

## **ADULT LEARNING SYMPOSIUM 2018**

### **Session 7.4 – Skills Internationalisation A Uniquely-Singapore Strategy**

*by Anderson Tan  
Chairman, SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd*

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

For many developing countries, as in the case of Singapore in the 1960s, one of the key growth strategies to expanding their economies is attracting quality foreign direct investments (FDIs). A critical consideration for FDIs is the availability of sufficient high-quality skilled labour to operate plants, production lines and other set-ups. Many of these countries with high FDI growth are also in need of a skills development system for their graduates and workers. This presents our Approved Training Organisations (ATOs) with good opportunities to ride on the skills development waves. The conventional market access approach of teaming up with local partners, setting up the training centres, recruiting trainees and delivering the skills programmes, is fraught with policy, regulatory and partnership blind-spots, often resulting in slow growth at best, or business failure at worst. This paper presents an innovative model for skills internationalisation, developed by SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd, to overcome the challenges. This is supported through case studies from India, Vietnam and United Arab Emirates.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

According to a survey by then International Enterprise Singapore (MR No. 004/17; February 16, 2017), “Internationalisation has become the key engine of growth for Singapore companies”. Some of the main findings are as follows:

- a) Of the 700 companies across major sectors, their overseas revenue grew at 4.2% year-on-year, outpacing total revenue growth of 1.3% year-on-year.
- b) Small and Medium Enterprises expressed renewed interest in Vietnam and India.

However, according to a Straits Times article (January 31, 2018), “only 14% of SMEs intend to expand overseas while almost half have no interest in taking their business beyond Singapore soon”. Among the barriers were “insufficient funds”, “unfamiliarity with the standards and processes of foreign markets” and “regulatory and legal compliance”. These are valid concerns that affect capability of set-up, continuity of investment and assurance of returns.

## CONVENTIONAL APPROACH

The conventional model of penetrating a new overseas market is usually of the following approach: an ATO might do a market survey in a foreign land; establish some connections with government agencies or private companies; set up a training centre either on its own or with a local partner; market its training programmes and deliver them thereafter. This is the typical *solo-invest-sell approach*. Alternatively, the ATO might approach the foreign government or major enterprises to buy its training programmes. This is the typical *sales approach*. The disadvantages of either method are as follows:

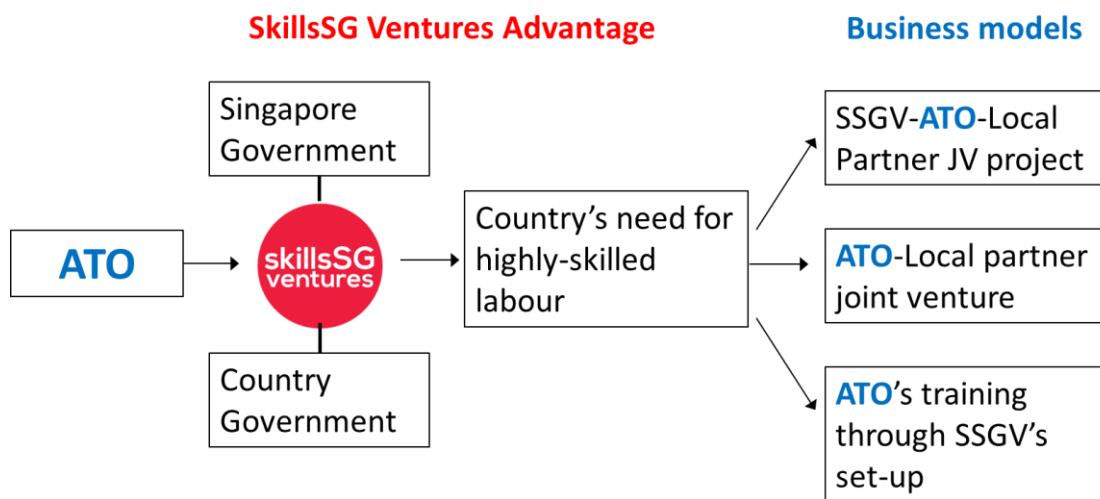
- a) The process involves much time, money and resources to find suitable local partners;
- b) There is a need to also navigate through uncertain terrain of policies, regulations and other blind spots;
- c) The sales approach puts the ATO in a position of bargaining weakness; and
- d) The training programmes which the ATO can offer are constrained by its own sector-specific specialisation and capabilities (besides its local partner's).

## CONVENTIONAL TRADE MISSIONS

Typical trade mission trips are intended to bring local SMEs overseas for high-level or high-profile meetings with government officials and potential stakeholders or partners. Beyond this initial group approach, individual SMEs may be left to suss out and execute business partnerships or projects on their own. The process from introduction to implementation entails high financial and often-times regulatory risks, and expecting an SME to absorb that with just a trade mission connection would be challenging. Hence many trade mission trips start off with high tempo, but often end in limbo. There is therefore a need for an investment vehicle to help cushion the impact faced by SMEs (or ATOs).

## “HUNT & CONSUME AS A PACK” APPROACH

SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd (SSGV) is arguably the first adult education organisation in Singapore to develop and implement its unique internationalisation model of “*Hunt & Consume as a Pack*” for the training-related sector. The diagram below summarises the approach:



ATO = Approved Training Organisation, Singapore

The key components of this model are as follows:

- a) Ministry of Trade and Industry and/or its agency Enterprise Singapore (and, where applicable, Singapore's embassy in the emerging market) opening doors to high-level contacts in foreign governments and potential partners.
- b) SSGV as the *collective negotiator and investor*.
- c) ATO (be it from among SSGV's member companies or from outside SSGV) as the expert team to deliver high-quality training programmes.

Using a military analogy, SSGV is an armoured personnel vehicle navigating rough terrain (i.e. foreign government regulations and market conditions) to bring infantry troops (i.e. ATOs) deep into the territory to capture targets (i.e. skills development opportunities). It is stronger and more efficient than individual troops penetrating on their own.

When SSGV has successfully secured foreign governments' recognition and acceptance of its skills supply capability and capacity, it will set up joint-venture companies with local training providers to offer skills programmes in a facility or campus, or partner an interested ATO from Singapore to spearhead and sustain sector-specific training programmes.

The advantages of this "Hunt & Consume as a Pack" model of skills internationalisation are as follows:

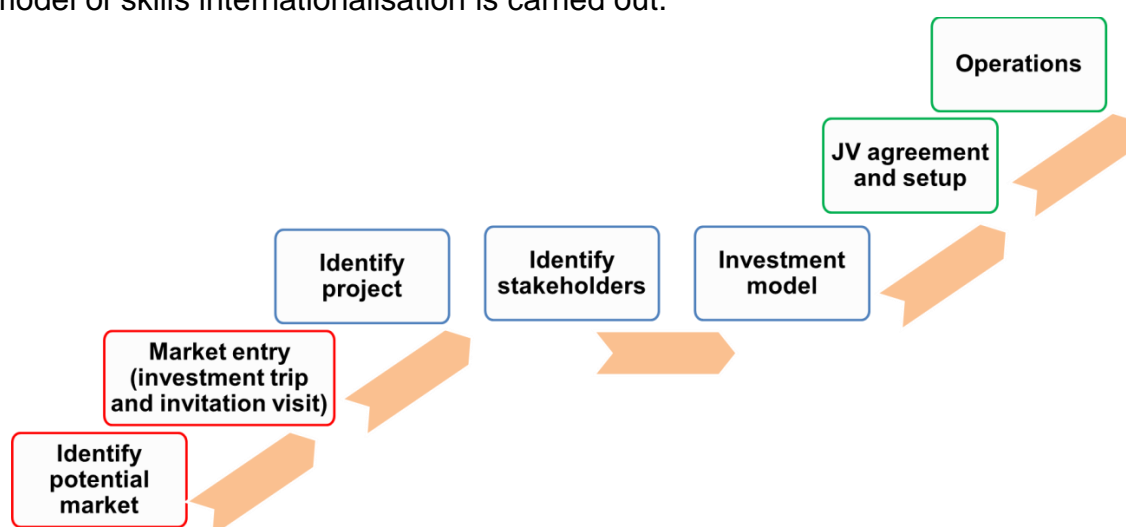
- a) Clear understanding of skills training needs and opportunities in the respective markets, based on first-hand inputs by senior officials of foreign governments and leaders of private enterprises;
- b) Clear understanding of various business support schemes from the national and state/provincial agencies;

- c) Promising meetings with credible local partners for collaboration to set up skills training facilities and operations;
- d) Stronger bargaining position of an investment proposal rather than a sales pitch; and
- e) Combined offer of a wide spectrum and depth of sector skills training by ATOs from within and outside SSGV.

Skills development by itself may not be on the same scale of investment as R & D, biomedical science, ICT or manufacturing. Yet it underpins and sustains all these industries with both industry-ready graduates and economy-relevant human capital. In the final analysis, skills development is an enabler and a multiplier of investments and returns. In simple terms, we emphasise to the host governments that our millions pale in comparison the multi-millions or even billions of other FDIs, but our millions can help to attract the billions because presence of skills-development system provides confidence to FDIs of the supply of needed skilled manpower.

## FROM IDENTIFICATION TO IMPLEMENTATION

The diagram below shows the process which SSGV’s “Hunt & Consume as a Pack” model of skills internationalisation is carried out.



No.	Steps	Brief details
1	Identify potential market	Countries with high FDI potential and/or significant need for skills development, eg India, Vietnam, UAE, etc
2	Market entry	Skills investment mission trips organised by SSGV and SAPTCO Singapore and Enterprise Singapore for ten or more participating ATOs

3	Identify project	Areas or sectors where ATOs can contribute training programmes
4	Identify stakeholders	Government entities and potential local partners
5	Investment model	Options available are eg SSGV-ATO joint venture or partnership, public-private partnership, etc
6	JV agreement and setup	Relevant parties sign an agreement, register the new business entity, source for premises, install equipment, purchase materials, etc
7	Operations	Launch training programmes, recruit trainees, etc.

## **WORKFORCE INTERNATIONAL SKILLS CERTIFICATION (WiSC)**

Two common questions which SSGV have been receiving from foreign governments and enterprises are, “What is the value of SSGV’s skills certificate?” and “Can trainees with SSGV’s skills certificate apply for a job in Singapore or other countries?”

The second question is easily answered by referring them to the respective countries’ Ministry of Manpower’s policies for foreign talent.

The first question is addressed by SAPTCO Singapore’s innovation, the Workforce International Skills Certification (“WiSC”). This is a competency-based certification aligned to, yet distinct from, SkillsFuture Singapore’s globally-esteemed WSQ. In countries like India where there is already a national skills framework, WiSC will be offered in addition to their own certification at the end of a course which combines both curricula. In Vietnam where the government is considering a comprehensive skills framework, WiSC will serve as a highly-credible foundation upon which the superstructure of policies and processes can be built.

## **CASE STUDY 1 – ANDHRA PRADESH, INDIA**

At the 3rd Joint Implementation Steering Committee Meeting at Vijayawada on 7th June 2018, chaired jointly by Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Mr N Chandrababu Naidu and Singapore Minister for Communications and Information as well as Minister-in-charge of Trade Relations Mr S Iswaran, SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd and SynchroServe Global Solutions Pvt Ltd (local training partner), jointly presented the proposed Multi Entrepreneurship and Skills Hub (MESH). The grand vision is to build Skills Learning Cities where people learn while at work. For example, a supermarket is where people shop, but is also a place where workers pick up the skills and qualifications for the various jobs within a supermarket. The same approach applies to a restaurant, facilities management etc. MESH is the first step towards achieving that vision.

When completed in phases commencing at the end of 2020, it will provide not just skills training for jobs but also entrepreneurship development for business set-up and self-employment. It will be located in Amaravati to support the life cycle development of the new capital city and surrounding region. Various Centres of Excellence in the

10-acre campus will cater to skills training for a range of industries, offering fee-based programmes by Singapore SynchroSkills Pvt Ltd (a joint venture company between SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd and SynchroServe Global Solutions Pvt Ltd) to Singapore standards. It will have research and innovation facilities for cutting-edge methods and technology in skills training according to evolving needs of the economy. It will also include some residential space for trainees to eliminate travel time from home.

Chief Minister Mr Naidu approved the proposal and directed Singapore SynchroSkills Pvt Ltd to work with Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) to commence skills training in existing facilities by early July 2018, while the proposed MESH is being developed in Amaravati over the next two years. The programmes offered by Singapore SynchroSkills received significant media coverage. Senior officials from Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry, Enterprise Singapore and APSSDC had visited the initial training classes in early August 2018 and left with good impression and optimism in their execution and benefits to the local population.

## APSSDC to roll out 3 more skill development courses

Focus Is To Boost Abilities Of Jobseekers

Vijal.Bommakanti @timesgroup.com

Vijayawada: Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC), which has already launched two international skill certification courses in Vijayawada, is going to introduce three more courses to boost employability.

A meeting was held at Singapore Synchroskill Centre at Neon Plaza in Eluru road on Wednesday. The managing director of APSSDC, Sambasiva Rao, said they have already launched a one-month long bridal fashion and apparel fashion designer courses in the beginning of July. Now APSSDC, along with the Singapore Synchroskill company, is set to launch three other technical courses, such as fork lift operator, boom lift operator, and chef and baking technician.

"We have already rolled out the applications on our website. Interested students can apply for the courses and the beneficiaries will receive special training from experts in Singapore. We also provide top courses on entrepreneurship and soft skills for the graduates," Sambasiva Rao said.

SINGAPORE COACHING FOR FREE

We have already rolled out the applications on our website. Interested students can apply for the courses and the beneficiaries will receive special training from experts in Singapore. We also provide top courses on entrepreneurship and soft skills for the graduates.

K Sambasiva Rao Managing Director of APSSDC

- The international certificate course was conceptualized by CM Chandrababu Naidu after he requested the Singapore delegates to set up something that will have an immediate impact for employment generation
- All the courses are provided to candidates at free of cost
- The government bears an expenditure of ₹20,700 to ₹31,800 per student
- The certificate courses would continue till APSSDC sets up multi entrepreneurship & skills hub (MESH) institute in Amaravati

Officials kept a minimum target of fetching 70% placement for the candidates, however APSSDC MD Sambasiva Rao expressed confidence of raising it to 90%.

During the meeting, the Singapore delegates proposed the idea to APSSDC they would groom the trainers to enhance skill development. However, the state government has already decided to execute the idea in the second phase, for which they are planning to come up with a multi entrepreneurship & skills hub (MESH) institute in Amaravati.

Sambasiva Rao said that the Singapore delegates are preparing a detailed project report (DPR) in implementing MESH and they would soon seek a land from Capital Development Region Authority (CRDA) by submitting it before September. On inspecting the Synchroskill centre in Vijayawada, the officials interacted with the students who came from various walks of life. One of the students, who came from a rural place in the outskirts of the city, had a complete makeover after taking up the bridal fashion course. Another student, Harika completed her chartered accountant course and is now pursuing the bridal fashion course out of her

## Minister: 10 lakh youth to be imparted skills

DC CORRESPONDENT VIJAYAWADA JUNE 22

"Developing about 10 lakh state youth in the current year with national and international skills is the aim of the government," said minister for Sports, Youth and Skill development, Kollu Ravindra.

He was the chief guest and launched the International Skill Certification Courses (ISCC) here on Friday. Three International Courses were offered by Singapore Synchro skills free of cost, for the sake of the youth of Amaravati as well as the state.

Speaking on the occasion, the minister said that these courses had international value. First of its kind, with the initiative of Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, the Singapore government had permitted its international courses to be offered in AP.

Mr Ravindra reminded everyone that the people who went to the Middle Eastern countries suffered from the lack of proper skills.

He said that these international certificates would be of great use for the poor and unemployed youth of the state in get-



Minister for Sports, Youth and Skill Development Kollu Ravindra launches the Singapore Synchro Skills International Skill Certification Courses (ISCC) on Friday. — DC

ting the jobs after completing the courses in the state and country.

These courses are a part of major initiatives launched by Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation (APSSDC) which was offered three courses to the poor and unemployed youth of the state.

The three international courses offered were Bridal Fashion (60 days) which includes Photographic Makeup Artist, Apparel Fashion Designer (120 days) and Empowering NextGen Applied Business Leadership and Employability Skills Programme (60 days) with the support of

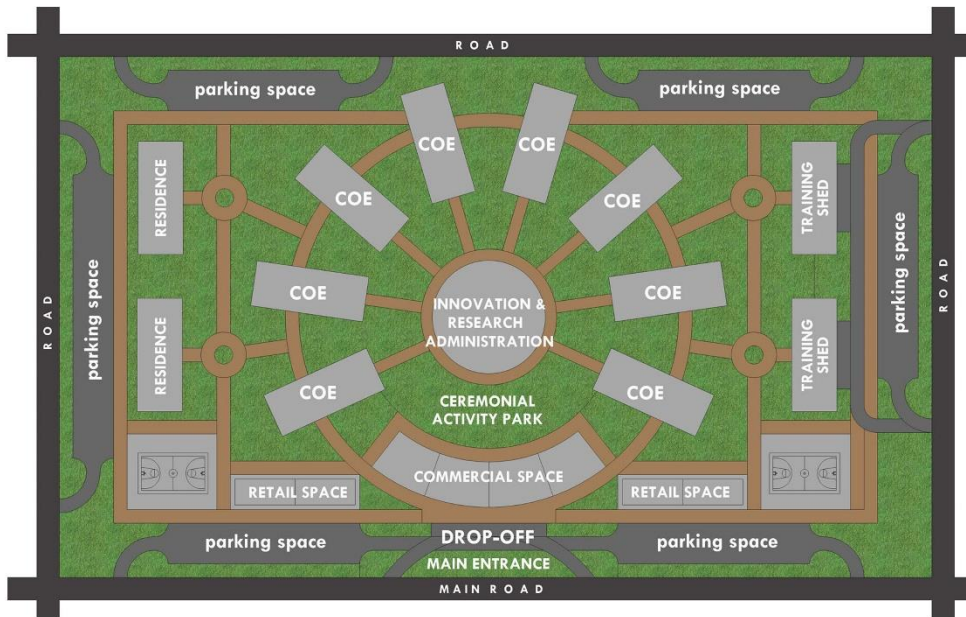
Singapore SynchroSkills. It is a joint venture company between SkillsSG Ventures Pte.Ltd., Singapore and Synchroserve Global Solutions Pvt. Ltd. India. Raja Suresh Kumar Adapa, MD CEO of Synchroserve Global Solutions said that the courses would be started by July first week at Machavaram in Krishna district and the unemployed who had qualified intermediate, those were eligible to get training and unemployed youth should apply through [www.apssdc.in](http://www.apssdc.in) website for getting free training and more details regarding the ISCC.





A schematic diagram of the proposed MESH is shown below. Actual design will be developed and constructed over a period of about two years on freehold land allocated by the state government.

**MULTI ENTREPRENEURSHIP & SKILLS HUB (MESH)**



*COE = Centre of Excellence*

## **CASE STUDY 2 – THANH HOA, VIETNAM**

At the presentation to Thanh Hoa Provincial People’s Committee Vice-Chairman Mr Pham Dang Quyen on 13th July 2018, SSGV proposed the following projects, in collaboration with Hong Duc University and Vietnam Chamber of Commerce & Industry (Thanh Hoa Branch), to support skills development and economic growth of the third most-populous province in Vietnam:

- a) International Skills Training Institute (ISTI) to spearhead Thanh Hoa VietSkills Credentialing System (THVCS)
- b) English Language Test and Learning Academy (ETLA)
- c) Hospitality and Tourism Academy (HTA)
- d) Digital Skills Academy (DSA)
- e) Corporate Leadership Academy (CLA)
- f) Multi Entrepreneurship and Skills Hub (MESH) (similar in concept to the proposal for Andhra Pradesh)

Vice-Chairman Mr Pham recognised and appreciated the importance of the proposed projects and requested SSGV to commence deployment for skills programmes with provincial support in policies and procedures. SSGV is currently studying its consultant’s feasibility study report as a pre-requisite for obtaining business and investment certificates.

## **CASE STUDY 3 – DUBAI & ABU DHABI, UNITED ARAB EMIRATES (UAE)**

In the Skills Investment Mission trip to Dubai and Abu Dhabi, UAE, SSGV met with senior officials of the following government bodies:

- Ministry of State for Higher Education & Advanced Skills
- Knowledge and Human Development Authority
- Knowledge Fund Establishment
- Dubai Entrepreneurship Academy

In the same trip, SSGV also had very promising talks with the following conglomerates and enterprises:

- Majid Al Futtaim – Retail and Hospitality
- Ghassan Aboud Group – Automotive, Logistics, Media, Hospitality, Real Estate, Retail, and Catering
- FASSCO International – Healthcare Food & Nutrition, Remote Site Catering, and Integrated Facilities Management
- DulSCO – People and environmental solutions
- Takatuf – Human capital development and solutions

Based on the positive reception and keen interest by the government bodies, conglomerates and enterprises, SSGV is in the process of submitting proposals for the enhancement of their skills development systems and the setting up of sector-skills training academies. It will garner support from ATOs to contribute their training



expertise and programmes to skill and upskill tens of thousands in the UAE workforce to meet their industry needs.

## CONCLUSION

In Finance Minister Heng Swee Keat's round-up speech on the 2018 Budget debate, he said that "(growing the Singapore economy) means fostering pervasive innovation throughout our economy, it means building deeper capabilities in our firms and our people, and it means forging stronger partnerships at home and abroad, to build, scale and ride on the region's growth together." (Source: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/heng-swee-keat-budget-debate-economic-transformation-10003176>).

SSGV's internationalisation model, which is a joint-venture investment model, is unique and innovative in adopting an investment approach to skills development in emerging economies; engaging foreign governments directly; building strong and stable partnerships with reputable training providers; bringing investors and other ATOs and their programmes from Singapore to the states and provinces; meeting their industries' need for highly-skilled manpower and fuelling the countries' FDI growth. ATOs will, in turn, get to expand their markets beyond Singapore; adapt their training programmes to the local environment; earn overseas revenue and grow their company and staff capabilities as part of Singapore's economic transformation.

This "Hunt & Consume as a Pack" model has been validated in India, Vietnam and United Arab Emirates through acceptance by the respective governments, conglomerates and enterprises. It is supported by the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Enterprise Singapore, as well as the Vietnam Embassy in Singapore and Singapore Embassy in UAE. Initial training has commenced in Andhra Pradesh India, and plans are underway for permanent facilities to be built with larger capacity, long-term sustainability and invaluable contribution to both Singapore and emerging economies. SSGV will be making inroads into other markets in ASEAN and Africa with even greater confidence to meet global skills development needs.

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## ABOUT SKILLSSG VENTURES PTE LTD



*Upgrading Skills  
Enabling Progress*

SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd (“SSGV”) is a Singapore-registered joint-venture company comprising ten Approved Training Organisations (“ATOs”) (see Annex B). Each ATO has at least 10-15 years of sector-specific expertise in skills training according to SkillsFuture Singapore’s Workforce Skills Qualification (“WSQ”) standard. In addition to being pioneer members of the Strategic Association of Professional Training-Consulting Organisations (“SAPTCO Singapore”), the ATOs also contribute to and support in

various ways such national initiatives as the initial WSQ framework, the ongoing Industry Transformation Maps and WorldSkills Singapore 2018.

SSGV welcomes interested ATOs to participate as investors, corporate members or training partners for specific projects.

## ABOUT THE SPEAKER



Anderson is a Practising Management Consultant and a Specialist Adult Educator. He holds a Masters in Lifelong Learning (with Distinction), a Diploma in Adult and Continuing Education and a Masters in Civil Engineering. He manages several Approved Training Organisations such as XpRienz Pte Ltd, Biipmi Pte Ltd, Focus Learning Centre Pte Ltd and Singapore SPA Institute Pte Ltd, just to name a few. The companies have a collective capacity of about 400,000 training hours per year spanning Food & Beverage, Retail, Lifestyle, Environmental Cleaning, Waste Management, Spa, Beauty and Wellness. An unwavering believer in, and an ambassador of, lifelong learning and

lifelong employability, he tirelessly blazes the trail in catalysing human capital skills development so as to enable the multi-billion-dollar FDIs to be materialised in emerging economies. His current consuming passion as Chairman of SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd is to bring globally-esteemed Singapore standard of Continuing Education and Training (“CET”) programmes, assessment and certification to ASEAN, South Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

### Contact information:



[anderson@skillssg.global](mailto:anderson@skillssg.global)



<https://sg.linkedin.com/in/tananderson>

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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- Ministry of Trade & Industry, particularly Enterprise Singapore and Amaravati Project Office, for tremendous support, high-level contacts, resources and planning of skills investment mission trips.
- Embassy of Vietnam in Singapore, for direct access to Vietnam's Ministry of Education and Training ("MoET"), Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs ("MoLISA"), Thanh Hoa Provincial People's Committee, Vietnam Chamber of Commerce & Industry, Hong Duc University and vocational institutes.
- India's National Skill Development Corporation ("NSDC"), for direct access to ministries and departments overseeing education and vocational training, sector skill councils and private training providers.
- SkillsFuture Singapore, for dialogues in the international certification of skills.
- Strategic Association of Professional Training-Consulting Organisations ("SAPTCO Singapore"), for resources and support in skills investment mission trips, meetings with ATOs and conception of Workforce International Skills Certification ("WiSC").
- ATOs and Adult Educators who participated in skills investment mission trips.
- Institute for Adult Learning, for the opportunity to share this Uniquely Singapore model of skills internationalisation at the Adult Learning Symposium 2018.

## **ANNEX A – LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

APSSDC	Andhra Pradesh State Skill Development Corporation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATO	Approved Training Organisation
CET	Continuing Education and Training
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
MESH	Multi Entrepreneurship and Skills Hub
MoET	Vietnam’s Ministry of Education and Training
MoLISA	Vietnam’s Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs
NSDC	India’s National Skill Development Corporation
SAPTCO Singapore	Strategic Association of Professional Training-Consulting Organisations (Singapore)
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
SSGV	SkillsSG Ventures Pte Ltd
WiSC	Workforce International Skills Certification
WSQ	Workforce Skills Qualification

**ANNEX B – CORPORATE MEMBERS OF SKILLSSG VENTURES PTE LTD**  
*(as at 30 September 2018)*

<b>Approved Training Organisation</b>	<b>Training Expertise Areas</b>
AGB Education Pte Ltd	Employability Skills, IT Literacy and Baking
Ascendo Consulting Pte Ltd	Food & Beverage, Security, Environmental Cleaning and Hospitality
Center for Competency-Based Learning & Development	Advanced Certificate for Training & Assessment (Train-the-trainers), Competency-Based Human Resource, Caregivers Programme
Eduquest International Institute Pte Ltd	Food & Beverage and Hospitality
Focus Learning Centre Pte Ltd	Environmental Cleaning and Waste Management
Lithan Academy Pte Ltd	Digital Skills Accelerator
Singapore Spa Institute Pte Ltd	Spa, Beauty and Wellness
Taf.tc (Textile & Fashion Industry Training Centre)	Textile and Fashion training for Retailers, Buying Agents and Apparel Manufacturers
Training Vision Institute Pte Ltd	Leadership, Employability Skills, Workplace English and IT Literacy
Xprienz Pte Ltd	Food & Beverage, Retail, Spa Services, Human Resource

