DEVPOLICYBLOG

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By Robert Cannon and Colum Graham
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Strengthening technical and vocation education and training

The challenges in creating more and better jobs are acute in developing countries. Many workers lack the basic skills to succeed in the labour market and training programs do not provide the skills in demand. Two new books and a website address these issues.

First, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) has released a new book, *Skills development for inclusive and sustainable growth in developing Asia*. This book looks at what's required for developing skills, sustaining growth, and improving competitiveness in the region. It explores a range of issues including lifelong learning and how secondary and tertiary education systems are incorporating vocational education and training into the curriculum.

The second book, from the World Bank, is *The right skills for the job? Rethinking training policies for workers*. This book discusses why training policies and programs in developing countries need to change to improve education levels and skills development. It uses the evidence from evaluations to review technical and vocational education and training policies, incentives for on-the-job-training, and training-related active labour market programs. In contrast to the ADB book, this one is heavy on labour market economics and policy and light on training and educational principles and ideas. Despite their different approaches, both books share a lack of well-developed and accessible sets of recommendations.

Finally, the NORRAG NEWSBite website has listed a new item that reviews various reports on technical and vocational education and training.

Meanwhile, AusAID has announced that it will spend $85m from 2012 to 2016 on strengthening technical, vocational and higher education across the Pacific. It will be interesting to see how, or even if, the Australia Pacific Technical Colleges set up in 2006 are involved in this funding.

Contrasts in major Pacific universities: The UPNG and USP

The University of Papua New Guinea (UPNG) has [appointed](#) a new Vice Chancellor, Professor Albert Mellam, previously Dean of the UPNG School of Business Administration. According to this Devpolicy [blog](#) post, UPNG is in a 'near terminal' condition, and rebuilding the university will be a 'monumental task'. That the University's website has not been updated since 2007 (and obviously has no information about the new appointment of Vice Chancellor) is only one indicator of the challenges Mellam will face.

On a more positive note, and by way of contrast, the [website](#) of the University of the South Pacific (USP) contains a wealth of relevant information and a recent message from their Vice Chancellor on their new Strategic Plan, released in January. The Plan can be downloaded [here](#). It identifies seven Priority Areas and related objectives of which the first three areas are learning and teaching, student support, and research and internationalisation.

PNG Government to review – not ditch – curriculum

The Papua New Guinea Government is [reported](#) to have delayed its [earlier undertaking](#) to ditch the country's national outcomes-based school curriculum until 2014 when an independent task force will have reviewed the issue.

Introduced through a $43 million AusAID-financed consultancy from 2000 to 2006, the current curriculum is controversial and widely perceived to have led to a decline in education standards. The PNG National Research Institute conducted an [evaluation](#) of the curriculum in 2010 and found that it was ineffective due to a lack of resources.

The independent task force will be chaired by the Divine Word University President, Father Jan Czuba, and will include NRI Director, Dr Thomas Webster.

Save the Children launches post-2015 vision

In a new [report](#), Save the Children (UK) has made its contribution to the debate about what follows the Millennium Development Goals post-2015. The Report asserts that "For the first time, it is feasible to imagine that in the next couple of decades no child will die from preventable causes, every child will go to school, every child will have protection from violence and we will eradicate absolute poverty."

The positive tone of the Report is reflected in its six 'foundation goals' for human development, one of which is to ensure children everywhere receive quality education and have good learning outcomes by 2030, and four 'support' goals, for example, to establish effective global partnerships for development.

To their credit, Save the Children make constructive contributions to the vexed question of the assessment of the learning outcomes goal. Commitments to learning outcomes are commendable. But assessing these is [not straightforward](#) and, as the report notes, assessing learning outcomes in ways that allows for valid global comparisons 'are complicated and part of a work in progress' (p.18). The need to focus on more than literacy and numeracy is asserted. For debate, the report proposes an assessment framework with some core global learning measures supplemented by ambitious national targets that many countries will need. This is a debate worth joining.

Education networks and newsletters

Eldis Communities has a networking [website](#) designed specifically with international development professionals in mind. The site provides support services to members who administer groups to help their members develop. An example of a [recent blog](#) is one titled, 'Supporting Young Learners' Information Literacy through applications of Information and Communication Technologies during the preschool period'.

The World Bank publishes a blog titled [Education for Global Development](#). Recent blogs address a range of topics including teacher effectiveness and the education of girls.

[*Childinfo*](#) is the name of a UNICEF maintained website that provides access to UNICEF's education statistics, and broader data sets used in UNICEF's major publications, [*The State of the World's Children*](#) and [*Progress for Children*](#).

Upcoming conferences, 2013

ANU conference: 'Reframing the youth bulge: From problem to solution'

The youth bulge is one of the biggest issues facing international development today. There are 1.2 billion people aged 15 to 24 year in the world, and one billion live in developing countries. This one-day conference examines the potential the youth bulge presents to further development goals and to increase innovation. The Children's Policy Centre at the Crawford School of Public Policy, ANU, presents this one-day conference on 14 February 2013 in partnership with the Australian Council for International Development's multi-agency Child Rights Working Group. Further information is available [here](#).

Indonesian Conference: 'Child Poverty and Social Protection'

Children living in poverty experience deprivation, exclusion and vulnerability at school and in their communities. They face circumstance that creates various life-long difficulties related to their educational development. The Indonesian National Development Planning Board (BAPPENAS), UNICEF Indonesia, and the SMERU Research Institute are calling for

the submission of proposals for a conference to be held in Jakarta on 10 and 11 September 2013. Background information and Terms of Reference are available [here](#).

In brief

'Self-directed learning oriented assessments in the Asia-Pacific', is the [latest edition](#) of *Education in the Asia-Pacific region: issues, concerns and prospects* series. This volume has numerous articles that delve into the ways that assessment methods are being reformulated in the region.

Education and inequality in India: a classroom view, by Manabi Majumdar and Jos Mooij, and published by Routledge, London is a new book on Indian primary school education. The book, which is reviewed [here](#), will be of interest to those engaged in policy work to implement the Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education.

USAID has [launched](#) the *Higher Education Partnerships to Support the US – Burma Commitment to Democracy, Peace and Prosperity*. USAID is seeking concept papers from US higher education organisations. The partnerships are intended to build on existing engagement with universities and the private sector.

China's state-run education system is reported in [The New York Times](#) as being riddled with corruption, bribery and cronyism. Such corruption has broadened the gulf between rich and poor Chinese families. It begins as early as "securing" admission of children to the "right" kindergarten and continues through to higher education.

UNESCO and Samsung are [launching](#) a US$1 million two year project to develop, pilot and distribute multimedia teacher-training materials on education for sustainable development in Vietnam.

The review of New Zealand's aid program for 2012 ([here](#)) reveals that, after economic development, education is the second largest sector for NZ aid. New Zealand allocates almost 25% of its aid budget to education.

Australia will contribute $34 million over four years to a World Bank project to improve education in Sri Lanka. Rather grandly, the [announcement](#) indicates that this support will help 250,000 teachers and 3,500 education administrators to deliver better education to more than four million students: very large target numbers indeed! More prosaically, the project will provide school equipment, improve facilities, strengthen the national curriculum, provide professional development for teachers and improve the management of education in Sri Lanka.

The PNG Promoting Effective Public Expenditure project (being undertaken by Devpolicy

and PNG's NRI) has completed its data collection phase. For insights into the difficulty of delivering education in remote areas read this Devpolicy blog post on the data collection process.

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