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Welcoming Address

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Development and Cooperation (SDC)**

On the occasion of the SDC-day on Vocational Skills
Development, preceding the 2nd International Congress on
Vocational Education and Training

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Excellencies,
dear partners,
ladies and gentlemen

On behalf of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, SDC, it is a pleasure for me to welcome you today in Winterthur.

I am glad to see that so many VET-specialists, high ranking officials and partners from more **than twenty countries**¹ from all over the world have followed our invitation. In the coming days, you will have the opportunity to **immerse yourself in the world of Vocational training** and bring in your own experiences from your country.

Today, we are trying to reach the following four objectives:

- 1) Through inputs, field visits and discussions you will **get acquainted with the particularities of the Swiss dual system of Vocational Education and Training.**
- 2) You will get familiarized with **the role and services of the Donor Committee for dual VET** and see how dual elements can be transferred and adapted to partner countries contexts
- 3) You will get an **insight into SDCs approach and activities** in the domain of vocational skills development world-wide
- 4) And last but not least – you will get the **opportunity to exchange with SDC guests from over 20 countries** on shared challenges and successful solutions in improving vocational education and training programs and systems.

¹ Bangladesh, Nepal, Laos, Myanmar, Benin, Burkina Faso, Tchad, Mosambique, Tanzania, Rwanda, Bolivia, Haiti, Kuba, Honduras, Kosovo, Serbia, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Bularia, Colombia, Switzerland, Germany.

(Switzerland and VET)

But let me now share with you some thoughts on our view on VET. At SDC we strongly believe that **vocational training, together with basic education, is one of the main preconditions for economic and social development.**

Vocational education and training has a **long tradition** in Switzerland. Our dual system has developed over centuries and is **deeply rooted** in the Swiss society. Regardless of whom you ask in Switzerland – politicians, employers, trade unionists, researchers, or just someone you cross on the street – most would agree that the Swiss VET system is one of the reasons for both, the **success and competitiveness** of the Swiss economy, and the very **low levels of unemployment** in general, and youth unemployment in particular. In fact, about **one third** of Swiss youngsters choose a VET-education in the first place. This is just one sign of its high **attractiveness** and a proof that VET is **not a second choice** option in my country.

But I don't want to anticipate too much. You will hear more about the Swiss VET system from our next speaker, Prof. Oertle. In addition to this, in the afternoon you will have the opportunity to talk to practitioners and students and to observe the dual training at work at the shop-floor level.

Therefore, I will now draw your attention on VET in the international agenda and to the place VET takes within SDC.

(SDC's VET tradition and context)

Seen the significance of VET in Switzerland, it appears only logical that VET has **played a major role** in Swiss development cooperation from the **very beginning**. It all started with a project in Nepal some 60 years ago. Ever since, SDC has been engaged in VET and has adapted its interventions and approaches to new challenges and demands from partner countries. Today SDC has **about 30 VSD projects in 23 countries** all over the world, and a **significant part of SDC's budget** is earmarked for VET interventions and activities in the field of basic education.

Furthermore, there are **other** state agencies, like the State secretariat for economy or education, many Swiss NGOs and also a few Swiss companies that are engaged in VET projects, research and partnerships abroad.

Around the turn of the century **VET had lost importance** in the international development world. The Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) focused rather on primary education at the expense of VET. But in the last fifteen (15) years the percentage of young people, who successfully complete primary education, has significantly increased in many developing countries. This is a great success story, but it also confronts many of our partner countries with a **new challenge**: a dramatically increasing number of young people undergoing primary or secondary education and expecting further career pathways after graduation. It goes without saying that not all of these young people can enter University although most of them would like to. Worldwide, approximately **200 million people are out of work** and the number continues to rise. At the same time, there are complaints about **skills**

mismatches: open positions can't be filled as job seekers don't dispose of the matching skills – they are poorly or wrongly qualified.

In this context, VET is ranking high again on the political agendas of donors and partner countries. It appears to be the only meaningful alternative that can be offered to those young people who leave secondary education and cannot enter – or not afford – University. It is also an option to **enhance the competitiveness of economies** and to **provide perspectives** to youngsters and adults for individual, social, economic development and inclusion.

This new trend for improved vocational skills development is clearly reflected in the **sustainable development goals (SDG's)** – the new international agenda for 2030 - where vocational education and training as well as lifelong learning are prominently placed.

(Dispatch 2017-2020 and learning from the Swiss VET-System)

At SDC, we are also noticing the **increased significance and a growing demand** for VET. Governments from partner countries request our support for the reform and/or expansion of their VET programs and systems. This goes hand in hand with a growing **recognition of the dual vocational training** as an instrument for providing people with the right skills-mix for the labor market.

Our new **dispatch** on Switzerland's international cooperation for 2017 – 2020, i.e. the legal document that sets the framework for SDC's operations, takes this development into account by **making basic education and VET a priority**. In the coming years, SDC will significantly increase its budget earmarked for basic education and VET. The envisaged 50% increase in funding underpins the high importance

our Parliament and government give to this sector.

Very often the partner countries that approach us are attracted by our successful VET system in Switzerland.

However, there is one lesson that we have learned already many years ago: Education systems are rooted in traditions and the **adaptation of reforms to the context** is of outmost importance for success. **The Swiss so-called dual training system cannot be exported as such:** it has been evolving over centuries and is – in its current form- too complex to serve as a blueprint. But we are convinced that partners can learn from this system and that some elements and principles, for example the strong involvement of the private sector in the management, implementation and financing of the system, can be used as inspiration for our partners when reforming their systems.

(Donor Committee on dual VET)

That is why SDC has taken the initiative and has invited its neighboring countries Austria, Germany and Liechtenstein, who have similar approaches to dual VET, to join forces and to jointly support the **transfer of knowledge and experience gained with dual vocational training** to partner countries. Earlier this year, these four countries have officially launched the Donor Committee on dual Vocational Education and Training (DC dVET). You will learn more about this initiative later today. We at SDC are sure that this collaboration amongst the four countries - where apprenticeship training is the mainstream approach in VET, - is helpful for our partners and will facilitate the access to the expertise available in Switzerland and its neighboring countries.

(SDC's approach to VET)

So, what is SDC's approach to VET?

You may have noticed that at SDC we use the **term Vocational Skills Development** –or VSD- instead of VET. The broad concept of VSD encompasses all organized learning processes for the development of technical, social and personal competencies and qualifications that contribute to the sustainable long-term integration of trained people into the formal or informal economy, either on an employed or self-employed basis.

Our **VSD interventions shall lead to individual, but also social and economic development**. With our actions, we try to serve a double purpose:

- On the one hand our interventions are designed to be **conducive for economic development** in order to facilitate competitiveness, growth and employment generation
- On the other hand, and equally important, our interventions are **designed to be inclusive for marginalized groups**, i.e. to facilitate the access of the poor and disadvantaged to quality training and to contribute to their labour market and social inclusion.

Basic education lays the ground for further learning and individual development. Therefore SDC pays special attention to the **interplays of basic education and VET** and adheres to the concept of lifelong learning in a rapidly changing world.

We are **inspired by our Swiss dual system** in many ways. Beneath our

efforts to increase the relevance of training and assure access for our target groups, we put emphasis on practical learning, labour market orientation and cooperation with the private sector.

And last but not least, imposing model solutions does not comply with **SDC's philosophy of partnership and cooperation** and has too often proved to be unsuccessful with regard to sustainability. We work with local actors and design programmes together with our partners in order to assure that the interventions respond to the needs and to the reality in our partner countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

With this in mind, I hope today's meeting, the International Congress on VET and the exchanges with other experts and partners will allow you to share your best practice and get inspired on how to improve VET in your own country, given its specific realities and challenges to be addressed.

I wish you an interesting and enriching meeting and an enjoyable stay in Switzerland.

Thank you for your attention.