

Nepal

Who Needs the Better Teacher – the Good or the Bad Students?

Regardless of all current debates on the necessity of "centres of excellence", the *Vision Statement of TITI* reads as follows: "TITI is recognized as a *Center of Excellence* in training within the SAARC Region." The project responsables are convinced that no kind of mediocrity will ever promote development – only the best quality is good enough.

In 1991, Swiss Development Cooperation and His Majesty's Government of Nepal signed an agreement for the foundation of a Training Institute for Technical Instruction (TITI).

Today, the staff of TITI consists of 24 trainers – 7 females and 17 males. Instruction is delivered in three focal areas: instructional skills, training management and curriculum development. The duration of courses varies between one day and one month. People having successfully completed a certain number of specific courses receive a certificate e.g. a Diploma in Technical Instruction. This diploma can be obtained within 18 months, but because all courses are modularized, it is also possible to spread the training over several years. In the beginning of the project, mostly instructors of public technical schools were trained. At present, a reorientation towards private technical schools and the private sector in general is in progress. Especially in the area of management and instruction, private organizations and different ministries with a demand for training are interested in TITI's courses.

TITI has a vision to become a "center of excellence" in training within the SAARC region. (SAARC consists of India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives).

Why should TITI become a centre of excellence?

There is a continuous debate on strategies and approaches in development cooperation. In this discussion, centers of excellence are viewed rather sceptically. The big number of foreign experts, comparatively high costs, and the gap between such centres and their environment are points of criticism. It is argued that developing countries can't make proper use of the quality services because the solutions are too complex and too sophisticated. But who needs the better teacher – the good or the bad students? Experience shows that disadvantaged learners are more in need of a favourable learning environment – the good ones learn anyway. To prevent any misunderstandings: people in developing countries are not

less intelligent than people in developed countries. Missing successes can be attributed to unfavourable learning conditions such as malnutrition, child labour, life in remote areas, missing health services, missing infrastructure, feudalistic political systems, etc. To cope with such complex and difficult situations, only the best instruction is good enough.

Standing above mediocrity

"TITI is outstanding" – this is a remark often heard in connection with TITI. The word outstanding indicates 'standing above mediocrity'. TITI is often perceived as an island. On the visual level, TITI looks different from what one usually sees in Nepal. The buildings are well maintained and still look rather new seven years after construction. Well trimmed lawns, flowers and many trees contrast with the dirt and pollution of Kathmandu. Negative voices call it a Swiss miniature that is unnecessarily perfect. On the other side, TITI has become a well-appreciated venue for training and conferences. Facilities are rented out to outsiders for several thousand Swiss Francs a year. This is not because TITI is typical Nepali but precisely because TITI is different.

Organizational processes like planning and management are unique for Nepal as well. For example, TITI's transparent accounting system is a novelty in a country with corruption and concealment as omnipresent practices. As a result of this accounting system, equipment is depreciated and respective funds are deposited in a specific account. In this respect, TITI can also serve as model for other projects.

The quality of training is crucial for a training institute. TITI is outstanding in the Nepalese context in this respect as well. In TITI, many Nepalis experience a learner-oriented teaching for the first time in their lives. This contrasts with the widely practiced lecturing in most Nepali schools. The instructional materials developed at TITI have been translated into eight different languages and they are used in many other projects. Management courses for principles and project leaders set standards which are also appreciated by managers of NGOs and INGOs. Instead of sending people to expensive fellowship programmes abroad, it has become possible to attend quality training in Nepal. The fact that participants from Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka rate courses in TITI higher than the offer in their own countries is also a new experience for our Nepali counterparts.

Pride can be felt among TITI's trainers, and an attitude of "we can do it as well". This is stimulating for the self-esteem of TITI's trainers, which has a direct impact on the development of quality awareness.

Skills are not only taught but applied in everyday life.

And what are the prospects for the future? It is always difficult to make a prognosis, but even after an expected decline in quality after the departure of foreign experts, the quality level should still be higher than the norm. Where there is a lot of substance, there will be a long-lasting effect. From this point of view, centers of excellence are not only justifiable but should – at least at the level of training of cadres – receive renewed attention.

Swiss inputs

Swisscontact has taken a leading role in planning and setting up the Institute. In a first phase, needs assessments and infrastructure support was the first priority. Parallel to these activities, a concept for the training of technical instructors in Nepal was developed. At present, the support focuses mainly on the coaching of TITI's training staff, and the development of new courses and programmes. Another focus of attention is the organizational development of the institute in areas of financial management and resource management. The Institute is striving to become ISO certified.

Heinz Bachmann, Swisscontact Nepal



Photo: Swisscontact / Fritz Berger

"The quality of training is crucial for a training institute".