the essential components of a functional system.

This vocational training system will depend heavily upon the establishment of a coordinating authority, which should then coordinate the production of a National Training Plan, develop and regulate curriculum, standards and quality, and ensure that provision meets national priorities.

Certainly, the Department of Education will have to work more closely with the Department of Labour and Industrial Relations, specifically the National Apprenticeship and Trade Testing Board and the National Training Council to develop the essential components of a functional and coordinated system.

A lot of work will need to be done by the Department of Education and within the TVET Division to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the public technical colleges and provincially run vocational centres..

The technical and vocational education and training institutions need to be strengthened so that they have the capacity (training and management) to respond to demands.

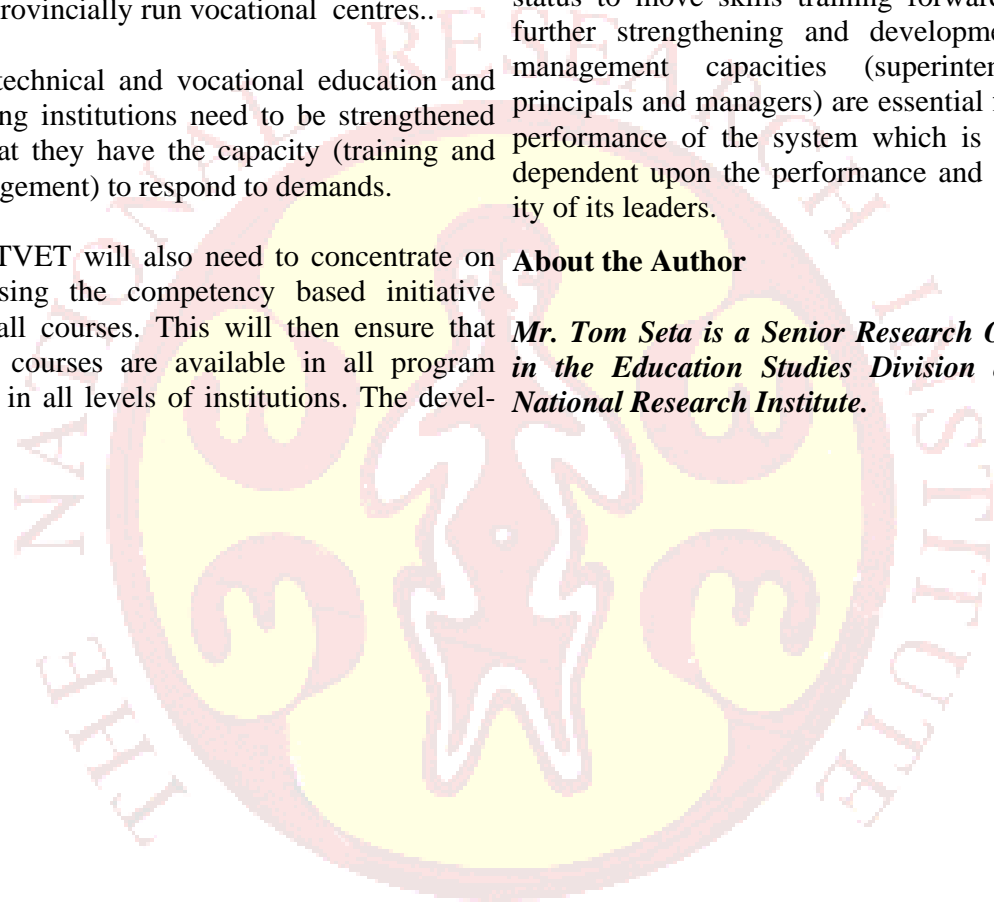
The TVET will also need to concentrate on finalising the competency based initiative into all courses. This will then ensure that short courses are available in all program areas in all levels of institutions. The devel-

opment of a reform charter for the vocational centres is an essential requirement.

This will give this sector a clear role and status to move skills training forward. The further strengthening and development of management capacities (superintendents, principals and managers) are essential for the performance of the system which is highly dependent upon the performance and capacity of its leaders.

#### **About the Author**

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