

Conference on "Policy Transfer in Vocational Skills Development Revisited"

Panel discussion: Do we need policy transfer in Vocational Skills Development after all?

14 September 2012, 16.45-17.30

Minutes

Participants in the panel:

Tahsinah Ahmed, Swiss Cooperation Office, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Philipp Gonon, University of Zurich

Matthias Jäger, Swisscontact, Durres, Albania

Madhu Singh, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning, Hamburg

Moderation

Franz Kehl, KEK-CDC Consultants, Zurich

A) Questions from the moderator

Do we need policy transfer in VSD at all? Get back to the title of the conference.

Question 1	We have now discussed about policy transfer during two days, though generally from quite a technical perspective. Why not talking about morals, just very briefly: Isn't policy transfer a very colonial, immoral concept?
Madhu Singh	She comes from a country with a strong colonial legacy. The comparison between policy transfer and colonialism is farfetched. There are, however, a number of similarities: India has been characterised by colonial education with a text-book oriented approach that also is present in skills formation. Also present is the language of colonialists. We can make the same sort of comparison today: NQF has a language that nobody understands. Again, marginalised and disadvantaged individuals are not reached by NQF. People in India think that models coming from the West are superior models and thus underestimate their own models. Another look at the transfer issue can be done in terms of social inclusion and rights.
Tahsinah Ahmed	She mostly agrees with the statement because remnants of the colonial cultures still exist in many countries of South Asia and the development agenda is strongly pushed by donors in countries with a strong donor presence, especially in these countries. However, it is important to build on experiences and lessons, specially taking into consideration individual country contexts, recognising that a single module can't address diverse needs. Globalisation now allows easier knowledge sharing, and developing country experiences are also very valid. Furthermore, things have changed tremendously. In the context of globalisation and global learning, we have moved on to new learning models where knowledge and skills from the economically more developed countries start to blur with experiences from the South.

Question 2	Is "policy learning" an attractive alternative term to "policy transfer"?
Philipp Gonon	He prefers the term policy learning as it shows the view we should

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	take. The concept of policy transfer stands in the tradition of countries in the North feeling superior. The term of policy learning is less one-directional.
Matthias Jäger	<p>When policy transfer means we have ready-made concepts, like the dual system and the NQF package, and we go to any country to implement these packages top-down, then this is proof of a colonial, even stupid attitude. Stupid because it won't be successful. Certainly, such reforms to implement the dual system or an NQF will not be successful.</p> <p>If policy learning means I keep what I know, then it is almost the same as policy transfer. If policy development, as alternative term to policy learning, means that ILO is responsible for one country, and in the other country it is Germany, then this concept is fundamentally wrong, too. However, policy development is a term that perhaps is more adequate to describe what should happen. Of course, this is not a linear process. As an external consultant, I am a stakeholder, an actor of the process, but never its driver. Unique chance to have different kinds of exchange. The task is to develop a garden of all these flowers.</p>

Question 3	Policy development and learning always takes time. How do you react to the time issue?
Tahsinah Ahmed	The issue of time is important and becomes critical in countries with low institutional capacities. Such countries welcome and are heavily dependent on external experts but this is not an effective solution. Adequate time and support must be allowed for transference of skills, for countries to develop their institutional capacities, for introducing, internalising and adapting to changes. Policy development processes require continuous communication and dialogue, which is also time consuming. Resistance to learn or change is usually stronger or ineffective if this time is not allowed.
Philipp Gonon	He supports this view. Changes in educational systems take a lot of time. At the same time, educational systems are very stable, conservative systems and do not react quickly which also can be seen as an advantage. The main reason for this is that it is very difficult to change mindsets.

Question 4	What is the economic motivation behind the transfer of systems?
Philipp Gonon	In the 19 th century the motivation was the competitiveness of nations; there was a strong incentive to invest in educational reform. A lot of researchers travelled to other countries, observed what happened.
Matthias Jäger	Economic motivations within a country for VET: i) social demand, need of people, ii) contribution to economic development. Donors can have direct economic motivations, for instance regarding infrastructure development, but he does not believe that economic motivations are prominent in skills development.

B) Questions from the audience

Markus Maurer	With regard to the flower picture evoked by Matthias Jäger: The soil is missing, there. In fact, to ensure that flowers can bloom it is important that stakeholders, both from the local context and the external experts, understand the local issues and traditions. Here, research can play an important role. A further comment on the economic interests inherent in the development business: There are problematic biases, as con-
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	sultants strongly depend on donor agencies. If they have a very critical opinion, they will have difficulties to further develop their business.
Matthias Jäger	It definitely requires also the soil. It requires also time. We need more process-oriented thinking and less linear thinking. This is contradicting the education system reform.
Kandasamy Parthipan	Nobody has considered Sri Lanka. He believes that policy transfer is learning and that developing countries should learn as there are now some fixed models. Political will and not funding is the problem for most developing countries. UN organisations implement VSD projects under income generation. Donors should insist on the poverty reduction aspect.
Cyril Alther	Policy transfer is the same as policy learning. What in terms of learning is coming back to the North? Is the development of NQFs in the North able to incorporate knowledge generated in the South?
Madhu Singh	Countries from the North and South exchange, it is a two-way process. Only elements can be imported. We should be careful about the language. It is learning across countries, a knowledge dialogue. These ideas should be communicated to key persons in ministries (advocacy work). The research community and consultants don't do that. There is also a lack of clarity in the terminology. Research community should get clarity to the ministries Policy transfer is not a sustained intervention. Who has an overview?