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COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES: ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT 2013



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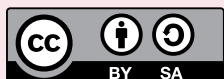
**COMMUNITY LEARNING CENTRES:
ASIA-PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT 2013**

National Qualifications Frameworks for
Lifelong Learning and Skills Development

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Special thanks goes to the Government of Japan for its continued financial support and participation in the conference; the Thailand National Commission for UNESCO, and the Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE), Ministry of Education, Thailand, who co-hosted the conference; the active participation of the country teams and representatives from ARTC member institutions for their contributions before and during the conference; and to all session facilitators, presenters and the UNESCO team for their tireless contributions.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Lifelong learning covers learning in all forms and all settings, from early childhood through schools to further and higher education. It extends beyond formal education to non-formal and informal learning for out-of-school youth and adults. To thrive and adapt to new challenges in today's rapidly changing world, individuals must acquire knowledge, skills and competencies through multiple forms of learning throughout their lifetimes. National Qualification Frameworks (NQF) are a mobilising mechanism that can facilitate lifelong learning either through horizontal mobility in order to access various types of competencies, or vertical mobility for higher levels of learning.

By contrast, when programmes are implemented in isolation, students are often unable to progress to higher levels of learning, seek other forms of relevant knowledge or gain labour market acceptance. Their opportunities become limited without a system to connect formal and informal learning. Recognising this challenge, UNESCO Bangkok, together with the governments of Japan and Thailand, brought together over 500 regional experts, policymakers, educationalists, ministry officials, researchers, civil society representatives and other stakeholders from 25 countries to share their experiences and discuss the linkages and mutually supportive aspects of Community Learning Centres (CLCs), National Qualifications Frameworks, lifelong learning and skills development.

The conference, the theme of which was "National Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning and Skills Development", featured examples of effective national and regional qualifications frameworks that support lifelong learning and skills development, with a particular focus on the community level. Countries' successes in using CLCs as a delivery mechanism for lifelong learning were shared. Global and regional trends on youth, employment and skills development were also identified. On the third day of the conference, the Thailand Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education (ONIE) organised a study visit to three local CLCs offering skills development, equivalency and education for sustainable development programmes.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE CONFERENCE

1. Participants agreed unanimously that education and training under the Non-Formal Education (NFE) sector and lifelong learning should be recognised, classified and connected through NQFs. There was a general consensus that these frameworks are a critical mechanism that not only harmonise diverse and complex qualifications but also ensure the quality and seamlessness of education and training systems within the broad framework of lifelong learning. Since NQFs promote easier comparability, better understanding and transparency of qualifications, they enable learners to make more informed decisions about their learning options and career paths.
2. In recent years and due to increasing economic globalisation, there has been an increased policy interest at both national and regional levels in establishing NQFs. A growing number of governments are acknowledging the importance of these mechanisms to ensure that academic degrees as well as vocational qualifications and standards are consistent at a national level. This, in turn, has created the need for governments to develop common and transparent standards as an important step towards enhancing student and labour mobility and facilitating the integration of national and international labour markets. In the region, the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) is currently being developed by ASEAN member states in light of the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015.
3. One of the main recommendations from the conference was that skills development in both formal and non-formal systems should not be implemented in isolation from other kinds of educational and vocational training programmes. In order to facilitate flexible pathways and increase individuals' learning opportunities, they should be linked to one another as well as to other academic programmes through a comprehensive NQF.
4. Unemployment and a lack of opportunity for youth remain serious issues in the Asia-Pacific region. Findings from the 2012 Global Monitoring Report, *Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work*, reveal that

many young people do not acquire foundational skills and are unable to find employment to maintain their livelihoods. There is also often a mismatch between skills and competencies required by employers. It is imperative for governments to carefully examine and invest in skills development to link training systems to the labour market and to ensure that young people have access to opportunities. Another pressing policy issue is that governments tend to neglect skills development and the frameworks needed to enable job market linkages, thus leaving the most disadvantaged behind.

5. CLCs are an effective delivery mechanism for lifelong learning within the non-formal education sector. There are CLCs in more than 24 countries throughout the Asia-Pacific region. A key issue emerging from the conference was how to position education and training programmes at CLCs within the NQFs. It was generally agreed that these frameworks need to cover the non-formal and informal learning taking place at CLCs. Linking lifelong and other non-formal learning programmes at CLCs to the formal system and the labour market is important to increase the value of lifelong and non-formal learning.
6. Many countries across the Asia-Pacific region have already developed NQFs and others are in the process of doing so. It is crucial for government officials and practitioners to ensure that their lifelong learning and non-formal programmes at the community level are integrated into their NQFs. NQFs must be designed to embrace the diversified learning needs of people at all levels in order to promote continuous learning for everyone.



Photos: UNESCO / S.Chaiyasook

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Lifelong learning can take place at all ages in formal, non-formal or informal settings. To thrive and adapt to new challenges in today's rapidly changing world, individuals must acquire knowledge, skills and competencies through multiple forms of learning throughout their lifetimes. In the Asia-Pacific region, developed and developing countries have identified lifelong learning as a key priority, especially with regard to developing skills required for the 21st century.

Need for Qualification Frameworks

The learning that takes place in education and training can be recognised, classified and connected through NQFs. Through a system of quality assurance, equivalency and credit transfer, learners gain further opportunities to continue learning in vocational and academic areas. Experiences and skills acquired through work can also be accepted as valid credit to proceed towards higher levels of education and training. Through NQFs, learners have more flexible options and wider opportunities to pursue their learning. Most policymakers believe that qualification systems can play a role in facilitating lifelong learning (OECD Policy Brief, 2007).

Seven countries in the Asia-Pacific region have already been developing national qualification frameworks for education and training. In Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand and the Philippines, education and training have already been included within an overarching national qualifications framework that subsumes lifelong learning and non-formal education.

Countries have recognised the benefits of NQFs and many are working to link such frameworks regionally.

- The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was established in 2008 to link the national qualification systems of European countries. It clearly aims to promote lifelong learning.
- Moving towards regional integration in 2015, ASEAN countries started to prepare their NQFs and are slowly working to establish an ASEAN Qualifications Framework, with support from the governments of Australia and New Zealand.

Skills Development

Unemployment and a lack of opportunity for youth remain serious issues in the region as well as in other parts of the world. According to the 2011 Global Monitoring Report, *Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work*, many young people do not acquire foundational skills and are unable to find employment to maintain their livelihoods. There is also often a mismatch between skills and competencies required by employers. When governments neglect skills development and the frameworks needed to enable job market linkages, the most disadvantaged are left behind.

The geographical, economic and cultural diversity of the Asia-Pacific region requires an equally broad range of essential skills and competencies. In urban areas, there is demand for formal Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for employment in factories and companies. The competencies required to gain employment in urban areas are sensitive to technological advances and economic changes, while those required for rural income generation are more likely to remain unchanged.

In most countries, skills development programmes currently fall under the management of non-formal and informal education sectors or exist as part of TVET programmes. Skills development in both formal and non-formal programmes should not be implemented in isolation from other kinds of educational and technical training. Rather, they should be linked to one another as well as to other academic programmes through NQF to avoid limiting individuals' learning opportunities. It is imperative for governments to carefully examine and invest in skills development, to link training to the labour market, and to ensure that youth have access to opportunities.

The Role of CLCs

CLCs have been an effective delivery mechanism for lifelong learning through non-formal means. There are CLCs in over 24 countries across the Asia-Pacific, as well as 10 in the Arab states. There are an estimated 170,000 CLCs and similar literacy centres in the Asia-Pacific region. Such programmes are managed by governments, NGOs and private companies – some are fully owned and managed by communities. The purpose of the CLC is to promote human development by providing opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development to everyone at the local level as community members can easily access these facilities. CLCs provide: i) education, training, and skills development; ii) community information and resource services; iii) community development activities, and; iv) coordination and networking. They support the empowerment, social transformation and improvement of individuals' quality of life.

Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning and Skills Development

Linking CLCs and other non-formal programmes to the formal system and to employers is necessary to increase the value of education, align competencies and improve livelihoods. Most importantly, greater coordination through a framework system can encourage lifelong learning and skills development.

1.2 Objectives of the Conference

The main objective of the conference was to disseminate information as well as exchange ideas and experiences on Lifelong Learning and Skills Development through NQFs.

Specifically, participants were expected to address the following guiding questions::

- *What are NQFs and what role do they play in promoting lifelong learning?*
- *How can lifelong learning and skills development be included and in NQFs?*
- *How can skills development programmes be provided effectively and efficiently?*

2. KEYNOTE BY DR. PATRICK WERQUIN

NQF: A Navigational Tool for Lifelong Learners

Mr. Werquin described the role of NQFs in promoting lifelong learning and shed light on the main elements to consider for the establishment (design and implementation) of an NQF. He also provided a conceptual clarification of relevant key terms to facilitate easier communication during the conference among different cultures and systems. Furthermore, he focused on the rationale for establishing NQFs and how they benefited lifelong learning.

Together with literacy, recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and vocational education and training, national qualifications frameworks are at the top of the policy agenda in the field of education in many countries around the world. Most of the time, they are placed under the general umbrella of a national lifelong learning policy.

There is strong evidence that undertaking learning activities throughout life depends heavily on broad approaches that are not necessarily directly related to the education and training policy per se, such as improving self-esteem and increasing motivation, etc: hence, the role of policy tools, or mechanisms such as a qualifications framework, which are not about teaching and training or education and training as such.

This paper attempts to show that qualifications frameworks – and other mechanisms lying within qualifications systems – are powerful potential mechanisms to promote lifelong learning. They operate through a higher motivation from the part of the individuals to become lifelong learners, whether in the formal learning system or beyond. Also, because systemic aspects of the education and training system are improved, the benefits of learning become more evident to learners, potential learners and other end users. This paper provides an opportunity to clarify the vocabulary and focus on some policy pointers to open up the discussion.

2.1 Background

The first version of this document was prepared as a briefing paper for the UNESCO Office in Bangkok for the purpose of stimulating discussion at the Regional Conference on Community Learning Centres (CLCs) on *National Qualifications Frameworks for Lifelong Learning and Skills Development*, 19-21 June 2013. Its main objective is to describe the role of national qualifications frameworks in promoting lifelong learning and to shed light on the main elements to consider for the establishment (design and implementation) of a national qualifications framework. It will also address the role and added value of a regional qualifications framework. It is meant to provide some theoretical elements as well as some more practical ones.

To the extent possible, this new version takes into account critical points made during the CLC Conference and during the round of electronic exchanges held after the conference. In particular, it pays attention to the fact that the work of the Community Learning Centres in Southeast Asia is taking place in very specific conditions in terms of governance, specific target groups (with low-literate participants), objectives and approaches (e.g. a learner-centred approach).

A national qualifications *framework* is only one of the many components of a national qualifications system. All countries have a qualifications system – mainly because they all deliver qualifications, even if not always at all levels and in all sectors – but not all of them have a qualifications framework. Several components of a qualifications system were identified in Coles and Werquin (OECD, 2007) as **potential mechanisms** to trigger more and better lifelong learning from within the qualifications system. They are not necessarily divorced from one another – and approaches such as a *credit transfer* system and *validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes* are natural companions to a national qualifications framework – but this paper will mainly focus on only one of them: the qualifications framework, whether sectoral, national or international/regional.

There is a large body of statistical and quantitative evidence about lifelong learning (UNESCO, OECD, EC¹) and also a wealth of publications about national qualifications system and frameworks (Coles and Oates, 2004; Tuck, 2007). The approach suggested by the title of the conference is that there must be a connection between qualifications frameworks and lifelong learning, with the former having the potential to promote the latter. This paper addresses this specific aspect.

In practice, this paper will explain some of the key terms (Section 1), at least for the time being – because definitions are meant to evolve over time – and for easier communication at the conference among different cultures and systems. It focuses on the rationale for establishing a national qualifications framework and stresses the benefits of lifelong learning (Section 2). The last section identifies a list of relevant policy pointers that should be kept in mind during the preparation and establishment of a national/regional qualifications framework.

How Can National Qualifications Frameworks Promote Lifelong Learning?

This paper provides definitions of the key terms and concepts. It also presents, in greater detail, some of the main benefits of establishing a national qualifications framework. Before doing so, it may be useful to provide up front concrete examples of how national qualifications frameworks can promote lifelong learning:

- **At the general systemic level:**
 - Qualifications frameworks can make clear progression routes within education and training which can motivate potential learners who are often reluctant to engage in learning activities due to the opacity of education and training system(s);

¹ Oftentimes to state that it does not happen, in a formal context during adulthood, that is, after individuals have left initial education and training.

- Qualifications frameworks can help scrutinise – and therefore the removal – dead ends in education and training systems and provide potential learners with greater opportunities to progress, which may motivate them to undertake learning activities, and;
- Qualifications frameworks can bring coherence and quality assurance to qualifications systems.
- **At the individual level:**
 - Individuals may be motivated to engage in lifelong learning if they can be guided towards appropriate qualifications for their aspirations, and;
 - Individuals may also have greater confidence – and therefore more motivation – if qualifications are nationally approved and are widely recognised (currency).
- **At the employers' level:**
 - Employers may find a qualifications framework helpful for setting out qualification requirements for a job, therefore providing more training opportunities for their employees, if the qualifications described suit their expectations;
 - Employers may also find a qualifications framework helpful in relating an applicant's qualification profile to a standard reference point, and;
 - Employers may see in a qualifications framework a tool to help rationalise their training provision.
- **At the level of the education and training providers:**
 - Providers may find a qualifications framework useful for promotional material as they can market qualifications according to a well-known structure, and;
 - Providers, like recruiters, may feel more secure in the knowledge that certain qualifications are national benchmarks, therefore offering more learning opportunities.



As can be seen from these concrete examples, promoting lifelong learning is at the same time a demand and a supply issue: national qualifications frameworks have the potential to impact on both sides of the “market”, and therefore to motivate potential learners to invest in learning. End users and other beneficiaries may also find incentive to facilitate access to learning.

Establishing a national qualifications framework is about motivating individuals to undertake lifelong learning activities and creating more opportunities for them to do so.

2.2 Terms and Concepts – A Complex Terminology to Save, but to Simplify for End Users

This section is not only another attempt to provide definitions; it also aims at providing explanations, especially for implementation in practice. Most definitions provided herein are taken, or adapted, from Coles and Werquin (OECD, 2007). They have been amply reused in the relevant literature (Bateman and Coles, 2013; Coles and Bjørnåvold, 2010; Tuck, 2007). Whenever necessary, they have been adjusted to reflect recent thinking or improvements. There are many terms, and only the ones immediately relevant to this paper are provided, and they are kept rather concise.² This review of relevant terms is useful for at least two reasons:

- There is some confusion in the field and some misconceptions also. The vocabulary is very complex and is full of jargon – and therefore difficult to understand and to translate in other languages – and researchers and policy makers need to agree on concepts rather than on words. For instance, the distinction between the *recognition of qualifications* and

² See Bateman and Coles (2013), Coles and Werquin (OECD, 2007) or Tissot et al. (CEDEFOP, 2008) for more terms, details and terminology.

the *recognition of learning outcomes* is critical, as well as the difference between a *qualifications system* and a *qualifications framework*.

- It is an opportunity to start framing some of the key issues that matter to individuals, policy makers, stakeholders and researchers, as the reader will rapidly realise this section is not only about providing definitions and explaining terms – it is an excellent opportunity to start framing the issues, as questions always arise with the relevant content.

As a consequence, this section does not attempt to provide an exact crisp definition of all the terms – it would not make too much sense in an international *forum* – but it brings the attention of the reader to what each key term is about, and to the issues that come with it. It also sometimes provides examples of what the term is not about³.

2.3 Qualification – A Parchment/Document Reflecting Competencies

Before describing what a qualifications framework is about, this section discusses **the term “qualification”, which designates both the process and the outcome of this process.**

A *qualification* is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual has acquired competencies³ to a specified set of standards. Therefore, a *qualification process* ends when an assessment is organised to check whether the individual applicant meets those standards. In the most open vision, the qualification process may entail formal learning, non-formal learning and informal learning; i.e. attending classes, collecting items of evidence about competencies possessed, demonstrating those

³ For the sake of brevity, this paper cannot afford to open the discussion about the meaning of “competency”. For the sake of the argument, it is knowledge, skills and attributes (and not “knowledge, skills and competencies” as wrongly used in the European Commission documents). Knowledge is about academic knowledge, or knowledge that is rather theoretical even if it is specific to a job. Skills is about practical skills, or know-how. The word attributes here means competencies that are broader than knowledge and skills, such as team working abilities, and any other transversal or soft competencies.

competencies through simulation or observation, showing evidence of relevant experience and of the learning outcomes that come with it.

In many countries, however, the assessment is organised against the content of formal learning activities – i.e. the assessment is done against the *curriculum* of a course of study typically – which makes it very difficult to consider non-formal and informal learning outcomes in the assessment process.

At the end of the qualification process, a qualification – or **parchment, i.e. a document describing learning outcomes or competencies achieved – is awarded to the successful applicant.** It confers official recognition of currency by the awarding body and it may have or may not have recognition in the society. This societal recognition – or currency in all segments of a society such as the labour market, the formal education and training system or the community – is a key element of success. It guarantees employability of the owner; at times a qualification can even be a legal entitlement to practice a trade. It also allows the individual to resume studies in the lifelong learning system, and/or to improve their self-esteem.

On the other hand, there are examples where qualifications awarded by formally accredited bodies have no currency in the local labour market. This is clearly an issue. This happens typically when the competent body, from a legal point of view, is not legitimate in the society or when it is well known by the wider public that the assessment process is not quality assured. A qualifications framework is a potential solution against this severe drawback simply by imposing conditions for the registration of the qualification in the database (repertory or catalogue) which back up the qualifications framework.

In practice, **a qualification should have double currency:**

- In the labour market, for individuals owning a qualification to apply for a job with legitimacy and credibility; and,
- In the lifelong formal learning system, for individuals owning a qualification to start/resume studies in the formal education and training system.

The currency in the community derives directly from this double currency.

Weaker versions – or less widely accepted versions – of a qualification can be termed **certificate**. It usually means that the certificates have currency only in a certain context (a company, a sector, a programme of studies), or no currency at all in the worst-case scenario.

For the sake of this paper, the words qualification and certification are taken as perfect synonyms. They designate a document (parchment) that describes the competencies of an individual. This is a crucial point because:

- In some countries, there is a slight disconnection between the parchment and the actual competencies. This may happen when the former can be obtained by illegal means or, usually, after an assessment process that is not fully quality assured, or organised by a body that is not seen as legitimate.
- In all countries, the parchment describes the competencies of individuals the last time they were assessed and this typically takes place just before completing initial education and training (usually after a long period of time has passed). In other words, almost all individuals have more competencies than what their highest qualification attests; and they often acquire competencies in new fields throughout life.

The latter point is perfectly addressed by the approach that many countries are developing to validate and recognise non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

In summary, a qualification is a **document** describing the **competency/competencies** of the individual owning it. It is meant to have **currency** in the entire society: in the labour market, in the lifelong formal learning system and in the community. It may or may not have currency in the labour market, depending on the quality and the formalisation of the assessment process.

In this paper, it is always assumed that the competencies described in the document and the real competence(s) of the individual do match.

A qualification is therefore about making competencies visible.

The key point is that only recognised qualifications are interesting because this paper claims that they are the only ones with currency in the society in general, and in the labour market in particular.

2.4 Qualifications Framework – A Classification Instrument

A *qualifications framework* is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning outcomes achieved. A national qualifications framework is one of the many components of a national qualifications system. Not all countries have a qualifications framework⁴ whereas all countries have a qualifications system.

A national *qualifications system* is a broader concept than a national qualifications framework. A national qualifications system includes all aspects that result in the recognition of learning outcomes (e.g. the means of developing and operationalising national or local policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, recognition of competencies and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society). One feature, among many others, of a qualifications system may be an explicit framework of qualifications.

⁴ The last count by the European Training Foundation (ETF) mentions about 140 countries having established a national qualifications framework or considering establishing one. The latter group is by far the largest.

Scope of National Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) throughout the world: *Selected countries having advanced, planned or established NQFs outside of Asia.*

During the design stage, key decisions are made regarding the purpose and scope of the national qualifications framework. It is important for decision makers to agree on the goals the national qualifications framework will help to achieve and on the education and/or occupational sectors to include in the framework.

In Europe – where most national qualifications frameworks are still in the design or implementation phase and under the influence of the European Commission– most national qualifications frameworks are rather broad in scope. They are comprehensive in the sense that they are meant to include all qualifications from all parts of the education and training system, from primary schooling to higher education (e.g. Belgium-Flanders since 2009; Ireland, since 2003; Malta since 2007 or Portugal since 2009). Some countries have a separate framework for higher education (England, Northern Ireland, Spain or Wales). Some countries are focusing on vocational education and training. For instance, in France, the focus of the qualifications framework and the related Catalogue (RNCP) is on vocational qualifications, but all higher education qualifications are considered vocational. Almost all European Union national frameworks have a strong focus on communication and orientation. Most of them emphasise the role of the qualifications framework in facilitating validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (e.g. in Germany, the Netherlands or Portugal. In France, offering validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (VAE) is a condition for registration of the qualification in the Catalogue (RNCP). In Russia and Lithuania, the national qualifications framework does not contain school qualifications. In France, the Catalogue of Qualifications does not contain the qualifications awarded at the end of upper secondary education (Baccalauréat). France (early 1970s) and the United Kingdom (1980s), have the oldest qualifications frameworks in Europe.



Photos: UNESCO / S.Chaiyasook / © Tinsiri Sribodhi

In Australia, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council, states very clearly that the AQF covers all education and training sectors. It is therefore a comprehensive qualifications framework too, even if Australia has a sub-framework for all vocational qualifications. The New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF) is also presented as a single unified framework for all New Zealand qualifications. This framework was established in July 2010 and it also has a sub-framework for qualifications directly relevant to the labour market.

In Africa, the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) website declares up front that the aim of the qualifications framework is: “to create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements”. It explicitly aims at unifying three sub-frameworks: the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF); the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF); and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-frameworks (OQSF). The three sub-frameworks are overseen by different bodies, while the national qualifications framework is coordinated by the South African Qualifications Authority. The SANQF is therefore quite close in essence to the AQF, to the NZQF, to the Scottish qualifications framework, and to the Mauritius framework as well. Mauritius also has a unique national qualifications framework, with a sub-framework for qualifications directly relevant to the labour market. It is a ten-level framework, from primary education to higher education. Botswana and Tunisia have a national qualifications framework only for TVET qualifications. The ECOWAS (Economic Community Of West African States) countries have been trying for several years to establish national qualifications frameworks and a Regional Qualifications Framework. It is unclear at this early stage what scope the national qualifications frameworks will cover.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, discussions are rather advanced in countries such as Chile, the Dominican Republic and Mexico. Discussions have also been held regarding the opportunities that

exist in countries such as Canada, Chile and Mexico, having a special focus on the establishment of a framework of occupational standards for workplace learning and with the aim to apply the same model to the TVET sector. If something comes to fruition in Haiti, it will be for vocational qualifications.

Source: Allais, 2010; AQFC, 2013; CEDEFOP

The set of *criteria* used in the qualifications framework may be implicit in the qualifications descriptors themselves, or made explicit in the form of a set of level descriptors, usually knowledge, skills and attributes. The scope of frameworks may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways or may be confined to a particular sector – for example initial education and training, adult learning or an occupational area.

Some frameworks may have more design elements and a tighter structure than others; some may have a legal basis whereas others represent a consensus of views of social partners. All qualifications frameworks, however, establish a basis for improving the quality, accessibility, linkages and public or labour market recognition of qualifications within a country and internationally.

The instrument that makes the national qualifications framework operational is a database of all the registered qualifications available in a country. It can be called *register, repertory or catalogue*. It is meant to provide the public and the employment sector with a constantly updated list of available qualifications, with all relevant details. Among these details, there are:

- Awarding body/bodies of such a qualification;
- Typical employment(s) or job(s) the owner such a qualification leads to; and,
- Whether it can be achieved through validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

It is through the necessary conditions that qualifications awarding bodies

– ministries or private providers typically – have to meet for registering their qualifications in the national catalogue that control may be exercised over the conditions in which qualifications are awarded (e.g. quality of the assessment process) and therefore their currency. It is not a sufficient condition for ensuring that quality is delivered, but it is an extremely powerful tool to govern the system and to provide incentives to providers so that they deliver quality. For instance, it is likely that the regulation should stipulate that every single qualification is revisited every five years or so, for renewal of registration. This prerequisite would provide an opportunity to check for actual performance of graduates,⁵ for example.

The National Catalogue of Qualifications is the necessary companion to the national qualifications framework. It is a complete list of all qualifications available in a country that have met the necessary conditions for registration.⁶ It aims at providing a state-of-the-art constantly updated list of qualifications to individuals, enterprises and the wider public. It facilitates access to employment, human resources management, occupational mobility and job matching. By creating a set of conditions for registration in the catalogue, a country naturally opens access to qualifications awarded by private providers. All qualifications registered in the catalogue are officially recognised in the country. It is a necessary⁷ condition for, and a good predictor of, societal recognition.

5 A commitment to collecting data regarding the performance of graduates in the labour market could be imposed.

6 For instance, some countries have made “access possible through validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes” a condition for registration (e.g. in France).

7 It may not be a sufficient condition for reasons explained above such as lack of trust or legitimacy/credibility.

In summary, a qualifications framework is a **classification** device. It resembles a big matrix organised by **levels** (from five to 12 in practice), and **descriptors** (knowledge, skills and attributes). A necessary companion to a national qualifications framework is a **catalogue** listing all the qualifications available in a country that have been approved by the competent authority.⁸

2.5 Lifelong Learning – Different Issues from Preschool Education to Adult Learning

Lifelong learning refers to learning activities that are undertaken throughout life, from preschool until beyond retirement age, and that are meant to improve competencies (knowledge, skills and attributes) within personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspectives. Thus the whole spectrum of learning – formal, non-formal and informal – is included, as are active citizenship, personal fulfilment, social inclusion and professional, vocational and employment-related aspects.

Access and participation in lifelong learning is generally the key issue. And no country has achieved satisfactory coverage and full participation⁹ with the notable exception of Norway, which seems to be achieving significant performance. For obvious reasons however, priorities of lifelong learning policy vary from one country/region to another. OECD member countries, for example, experience difficulty in achieving full participation in preschool, early childhood care and education. They have even bigger challenges

8 It may be an independent authority, an inter-ministerial agency or an agency housed in a ministry. When it is the latter, it is usually the Ministry of Education, unless the national qualifications framework is only for vocational qualifications. In that case, it would most likely operate under the Ministry of Labour.

9 In the context of adult learning, full participation refers to the number of participants or, more specifically, those requiring an upgrade of their competencies. At the individual level, adult learning is rarely possible on a full time basis; most of the time, it means scattered learning activities on a part time basis.

with the adult learning component of lifelong learning. Participation rates in formal learning activities drop dramatically after individuals have left the formal initial education and training system. And for those adults undertaking learning activities, the learning almost never leads to a recognised qualification (in less than 10 per cent of cases). In short, even in the most advanced countries in terms of adult learning coverage, learning activities leading to a recognised qualification take place only in the formal initial education and training system, for young people. In other regions, such as in sub-Saharan Africa, Southeast Asia or in the Caribbean, even access and participation in compulsory schooling is an issue.

This is why researchers and policy makers have consistently been trying to find ways to promote lifelong learning, whether initial schooling or adult learning or both, for the past decades. Qualifications frameworks are only one of the policy tools for doing so, and there are many other strategies (professional development of teachers, improving success rates at upper secondary levels, increased financing, information, advice and guidance, etc.). These will not be addressed in this paper which focuses only on the role of qualifications frameworks in promoting lifelong learning.

2.6 Recognition – It is Societal Recognition of Qualifications that Matters

In the context of this paper, the word *recognition* can be associated with either *learning outcomes* or *qualification(s)*. The two terms are obviously connected but they do not refer to the same set of issues, especially from a policy point of view.

Recognition of learning outcomes is the process of recording the achievements of individuals arising from any kind of learning in any environment. The process aims at making individual competencies visible so that they can be combined and individuals can build on learning achieved and be rewarded for it. Recognition of learning outcomes happens when an assessment is undertaken and, typically, a qualification is awarded to successful applicants.

From this point the next key question follows: *Is this qualification recognised by society?*

Recognition of a qualification happens when it is accepted – by society, including employers, parents, community leaders and all stakeholders – that the qualification provides evidence for competencies, and should have currency, in the labour market. This societal recognition is the key element of the entire qualification process because it would not make sense – for the individual and for the system – to invest time and money for being awarded, or for awarding, a qualification that nobody would recognise as legitimate evidence of competencies.

The most immediate practical application of this distinction can be found in the field of validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (Werquin, OECD, 2010). In many countries (such as France) this is a process meant to deliver qualifications to successful applicants (Werquin, 2012a). However, in many countries, it can be a long and complicated process and there is little or no incentive to engage in a long, complicated and sometimes expensive process if success in the technical part of the recognition process – i.e. assessment and validation – does not lead to societal recognition. It is not because the assessment process has led to the conclusion that the applicant meets the standards – i.e. learning outcomes are officially recognised – that the employers will proceed to accept this qualification in a job recruitment process.

It is a key concept at the heart of this paper because without recognition of learning outcomes, there is no such a thing as a qualification, and without recognition of qualifications there are no benefits associated with a qualification. Ultimately, the qualifications framework will become useless.

One final note is that recognition of qualifications may be dependent on several other elements such as quality and formalisation of the assessment/validation process. There is barely any societal recognition of qualifications that are awarded without **quality** being devoted to the assessment and level of formalisation of the assessment/validation process.

In short, recognition of learning outcomes – also called validation in this case – is a technical process.

Recognition of qualifications is a societal issue.

For instance, it is not rare that certificates delivered by well-known international vendors have more currency than qualifications delivered by a national ministry.

2.7 Main Lessons about the Vocabulary – The Reality is Complex

The literature on lifelong learning, skills development and qualifications systems and frameworks is a rather complex one, even for specialists in the field as it may happen that there is no consensus on the exact meaning of some of the key words. A lengthy discussion about terms and concepts may not be necessary however as:

- The meaning of [almost all] terms evolves over time,¹⁰ and;
- There will never be any international agreement on the meaning of all the terms – and no one needs one.

Nevertheless, for the sake of good communication, it is always safer to provide some definitions to avoid any misunderstanding. It does not mean the definitions provided here are the only acceptable ones, but they are the ones used in this paper. The definitions provided here are not carved in stone but just necessary to organise the discussions, and to communicate to the wider world.

¹⁰ For example “formal learning”: at the end of the 1970s, formal learning involved only learning activities undertaken by young people (children, in fact) during the initial formal education and training system, whereas it is now widely accepted that formal learning activities can be organised for adults, in the workplace, for instance.

As often with technical work, it uses jargon to a large extent. Words that have quite a well-known meaning in general, for lay people, have a very specific and precise meaning in this field (e.g. recognition, framework, systems or qualifications). Those technical words should not be used with end users – and the vocabulary should be made more accessible to them – but they are useful for researchers and policy makers as the reality is complex. It cannot be described in terms that would be too simple. The next section will more explicitly link national qualifications frameworks and lifelong learning systems.

2.8 Qualifications Frameworks – A Powerful Policy Tool

As it is now clear, a qualifications framework is a classification instrument. However, the idea of classifying qualifications to make apparent how they relate to one another is not new. Such an approach has always been seen as a way to control the acquisition of competencies and the progression from one level to the next in a given sector, profession or education and training institution. It has also been used as a way to exercise control over the right to practice a trade.

What is new is the use of qualifications frameworks as a policy tool. Governments are interested in developing overarching frameworks to incorporate qualifications that recognise learning outcomes from school, vocational education and training and higher education. Most governments are also interested in incorporating qualifications that recognise learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning; i.e. from experience in general, however acquired. This approach is consistent with the lifelong learning approach that, from the early days, emphasises life-wide learning, i.e. learning that takes place throughout life and in any kind of contexts (UNESCO, 1972 and 1996).

2.9 Overall Aims – Lifelong Learning and Employability for the Labour Market

The rationale for establishing a national qualifications framework varies from country to country. Nevertheless, all national qualifications frameworks usually have the following overall aims:

- Promote lifelong learning activities, especially among the adult population, and;
- Improve employability to facilitate the search and retention of a job.

Of course, these two aims are not divorced from each other; it is through competencies acquired or reinforced in the lifelong learning system that individuals may become more employable. However, the issues countries are faced with – and the practical objectives assigned to national qualifications frameworks to meet these two overall aims – are often phrased rather explicitly in terms of either lifelong learning or the labour market. Often through time, the descriptors defining the levels in the qualifications framework even emphasise the two contexts: “work” or “study” (e.g. the European Qualifications Framework, 2008).

In official rhetoric, the lifelong learning approach has a wider scope than providing qualified and competent workers to the labour market. It touches upon democracy and citizenship. It is also meant to improve the self-esteem and well-being of individuals. However, many countries are faced with economic difficulties and depressed labour markets – high unemployment rates, large proportion of unqualified school leavers, difficult and long school-to-work transitions, reskilling experienced and senior workers, postponing retirement age, untapped human capital, Matthew Effect,¹¹ etc. so that they often adopt a more pragmatic approach regarding the lifelong learning approach.

¹¹ When the adult learning system does not bridge the gap between the poorly qualified and the highly qualified because the adult learning system is not equitable, highly qualified people benefit more often from it than poorly qualified ones.

2.10 Practical Objectives

In order to meet the two overall aims of national qualifications frameworks, countries usually opt for all or part of the following objectives in practice:

- To establish national standards for learning outcomes;
- To promote through regulation the quality of education and training provision (e.g. by imposing rules and regulations for registering a qualification in the national catalogue of qualifications attached to the national qualifications framework);
- To act as a way of relating qualifications to each other;
- To promote access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning;
- To rationalise the education and training provision, by integrating parts of the qualifications system (e.g. vocational education and training delivered in further and higher education) or to modernise parts of the education and training system (i.e. to change the regulation of the quality of qualification processes or to change the way public funds are used to support education and training);
- To improve the infrastructure of some sectors of the lifelong learning system, such as the vocational education and training sector, and;
- To extend the recognition to all forms of learning outcomes, including learning outcomes from non-formal and informal learning.

2.11 Expected Results – First and Foremost: Transparency of the Qualifications System

In theory (but pieces of evidence are still somewhat missing) when they are turned into actions, these objectives have the potential to lead to the following **results**:

- Visibility of competencies;
- Mobility of qualified individuals (e.g. workers or students);
- Greater societal recognition of awarded qualifications (e.g. after a validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process);
- Improved information, advice and guidance of learners and potential learners through better legibility/readability of the qualifications system;
- Improved credibility/legitimacy of qualifications.

As can be expected, some of these results are often a consequence of other results. From this point of view, the key aspect and greater potential achievement is an improved transparency of the national qualifications system. It is through transparency that most of the other results may be achieved. There is strong evidence that individuals do not engage in formal or non-formal learning activities because they do not see clearly the potential benefits of doing so. Motivation is often the critical factor in adult learning (OECD, 2003 and 2005). By providing transparency about what a qualification will potentially bring to successful learners, and where they can move on from this point in the national qualifications framework, individuals are more motivated about engaging in learning. They see clearly what they may achieve and how to achieve it. They also see – provided that there is clear information, advice and guidance – the potential benefits they can get from achieving a qualification, in the labour market, for instance.

At the same time, for this to become a reality, the approach has to be rather holistic. For instance, it is when recruiters use qualifications in recruitments – in the way they describe their job vacancies for instance – that they send a strong signal to end users about their expectations. If the qualifications are described in the same terms in the national qualifications framework, the

full transparency is achieved and individuals can make informed decisions about their investment in learning and in trying to achieve a qualification.

There is also evidence that individuals are interested in achieving a qualification, but they may not be interested in resuming formal learning, especially among unqualified individuals¹² (Werquin, 2006). On the one hand, unqualified individuals have by definition a poor track record in the initial education and formal training system. Their motivation to engage in a system that failed them years ago is low. On the other hand, adults have come to realise that successful people in their professional activities, in their role in their community and also, to some extent, in their private life are qualified people. Unqualified individuals are therefore interested in achieving a qualification. There are plenty of examples whereby awarding even basic certificates to poorly qualified adults has generated motivation to resume learning on a more systematic basis; sometimes, in the formal learning system. This is clearly witnessed in the context of CLC work in Southeast Asia. There are also many examples of individuals resuming studies in the formal learning system after a successful validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process.

The next section focuses in particular on the role of the qualifications framework in promoting lifelong learning.

¹² It is essential to note that, in this paper, unqualified individuals may possess competencies. Again, a qualification is awarded after an assessment and a validation process. Self-learners may have competencies even if they were never assessed.

2.12 Expected Results – Mechanism for Promoting Lifelong Learning

There are many other ways aside from establishing a national qualifications framework to promote lifelong learning. Approaches such as the professional development of teachers, improving teaching and learning strategies, optimisation of financing and the elaboration of costing options to provide incentives to individuals so that they undertake learning activities, among others, also have an impact on lifelong learning activities. This paper addresses only the role of qualifications frameworks.

The sections above have clearly emphasised the general role of national qualifications frameworks in promoting lifelong learning. This section highlights some of these aspects. The link between lifelong learning and qualifications systems is evident from at least two points of view:

- Both lifelong learning and national qualifications frameworks are of systemic nature, and;
- They both emphasise that all forms of learning should be recognised, whether formal, non-formal or informal.

A national qualifications framework, among other things again, helps shape the outcomes of the different forms of learning and articulates the qualifications awarded after the assessment of these different forms of learning with one another. In doing so, the national qualifications framework gives currency to the different forms of learning that belong to the lifelong learning approach. In turn, end users use the national qualifications framework to decide on how they invest in learning (individuals) and use the qualifications framework for recruiting (employers, tertiary education institutions, etc.). A qualifications framework helps make sense of the complex world of education, training and lifelong learning.

Qualifications frameworks also have a potential role to play in promoting a culture of lifelong learning to a wider set of learners because they make the concept of qualifications – and of how qualifications connect to one

another in a sort of progression path, vertically and/or horizontally – more understandable to people that do not have a personal history of success in the formal learning system. Whether countries have an ageing population (and a need to organise the “reskilling” of individuals toward the end of their working life) or a young population (and a need to prepare them for their working life), promoting a culture of lifelong learning may be an interesting option to consider.

Qualifications frameworks are suitable instruments to allow for the integration of a sometimes complicated lifelong learning provision into a coherent framework where all awards – full qualifications, partial qualifications, certificates, diplomas and degrees – can be registered, or not, depending on whether they meet agreed pre-defined standards, in the database supporting the qualifications framework (catalogue). This is a powerful way to facilitate the transferability and portability of competencies, from one area to another, and from a place to another (international/regional qualifications framework).

Qualifications frameworks are natural instruments to give legitimacy to qualifications achieved after a validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes processes. This is a major factor for lifelong learning – with strong evidence – because people that see their experience recognised are highly motivated to resume learning, including within the formal learning system. Recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is of high relevance in countries aiming at improving the overall qualification levels of their population, e.g. for different target groups of adult potential learners with different backgrounds in terms of educational attainment and work experience.

The opacity of the qualifications system is a strong deterrent to undertake learning activities at any stage throughout life. By relating and comparing qualifications to each other on the basis of common reference points, qualifications frameworks may increase motivation to engage in learning. In addition, this would support the development of information, advice and guidance materials, which could be more easily developed, produced and disseminated if they referred to a largely accepted framework.

In the context of qualification frameworks, learning can be more easily focused on both individuals and company learning needs (enabled by equivalences between qualifications provided by different segments of the education and training system). Qualifications can meet the expectation of end users – workers or employers typically – by delivering more tailored qualifications.

Through the recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes – which are their natural companion – qualifications frameworks can reduce the time spent by learners re-learning to reach outcomes already achieved in other contexts. Finally, qualifications frameworks provide clarity and simplicity about skills and qualifications needed by policy makers, stakeholders and companies when preparing new measures and reforms.

2.13 Emerging Issues and Policy Pointers

It is difficult to provide policy recommendations without sound knowledge of the national and regional contexts (the Asia-Pacific one in this particular case). Surprisingly enough, there is no such a thing as a general [internationally valid and reliable] set of guidelines for establishing a [national] qualifications framework. Caution must be exercised when establishing a qualifications framework as there is no such a thing as a generic approach that could be safely reproduced. The best approach – if there is one – is probably highly conditional to the context and the general aims of the framework. It is also one that serves the aims of the countries in the first place. Nevertheless, from the experience accumulated in Africa, Latin America, the Caribbean and Europe, it is always possible to suggest some policy pointers. They attempted to respond to most of the general points made during the CLC Conference in Bangkok.

2.14 Adopting a Vision

First and foremost, even if it may be a bit early to be positive about success, it seems that the most successful countries who established a national qualifications framework, and being on the verge of reaping the benefits of it, are those having a vision and being able to clearly state their general

aims in revisiting their national qualifications system (of which a national qualifications framework is only one component). This presupposes that the country aiming at establishing a national qualifications framework has organised a consultation to identify those general aims. They could take the form of a general policy stating the vision of where the country wants to be in the medium or long run. This vision could highly benefit from setting up some quantitative targets such as:

- Reducing by such and such per cent the number of workers without a recognised qualification;
- Increasing by such and such per cent the number of young people enrolling in the vocational education and training system; or,
- Increasing by such and such per cent the number of young people leaving the initial education and training system at such and such level in the national qualifications framework.

This policy could be backed up by a strategy – with details about the method and the practical objectives – which emphasises the role of the national qualifications framework to meet the general aims of the policy.

Another point to consider is adopting a rather holistic approach. Establishing a national qualifications framework without addressing some of the crucial issues – such as the concept of competence descriptors and learning outcomes that should be adopted in the country, or the creation of a system for validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes – may experience problems. This is especially so during the implementation phase, when there is a focus on making the qualifications framework operational.

An example is provided by the European situation where the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) was designed before some of the national qualifications frameworks were established. The EQF was designed as a meta-framework, a sort of translation device for comparing qualifications across national qualifications frameworks. In other words, the EQF was not intended to be a template for countries not having a national qualifications framework to necessarily copy it. A national qualifications framework should, first and foremost, serve the purpose of the country. When it is

established, then it can be referenced to the EQF, but not the other way around. By imitating the EQF too closely, some countries that did not have a national qualifications framework beforehand went for the apparently easiest solution, but they may have missed some idiosyncrasies and may have left out of their national qualifications framework levels, learning outcomes or competencies that should be in it. By way of evidence for the likely reproduction of the qualifications framework, many countries having accessed the European Union, and having designed their own national qualifications framework, after the design of the EQF now have eight levels in their national qualifications framework, as in the EQF. On the contrary, all the countries that had established a national qualifications framework before the design of the EQF have a different number of levels: France has five, Ireland has 10, Scotland has 12.

This is also true when it comes to the relevant level descriptors. A question, for instance, is how to qualify workers that have practical skills but are illiterate. This issue is not only relevant at the CLC level but at the national level as well. The issue arises because all qualifications in the national qualifications framework contain some elements of literacy, even at the lowest level of the framework. Three options seem possible to address this issue:

- Creating a sub-level – a level 0 – in the national qualifications framework to register qualifications that do not require literacy;
- Creating a certificate outside of the national qualifications framework and strike a deal with employers organisations so that they accept this certificate as a evidence of practical skills; or,
- Delivering a partial qualification recognising only the practical skills and allowing a period of time for the owner to become literate, through formal learning.

The first solution would require extreme caution when comparing qualifications from a country to another, through the regional qualifications framework typically, if the national levels of literacy are not similar between the two countries. It may mean, for example, that one level in a country corresponds to several levels in another, or that there is no correspondence at all at a given level if one country is fully literate and not the other.

The second solution requires important preliminary work with the employers and the labour market actors so that they accept, as proof of competencies, certificates that are outside of the national qualifications framework.

Because contextual elements may vary over time and across countries, and that national qualifications frameworks should first and foremost meet the national context of a particular country, level descriptors should also have the potential to evolve over time.

It is only when countries have a vision, and a holistic approach, that they can easily address the issues that will inevitably arise, especially in the early days of the qualifications framework.

2.15 Addressing Potential Tensions between the Need for Harmonisation and the Uniqueness of Individual Profiles and Needs

Many countries, or approaches (including the one developed within the CLC Network), have been facing tensions due to the existence of several objectives seemingly difficult to achieve simultaneously. In the case of the CLC, for instance, it was reported during the conference that there is a tension between the quest for alignment of CLC programming with nationally defined qualification standards and the learner-centred philosophy of community-based non-formal learning.

The issue comes the fact that the awarding of a qualification demands that there is some form of harmonisation regarding what is expected from applicants in terms of competencies (knowledge, skills and attributes), whereas all individuals are different regarding their objectives for learning and, above all, regarding the way they actually learn. This harmonisation is

generally carried out through qualifications standards.¹³ Harmonisation is necessary for many reasons, such as:

- Ease of the assessment process, which needs to be based on [predefined preferably widely accepted]¹⁴ standards, which means harmonisation;
- Equity and fairness of the assessment process, since equally competent applicants should be treated in the same way;
- Reliability of the assessment process, since repeated assessments of the same applicant should lead to the same result;
- Transparency of the qualifications framework for end users;
- Relevance of the qualification process, which should make the assessed and validated competencies visible to the wider world, and;
- Societal currency of the qualification awarded, especially among employers.

Harmonisation is therefore a necessary condition for bringing quality and building confidence in the qualifications awarded. At the same time however, individuals are all unique and they all bring different competencies to the assessment process leading to a qualification. One obvious solution to address this tension, between the need for harmonisation and uniqueness of individuals, would be to multiply the number of qualifications registered in the Catalogue attached to the National Qualifications Framework. In this case, multiple individual profiles would be represented in the qualifications standards. This solution should not be adopted though because it leads

13 Qualification standards are precise descriptions of the criterion that any applicant must meet in order to be awarded the corresponding qualification. They are recorded in an official document that is formally approved by a competent authority. They are national benchmarks against which all applicants to a qualification – within the [initial] education and training formal system, or those engaging in a validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process – are assessed before they can be awarded the corresponding qualification. Some countries have different standards for assessing applicants in the formal education and training system or in the validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes system.

14 “Predefined widely accepted standards” constitute a condition of societal recognition of the qualification

to the existence of too many qualifications; and all countries with a large number of qualifications – more than 10,000 in the United Kingdom and France for instance – are trying to reduce it. A large number of qualifications is not necessarily an issue to the extent that there is no overlap among qualifications. Multiplying qualifications just for the sake of meeting individuals micro-needs would necessarily lead to overlaps, and work against transparency and easy navigation throughout the qualifications framework. Two other options should be considered to address this sort of tension.

Firstly, the issue the promoters of learner-centred approaches should examine is whether it is really the competencies acquired that are unique, and should be learner-centred, or is it the way they are taught and learnt? It is likely that all individuals have different ways to acquire competencies but can it be said that all acquired competencies are specific, and cannot be assessed against unique standards? “Learner-centred” may not mean that the competencies acquired are different from an individual learner to another. Instead, it may mean that each learner has a different approach to learning, and and acquiring competencies, because all individuals have a different experience. On a different level, it is also true that all learners have different objectives – and a learner-centred approach should definitely address these objectives too – but achieving those objectives may be boiled down to a small number of competencies; and these competencies can probably be described in a rather harmonised way in qualifications standards. For example, there is strong evidence that literacy provides opportunities to achieve many objectives, but literacy is a rather unique competency that can easily be described in standards and assessed in a rather harmonised way. In short, promoters of learner-centred approaches, such as the one used in CLCs, probably need to simplify the learning outcomes and acquired competencies as well, as they need to be creative in terms of delivery modes.

Secondly, another way to address this sort of tension is to put some emphasis on the assessment toward a qualification. The idea is that the assessor, or assessors, can spot to what extent extracurricular competencies or specific experience can work toward the awarding of a qualification or, if not, to a

partial qualification. Ideally, well trained/experienced assessors should also be able to re-orient applicants if their competencies are not suitable for the qualification aimed for in the first place. This may require that specific training is organised for the assessors but this point seems worth investing in. The assessment process is clearly at the heart of the qualifications process and it is during this procedure that qualifications standards are the most widely used.

It is worth noting that this tension between predefined standards and the individual's uniqueness is precisely one of the key difficulties when assessing an applicant going through a process to have their non-formal and informal learning outcomes validated and recognised. In such a process, all individuals come to the assessment with their own experience and assessors often report that it is difficult to make individual experience fit with predefined standards. The problem arose in France for instance, in the early 2000s, when it was noticed that the preparation of the assessment by the assessors was more difficult than the preparation for the assessment by the applicants; precisely because assessors did not know what to expect – unlike when applicants are assessed against a curriculum, i.e., against a well-known programme rather than unknown experience – and because they had to use very general standards for assessing unique [learning/life] pathways. Experience suggests that assessors, in the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes, assess applicants somewhat beyond the standards if need be. The idea is that there is a guidance component in such an approach. The point could be made here that there are similarities between the learner-centred approach used in the CLC network and the validation of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes approach. Both of them put the learner at the centre of the process and recognise its uniqueness. They also insist on communication and orientation; both have a function of career guidance. There is therefore room for policy learning by looking at solutions adopted during the assessment process for applicants aiming at having their non-formal and informal learning outcomes assessed, validated and recognised toward a qualification. For example, evidence suggests that professionals often have a better grasp, than teachers or professors, of the competencies that will be

needed. It also shows that qualifications standards have to be “interpreted” when assessing non-formal and informal learning outcomes, and that assessment can be tailored to the experience of the applicants thanks to this possibility of interpretation. For all these reasons, several studies have also concluded that the professional development of assessors is a key element of success in validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes.

In summary, the tensions described in this section could be addressed at two levels. First of all when drafting the standards, so that they are general enough but also open enough to allow for some specificities. Standards are social constructs. They are therefore meant to be widely discussed – so that a consensus is reached – and to evolve with the society, to follow and meet its needs. Second of all, the tensions could be addressed during the assessment process when individuals bring their own experience. In both cases, bridges should be built between formal education and training on the one hand and non-formal and informal learning on the other, and between qualifications standards and individual experience.

Finally, the several points made above bring about discussion about the philosophy of national qualifications frameworks brought together. If there seems to be a strong agreement, throughout the literature and among the practitioners that the definitions of the needs in terms of competencies should start from observing actual activities (in the labour market typically), there is no such a thing as a unique approach from there on. Once the analysis of an activity is carried out, some countries go on by defining education and training programmes so that individuals are provided with the competencies necessary for this activity; whereas others put the qualifications process as the immediate next step. In other words, despite the same starting point (analysis of the activity), some countries use the education and training programmes as the entry point, whereas others use the qualifications at the main entry point. In the former case, the focus is on curricula; in the latter case, it is on qualifications standards. The difference is that, in the latter case, no attention is given to how or where the competencies have been achieved; the only issue that matters is whether applicants for a qualification are competent or not. It is the



approach used in France, for instance, and it is probably why validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes was introduced rather early on in this country; because one of the ideas at the core of validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is that only the learning outcomes matter, and not the input process (“how”, “where” and “with whom” competencies have been acquired).

Even if the matter is not too consensual, qualifications frameworks intend to separate the input process from the qualification process to give readability/legibility to learning outcomes, and to be able to describe the content and the currency of the learning outcomes of a qualification owner. As a consequence, designing a qualifications framework means a paradigm change where learning as such disappears from the forefront. This approach is not usual for the education and labour market stakeholders. If common bases for dialogue could be easily found about education and training programmes, it is not often the case for qualification standards. The qualification is indeed a more complex concept because learning outcomes reflect the representation of what a society defines as what is expected from a qualified individual. Some qualifications are related to the demonstration of performance on a specific and single work situation. Others may cover the largest scope related to a whole occupation, and transferable to another occupation. Harmonising those two approaches to a qualification (the result of an assessment against a curriculum, or the result of an assessment of learning outcomes regardless of the input process) is not possible, and not even considered. Diversity is a source of richness and innovation. The qualifications framework challenge is to provide sufficient readability/legibility to understand and respect each approach according to the national context.

2.16 Agreeing on the Key Concepts

If there is a strong agreement that a qualifications framework is an instrument for classifying qualifications, the object used to classify the qualifications seems to vary from a country to another. This object is – or should be – a reflection of the value system that has currency in the country. In other

words, there are two ways to provide the qualifications framework with a structure, two ways to organise the qualifications. All countries seem to use the term learning outcomes, but it seems the term has two meanings and therefore it seems there are two types of approaches.

Some countries use the term learning outcomes in the sense of outcomes of the formal learning period/process. For example, in the initial education and training formal system, the concept of learning outcomes refer to the degree to which learners/students have acquired all or part of the *curriculum*, to the degree to which they have attended the course almost. There is no explicit reference to the objective of the learning and to how the qualification will be used, in the labour market for example. In the worst-case scenario, the assessment is even carried out against the *curriculum*.

Some other countries insist on the qualifications having a practical objective of being used in the labour market. In this case, the concept of learning outcomes refers to the acquired competencies, and stresses the context(s) in which those competencies can be used. In short, what seems to matter almost as much as the assessment and the delivery of a qualification, is the negotiation process in the preparation phase – and the elaboration of the standards – so that there is a clear and shared understanding of what is the meaning of the qualification and how it can be given currency to act as a passport for work for example.

2.17 Avoiding Misunderstandings and Pitfalls

According to past and current promoters of national qualifications frameworks, the endeavour is quite demanding in terms of human resources and expertise. It takes a considerable amount of time and effort to set things in motion. For all these reasons, establishing a national qualifications framework can be costly. It is difficult to provide an estimate because the cost depends on many contextual factors but it is a fair statement to say that most of the overall cost is composed of human resources, transaction and communication costs. In many countries, the human resources are provided by the government. The transaction costs come from bringing

the stakeholders in early enough in the design process, so that they feel some kind of ownership. The communication costs are important to inform end users about the national qualifications framework, to make it visible and used.

It will also take time to achieve results in terms of more people participating in lifelong learning and/or improving the quality of the education and training provision. It will most likely take years before any benefit can be felt, perhaps five to ten years, depending on many other factors such as communication. It will take even longer for the concept of the national qualifications framework to permeate in the society. It is a long-term endeavour. It requires patience and it is a technically, institutionally and financially demanding process.

In terms of establishing a regional/international qualifications framework, priority should be given to establishing a national qualifications framework in the first place. The regional/international qualifications framework should be seen as a meta-framework, not a template that should be mimicked regardless of any consideration about relevance of the local contexts and of the domestic needs of the countries.

Another issue that might be interesting to CLCs is the connection between a national qualifications framework and the financing of lifelong learning. It seems that national qualifications frameworks have the potential to contribute to organising the financing of the lifelong learning system and to optimise and rationalise the use of existing money. A qualifications framework can be a tool for managing money and creating incentives. After the establishment of a national qualifications framework and a catalogue of qualifications, subsidies to lifelong learning activities can be based on:

- Registration in the catalogue of qualifications; and,
- Any other considerations that are made patent thanks to the existence of a qualifications framework (qualifications in need, qualifications accessible to validation of a non-formal and informal learning outcomes)

Among the potential pitfalls that deserve attention, there is the temptation to simultaneously address the establishment of a national qualifications

framework and of a system for the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes. This point is dealt with in the next section.

2.18 National Qualifications Framework and Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes

Even if the national qualifications framework and a validation of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes system have a lot in common (learning outcomes, transparency, qualifications, etc. it is not sure that they should be addressed at the same time under the same legal framework or the same consensus building process. Validation of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a process, whereas a national qualifications framework deals with the result of this process; the qualification. The stakeholders and actors are different. The French approach brings an interesting perspective.¹⁵

In France, the Law of “*Social Modernisation*” established Validation of Experiential Learning Outcomes (*Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience*, VAE) as a right for every citizen in 2002. It is the most recent achievement in a 200-year process focusing on the preparation of adults for the labour market. After continuous attention and many laws on adult vocational training and a rather unsuccessful law on Validation of Occupational Learning Outcomes (*Validation des Acquis Professionnels*, VAP) in 1992, the system established in 2002 is now ten years old.

Despite a slow start in terms of take up, participation keeps increasing. For the first time in French legislation, whole qualifications can be awarded only on the basis of a successful assessment against predefined widely accepted standards (*référentiels*). In case of failure to achieve the full qualification, the VAE Committee can award a partial qualification or fail the applicant all together. In both cases, by law, the committee must provide a rationale for its decision and recommend further learning where appropriate.

15 The rest of this section is adapted from Werquin (2012a).

The general institutional framework for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes is under the responsibility of the Ministry of Labour, which is in charge of lifelong learning in general, and of adult learning in particular. Nevertheless, the legislation was prepared during discussions with social partners and the different ministries that deliver qualifications (about ten). The laws are general statements where the decrees and decisions can describe specific rules and practices for the implementation of the VAE process in each context by each ministry. As a consequence, France has a single law whose purpose is to be universal and provide rights and duties to every single citizen, but there are several frameworks operating at the same time for the validation of experiential learning outcomes. They correspond to different objectives: access to study through exemption of academic prerequisite, career guidance, partial or full qualification and entry into the labour market. Since 2002, the most important improvements took place in 2009, with a text that aimed at increasing participation in VAE by targeting private sector employees in particular, and developing an effective information and guidance system.

In the case of Southeast Asia, if a law on recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes should be passed in parallel to the establishment of a national qualifications framework, the key questions could be:

- For which objectives (access, career guidance, qualification and/or the labour market)? France has a different law for each objective;
- What type of preparatory work is required with the key stakeholders? Involving them before the law is actually drafted creates a sense of ownership. Most recent French laws follow an inter-sectoral agreement achieved after intense negotiations;
- Should the law on recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes be part of the law on the national qualifications framework? Not only is this not the case in France (the VAE Law is part of a law on “*Social Modernisation*”), but the argument made in this paper is that it is not possible because the qualifications classified in the qualifications framework are outcomes, whereas recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a process. The actors and stakeholders are

different. The objectives are different. The points on which a law should focus for legal formalisation and for providing a vision are different. There are commonalities between recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and a national qualifications framework, but passing a law describing both systems may create unnecessary complexities and rigidities; and

- Is there a risk that a law creates unnecessary demands on the recognition of the non-formal and informal learning outcomes system and therefore makes recognition more expensive for participants and/or organisations? There is no such evidence in France, probably thanks to the preparatory work mentioned above that has identified the actual needs and expectations in advance.

Concrete Cases Regarding Recognition of Non-formal and Informal Learning Outcomes

Even if countries are usually faced with the same issues – high unemployment rates, high long term unemployment rates, high youth unemployment rates, low activity rates (especially among women and seniors), skewed qualifications distributions and overall low levels of qualifications – they usually adopt somewhat different approaches to implementing systems for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes as a possible solution to some of these issues.

The differences among countries in the way they concretely approach recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes are:

- What sort of learning outcomes are accepted for assessment: some countries focus on vocational experience (the labour market), others on learning outcomes from the formal education and training system not yet assessed or recognised;
- What sort of benefits are expected from enrolling individuals in a recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes process: some countries focus on finding them a job or a better wage,

whereas others also insist quite strongly on improved democracy and citizenship;

- Assessment methods vary from a country to country, even from a sector to another: from a portfolio of competencies to actual assessment on the spot (at the workplace (observation) or in a training centre (simulation) for example;
- Whether successful applicants are awarded the exact same qualification as the one awarded in the formal education and training system, or whether they are different (rubber stamped in red typically to signal a difference in the awarding process);
- Whether the assessment and validation lead to a full qualification (Ireland, Norway, France for example) or only to some credits or a partial qualification; and,
- Whether countries passed a law in their parliament, or whether a social consensus was built through bargaining.

It is not possible to list all the actions governments have taken. Examples are plenty where, in the countries delivering vocational qualifications, assistant nurses have become nurses (Switzerland), simple bricklayers have become foremen (Slovenia). Other examples are given by countries where individuals with less than compulsory schooling have been granted primary or secondary education (Portugal, Spain, etc.); those that have been granted upper secondary education often time enrolled in tertiary education, opening completely new possibilities. On a different level, a significant concrete example is given by Canada where foreign workers have been awarded a national qualification after an assessment process (Van Kleef and Werquin, 2013).

In a nutshell, there are as many concrete cases as countries, regions or sectors. The common factor seems to be a strong push from Governments, or International Organisations, that see in recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes a way:

- To improve the level of qualifications of the population, at a cost which, although not trivial, is lower than full education and training;
- Make competencies visible for better job matching, job promotion and people well being; and,
- Create new routes to qualifications.

2.19 Preparing Potential Next Steps

By way of conclusion, some possible next steps can be listed.

In terms of establishing a national qualifications framework, these are:

- Pass a law and/or create a societal consensus (with main education and labour stakeholders);
- Make it happen, be it on a small scale: pilot projects and collect low hanging fruits, e.g. on a sectoral, enterprise or local level (build success stories, organise communication);
- Meet employers' expectations and needs;
- Create partnerships, potentially involving the private sector;
- Learn from international comparisons, but do not transfer practices from a country to another without exercising extreme caution, and;
- Investigate to what extent validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes could be organised, as a complement to the establishment of a national qualifications framework.

The latter point – regarding organising validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes and establishing a national qualifications framework – is certainly the most difficult to address in a rather crisp way. As underlined above (see Section 3.5), the two approaches have some elements in common (the focus on learning outcomes as opposed to the input process; the importance of awarding a qualification describing competencies actually owned; the promotion of lifelong learning) but these are rather distinct in essence. The validation and

recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes is a process, whereas the national qualifications framework deals with the result of this process; the qualification. This is why, as potential next steps, countries should investigate to what extent the two approaches could be dealt with simultaneously. This means:

- Whether there is a wide acceptance, throughout the country, that what matter are more competencies (knowledge, skills and attributes) actually owned rather than schools, training centres or universities attended;
- Whether qualifications (degrees, diplomas, titles and any type of awards) are important to the extent that they are a mirror/reflection of competencies rather than a proof of social status;
- Whether employers, and the society at large, are ready to accept that fully assessed experience is as important as attending classroom-based education and training;
- Whether end users and beneficiaries are aware that they could greatly benefit from such a system that basically creates a new route to qualifications, and reinforce equity and inclusiveness;
- Whether all actors and stakeholders are ready to meet and be involved in creating a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes (re)designing assessment standards, elaborating certification processes, defining assessment methods (observation, simulation, written tests, interviews and/or any other state-of-the art approaches), and;
- Whether a law, or any other official process, has reasonable chances to be passed regarding the currency of fully validated and recognised experience.

Establishing a system for recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes and a national qualifications framework entails national and local studies, statistical surveys, and pilot projects on a small¹⁶ – but full¹⁷ – scale.

Given the experience acquired in other countries, it is likely that any attempt at recognising non-formal and informal learning outcomes will fail if it is not carefully prepared, including using a heavy communication policy about the value of experience, in addition to the role of qualifications in making competencies visible. As surprising as it may seem to the reader, the technical aspects of implementing a system for assessing and validating non-formal and informal learning outcomes are rather easy to deal with (Werquin, 2010a and 2010b). It is the acceptance, by the society at large (including employers and other end users and beneficiaries such as families and communities), that this is the issue to address ahead of time (Werquin, 2008).

In broader terms, possible next steps are about addressing systemic issues:

- Define the overall aims of the national qualifications framework, identify the target groups and intended beneficiaries;
- Simplify the vocabulary, establish communication among stakeholders;
- Choose meaning of key concept (learning outcome, recognition, qualifications, etc.)
- Publicise the benefits;
- Pilot broad strategies;
- Establish a regional/international qualifications framework to facilitate mobility of workers and students across borders; and
- Anticipate evolution of the lifelong learning system (increased take up, etc.) and of the labour market (stronger regulation of occupations, etc.)

16 Region, municipality or enterprise for example.

17 With all the necessary actions for establishing a qualifications framework (standards, descriptors, etc.), and for establishing a system for recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes (guidance, documentation of learning outcomes, assessment, validation, awarding of a qualification).

Summary for Policy Makers: National Qualifications Frameworks in Short

National qualifications frameworks are designed to structure and classify regulated qualifications, and have the potential to:

- Link education and the labour market;
- Give qualifications currency in the labour market;
- Provide transparency about qualifications;
- Assist people to move freely through the lifelong learning system (from the formal education and training initial system to informal learning);
- Bring quality to qualifications;
- Build confidence in qualifications;
- Enable comparability of qualifications, nationally and internationally;
- Support national and international mobility of students and workers; and,
- Help provide the ground for establishing validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning outcomes systems.

For all these reasons, national qualifications frameworks have the potential to promote lifelong learning, through better information and greater motivation of the potential learners.

3. SUMMARY OF PRESENTATIONS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Introduction

Her Excellency Chaveewan Klungsang, Vice-Minister of the Ministry of Education, Thailand highlighted the need to strengthen human resource development in today's rapidly changing world. Eradicating illiteracy by 2015 as well as improving access to education and its quality are also areas requiring urgent attention. She noted that in order to meet EFA goals and promote education for sustainable development, the Thai Ministry of Education has established around 8,000 District Non-Formal Education Centres as focal points for the provision of all forms of non-formal and informal education services across the country. Non-formal education centres, or CLCs, are an effective means through which educational opportunities can be extended to all target groups of learners. In addition, the Ministry of Education has recently initiated a new literacy promotion project to develop 40,000 "Smart Book Houses" to assist people throughout the country in the pursuit of lifelong learning.

Mr. Gwang-Jo Kim, Director, UNESCO Bangkok, extended a warm welcome to all participants and expressed his appreciation to the governments of Thailand and Japan for their generous and long-standing support of UNESCO in organising this regional conference. He highlighted four key terms which figure prominently in the theme of this year's conference: CLCs, NQFs, *Lifelong Learning and Skills Development*. He invited the participants to reflect on the linkages and mutually supportive aspects of these four key elements and their implications for their collaborative work. Mr. Kim shared that CLCs, NQFs, lifelong learning and skills development are high on UNESCO's agenda. He added that CLCs have always played a significant role in the empowerment, social transformation and improvement of individuals' quality of life. CLCs likewise promote human development by providing opportunities for lifelong learning and skills development to people of all ages in local communities. Regarding

NQFs, Mr. Kim said that UNESCO has been working closely with the ASEAN Secretariat to develop a regional qualifications framework in Southeast Asia. This framework would act as a translation device to make national qualifications more readable across the ASEAN Community. Mr. Kim closed his address by urging all participants to work together towards establishing or maintaining NQFs that fully recognise the linkages between formal education and learning taking place in non-formal and informal contexts. “Taken separately, CLCs, NQFs, lifelong learning and skills development already have significant intrinsic value. However, when working in harmony they have the potential to become an even more powerful collective force for development,” said Mr. Kim.

Mr. Hiroaki Motomura, Assistant Director-General for International Affairs, Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), Japan thanked UNESCO and its Member States in the Asia-Pacific for promoting the development of CLCs in the region. He was delighted to learn that the number of CLCs in the region has increased sharply to 17,000. He is confident that CLCs will be a vital instrument in achieving EFA goals. Mr. Hiroaki was likewise very pleased that both UNESCO Bangkok and its Member States have gained valuable experience in promoting lifelong learning and education for sustainable development –two thematic areas which the Japanese government have made a top priority and plan to continue supporting. To close, Mr. Motomura announced that the next regional CLC and ESD conference will be held in Okayama City, Japan in 2014.

Mr. Qian Tang, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO, said that the 21st century is an era where unprecedented changes happen at a breakneck speed. As we speak, an infinite number of changes are taking place in the political, social and economic arenas. The question now is how should these changes be tackled? Mr. Tang said that lifelong learning is one of the most important paradigm shifts in the history of education and it will affect both what we do and how we do it for many years to come. There is no doubt that lifelong learning can be an effective strategy to address skills shortages among young people in a rapidly changing world, particularly those who are marginalised and disadvantaged. When

establishing qualifications frameworks, whether on a national or regional scale, Mr. Tang reminded participants that it is essential to integrate a strong lifelong learning component by recognising non-formal and informal education. “In this sense, CLCs deserve special mention as they are at the heart of lifelong learning and skills development, catering to people of all ages and backgrounds in local communities,” added Mr. Tang.

Mr. Ichiro Miyazawa, Programme Specialist, UNESCO Bangkok, introduced the objectives of the conference and explained why lifelong learning and skills development programmes need to be integrated into NQFs.

He showed a photo of a group of mothers attending a basic literacy course in Bhutan and asked conference delegates what ongoing learning options these women have once they have completed that course. He discussed how the education system could facilitate their ongoing capacity building. He also showed a picture of youth in Bangladesh who left school in their primary years but later received vocational training from a local NGO. Mr. Miyazawa stressed that young people have limited opportunities to develop their skills within current education systems, often despite a strong commitment and motivation to learn.

Mr. Miyazawa explained how current education programmes have been implemented in isolation. He stressed that lifelong learning and non-formal education programmes have been allocated insufficient budgets despite their needs and that they have been sidelined without proper linkages to formal education programmes. He stressed that education programmes could be better connected by NQFs, which would provide learners more options to pursue lifelong learning. He encouraged participants who are engaged in lifelong and non-formal education to become more involved in the formulation and implementation of NQFs in their respective countries.

3.2 National Qualifications Framework: What is it and how it functions.

This session was facilitated by **Mr. Shigeru Aoyagi, Director of UNESCO New Delhi.**

Mr Shigeru Aoyagi chaired the first Session on '*National Qualifications Framework: What is it and how it functions?*' At the outset of the session, the Chair reminded participants of the three key questions that underlie the Regional Conference, namely: (1) What are NQFs and what role do they play in promoting lifelong learning and skills development? (2) How can lifelong learning and skills development be included and recognised in NQFs? and; (3) How can skills development programmes be provided effectively and efficiently? The Chair also invited participants to reflect on how best to build effective linkages between NQF, lifelong learning and CLCs. There were two speakers in this session: Mr. Adam Luckhurst and Mr. Muhammad Omar, who presented the Australia and Malaysia Cases, respectively.

Mr Adam Luckhurst, General Manager of the Tertiary Quality and Student Support Division from the Australian Government Department provided an overview of the Australia Qualifications Framework (AQF), specifically; how it is implemented within the context of broader quality assurance arrangements and how it supports the Australian government's goals of ensuring the future needs of the workforce through increased participation and educational attainment and supporting lifelong learning and skills development. He shared that Australia was the first country to adopt a national policy for regulating qualifications in its education and training sector. He added that the government's main focus of reform was to increase participation and educational attainment in order to achieve greater productivity and an inter-connected tertiary education environment that supports lifelong learning and high quality education and training.

Mr Luckhurst mentioned that the AQF – which is aimed at increasing labour mobility – was developed as part of the broader reform process in terms of changes in the economy, a demand for skilled workers and an increase in VET enrolments.

At the end of his presentation, he identified the various benefits of the AQF:

- The qualifications are recognised in Australia.
- It provides consistency in outcomes for each qualification type.
- It supports national standards in education and training.
- It is central to ensuring that qualifications will enable learners to meet standards expected by industry.
- It facilitates the mobility of learners and workers.

Mr Muhammad Omar, Director of Coordination and Quality Assurance Reference Division, Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), Ministry of Higher Education presented the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) which is an instrument that classifies qualifications according to a set of criteria.

Mr. Omar opened his presentation by providing a full description of the Malaysian MQF. Mr. Omar highlighted the fact that Malaysia aims to make the MQF a reference point for national qualifications in order to improve and promote understanding of qualifications, the transparency of individuals through learning outcomes and to reform the delivery of education by shifting the focus to learning rather than an emphasis on input. He concluded that the ambitions of the MQF are to solve credit accumulation in order to realise lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning, support open access to higher education systems, to build strong relationships with the employment market, to improve the parity of esteem for vocational and skills qualifications and to facilitate international recognition and labour mobility.

3.3 Regional Qualifications Framework

This session was facilitated by **Prof. Peter Kell** from Charles Darwin University, Australia and two guest speakers were invited to present their experiences on the European and ASEAN Qualifications Frameworks.

The session identified the need for long-term planning, the commitment of various nations as partners, the need for adequate funding and a vision



for what a qualifications framework can achieve in harmonising regional and national initiatives. The presentations by Ms. Susana Oliveira and Ms. Magawati Santoso outlined the progress being made in linking qualifications frameworks in the regional context.

Ms. Susana Oliveira, Project Director of the Kerigma Association for Social Development in Portugal, gave a presentation on the relationship between Portugal and the European Union. She highlighted the development of the New Opportunities Centre which she described as an important initiative in assisting marginalised people between 30-65 years of age. The 500 centres have been 70 per cent funded by the European Social Fund and she said that this highlighted the need for government funding. The centres also capitalise on the development of the European Skills Passport. The challenge is for such initiatives to survive a period of government austerity and diminished funds from the European Social Fund.

She discussed how the Portugal NQF was created and adopted, as well as how it functions and how it seeks to promote lifelong learning and labour market mobility. In addition, she described Portugal's NQF main objectives: (1) to improve access to education; (2) to develop a system where all non-formal education strategies or formal training courses have value and contribute to education progression; and (3) to increase the relevance of adult education for economy modernisation. Some practical tools with a special focus on the Ageing Work Force (adults 50+ years old), like AMaP – Age Management in Practice¹⁸ were presented. These initiatives sought to address the challenge of raising awareness of EQF.

The second speaker, **Ms. Megawati Santoso**, Vice-Chair, Task Force on ASEAN Qualifications Framework, described ongoing initiatives in developing a common qualifications framework in the ASEAN region, involving 600 million workers. The objective of this long-term process is to synchronise recognition of qualifications to promote labour mobility across the ASEAN region. The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework

¹⁸ AMaP is a collaborative partnership involving organisations from Germany, Greece, Poland, Portugal, Sweden and the UK.

(AQRF) will be introduced in 2014. This framework has an important role in building workforce capabilities. The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) was identified as playing an important role in harmonising and synchronising the initiative. The AQRF has eight levels across four domains and includes responsibility and accountability, knowledge and comprehension skills, work competency and morals and ethics. Ms. Megawati Santoso also described the development of the Indonesian Qualifications Framework utilising nine levels across four domains such as formal education, professional certificate, self-learning and career advancement. A key challenge will be integrating national qualifications frameworks into the AQRF and developing a notion of interoperability.

3.4 National Policy on Qualifications Framework

This session was facilitated by **Mr. Ehsanur Rahman**, Executive Director, Dhaka Ahsania Mission.

The focus of the session was the '*National Policy on Qualifications Framework*'. There were two designated speakers for the session who shared the national policy frameworks and practices of the Philippines and Thailand relating to Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The speakers were Ms. Irene Isaac, Deputy Director-General for Sectoral TVET, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Philippines, and Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong, Secretary-General, Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education, Thailand.

Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong, Secretary-General, Office of the Education Council, Ministry of Education, Thailand, was unable to deliver her full presentation as she was called to an urgent meeting at the Ministry of Education. Nonetheless, she spoke briefly about the importance of NQFs as instruments in bridging the gap between formal and non-formal education. She then circulated copies of her presentation among delegates.

The formal session started with brief introductory remarks from the facilitator stressing the importance of linking national frameworks with community level delivery systems through CLCs. The importance of links between the market needs at the national, sub-national and regional level, as well as the contexts at the community level, where the learners live, was emphasised. The introductory observations referred to earlier conference presentations which emphasised the importance of qualifications frameworks – that start at the national level – maintaining the dynamics of needs at corresponding levels.

Ms. Irene Isaac, Deputy Director-General for Sectoral TVET, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, presented a brief overview of the ongoing TVET system in the Philippines along with an overview of how it has been developed over decades. She explained, with reference to the Executive Order of 1982, how the system came into place, covering all levels of education – basic to tertiary levels. Key elements of the system include: the national certification system; process of partial certification recognising attainment of specific competencies; and diversity in competency descriptors covering three domains of competencies – basic, common and core competencies. Ms. Isaac emphasised that the unified Philippine NQF provides academic equivalency pathways and access ramps for a ladderized interface system allowing for easier transition and progressions between higher education and TVET, as well as formal and non-formal education.

Since the Philippine NQF system is able to recognise partial completion of vocational competencies, learners/workers are still given opportunities to enter the workplace despite lacking a full certificate of competency. They can also advance to higher levels of learning by acquiring a National Certificate of Competency (equivalent to a full certificate of competency in a certain trade) or progress onwards to higher education.

The National Certificates and Certificates of Competency are issued pursuant to the PQF descriptors levels. The qualification can be achieved through recognition of prior competency assessment and certification. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) competency can be achieved via school-based, work-based and community-based training.

The Expanded Equivalency Tertiary Education Accreditation Programme confers recognition of learning outside of the formal system. However, the Department of Education, TESDA and CHED shall make detailed descriptors of each qualification level based on learning standards in basic education, competency standards and training regulations (in TVET) as well as the policies and standards of higher education programmes. They shall jointly implement national pilot programmes to determine their relevance and applicability in all levels of education.

She also highlighted the eight levels of PQF which are regarded as the framework of the Philippine education system.

Dr. Sasithara Pichaichannarong distributed her document on her country's National Qualifications Framework and requested that the audience excuse her for not being able to remain at the conference due to her prior engagement to defend the 2014 annual budget in Parliament. The document on Thailand's National Qualifications Framework demonstrated that the country is fully aware of the importance of having an NQF and subsequently has proposed its development under the National Manpower Production and Development during the Second Decade of Education Reform, 2009-2018 Strategy approved by the Thai cabinet on 21 December 2010.

3.5 Global and Regional Policies and Recommendations

This session was facilitated by **Ms. Tomoko Shibao**, Deputy Director of Programme Department, ACCU, Japan. Two guest speakers were invited to present on separate topics.

The session highlighted two presentations. The first was UNESCO's Policy on Registration, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of the Outcomes of Non-formal and Informal Learning (UIL) by **Ms. Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo**, UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. The presentation covered important aspects of the Guidelines of the Belem Framework of Action, and the concept and practically on RVA. Ms. Carolyn Medel-Anonuevo gave a

presentation on UNESCO guidelines on recognising all forms of learning with a focus on non-formal and informal learning.

Ms. Medel-Anonuevo explained the context and features of the UNESCO guidelines as an implementation strategy for lifelong learning. Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of all forms of learning outcomes is a relevant practice that values the full range of competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude) that individuals have obtained in various contexts and means in different stages of their lives. Ms. Medel-Anonuevo referred to the Shanghai Consensus¹⁹ which advocates flexible pathways, seeks to link TVET with general education at all levels and facilitates the progression of TVET learners. She pointed out that the Belem Framework for Action (the outcome document of the Sixth International Conference on Adult Education or CONFINTEA VI) recommended development guidelines on all learning outcomes, including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning.

Ms Medel-Anonuevo also outlined the principles of the UNESCO Guidelines: 1) to ensure equity and inclusiveness in access to learning opportunities; 2) to promote the equal value of learning outcomes of formal, non-formal and informal learning; 3) competency accumulated through non-formal and informal learning should be treated on a par with those obtained through formal learning; 4) to ensure the centrality of individuals in the RVA process; 5) to improve flexibility and openness of formal education and training; 6) to promote quality assurance in the entire RVA process; and 7) to strengthen partnerships among all stakeholders. Ms Medel-Anonuevo proceeded then to enumerate the six key areas of action at the national level. Her presentation received favourable support and comments from the audience. Most participants agreed that the RVA process is a good programme and model to follow. However, it tends to involve the political process at the global level since some countries in the region have not met

¹⁹ The Shanghai Consensus is a summary of key recommendations emerging from the UNESCO Third International Congress on TVET in 2012. The document highlights the need to validate, recognise and transfer non-formal and informal learning and skills regardless of how they are acquired.

their basic needs. As raised by some participants, in the context of some CLCs in remote areas, NQFs or RVA may not be appropriate to their learning environment, although their learning needs are a lifelong process.

The second presentation was by **Mr. Le Huy Lam**, Interim Director, SEAMEO Regional Centre for Lifelong Learning (SEAMEO CELLL) on Promoting Lifelong Learning for All: Regional Advocacy Brief on Lifelong Policy and Strategy with policy, finance (ASEAN LLL Fund), quality and awareness raising for social cohesion, equity, cultural diversity, sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

Comments and questions by participants from countries including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Japan, Philippines and Thailand highlighted the following points for further discussion:

- The uniqueness of each CLC depending on learners' needs;
- The critical role of various levels of government, with local governments playing an important role in global vs. national priority setting;
- The need for indicators for education for sustainable development (ESD) to follow the Belen Framework of Action, which incorporates sustainable development challenges – the importance of acknowledging the knowledge system of indigenous people in RVA;
- The need for capacity building;
- Financing for CLC and LLL, especially in post-conflict stage;
- Increased industry contributions to the development of RVA;
- The target for RVA (what should be covered in RVA) and the significance of basic literacy in it;
- The central role of learners in LLL, thus in RVA, and the need for a holistic development of the system.

Mr. Le Huy Lam's presentation was on '*Promoting Lifelong Learning for All – Introduction to Lifelong Learning for All: Southeast Asia Regional Advocacy Brief on Lifelong Learning Policy and Strategies*'. He started with a general overview of ASEAN and its ten members as well as its progress in social and economic development and its three pillars for regional cooperation. The major focus of his presentation and discussion was to review the results of the "UNESCO joint Seminar on National Policy Frameworks for Lifelong Learning in ASEAN Countries" held from 10 to 11 January this year in Hanoi, Vietnam. The seminar was joined by 150 representatives from seven countries and aimed at identifying effective strategies in establishing lifelong learning systems as well as sharing experiences in implementing lifelong learning policy frameworks and producing a regional advocacy brief on related policies and strategies. This presentation outlined the background and rationale for promoting lifelong learning for all as an urgent need to realize ASEAN aspirations and key recommendations from the seminar which were grouped in five categories: policy and legislation; finance; provision of learning opportunities and enhancement of quality; awareness raising; and regional collaboration.

3.6 Global Trends on Youth, Employment and Skills Development

This session was facilitated by Ms. Dian Zhang, Associate Programme Specialist, INRULED. Two guest speakers were invited to present their topics on skills development regarding youth employment

Youth and adults form a major part of the total population in almost all developing countries and there is evidence showing a surge in their numbers in recent years. With the long-term consequences of the financial crisis as well as challenges posed by knowledge-based economies that governments are grappling with worldwide, the need to capitalize on untapped human potential and develop a skilled workforce for a nation's social and economic prosperity has become critical. However, available evidence reveals that our young people and adults are facing multiple setbacks, such as inadequate

access to education and training; unemployment and underemployment; and a skills mismatch in the labour market. Preparing them for a better future requires immediate and assertive actions at the policy, institutional and individual levels.

This session was held to highlight these challenges and to suggest concrete measures and policy interventions to ensure challenges such as these are met. The first presentation entitled: “*Be Skilled, Be Employed, Be the Change Generation*” was delivered by Ms. Virginia Pontarolo, Digital Strategist of the Peace Child International organisation. To address the universal youth unemployment crisis, the provision of education for all is a critical step. A large number of young people now lack adequate access to education and training due to poverty, gender, disabilities, HIV/AIDS, discrimination, social status, armed conflict, etc. However, all prospects are not grim in the panorama of Education for All. National governments, international organisations, NGOs and the private sector are striving to ensure the provision of education or second-chance education programmes. Additionally, young people are able to help themselves and their communities in many ways. Regarding access to education, it is important to examine what type of education is provided to young people so as to prepare them for the working world. Education should be aimed at the full development of the human personality and to strengthening respect for human rights and fundamental freedom. To make substantial and inclusive changes, we must tackle the issue from the grass-roots level, which means drastically reforming school curricula and formats.

Mr. Matthieu Cognac, Youth Employment Specialist of the ILO Regional Office for Asia and Pacific, discussed global trends in youth unemployment and under-employment in both developing and developed economies due to the weakening of the global recovery in 2012 and 2013. His presentation suggested the need for concrete actions in five key areas: employment and economic policies to increase aggregate demand and improve access to finance; education and training to ease the school-to-work transition and to prevent labour market mismatches; labour market policies to target employment of disadvantaged youth; entrepreneurship and

self-employment to assist potential young entrepreneurs; and labour rights that are based on international labour standards to ensure that young people receive equal treatment.

Ms. Virginia Pontarolo is one of the young editors who has been selected to prepare the final draft of UNESCO's '*Youth Edition of the Global Monitoring Report on Education for All*'. Ms. Pontarolo presented a collection of stories from disadvantaged youth around the world who struggle to access life-changing resources. Gender, location and economics were the main obstacles they faced, she said. The aim of the task was to inform and inspire young people to take action and encourage their governments to fulfill their obligation to provide education for all. The passionate call of these young people for their right to education did inspire their governments to re-examine what kind of education young people actually need or what the world requires. For instance, youth should be taught about environmental awareness and develop entrepreneurial skills. Ms. Pontarolo said the stories collected from youth around the region, “The Change Generation”, underscore how vital it is for youth to be involved in the cycle of change. This information formed the basis of the document “Global Trends on Youth, Employment and Skills Development: Be Skilled, Be Employed, Be the Change Generation”. Ms. Pontarolo identified several issues that must be considered regarding progress towards Education For All goals such as; what skills are needed; issues affecting disadvantaged youth, those living in rural and urban areas, young women, youth affected by conflict and marginalized minorities; pathways to empowerment, equity in education, and what steps must be taken for youth to be actively involved in ensuring a better future for themselves.

Mr. Matthieu Cognac spoke on the topic '*Global and Regional Trends for Youth Employment: Facts, Challenges and recommendations of the International Labour Conference*'. His presentation highlighted the fact that young people remain particularly stricken by the crisis. Currently, some 73.8 million young people are unemployed globally and the economic slowdown is likely to push another half-million into unemployment by 2014. The youth unemployment rate – which had already increased to 12.6 per cent in 2012

– is expected to increase to 12.9 per cent by 2017. Over the medium term, the global economy is expected by many commentators to recover, but growth will not be strong enough to bring down unemployment quickly. Even with an acceleration of growth, the global unemployment rate is expected to remain at six per cent until 2017, not far from its peak level in 2009. It is essential to invest in youth and to put jobs first. Pressing areas for action include employment and economic policies; employability – education, training and skills, and the school-to-work transition; labour market policies; youth entrepreneurship and self-employment; and a focus on the rights of young people.

3.7 Developing Skills: Connecting Formal, Non-formal and Informal Programmes

This session was facilitated by **Ms. Raquel D. Castillo**, Advocacy and Campaigns Adviser, Asia South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and two guest speakers from Hong Kong and Korea were invited to present their countries' experiences on this topic.

This session addressed one of the key questions the conference wanted their participants to address: How can lifelong learning and skills development be included in NQFs? The resource speakers were **Dr. Eric Tsang**, Associate Director, UNESCO-UNEVOC Hong Kong and **Dr. Dong Im-Lee**, Senior Research Fellow at the Korea Institute for Vocational Education and Training (KRIVET). The session was facilitated by Ms. Raquel D. Castillo.

The main considerations highlighted were the diverse social fabric in Asia-Pacific, its rapid socio-economic development in the midst of widening disparities, environmental challenges and demographic changes– some countries are faced with a youth bulge while others are home to greying populations. In a rapidly changing and globalised 21st century world, relevant and high quality skills are crucial. The Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2012 strongly recommended that there needs to be some blurring of the demarcation between general academic education and that pertaining to skills development. Civil society has long been advocating that alternative

pathways to quality learning and skills development be supported and recognised. Multiple learning pathways, multiple entry points and re-entry points at all ages and education levels should be provided, especially for the disadvantaged.

Dr. Tsang shared his thoughts on the role of the Hong Kong Qualification Framework (HKQF) in skills development and the challenges ahead. In Hong Kong, the development of its Qualifications Framework (officially adopted since 2008) is industry-led and influenced by those from the EU, Scotland and Australia. This is not surprising, given the pervading view that an NQF should assist a society to build up a workforce that is adaptable to change in a highly competitive world, where continuous skill upgrades are mandatory to cope with challenges. (For example, the creation of “green jobs” to deal with climate change). The HKQF is a seven-level hierarchy, governing qualifications ranging from the academic sector to vocational training and continuing education. As in Malaysia, the levels indicate the relative complexity and depth of learning outcomes. All learning programmes must be accredited by the HKCAAVQ, entering the QF formally, thereby encouraging lifelong learning through articulated and quality-assured multiple learning pathways.

Of particular interest in Dr. Tsang's presentation is the development of Industry Training Advisory Committees (ITACs), composed of key representatives of employers, employees, trade associations, trade unions, professional groups and government bodies relevant to the industries. So far, 18 industries, covering about 45 per cent of the total labour force have set up ITACs. These ITACs indicate giving value to “ownership” of the QF for the different stakeholders involved in its development. In addition, the ITACs are also expected to develop mechanisms for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), which should be one of the major connectors from the non-formal and informal to the formal sectors. However, much remains to be done in this regard since only three industries have piloted the RPL so far. A question was posed during the open forum on whether industries shared the cost of accreditation. The response was that the government subsidizes the process. Dr. Tsang cited work-based learning and accreditation of

corporations that award certificated training as a way forward. It was noted that while it was clear there was a linkage between the different vocational education and training providers, how the learning programmes of CLCs are being promoted and connected in a major way to the entire qualifications system was not as obvious.

The inputs shared by Dr. Lee of KRIVET in South Korea centered on how the country is developing its NQF. The major difference between the Korean NQF and the Hong Kong NQF is that while the latter is industry-led, the former is closely aligned with the education system. The Korean NQF has been a work-in-progress for the past 10 years and there is still a lack of consensus about it. The Qualifications System is two-tiered, flanked by academic qualifications on one hand and the vocational training system on the other. There is a marked public bias towards the academic stream as shown by 80 per cent college enrolment, compared to the OECD average of only 56 per cent. Unfortunately, youth unemployment is almost three times that of adult unemployment in Korea. Korea is looking to progress towards a competency-standards based system. A policy directive from the new president recommends the development of an NQF where the areas of learning are integrated and can promote the creation of new professions required by industry. It was made clear, however, in response to a question during the open forum, that the NQF was still more about learning, education and competencies, than the needs of the labour market.

A notable feature of the Korean QS that other countries can adapt when developing or revising their own systems is that there is a mechanism in place to promote and account for lifelong learning. A systematic method of recording continued education and accumulating an individual's various learning experiences for progression to higher levels is in place. Thus, even non-formal learning can be credited through this Credit Banking System. It also links the vocational qualification (VQ) and the academic qualification (AQ). In conclusion, this session offered participants an important insight into the use of NQFs in promoting skills development. Conference delegates heard that it is important for lifelong learning to be an organising principle, in that all learning acquired in different ways – whether formal,

non-formal or informal and whether in school, CLCs, work or other areas of life – needs to be “hyper-linked” and that many windows informing us about these areas and multiple doors accessing them need to be opened simultaneously. The role and connection of CLCs, in particular, needs to be given a higher profile.

3.8 CLCs as a Delivery Mechanism for Lifelong Learning

Mr. Abdul Hakeem, APPEAL Coordinator, UNESCO Bangkok was the facilitator for this session in which two guest speakers from Indonesia and Thailand were invited to present their CLCs experiences.

Mr. BuhaiSimanjuntak, Advisor, Indonesia Community Learning Centre Communication Forum gave a PowerPoint presentation on CLCs as a Delivery Mechanism for Lifelong Learning: Indonesia Case. The sub-topic of his presentation was the current situation in Indonesia and the need for lifelong learning. He described the national policy in lifelong learning; the policy on development of CLCs; the CLCs' social economic impact; and challenges facing CLCs and future plans. He said that Indonesia still faces many socio-economic problems and needs to develop a good educational system and delivery mechanism to address them. In today's rapidly changing world, Indonesia considers lifelong learning to be the most important part of the national education system, as reflected in the country's constitution, law and national policies. In the current educational system, the CLC, which are called *Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat*, (PKBM) in Indonesia, have an important function as a delivery mechanism for lifelong learning.

Mr. Simanjuntak concluded that CLCs are an effective mechanism for delivering a variety of programmes for lifelong learning, especially as CLCs serve people of all ages. CLCs, within the national policy, have to provide at least three kinds of learning/education programmes and they have a significant role as a non-formal education unit for young children, youth and adults. CLCs in Indonesia offer a wide range of educational activities to serve community needs.

3.8.2

CLC as a Vehicle for Promoting Lifelong Learning was the last presentation and this was presented by Dr. Sombat Suwanpitak, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education, Thailand. CLCs in Thailand, he said, are intended to serve as community hubs for lifelong learning activities. They are regarded as “learning facilities of the people, by the people and for the people”. Thai CLCs have facilitated practice-focused learning, serving as a bridge between the curriculum and the people’s way of life. He further added that CLCs provide educational and vocational counseling to community members, as well as coordinate and link the community’s learning sources and national resources, thereby forming an extensive network to facilitate lifelong learning. Dr. Suwanpitak highlighted significant parts of current national policies on education in Thailand in which the government has set out guidelines to expand educational opportunities to include the disadvantaged, people with disabilities and other target groups which are hardest to reach.

With regard to lifelong education, the Ministry of Education promotes non-formal and informal education by establishing community vocational training centres to allow the working age population to raise their education level

and upgrade their skills to prepare for entry into the the ASEAN Community. In so doing, the Ministry of Education has introduced ASEAN Study Centres in 15 pilot provinces to provide English and Chinese language courses, in addition to tuition in the languages of neighboring countries. He said these activities have been organised through the use of CLCs.

He also mentioned the four different types of Thai CLCs: the highland type of CLCs, the lowland type, CLCs in particular areas and CLCs that represent sub-district NFE Centres. Apart from the CLC activities, he introduced other types of NFE Learning Centres which perform tasks similar to those of the CLCs. Examples of these include CLCs in military agencies and in the enterprise sector which offer basic non-formal education and vocational training; CLCs in special target areas such as ones for the Mlabri people (Phi Tong Luang), the Mogan (Surin Islands) as well as the pondok schools in southern border areas.

3.9 Study Visit to Community Learning Centres

On the last day of the Conference, The Office of the Non-Formal and Informal Education, Ministry of Education organised three study visits:



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Group A (Skills Development): PhraNakhon Si Ayutthaya Province

The visit to CLCs at Nam Tao and Rong Chang sub-districts of Phra Nakhon Si Ayutthaya Province, demonstrated successes in incorporating H.M. the King's Sufficiency Economy principles into the agricultural way of life, through the centres' skills development programmes. Apart from equipping the locals with various vocational skills, from making Nam Op Thai (traditional Thai perfume) to sandalwood, teak-wood spirit houses, and salted eggs etc., these programmes also ensure job security and the ability to generate income before and after studies. They also promote an informal association of community members.

Group B (Equivalency Programme): Chachoengsao Province

Built on a donated plot of land through funds raised from local benefactors, KohKha Noon CLC in Chachoengsao Province has since its establishment served its founding purpose as a local hub for lifelong learning and actively contributed to raising the quality of life of community members of all ages. At KohKha Noon CLC, participants learned about the success in incorporating local needs and engaging this mostly agricultural community in its various activities; from basic non-formal education and equivalency programmes to vocational skills training (such as cooking, basket making, Thai massage, etc.) and life skills development.

Group C (Education for Sustainable Development): Nakhon Pathom Province

At Katumlom CLC of Nakhon Pathom Province, participants greatly appreciated the hands-on experience they were receiving and the practical application of vocational training to foster community development. To achieve sustainable growth, the CLC in Katumlom subdistrict has engaged every sector in the community to translate local needs into educational and learning activities for members. These activities span from IT skills training and promoting reading habits to setting up community enterprises. The ultimate goal of the community is to create a learning-based society in the lead-up to the ASEAN Community, emphasising lifelong learning with

quality, coverage and equity. One of the highlights included an engaging visit to the famous riverside Don Wai Market, where locals employ the knowledge and skills acquired through CLCs' vocational training to open up business opportunities and generate income for their families and the community.

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