



## 2012 SUBSTANTIVE SESSION COORDINATION SEGMENT

### Panel II

#### “Addressing the challenges of the education/skills and jobs mismatch”

*11 July 2012 – New York, UN Headquarters*

#### Opening statements

Opening the meeting, **Council Vice-President, H.E. Ambassador Mootaz Khalil**, stated that today’s youth were the most educated generation ever, yet they made up nearly half of the world’s jobless population. A mismatch exists between qualifications and labour market needs and is especially notable in developing countries. While employers are increasingly demanding strong thinking, communication and entrepreneurial skills, those skills are often unmet by education systems around the world. Ambassador Khalil stressed that while governments have the primary responsibility in education, the private sector and civil society have become key players, including for harnessing technology to provide affordable higher education.

Setting the stage for the discussion, moderator **Ms. Sigrid Kaag, Assistant Secretary-General and Assistant Administrator of UNDP**, reinforced the severity of the existing mismatch. She stressed the importance of informing the public, keeping up to date on reports and resolutions and encouraged moving solutions from theory to practice.

#### Discussion

A number of themes and recommendations emerged from the presentations and discussions:

#### *Shifting from supply-driven to demand-driven education*

Speakers agreed that there was a need for a “180 degree” shift from supply-driven to demand-driven education. **Dr. Amr Ezzat Salama, Counsellor for the American University in Cairo and former Egyptian Minister of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Technology**, stressed that detailed labour market analysis was needed both nationally and globally, which was reiterated by respondent **Ms. Christine Evans-Klock, Director of the Skills and Employability Department, ILO**. Improved information about labour market needs helps anticipate the skill needs and develop the productive sides of the economy. **Dr. Salama** further underscored that educational institutions needed to develop students as “a whole person” by combining intellectual, physical, emotional, spiritual and professional training. Policy options included putting in place student evaluation systems measuring the knowledge and skills needed by the labor market rather

than measuring a student's ability to memorize. **Dr. Abdalla Hamdok, Deputy Executive Secretary of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA)**, added that social returns on education needed to be considered for human capital accumulation.

### *The importance of technical and vocational education and training*

Several speakers pointed to the need for technical and vocational training to bridge the gap between skills and jobs. **Dr. Andreas Koenig, Head of Section, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Labor Markets, German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ)**, emphasized that TVET enabled individuals to continue developing on a lifelong basis the professional and social capacities required for a skilled occupation. For any training system, elements such as cooperation between the state, trade and industries; learning as part of the work process; acceptance of national standards; qualified vocational training staff; and institutionalized research and consultancy were highlighted as vital components. Respondent **Mr. Philippe Kridelka, Director of the UNESCO Liaison Office in New York**, added that the primary task of technical and vocational training was to bring supply and demand into balance. He encouraged the development of training programmes with employers, labour organizations and workers' unions alike. **Dr. Salama** noted that in some countries vocational training was often perceived to be of low quality, which is a perception that must be altered. Delegations cited difficulties in engaging resource-strapped small and medium enterprises in the process of addressing the skills/jobs mismatch and conducting training. **Mr. Koenig** noted that a trade and industry chamber could assist those entities, as it was crucial to engage the private sector at all levels.

### *Bringing local and global stakeholders together*

It was noted by several panellists that "starting local" was critical to tackling the root causes of the mismatch. **Mr. Ron Bruder, Founder and Chair of the Education for Employment Foundation**, stressed that local and global stakeholders should be brought together in novel ways, citing the example of his organization, which was a "networked platform" of locally-run non-profits that built partnerships with the public sector and others to determine labour market needs, train youth, and link them with appropriate companies. Marshalling the agility of affiliates as recruiters and engaging companies in meaningful ways was described as paramount to train youth successfully. Soft skills were also noted to be important especially for jobs in the public sector, which should not be discriminated against. Delegations expressed concerns about the impact of the global economic crisis, particularly budget cuts in education and health, and stressed the need for a systematic approach to partnerships. **Dr. Hamdok** stressed that while partnerships were important, development planning comprising a vision for education and the job market should be led by the state and addressed in an organized manner.

### *Pursuing equity and employment creation*

Participants commented on the need for focusing on equity in the job market. **Dr. Hamdok** pointed out that Africa had seen high growth rates but "jobless" growth rates. Targeted policies are needed for making informed choices. Active labour market policies could look into public work programmes, skills training, job search assistance and self-employment. At the same time, he stressed the need for a balanced approach towards quantity and quality of education. Countries should also address the need for tertiary

education, research and development, technology and innovation. **Dr. Salama** added that in order to reduce structural barriers for young men and women, merit-based rather than seniority-based systems were desirable for a change in employers' recruitment and promotional policies. **Ms. Evans-Klock** further noted that decent earnings, opportunities to continue learning and protected rights are paramount to attract youth into the labour market. Employment must be at the heart of macroeconomic policies. Delegations raised the issue of the informal sector, noting that national policies should focus on moving youth into the formal sector. It was emphasized that investment in education and research, as well as awareness-raising and capacity-building in formal and non-formal education could help youth enter formal labour markets. **Mr. Bruder** added that the absence of a bankruptcy law, which would reduce risks of entering the formal sector, has prevented informal-sector entities from registering with governments in many countries.

### *The need for coordination among line ministries*

Speakers agreed that coordination of efforts, especially among ministries was essential. **Mr. Bruder** noted that ministries often competed with one another, which was a dynamic that should be changed if the youth unemployment scenario were to be improved. Education ministries often focus on long-term goals where Labour Ministries generally place priority on short-term results. **Dr. Hamdok** pointed out that there was a tension between government agencies, especially with Finance Ministries seeking to rein in expenditures but other agencies demanding and competing for more money. **Dr. Koenig** encouraged partner countries to establish a national agency dedicated to TVET to coordinate policies and goals of different government agencies. **Ms. Evans-Klock** further underscored the need to have institutional mechanisms that link skill development to the productive sides of the economy.

### *Integrating women into the job market*

Several speakers noted that youth unemployment rates were considerably higher among females than males. **Dr. Salama** noted that the issue is particularly predominant in the Middle East and North African regions, where women had fewer job opportunities than men. **Dr. Hamdok** argued that much gender discrimination in the labour market could be traced back to the education system itself and needed to be tackled at an early stage. **Mr. Bruder** reminded that women were a key component of social change and that the benefit from placing women in the workplace should be reaped.

### Concluding remarks

Closing the meeting, **Ambassador Khalil** noted that despite the economic crisis, austerity programmes should not affect job creation as it was the engine of demand and growth. He also encouraged including sustainable development measures and practices into all employment programmes.