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**2012: The Year of Global Reports on  
TVET, Skills & Jobs**

**Consensus or Diversity?**

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## What is NORRAG?

NORRAG (Network for Policy Research, Review and Advice on Education and Training) is a focus and a forum for the analysis of international cooperation in the education and training field.

The objectives of NORRAG are:

1. Collection, critical analysis, and synthesis of research on education and training policies and strategies, and on international cooperation;
2. Dissemination of just-in-time information and knowledge on education and training policies and strategies, and on international cooperation;
3. Advocacy of critical analysis on education and training policies and strategies to governments, NGOs and other organizations;
4. Cooperation with other networks in order to share information, carry out joint programmes, joint efforts in advocacy and strengthen networks.

The main instruments of NORRAG are its publications (*NORRAG NEWS* and Policy Briefs), its website and the organization of/and participation in meetings.

For more information, please visit: [www.norrag.org](http://www.norrag.org)

## What is *NORRAG NEWS*?

*NORRAG NEWS* is a digital newsletter that is produced twice a year. Each issue has a large number of short, sharp articles, focusing on policy implications of research findings and/or on the practical implications of new policies on international education and training formulated by development agencies, foundations and NGOs. The niche of NORRAG has been to identify a number of 'red threads' running through the complexity of the debates and the current aid and cooperation discourse, and to dedicate special issues of *NORRAG NEWS* to the critical analysis of these themes.

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**NORRAG NEWS 48**  
**A SPECIAL ISSUE**  
**2012: The Year of Global Reports on TVET, Skills & Jobs**  
**Consensus or Diversity?**

Ten years after the start of the Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report process in 2002, we finally had a Skills GMR entitled: *Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work*. The other five EFA Dakar Goals were analysed as individual GMRs from 2002 to 2007. The first GMR explained the difficulty of treating Goal 3 (on skills) of the Dakar World Forum as follows: 'The monitoring of this Dakar goal presents major conceptual and methodological challenges which this Report is in no position to address.' How different the situation seems today as the new Report was launched in 50 different cities in just two months, from 16<sup>th</sup> October to 16<sup>th</sup> December 2012!

After the dearth of global skills analysis for many years, there is now suddenly a glut. 2012 has certainly been a busy year for those interested in the links amongst Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), skills and jobs, and there have been launches of a number of global reports on these topics. January 2012 saw the ILO's *Global Employment Trends 2012*. In May, came the ILO's *World of Work Report 2012*, UNESCO's *Transforming TVET: Building Skills for Work and Life* and the *Shanghai Consensus* from UNESCO's Third International Congress on TVET, and the new OECD skills strategy, *Better Skills, Better Jobs, Better Lives*. In June, the McKinsey Global Institute's (MGI) *The World at Work: Jobs, Pay and Skills for 3.5 Billion People*, arrived, and October saw three more: the World Bank's *World Development Report 2013: Jobs*, the long-awaited EFA GMR 2012 on Youth and Skills, already mentioned, and *Skills for Employability in Africa and Asia* by Innovative Secondary Education for Skills Enhancement (ISESE). In addition, throughout much of 2012, there has been the development of UNESCO's *World TVET Report* (WTR), which is expected to be published in May 2013.

This issue of NORRAG News looks at the many different meanings of skill in these reports: high, medium, low, foundation, transferable, technical and vocational skills, as well as life-skills. It looks also at the state of skills in both urban and rural areas, and considers skills-for-poverty-reduction as well as skills-for-growth. The reports cover skills in the informal economy, as well as work-based skills and on-the-job training. Some of the reports also consider the emerging meanings and frontiers of TVET. These reports seem to use 'skills' and TVET in very different ways. Even though they are, by no means, a series of coordinated approaches to TVET, skills development and jobs, they do cover a good deal of the global landscape, and not just the developing world.

We should perhaps beware of the danger of regarding some reports as being of 'international' or 'global'; there have been other 'regional' publications which may also have a global reach e.g. *Skills Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth in Developing Asia-Pacific* (2012;2013).

The timing of the GMR 2012 and of these other global reports on skills and jobs coincides with an explosion of interest, particularly in the North, about future development agendas post-2015, including the future of the EFA Goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) after that date. Now that the last of the six Goals has been reported on in the skills GMR, it may prove useful to consider to what extent the GMR 2012 and these other global

reports have raised any very specific implications for the role of skills and jobs in post-2015 agendas.

In total these reports amount to some 2000 pages of text, and though most of them have some form of executive summary, the policy community concerned with TVET and skills may still find these very lengthy. The role of *NORRAG News* is not to summarise these kinds of international reports, but to offer a wide diversity of short, sharp different reactions from our main constituencies, - policy makers, think tanks, academics, consultants and NGOs.

As NORRAG has played a role, since 2006, in arguing for there to be a Skills GMR, we shall give this key report more attention than some of the others. Also, more than 658 NORRAG members have professional interests in TVET or Skills Development; hence they may well be very interested to read and contribute to the debate on the GMR.

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## Don't Get Lost – Focus on Quality

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**Keywords:** school quality; teacher quality; cognitive skills; growth-skills link

**Summary:** Countries have a choice of focusing on educational quality improvements and reaping the benefits of future growth improvements or of letting the future be stuck with today's economic outcomes. Student outcomes flow directly from teacher quality.

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UNESCO has done both a service and a disservice to those concerned about global development. GMR 2012, *Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work*, brings its analytical attention to bear on the relationship between skills and economic development. The power of the idea of Education for All has been to underscore that improved education and skill represents the clearest, if not the only, path to economic progress in developing countries. But GMR 2012, like the underlying idea of Education for All, provides a breath-taking journey through most of the improvement ideas and exhortations of the past two decades – resulting in a distinct lack of priorities. The real path to development is an intense focus on quality and on broad cognitive skills.

To me, the evidence is very clear that economic growth is closely related to the cognitive skills of the work force (Hanushek and Woessmann (2008)). Skills in mathematics and science, as measured by the TIMSS or PISA assessments, track international differences in long run growth and are a good metric for judging the labour force of a country. Thus, for example, the disappointing development histories of Latin America or of Sub-Saharan Africa can be accurately related to the fact that improvements in school attainment have not translated into achievement of students as measured by international standards.

The importance of quality has of course been recognized in Education for All and is part of the running commentary in GMR 2012. The problem is not one of omission. Instead it is burying the quality issue within a very wide array of alternative potential goals, of varying measures of educational processes, of data and comparisons about side issues, and of strong statements about what to do that lack credible support. What is left is an ability to pick and choose different portions that can leave a country or a development agency too satisfied with progress. Virtually every country in the world is progressing well on one or another of the items highlighted in GMR 2012, providing some solace even as economic development is stalled.

The first goal should be simply bringing the skills of the current students up to international levels. This statement implies measuring performance on international scales. It implies having a priority on schools and what is being learned.

A part of GMR 2012 is also devoted to issues of how to improve quality. The emphasis is on the old bromides – increase funding, reduce class sizes, improve the training of teachers, and more. It is remarkable how few of these standard solutions hold up to close scrutiny and evaluation (Hanushek (2003)).

Again, it is not omission but burying the evidence in chaff. The one consistent story is that teacher quality is overwhelmingly important. The problem is that teacher quality measured by effectiveness in the classroom is not consistently related to the training and backgrounds of teachers. Further, typical salary policies insure that salaries are quite unrelated to the effectiveness of teachers. Simply pursuing the standard policies offers little hope.

My reaction to GMR 2012 is completely summarized by one overall message: **FOCUS!** The future development of the low-income countries of the world depends crucially on developing a skilled labour force – one that is internationally competitive. This is a tall order for many developing countries, because currently available measures suggest a huge gap between the skills of those in developed countries and those in developing countries. Getting there will require a strong commitment to improving the quality of schools and teachers – something that many countries find to involve difficult policy changes. But the choice is simple: Improve quality and reap the benefits of future growth improvements, or let the future get stuck with today's outcomes.

This message is contained in GMR 2012. It is simply not possible to substitute “easier” policy changes and to expect the same outcomes.

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## The 2012 GMR's Pathway Towards a Taxonomy for Skills

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**Keywords:** Skills; informal; literacy; numeracy

**Summary:** The GMR provides a valuable foundation for progress towards a fit for purpose international goal on skills. Greater consideration is needed, however, for the diverse ways in which skills are developed, in particular outside formal school settings.

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The 2012 Education for All (EFA) Global Monitoring Report (GMR) devotes a considerable amount of attention to defining 'skills development', its purpose, and how it happens. This is the first step towards creating a meaningful international goal for skills, and the struggle with this step to date has, as the GMR acknowledges, led to an attempt to both measure