

KINGDOM OF CAMBODIA  
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Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training

H.E Pich SOPHOAN's Speech in Open Ceremony of International Workshop on  
"the development of cooperation and future planning of TVET in Cambodia "  
26-27 March 2008, Sun Way Hotel, Phnom Penh

Excellencies, Honoured Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour to be here to day as this workshop addresses some of the most pressing issues faced by Cambodia. As Lee Kuan Yew has said repeatedly, "a Nations future is built on the skills of its workforce". Countries' can buys every other key input to economic development...energy, technology, raw materials, transport and even markets. But no country can buy a skilled workforce. Even oil rich countries who for many years have depended on foreign workers are now working hard to develop the skills of their own people by building technical colleges and pushing enterprise to do more training through a levy grant system or training incentives or legal requirements. To be part of the world economy, a country must have a workforce that is flexible, motivated, highly productive, well educated, mobile and committed to life long learning. That is the challenge for Cambodia.

A study of student hopes and employer expectations was completed in early March of this year and the data is disturbing. Only 17% of the students surveyed expressed an interest in skills training as opposed to 51% who expressed an interest in University. And this despite the fact that graduates unemployment from academic universities is growing. We recognize that the social value of a Degree is very high, so we must expand our programs at the Degree level in TVET and attract more secondary school graduates to 'Applied Degree" programs that lead to employment. .

For their part, employers indicated that there is a significant gap between graduate skills and their needs and they are having real difficulties recruiting young people with skills. Employers stated that they wanted changes in the Education system and suggested that there be better links with vocational training.

Employers also said that they believed that of the graduates they are hiring with education beyond secondary school, only 13% have most of the right skills required for the labour market.

Of the employers surveyed, 44% told the education and training sector that we must teach more practical workplace skills and less theory and 37% said we needed to build better links with employers. Over 30% indicated that in all three categories, unskilled, specialized and professional, technical skills were a major employment issue.

The study has a great deal of information that will keep Government and private sector planners busy for months as we try to use this and other input to meet the challenge of developing a skilled and flexible workforce. We clearly have a problem with attracting young people to skills training and we must attract some of our best and brightest, not only school leavers who have no other learning options.

We know that employers do not see our system as being adequately demand driven and aimed at employment and that we have a real distance to go in meeting their demands for both quantity and quality.

Over the past five years, the Government has increased its focus on the issue of TVET. Investment has been made in equipment, facilities and in staff development. The international community has come with advice and policy alternatives to strengthen the system. While planning the long term

system, the main challenge has been to respond to the needs of our rural communities for poverty alleviation. Real strides have been made in achieving poverty reduction goals although much remains to be done. The expansion of our very successful Voucher Skills training Program to all Provinces will be an important next step and we hope that ADB will support this.

But now, while maintaining the continuing investment in improving rural family incomes, it is time for TVET to shift more of its development energy and resources back to the needs of the formal, wage based economy.

Our challenge is clear in this area. We must build partnerships with employers that ensure that TVET leads to employment. Our job in TVET is not completed until our graduates find employment. Sometimes I envy our academic colleagues who can be satisfied when students simply complete their studies. Our job is much more challenging.

The skills of our graduates can be measured. We either meet employers' skills and knowledge standards or graduates will be unemployed. We must continue to reform our system to meet this demand.

TVET is now a part of a larger Ministry with a clear interest in the fair and equitable treatment of our workforce as well. As ILO says, work must be based on **decent** jobs, not low wages. We know that to attract young people to TVET we must be able to show them that decent jobs in healthy worksites await them and we will work with our employers to achieve this.

We have a major challenge in linking the country's employment market into one system in which job seekers can meet, on-line, with employers seeking skilled workers. The absence of such a system has led to unemployment in some regions and a demand for workers in others with no central market place. Any skills gaps will be revealed in this process and we can link training to real jobs. This Government intends to deal with this issue as quickly as possible.

Korea has given us lessons to be learned in addressing its workforce needs. Starting with a destroyed economy in 1953 and with poverty challenges of a similar magnitude to post 1979 Cambodia, Korea has built an economy that is one of the most aggressive in the world. Even a brief visit to that country reveals the energy and dynamism of its economy and social fabric. They have much to share with developing countries, even ones like ours that will not concentrate on heavy industry.

Our model will be somewhat different as it will be based on tourism, agriculture, light manufacturing and natural resources. We need to make certain that the models developed for highly industrialized economies make sense for a service and resources based economy like ours. Korea has designed a system that meets the needs of that very powerful economy. What really interests us is the process used to develop this model and how partnerships were built in TVET that have worked so well.

Our colleagues at ADB, the World Bank, ILO and UNESCO also bring ideas and the experience of others to the table to support this process of developing the Cambodian TVET model and we acknowledge and appreciate their continued commitment to supporting this process. Over the next two days we will have a chance to listen, to measure what we hear against what is possible in our environment, and to speed up the decision making process for strengthening our skills development system.

Welcome to Team TVET...or as we say in Khmer....Svakum Krom TVET.

Thank you and my best wishes for the success of this workshop.