

TVET Developments in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh like many other countries had a mismatch between the programs run TVET institutions and the skill sets required by industry. TVET programs were mostly supply driven rather than demand driven and lacked sufficient hands-on practice and industry attachment. To begin to address these issues, the Government of Bangladesh initiated a number of reforms to the TVET system through its own initiatives and with the help of development partners. Reforms range from new legislation and policies to the establishment of a National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework, and a Quality Assurance System and new competency based training courses. The reforms also involve closer cooperation with industry including the establishment of Industry Skills Councils. Reformed TVET is expected to contribute to national development through more employment and productivity at work, as well as larger numbers of skilled workers going abroad.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

TVET in Bangladesh is under-going a major reform initiative with government plans to increase the number of training institutions and development partners contributing to major reforms in policy, credentialing, industry linkages and quality in provision. This paper provides a background to these reforms, describes issues to be addressed by the reform process and highlights the key outputs expected. Strategies to increase access to TVET are identified along with a description of the benefits from cooperation with other countries.

2.0 TVET REFORM IN BANGADESH

2.1 Background and Context

Bangladesh's 6th Five Year Plan (FY2011-FY2015) is entitled "Accelerating Growth and Reducing Poverty". Bangladesh wants to achieve Middle Income Status by 2021 and in order to achieve this goal must increase the proportion of higher value added manufacturing from 18 to 25 % of the gross domestic product (GDP). This will require a number of factors but three primary ones are: increased investment, improve labour productivity through increased skills, and increase trade. The Plan stresses employment as a major instrument for poverty reduction. It acknowledges the important contribution that the private sector as well as non-government organizations can have in strengthening government provision of TVET and the role TVET can have in productivity improvement as well as in meeting the needs of disadvantaged groups who need to acquire skills for employment. It further recognizes the value that skills development for workers going abroad has on their employment opportunities as well as on the size of remittances they send back.

2.2 TVET institutions

More than nineteen Ministries operate technical training institutes including Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Education (Directorate of Technical Education), Ministry of Agriculture, offering courses at different levels ranging from high school to Polytechnic. Many institutions also offer a variety of short courses ranging from just a few weeks up to six months. One of the most popular is the basic trade course of 360

hours over six months with some 18,000 + students registered. Whereas government TVET institutions number about 200, private sector institutions number more than 3000. Of the latter most offer Higher School Certificate in Business Management or are secondary vocational schools. The Bureau for Manpower Employment (BMET) operates 38 technical training centers which have a focus on training workers for overseas.

2.3 Challenges

Historically, the major road-block in the provision of skilled workers was an ineffective TVET system that was out of touch with the demands of industry. The reform agenda had to tackle:

- Identifying skills demand and matching with supply;
- Increasing number of TVET seats available which implies more investment;
- Enhancing capacity of TVET institutions to offer courses industry wanted;
- Providing better quality courses with credentials recognized nationally and internationally;
- Promoting higher profile for TVET and new qualifications;
- Finding qualified staff (combining technical and teaching skills);
- Establishing and strengthening the links between industry and TVET institutions.

Meanwhile, those institutions and agencies involved in training for the international market had additional challenges. How were they to:

- Accurately assess the demand for different categories of skilled workers in different overseas markets;
- Develop a coordinated and flexible recruitment and training strategy to service that demand;
- Develop a national qualification system against which skill certification of an international standard can be made;
- Improve the regulation and quality assurance of training providers delivering pre-embarkation training;
- Improve the employment outcomes of those who undertake skills training for

overseas employment; and

- Engage with returning migrants to assess and certify higher skills gained overseas?

2.4 The Response

The government of Bangladesh recognized this skills gap and established plans to construct new TVET institutions and inaugurated three development projects intended to reform the TVET system and improve the quality of TVET graduates to make them more work ready. The three projects are:

- TVET reform project (2008 / 2012) – Implemented by the International Labour Organization
- Skills development project (2009-2013) – Funded by the ADB and SDC
- Skills Training Enhancement Project (2010/2014) – Funded by the World Bank

Another project focusing on migration issues with technical assistance from the ILO started in 2011.

2.5 Key Outputs

The three skills projects contributing to the TVET reform agenda have multiple inter-related outputs which include:

- Modified TVET legislation
- National skills development policy
- National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework
- Bangladesh TVET QA System
- TVET data system
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- Model for competency standards development and new demand driven courses
- New training programs for TVET teachers and principals
- Enhanced work based learning including apprenticeships

2.6 Focus on the National Skills Development Policy

“The National Skills Development Policy in Bangladesh will guide skill development strategies and facilitate improved coordination of all elements of skills training and the parties involved. The policy provides

the vision and direction for skills development over coming years as its sets out the major commitments and key reforms that government will implement in partnership with industry, workers and civil society.” (GoB, 2011)

The policy addresses a number of issues including: provision of demand-driven, flexible and responsive training provision; nationally recognized qualifications; competency based training; quality assurance; accurate skills and labour market data; and competent TVET instructors and managers. Other elements in the policy are strengthened apprenticeships; recognition of prior learning; improved access for under-privileged groups; private training provision; industry training; TVET financing; and skills development for overseas employment.

One of the many important elements in the policy is the engagement of industry through the establishment of Industry Skills Councils (ISCs). The TVET reform project has helped establish ISCs in five sectors – agro-food processing, transport equipment (e.g. ship-building), leather and leather products, information technology and tourism. Meanwhile, the SDP has established similar councils (which they call sector working groups) for construction, light engineering, ready made garments and the informal economy.

The ISCs have been instrumental in helping identify the long and medium term skills demand for their sectors, and in identifying priority occupations where training is needed. They have also recommended technical experts as members on the Standards and Curriculum Development Committees (SCDCs). Competency based training courses will be piloted starting in the summer of 2011 and will be aligned with the new National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF). Two of the ISCs have established Centers of Excellence - the Center of Excellence for Leather (COEL) and the Center of Excellence for Agro-Foods (CEAFS) – which even at this early stage are organizing on and off-job training for industry.

The ISCs will also house computer equipment to be used to collect demand side data on industry skills needs as part of the new skills data system. A national skills demand survey in targeted sectors will be completed this year.

2.7 National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF)

The NTVQF that is being launched in Bangladesh has levels from 1 to 6, as well as two pre-vocational levels to allow easier access to formal TVET for poor or disadvantaged groups who might not have sufficient formal schooling. At the top end, there is a pathway to the Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology (BUET). Figure 1 provides an outline of the Bangladesh NTVQF.

Figure 1 about here

For an understanding of the different levels in the NTVQF, refer to Figure 2.

Figure 2 about here

The NTVQF will provide an exit point at each of the levels for learners to enter the workforce from full-time and part-time studies. Persons from time to time may also leave work to take up full or part-time studies. Existing workers will benefit by being able to seek a qualification under the framework through training and/or by recognition of prior learning. The framework supports flexible delivery of training programs whereby individuals can stop and start their programs as circumstances require.

2.8 Quality assurance framework

A series of quality standards for TVET institutions covering internal QA management, teaching, facilities, etc. are being fine-tuned. TVET institution principals

will complete a self-assessment instrument based on the quality standards. These ratings will be compared with those on the assessment form completed by an external quality auditor. Both parties will agree on institutional strengths and weaknesses and agree on an improvement action plan. There will be regular quality assurance visits and quality assurance support documents such as a TVET institution management manual produced. TVET institutions will have to meet quality standards in order to offer NTVQF courses.

2.9 Measures to Increase Access

A number of innovations that increase access to TVET are being testing in various TVET pilots run by skills projects including: training for rural economic empowerment; removing Grade 8 bar for entry to TVET; reasonable accommodation in TVET for persons with disabilities; gender friendly courses and TVET environments; enhancing and increasing apprenticeship in informal and formal sectors; and recognition of prior learning (RPL).

2.10 Linkages to promote skills for development

Many countries continue to review and refine their national strategies towards skills development. There are opportunities for countries to learn from each other's experience and share knowledge. For example, Governments of **Bangladesh** and **Sri Lanka** recently signed an MOU on cooperation in TVET including exchange of resources. Bangladesh is open to explore similar linkages with other countries in the region and beyond.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

Bangladesh is making progress on TVET reform, for example, a new TVET Act, the National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework, the National Skills Development Policy, establishment of industry skills councils, new competency-based training courses and so on. Though significant reforms are underway, it's too early to tell which reforms will yield the best dividends. However, early indications are showing positive response from industry and excitement from trainees.

There are still challenges, for example, TVET financing, shortage of TVET instructors and strengthening links to industry that need on-going attention. Review of project sponsored TVET pilots and sharing of best practice with other countries on skills for development can assist in finding the right mix of interventions.

4.0 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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5.0 REFERENCES

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