

# Developing the Vocational Training Report of Viet Nam

## Lessons learned for international TVET cooperation



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**The Vocational Training Report of Viet Nam, the first of its kind in the ASEAN region, is a milestone in building the monitoring and reporting capacities needed for reforms in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The article provides insights into how the Vietnamese National Institute for Vocational Training (NIVT) strengthened its capacities (competencies of personnel, procedures, resources) in order to develop the Vocational Training Report in the frame of a trilateral cooperation with the German Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ). It finally draws lessons learned from this process for similar undertakings in other countries.**

### The TVET reform process in Viet Nam: needs for monitoring and reporting

The Vietnamese government emphasises the role of TVET in improving the quality and competitiveness of human resources for industrialisation and modernisation. Accordingly, the Vietnamese Vocational Training Development Strategy (hereafter »TVET Strategy«), approved by the government in 2012, posits that by 2020 »vocational training will meet labour market demand in terms of quantity, quality, occupational structure and training qualifications, with the quality of training in a number of occupations reaching that of developed countries in the ASEAN region and the world«. This means, for instance, starting from a workforce in which 32 percent of workers are vocationally trained, to provide vocational training in order to increase the rate of vocationally trained workers to 55 percent by 2020, equivalent to 34.4 million people.<sup>1</sup>

Implementing the TVET Strategy – supervised by the Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MoLISA) and its General Directorate for Vocational Training (GDVT) – is an enormous task, with national but also international scope. This is especially so, given that Viet Nam finds itself in the increasingly competitive regional context of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) 2015, where free

flows of goods, services, investment, capital and labour are to be realised. This task can only be effectively managed if reliable information and data on TVET in Viet Nam are available. That is also how quality and evidence, central to political decision-making within the TVET reform process, can be firmly established. To gather meaningful data on TVET reform progress, systematic TVET monitoring and reporting capacities based on institutionalised and standardised instruments are needed. Accordingly, among other things, the TVET strategy calls for vocational training research to be stepped up in cooperation with international partners.

### Cooperation between Germany and Viet Nam

Viet Nam selected Germany as a partner in developing its Vocational Training Report for two reasons.

First, the German Vocational Education and Training Report is regarded as a promising instrument to meet the monitoring and reporting needs in the TVET sector in Viet Nam. This is because in Germany, the Report is recognised by government, social partners, the academic community and society as a reliable, accurate and up-to-date source of information. It serves as both a monitoring and a political advisory instrument for the German vocational training system.<sup>2</sup>

Second, Germany and Viet Nam have a long-standing successful cooperation in TVET. The Vietnamese-German bi-

<sup>1</sup> Vietnamese TVET Development Strategy 2011–2020, No. 630/QĐ-PTg Hanoi, May 29, 2012.

lateral development cooperation »Programme Reform of TVET in Viet Nam« (henceforth »TVET Programme«), on the German side funded by the Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), implements measures to improve the demand-orientation of TVET. Implementation by GIZ jointly with the Vietnamese partners (Technical Cooperation) takes place both on the level of political reform as well as on the level of selected pilot TVET institutes, thus contributing to TVET system development as a whole. Furthermore, BIBB has an institutional cooperation with NIVT, supporting NIVT in becoming a TVET research institute.

A formal basis for jointly working on monitoring and reporting exists since a trilateral cooperation agreement between BIBB, GIZ and NIVT was concluded in 2007. For the German side the agreement meant moving from running parallel activities in Viet Nam towards working in a more integrated and coordinated manner. Renewed approximately every two years since, the agreement defines the basic content of cooperation, activities and resources each side provides.

### Key challenges for TVET reporting

In initial joint workshops in 2010 and 2011 experience was exchanged on TVET reporting and monitoring in Germany and in Viet Nam. As a result, several challenges for TVET reporting were identified:

1. No officially recognised indicators to measure the effectiveness and efficiency of the TVET sector existed. A joint definition of TVET reporting needs by all relevant stakeholders was lacking. Accordingly, key questions on what should be measured in order to make meaningful statements on the TVET reform progress had not been developed yet.<sup>3</sup>
2. It was found that there is a lack of publicly and centrally available data on the TVET system. Apart from the lack of indicators, this is a major reason why TVET in Viet Nam is very difficult to monitor in the first place. There are many different institutions offering myriad

TVET qualifications. Furthermore, even when data is gathered, this is done by different agencies, which do not necessarily publish the data. Therefore, even with proper indicators in place, it would be difficult to accurately measure, for instance, the rate of trained workers in the overall population or to determine the number of qualified instructors nationally.

3. The TVET data which was available needed quality. The data's primary data sources are rarely accessible; data comes primarily in aggregated form. Accordingly, without the primary data sources, it is difficult to ascertain the quality of this data and even more so to extract meaningful relations between different data sets.

To sum up, tracking TVET developments in Viet Nam over time had proven to be almost impossible due to a lack of TVET indicators and sound data. These initial findings were the starting point for developing the Vocational Training Report Viet Nam.

### Developing a project proposal for the Vocational Training Report Viet Nam

Given the situation stated above, the objective of the first Vocational Training Report of Viet Nam was merely to provide an overview of the data already available and to arrange this data in a basic structure, reflecting the reporting needs of the Vietnamese government.<sup>4</sup>

With this objective in mind, the question turned to implementation. At the request of the Vietnamese government a project proposal was eventually drafted in 2011 by NIVT in collaboration with the TVET Programme. The proposal defined the objective, implementation procedure, organisational structure and necessary resources for developing the Vocational Training Report Viet Nam.<sup>5</sup> The approval of the project proposal, finally and most importantly, provided NIVT with a formal basis and the political backing for piloting the vocational training report.

### Piloting the Vocational Training Report Viet Nam

Based on the project proposal a series of technical workshops was conducted jointly by BIBB, NIVT and GIZ. Referring to the steps defined in the proposal, workshops dealt with different topics, from defining the basic structure of the report to collecting and arranging data, developing a story line and finally drafting the report. The workshops were not only designed as interactive learning experiences

<sup>2</sup> Since 2009, the Report has had two parts: the »Data Report« by BIBB featuring data on the current state of Vocational Education and Training in Germany, and on the other hand the »Political Report« by BMBF providing recommendations for Vocational Training reform based on the evidence of the Data Report. The Report is legally »enshrined« in the German Vocational Training Act. The Act assigns to the Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) the task of monitoring and reporting annually on the state of the art of Vocational Training in Germany. It defines BIBB as the responsible and competent institution in Germany for assisting BMBF in the preparation of this monitoring instrument.

<sup>3</sup> For example: what numbers of trained workers are needed in each sector in order to meet the demand of that industry, or, what are the training needs for management and teaching staff in order to meet TVET requirements in coming years?

<sup>4</sup> This was a particular challenge for the first report, as the TVET strategy had not been promulgated until May 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Project Proposal for Development of the National TVET Report, GDVT, 2011.

enhancing project management and team work capacities, they also served to mobilise expertise of different stakeholders in Viet Nam, and to provide networking opportunities, since a wider circle of Vietnamese agencies involved in data collection and publishing, such as the Ministry of Education and Training, the General Statistics Office and the Vietnamese Chamber of Commerce and Industry, took part and increasingly developed ownership, which was illustrated by high attendance and participation in the workshops.

This workshop series functioned because an underlying project structure and about ten project teams dealing with specific topics – such as labour market, vocational qualifications and vocational institution networks – had been set up as result of the advisory process. Before and after workshops, these teams also continuously worked on the report, together with the TVET Programme in Hanoi and with BIBB in Bonn, receiving support and expertise from the German partners BIBB and GIZ and from NIVT staff specifically trained in the frame of guest researcher and study visits to BIBB. Work on the report was, furthermore, combined wherever possible with ongoing capacity development activities of the TVET Programme, notably the piloting of tracer studies and enterprise surveys. As a result of the work, the first Vocational Training Report Viet Nam was published in October 2012 at the Regional TVET Conference in Ha Noi, hosted by MoLISA and the BMZ.

Based on this first report, work on the second report commenced. This time the partners focused on relating the available data to the objectives defined in the TVET Strategy and on developing and measuring indicators. Knowledge transfer was organised by means of thematic working groups working on core statements, validity, significance, reference variables and calculation formula of different indicators. The partners also transferred knowledge concerning quality standards, training regulations and cost-benefit analysis.<sup>6</sup> Additional measures included Skype and video conferences, guest researcher and study visits to BIBB, and continuous exchange with the integrated expert of the TVET Programme working at NIVT. The second report was published in Vietnamese in March 2014, in English in July 2014.

As a result of the piloting process, two reports have so far been developed. They are largely data collections, reporting on information extracted from secondary data sources. The structure of the reports attempts to match issues raised in the TVET Strategy, such as TVET policies, TVET Teachers, cooperation with enterprises and accreditation. Furthermore, the reports also combine labour market and population data with data on vocational training, which is

a novelty in Viet Nam. Finally, the reports come up with key findings based on the published data.

In reference to the original situation, some first steps have been taken. However, much more has to be done. The report does not yet provide a sufficient data basis for tracking TVET reform progress. A storyline, deriving from reliable data, facts and figures and meaningful statements on the progress of TVET reform is needed. As a result, policy recommendations on how to work towards and eventually meet the objectives set in the TVET Strategy could not be developed. One of the next challenges, then, consists in developing the data basis further, starting with further developing key indicators for the next report.

### Lessons learned

A national TVET report constitutes an effective instrument for TVET system monitoring. But what can be done to develop such a quality feature in other countries? The case of Viet Nam offers valuable insights not only for further developing monitoring and reporting capacities in Viet Nam, but also elsewhere.

First of all, an institutionalised mandate is crucial. TVET monitoring and reporting must be set as a political priority, the task should be assigned to a responsible institution and resources should be provided in order to build the capacities needed for piloting and implementing a TVET monitoring and reporting instrument such as a national vocational training report. Monitoring structures set up during the process of piloting a VET report have to be maintained after being established. In the case of Viet Nam, a permanent mandate for NIVT to publish the report as well as adequate human and financial resources are still needed. Such a mandate is crucial to raise ownership and improve access to external stakeholders' data.

Second, the German Vocational Education and Training report and its production process are no blueprint for TVET reporting in general. Simply »telling« partners how the German Vocational Education Report works, expecting them to copy the experience on their own is futile. As the case of Viet Nam shows, both structural conditions as well as capacities are too different from the German situation. For example, one main indicator of the German report measures the number of in-company training places offered and training contracts between enterprises and trainees concluded. In Viet Nam, however, this indicator has little relevance as the TVET system is school-based offering little formalised in-company training opportunities. This became also evident when questionnaires from a German cost-benefit analysis serving to find out the number of apprentices trained failed at Vietnamese enterprises, because the questions did not apply to Vietnamese circumstances. Vietnamese companies are not familiar with »apprentic-

<sup>6</sup> A cost-benefit analysis will be published in the Vocational Training Report of Viet Nam 2014.

es« but rather »vocational students doing internships«. To sum up, the German experience cannot be copied, but may rather serve as a reference point, against which the country's own system is reflected and its own questions and indicators for TVET reporting are formulated. Accordingly, for Viet Nam, and indeed for every country seeking to develop TVET monitoring and reporting, the challenge is to develop a monitoring system, capacities and indicators on its own terms.

Third, what then can German international cooperation contribute? As the example shows, the answer is capacity development by means of (change) process moderation and management as well as expertise on specific topics. The cornerstone of such capacity development is working jointly with the partners on a concrete product, such as the Vocational Training Report, and learning within the process. In such a process, the role of the German partners is not that of external advisors, but moderators or facilitators, who jointly with the partners implement study tours, workshops, and continuous training activities. A learning environment is thereby forged in which competencies in research methods and project management, processes and networks of information exchange, and knowledge about TVET systems are developed on all sides of the partnership. Finally, for such a process, time, effort and trust are needed. And for this, partnership is the key, with partners' strengths and needs complementing each other. In the discussed case, NIVT is tasked to conduct TVET monitoring

and reporting and possesses the expert knowledge of the Vietnamese TVET system while lacking the means and the competencies to develop a national vocational training report by itself. BIBB, on the other hand, based on German experience, contributes technical expertise in how to conduct national TVET monitoring and reporting. However, BIBB's means to conduct the required intensive long-term capacity building process in Viet Nam in the context of a bilateral institutional cooperation framework are limited. The TVET Programme provides the bilateral political framework, the technical expertise and the organisational resources for extensive and continuous »on the ground« capacity development in TVET in Viet Nam.

To sum up, the present case provides a good example for integrated and fruitful action of the German BMZ and Ministry of Education and Research (BMBWF) together with the Vietnamese partner ministry MOLISA, bringing the different complementary competencies into play in a TVET system development context. It is also a good example for realising the institutional cooperation agreement between GIZ and BIBB showcasing the complementary implementation strengths of both organisations. Capacity development for TVET monitoring and reporting in the frame of a trilateral cooperation as presented here provides useful insights for developing TVET reporting in other countries. ◀

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