



**Background and Context**

**T**he technical education and vocational training (TEVT) sector is receiving considerable interest and attention of the Government and the private sector. The Government has taken significant initiatives to rationalise and reform this sector by elevating vocational training to a ministerial function. Since 1994, the following major institutions responsible for technical education and vocational training have been brought under one Ministry (i.e. since June 1997, under the Ministry of Vocational Training & Rural Industries, and, prior to that, under the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training).

- ✓ Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)
- ✓ Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET)
- ✓ Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka (VTA)
- ✓ National Institute of Technical Education (NITE)

In order to understand and appreciate the issues related to reforms and rationalisation and results achieved so far, it is necessary to know the mandates, functions and evolution of these agencies which are mainly responsible for policy formulation, planning, and delivery of technical education and vocational training. These are summarised below :

The **Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)** is a statutory body responsible for policy formulation, coordination and planning and development of technical education and vocational training. Its responsibilities include the formulation of skill standards, testing and certification procedures, and registration of training institutions. Quality of

# Some Aspects of Reforms in Technical Education & Vocational Training

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training is assured through its programmes of standard setting and accreditation of courses.

The **Department of Technical Education & Training (DTET)**, with a 106-year history, delivers formal, institutional-type training at 34 technical colleges and affiliated institutions located in major provincial and district capitals. The DTET has traditionally been with the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. This Department is now under the new Ministry that is responsible for both technical education and vocational training. Thus, it has been possible to make these complementary and mutually supportive functions. This step is in line with modern trends in other parts the world.

Nearly forty years ago, the Labour Department pioneered vocational training for out-of school, unemployment youths. This is a very sensitive and vulnerable group. Over the years, vocational training expanded and assumed considerable importance because of its usefulness in supplying urgently needed skills particularly for the informal sector. However, it was not possible to develop vocational training while it remained locked in a Government Department that is essentially meant for drafting and enforcement of labour laws. Therefore, in August 1995, the Government established the **Vocational Training Authority of Sri Lanka (VTA)** as a statutory body. The training

programmes of the Labour Department were brought under the VTA which continues to serve the rural, unemployed youth through employment-oriented, short courses conducted a network of 176 Rural Vocational Training Centres (RVTCs). These RVTCs are infact the 'satellites' of the II District Centres that provide technical and other support to this network. In addition, the three National Institutes offer certificate level courses of longer duration.

The **National Institute of Technical Education (NITE)** is responsible for the training of trainers (i.e. training managers, technical teachers, vocational training instructors), and development of curricula, training methodologies and teaching materials. In January 1999, NITE was converted to an independent statutory body separate from its former parent body, the DTET. It now has the necessary autonomy and the flexibility to respond to the diversified and expanding needs of the entire technical education and vocational training sector which now includes not only the technical colleges and other training organisations and institutions of the Government but also a large number of enterprise-based, inplant and other training programmes of the private sector, NGOs, and voluntary, religious and other organisations.





This sector also includes an increasing number of privately funded training institutions.

Formal, Apprenticeship training is the responsibility of the National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) which was formally known as the National Apprenticeship Board (NAB). Training conducted in industry is supplemented by theoretical and related instruction given at the training institutions of NAITA.

In addition to the Government organizations and institutions described above, there are several specialised training institutions operated by different Ministries and Agencies. The programmes of these institutes are aimed at satisfying sectoral skills needs related to : telecommunications, transport, construction, textiles and garments, and other specific fields.

It is important to note that the major training agencies that supply the more conventional and traditional skill needs of the labour market, namely the DTET, VTA and NAITA account for nearly eighty five percent of the training provided by the state sector. As mentioned earlier, these agencies, except NAITA which is still under the Ministry of Science and Technology, have been brought under the new Ministry thus completing the process of rationalization and also contributing to the planned development of the technical education and vocational training sector.

The Government's commitment to develop this sector is seen from the following extract of a newspaper article<sup>2</sup> on the 1999 budget :

*"As we present the fifth budget of the PA Government, the President, in her capacity as the Minister of Finance &*

*Planning, has put the focus sharply on skills development and training in order to enhance the capabilities particularly of the younger generation in the country," Prof. Peries disclosed. Pointing out that since human resources represented the greatest asset in Sri Lanka, he said : "It is the principal obligation of the Government to do everything possible to enhance the quality of these skills. That is the basic theme that underpins the 1999 budget."*

Against this background, what is outlined in this note is the rationale for reforms and the more important changes that have been initiated and achieved through the reform process.

#### Reforms In the Technical Education and Vocational Training (TEVT) Sector

The ongoing reforms in the education sector cover the following three sub-sectors:

- √ General Education
- √ University Education
- √ Technical Education and Vocational Training

In the case of general education and university education, the schools, teacher training colleges, universities and other relevant institutions and organizations are the Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The TEVT sector is different. Several Government Ministries and organizations as well as the private sector operate a variety of training programmes targeted at different groups such as unemployed youth, rural women, young school leavers, unskilled and semiskilled workers. Different training delivery modes, such as formal, institutional, apprenticeship, inplant and on-the-job, are designed to cater to the varying educational attainments and learning abilities of the target groups. The duration of training and methodologies used depend on the levels of skill to be attained.

The technical education and vocational training reforms are grouped under the following major thrust areas :

- √ The Role of the Government
- √ The Involvement of the Private Sector in TEVT
- √ The Linkage between General Education, University Education and TEVT
- √ Training for Self Employment and the Unorganized Sector.

#### 2. Daily News, 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1998.

A brief account of the issues and rationale for reforms is given under each of these thrust areas.

#### The Role of the Government

When the major sectors of the economy were dominated by the state sector, there was almost a captive market for those who came out of the state-run technical education and vocational training institutions. When the economy was liberalized, this situation changed and the private sector became the main employer. Consequently, the trainees graduating from the state training institutions had no guarantee of jobs in the Government sector. They were therefore compelled to compete for jobs in the private sector.

Although the Government is not the main user of trained people under a liberalized economy, disproportionate share of costs of training is borne by the Government. In addition to the costs of inputs, such as salaries of teachers and instructors, raw materials and other operating expenses, trainees are also paid a daily stipend. It is imperative therefore that the private sector, which is the main user of trained personnel under the prevailing liberalised economic setting,





should be asked to share the costs and, more importantly, become an active partner in training. Also, if the private sector were to take responsibility for training to satisfy their own skill needs, the Government could focus its attention on training with strong social development goals and on training programmes where the private sector has no interest or capacity at present.

The main thrust of reforms is for the Government therefore is to move away from being the main provider of training and become its facilitator, coordinator, standard setter and regulator.

#### **The Involvement of the Private Sector in of TEVT**

In a liberalized economy, the labour market changes rapidly. The changes are brought about by the advent of new technology and adaptation of modern practices, particularly in the manufacturing and service sectors. Existing jobs are being lost but new jobs are being created. Information technology accelerates the pace of change. The business community is compelled to embrace new technology and modernize their businesses in order to remain competitive in a globalising economy. It is inevitable, therefore, that the private sector and the business community should be asked to take an active role in reforming the TEVT sector and also to join hands with the Government in planning and implementation of TEVT reforms.

Therefore, an important strategy of the reform process is to provide the necessary environment and incentives for the private sector to take the lead in providing training to satisfy their own requirements. Such training includes job-entry and on-the-job

training is well as retraining and upgrading of workers. The private sector is being offered a range of incentives such as tax concessions, duty free imports and grants to meet capital expenditure to meet operational expenses on training. A package of incentives offered to the private sector in the 1999 budget is described later in this note.

#### **The Linkage between General Education, University Education, and Technical Education and Vocational Training**

The general perception of technical education and vocational training is that this type of education is meant for those who are out-of-school and looking for work. It is thought to be an inevitable route that most students take when they fail to move up the general education ladder. This is being changed through the reforms. Training should no longer be perceived as some kind of welfare support for school dropouts or a temporary alternative to a job that keeps the unemployed occupied.

Students who are at the secondary school level should make an informed decision to embark on technical education and vocational training. They should do so because they see clearly an **alternate route to acquire knowledge and skills that will prepare them for not only for productive employment but also provide them opportunities to progressively acquire certificate, diploma and degree qualifications.** With this objective in mind entry criteria for admissions to vocational training centres, technical colleges, apprenticeship schemes are being reviewed and modified so that there will be progressive paths for talented students and late developers to move upwards in the technical education and vocational training system. At the same time, necessary steps are being taken to develop two-way, lateral linkages between General and University Education and TEVT.

#### **Training for Self-Employment**

It is very important to note that Training cannot create employment. However, training is a powerful method of preparing people for employment. But training alone is not sufficient for self-employment. Post-training support measures such as start-up capital, business know-how, access to raw materials and markets are essential for promoting self-employment. The reforms have identified the means to strengthen the links between the training system and the mechanisms available for providing post-training support measures.

#### **Some important changes achieved through TEVT reforms**

H.E. the President has appointed a Task Force to implement reforms in technical education and vocational training. Some of the more important changes initiated by the Task Force are briefly described below : **Restructuring and Strengthening of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)**

It was mentioned earlier that the main objective of the proposed reforms is that the Government should move away from being the major provider of training and become its facilitator, coordinator, standard-setter and regulator. To achieve this objective, it is important to strengthen the capacity of the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), which is the apex body responsible for such work. Therefore, the necessary amendments to the Tertiary and Vocational Education Act No. 20 of 1990 have been identified. Cabinet approval has been obtained to present these amendments to the Parliament and also to make TVEC a statutory body. The TVEC





will be restructured and strengthened so that it will be a more functional and effective organization with necessary powers. The required technical capabilities to formulate strategies and programmes to bring about the above changes are also being developed.

**Standard Setting and Certification**

At present, different training institutions issue their own certificates. This creates some confusion amongst employers because it is difficult for them to understand the competency levels of the holders of these certificates. To overcome this problem, the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) has finalized plans to issue national certificates according to accepted standards. For a start, the main training institutions of the Government such as the Vocational Training Authority (VTA), National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA), and the Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET) will use a common national certificate approved by the TVEC. This scheme will be extended to other training institutions in the state and private sector. The strategy is to promote competition among training institutions as they will try to improve their training programmes to reach the prescribed national standards. This will improve quality of training and job prospects of those who complete training.

**Incentives to the Private Sector**

As a result of the efforts of the Presidential Task Force, the 1999 Budget provided significant incentives to the private sector to invest in training and to expand and intensify their ongoing training programmes. The following extract from the 1999 Budget speech of the Hon. Deputy

Minister of Finance illustrates the commitment of the Government to motivate the private sector :

**Assistance for the Private Sector to engage in Training in Priority Sectors & Productivity Improvement in Local Industry.**

*In the context of on going reforms in technical education and vocational training, it is necessary to encourage the private sector also to invest in training. The BOI already provides preferential tax rate of 15 per cent and duty free facilities to establish training facilities. In order to further stimulate the private sector investor engagement in the provision of training facilities in priority sectors such as garments, gem and jewellery, electronics, computer software, I now propose to amend BOI incentives to grant a 5 year tax holiday provided each training institute undertake training for a minimum of 300 persons. I also propose to provide financial assistance to expand and improve existing training programmes or to establish new training facilities. Therefore, I propose to allocate Rs. 50 million to the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission, which will disburse funds based on, established criteria that are aimed at promoting transfer of technology, modernization and employment promotion.*

*I also propose to set up a Skills Development Fund in order to support the employers to conduct job entry training, upgrading and retraining of their employees as well as to improve enterprise based training, with the objective of raising productivity in Sri Lankan industries. I propose to allocate an initial grant of Rs. 100 million for this purpose.*

Pending the allocation of Rs. 100 million in the 1999 financial year, a grant has been obtained from the UNDP/ILO Vocational Training Project to start a Skills Development Fund (SDF) on a pilot basis. During the pilot phase newspaper advertisements and

letters were sent through Employers' Organisations, and Chambers of Commerce and Industry explaining the purpose of SDF and calling for requests for training of their workers. The response was positive. Over fifty private sector firms have requested assistance for training, retraining and upgrading of their workers. A number of tailor-made programmes were started at selected Government training institutions. It is important to note that the firms have paid for these services. During the pilot phase therefore, the SDF was able to demonstrate its usefulness to the employers and also solicit their support in financing and operating it.

Operational procedures and a legislative framework or other suitable mechanism for the establishment of the SDF are also developed during the pilot phase. The government allocation of Rs. 100 million is to be used to establish SDF as a private limited liability company. Already, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon has pledged Rupees one million as a token contribution to SDF. Other organizations are expected to follow suit.

**Linkage between General Education, University Education and Technical Education and Vocational Training**

As a first step in providing opportunities for upward mobility for those in the TEVT sector, agreement has been reached to establish linkages between the major state institutions awarding National Certificates and Diplomas in TEVT. Two of the three institutions awarding Diplomas, namely the Technician Training Institute (TTI) of the National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) and Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technical Education (SLIATE) have agreed to

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and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) of the Ministry of Vocational Training and Rural Industries has initiated a dialogue with the concerned Ministers and Heads of Agencies to develop a common programme of action taking into consideration the experience and strengths of the Vocational Training Authority (VTA), National Apprenticeship Industrial Training Authority (NITA), and National Youth Service Council (NYSC). The strengths of these agencies are outlined below :

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consider the certificates issued by the Technical Colleges and Vocational Training Centres operated by the Department of Technical Education and Training (DTET), Vocational Training Authority (VTA) and NAITA as an alternate entry qualifications for their diploma courses. The next step is for the Degree awarding institutions to recognize Diploma courses offered by the respective TEVT institutions as an alternate, entry qualification relevant to the degree courses.

The Task Force has emphasized that the purpose of this exercise is to promote upward mobility and career prospects to those starting at the bottom of the TEVT system. This scheme will provide opportunities to bright, promising students who have demonstrated ability and aptitude to pursue higher technical and vocational studies. The criteria for selection, numbers to be taken are left to the concerned agencies and institutions.

#### Training for Self-Employment

Keeping inline with the recommendations of the Task Force, the Tertiary

The VTA has a network of Rural Training Centres supported District and National Training Centres. These centres conduct short, employment oriented courses satisfying the needs of the rural sector. The centres are operated in close collaboration with rural committees and organizations. By nature, apprenticeship consists of basic training combined with on-the-job training in industry. During the past twenty five years, NAITA has successfully developed Skills Training Standards, and Testing and Certification procedures.

The main objective of the NYSC is the total development of youth. (i.e. development related to physical, psychological, social, political and cultural aspects). In addition to regular programmes on career guidance and counseling, and job placements, NYSC organizes 'job fairs' which have become popular.

Although these agencies are under different Ministries, they are now working very closely to identify and develop mutually supportive strategies and programmes that will use their existing resources and institutional strengths in promoting self-employment through a combination of joint inputs consisting of employment-oriented rural training, career guidance and counseling, and inplant training. ■

