

**Synthesis of the online discussion on
“Labour Market Orientation in Skills Development / TVET projects with a
special focus on Occupational Standards, Assessment and Certification
(OSAC)”
13th February to 2nd March 2012**

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1. Background

Following the [first round](#) of online discussion on labour market orientation in SDC’s Skills Development Projects conducted in September 2011, the second round put the focus on a **systems approach**, i.e. on a demand-driven VET system based on occupational standards, assessment and certification (OSAC). Starting point for this online discussion was an [input paper](#) based on the results of an SDC exchange project implemented between 2009 and 2011 in four Latin American countries: Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Peru.

The online discussion was open to the 112 e+i VSD network members from SDC, SDC’s strategic and operational partners, subject matter experts from other donor agencies and consulting companies. 18 contributions have been posted representing experiences from the following countries: Albania, Bolivia, Burkina Faso, Ecuador, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Romania, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Thailand, Uzbekistan, and Vietnam.

The discussion focused on three topics (cf. central questions in the boxes). This document is a **synthesis** of the participants’ contributions and experiences and draws conclusions and lessons learnt from the major points of discussion.

2. Tools and Approaches to define Occupational Standards as the basis for a demand-driven VET system

There was consensus among the contributors of this online discussion that the **basis for any training programme should be an occupational standard** defined in close consultation with the prevailing industry.

An **occupational profile** is a detailed description of an occupation with its duties and related tasks.

Attaching performance criteria to the different tasks converts the profile into an **occupational standard**.

Occupational profiles and occupational standards are considered key

elements of labour market orientation and projects are open and keen to experiment with various tools and approaches to identify the most appropriate one for their project context. If one looks back about one decade, the situation was very much different:

The concept of occupational standards was very new and a lot of pioneering work was necessary to establish a basic conceptual understanding of this term and to train project staff

Central Question: *What are your experiences with **tools and approaches** to develop the three main components of a demand-driven VET system, i.e. occupational standards, curriculum development & training delivery, and assessment & certification?*

in its underlying methods. The most common used approaches for the establishment of occupational standards have been and still are the **DACUM** and **Functional Analysis** approaches. Today they are less considered as competing or even excluding concepts but rather as complementing methods providing added value at different levels of action. Whereas Functional Analysis allows determining the broader scope of an occupational area (e.g. textiles) and defines the corresponding training pathways, the DACUM approach results in a very clear and standardized occupational profile for one specific occupation serving as the basis for curriculum development, assessment and certification in this occupation. In addition to these two major approaches of occupational analysis a number of other methods, most of them variations of the DACUM approach, have been tested in various project contexts. One is the **Análisis Ocupacional Participativo (AOP)**, an adapted version of the DACUM approach widely disseminated in SDC's Skills Development Projects in Latin America. It is an integrative process of occupational analysis and curriculum development to update existing training offers according to labour market needs. Another method is the German Approach of **Work Process Orientation** defining an occupation along the five stages of a work process with the goal to shift the curricula focus from subject orientation to work process orientation. The third alternative model presented was the **Regional Model Competency Standard (RMCS)** – an ILO approach for occupational analysis, which has been disseminated mostly in Southeast Asia (for instance in Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines).

The variety of approaches and the success-stories behind reveal the fact that *there is not the one size fits all approach* suitable for each project situation. It is far more important to consider the prerequisites in our partner countries and to familiarize with their VET tradition and the approaches they are used to work with. A lot of efforts have been made to adapt existing methods to the local conditions. Although these “adaptation processes” are considered in general as a positive and useful endeavor they bear the risk of spoiling the original concept when neglecting essential quality standards. It is therefore important to train local experts in the “basic concepts” of occupational analysis (DACUM or Functional Analysis) and emphasizing on their quality standards, before developing local adaptations.

3. The linkage of Training Programmes with Occupational Standards

There was an intensive debate about how to adapt training programmes to the occupational requirements defined in the occupational standards. Once an occupational profile has been developed it does not automatically turn into a training programme. Here again, it is not only the question of an **appropriate tool or mechanism** to transform occupational profiles into curriculum and assessment instruments but rather the **acceptance and identification of the major stakeholders** with the set standard, which turns it into a very sensitive issue. Most of the VET projects operate at the interface of different, sometimes even rivaling institutions: The labour market actors (mostly represented by the Ministry of Labour, Ministry of Economics, Chambers or Business Associations) and the Educationalists (represented by the Ministry of Education and the Training Centres).

Central Question: How do you link all three components?

By following a demand-driven approach **all three components - occupational standard, curriculum development and assessment & certification - have to be strongly linked**

with each other. Several steps can be discerned in the process of the adaptation of the training offer to the occupational standard.

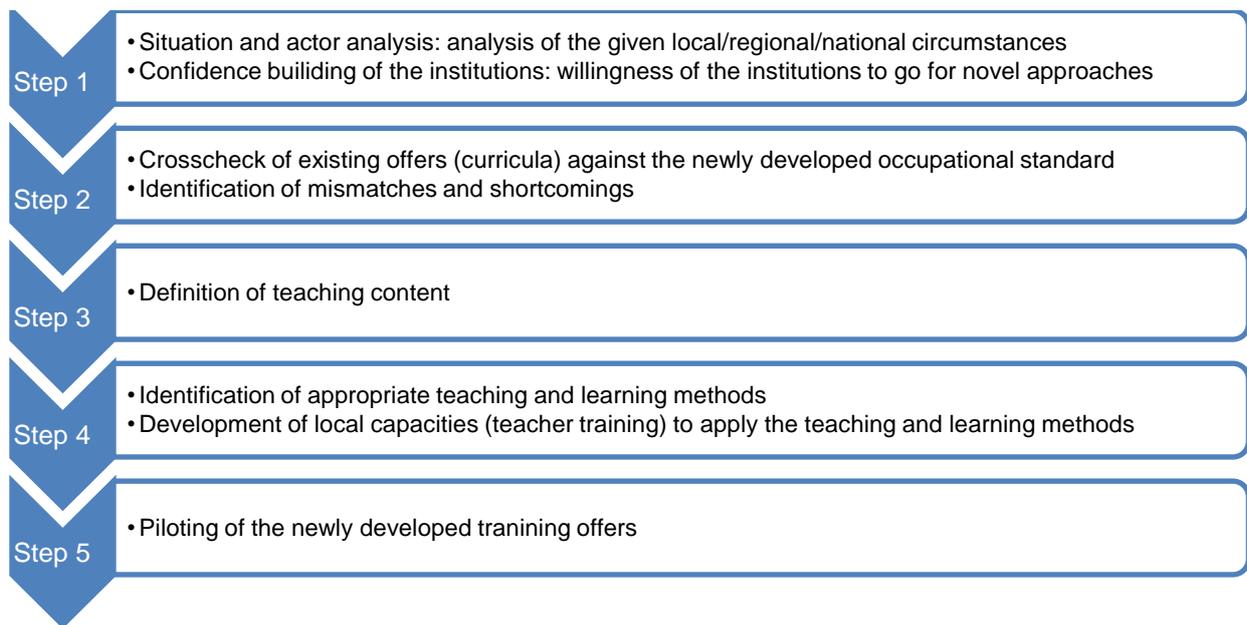


Figure 1: Steps identified in order to link training programmes with occupational standards

One approach which encourages the exchange between the three components is the **Problem Based Learning (PBL) approach** where the curriculum is designed along “problem cases” from real work situations.

Several factors are key for success: Didactical materials for teachers and students have to be handy and appropriate for the respective context. The intensive involvement of **local experts** in the training design and elaboration of teaching and learning materials has been identified as a key for **developing ownership of local VET authorities**. **Approval and endorsement** of occupational standards and related training programmes by the responsible entities (e.g. Ministries, Chambers, Sector Associations) is a key for success. A strong relations and coordination mechanism, transparency of project activities and the integration of project structures into the existing VET structures of the respective country are proven elements to secure a continues and fruitful stakeholder involvement.

4. “Public Credibility” of Assessment & Certification Systems

Occupational standards are not only a key input for the design and reform of training offers but also lay the foundation for a transparent assessment and certification system since they contain clear defined **performance criteria**. Assessment and certification in a demand-driven VET system is an **output control system** evaluating the competences of individuals regardless of where and how they have been trained (formally in a VET training programme or informally on the job). The decision for what type of assessment system one decides - the Anglo-Saxon “assessor system” or the Central European “test-based system” seems to be of secondary importance since the most

Central Question: “Public Credibility”: How do you ensure that your assessment & certification system is recognized by both: employers and public institutions?

crucial success factor is “**public credibility**” – no matter what system is behind. Public credibility can be defined as the **value of a certificate** for both – the certificate holder whom it will help to find adequate employment and for the employer whom it will help to identify competent workforce.

In order to develop a publicly recognized and valued assessment and certification system the private sector as the main purchaser of certified competences has to be on board right from the beginning. One key word here is **inclusiveness** meaning to involve all stakeholders in each cycle of the project in a participatory way in order to build up strong local ownership. The list of examples provided to enhance stakeholder participation is quite comprehensive starting with occupational analysis workshops with private sector representatives, over a cooperative style of project plan implementation interlinking all three elements (“vertical scaling up”), to thematic workshops bringing together VET school staff and company managers, and a participatory curriculum development with stakeholders from the Government, VET schools and the private sector.

5. Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

Following the world-wide trend towards the establishment of demand-oriented VET training systems the **concept of occupational standards as the basis for curriculum development, assessment and certification** has been determined as the key factor for success. The cooperation with the private sector is essential. International well-known methods for occupational analysis such as **DACUM and Functional Analysis** have further strengthened their position because they are quick, cost-effective and reliable. They are less seen as competing concepts excluding each other but rather as complementing methods having their own comparative advantages. Whatever method is being used, it is of greatest importance that the result is being recognized by the central actors. Any occupational profile has to be clear, understandable, serve the needs of the labour market and provide guidance for the training programmes in terms of requirements and competences to be addressed. Yet, the difficulty and biggest challenge is not the occupational profile itself but the following steps – to transform these labor market information into training programmes, assessment and certification instruments and to have them officially accredited. This is still a pioneering area with ample room for innovative concepts and will be one of the biggest challenges for VET projects in the coming years.

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