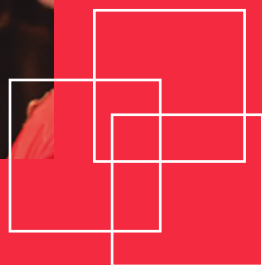


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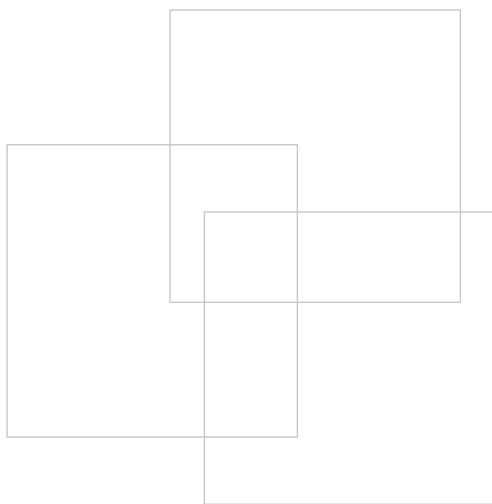
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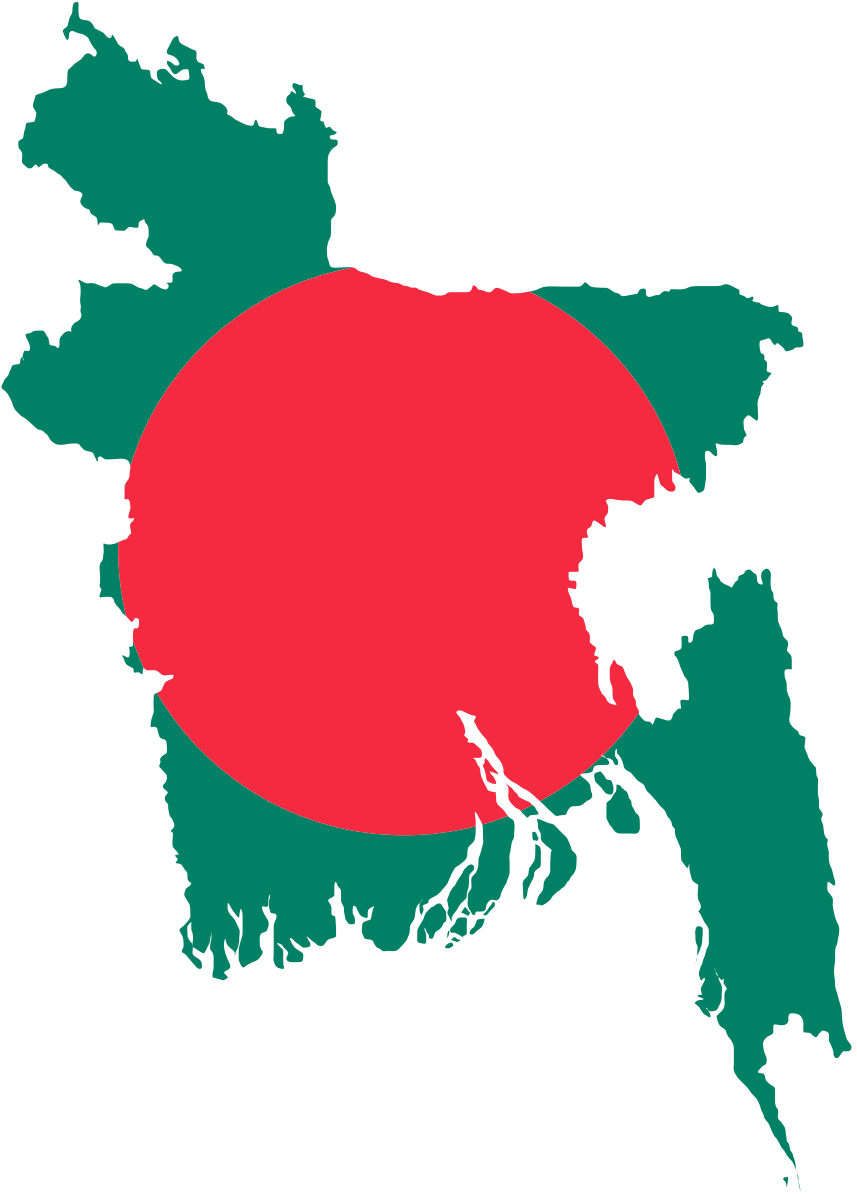
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Bangladesh

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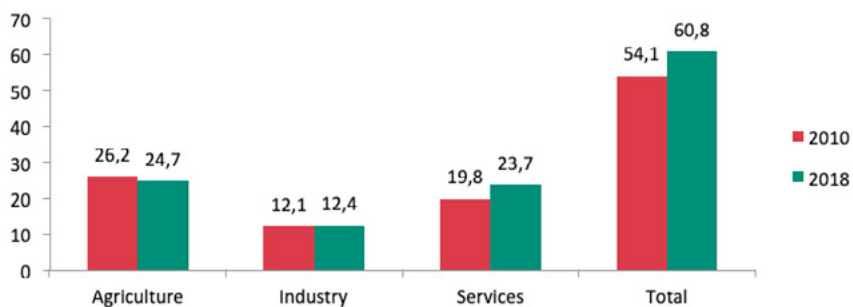


The socio-economic context

In 2015, Bangladesh attained lower middle-income status – a major achievement for the country – due to its rapid and sustained economic growth over the past decade. During the period 2010–18, Bangladesh recorded an average annual growth rate of 6.93 per cent and per capita income increased from \$928 in 2011 to \$1,751 in 2018 (GOB, 2018, p. 21, table 2.5). This impressive economic growth has brought major changes to the sectoral composition of the economy and labour market, with people moving from traditional agricultural occupations into the manufacturing and services sectors (figure 1).

Among the country's major industries are garments and textiles, leather, pharmaceuticals, ceramics, furniture and light engineering, while the primary drivers of the services sector include transport and communications, hotel and tourism, and services related to information and communication technology (ICT).

Figure 1. Employment trends by economic sector (millions).



Source. BBS, 2018 α , p. 123.

Economic growth has delivered human development gains in health and education, particularly girl's education, but job creation lags behind.

Although Bangladesh has risen up the Human Development Index (HDI), to rank fifth among South Asian countries in 2016 (UNDP, 2017), job creation has not kept pace with economic growth. This is a major concern for policy-makers. A recent report by the Bangladesh Planning Commission reveals that only 1.78 million jobs were created during the period 2016–17 – well below the target of 3.9 million.¹

Bangladesh has a large youth² population and is undergoing a demographic transition.

In 2016/17, Bangladesh's population stood at 161.3 million. In 1989, just over half (54 per cent) of the country's population was of working age (15 years old and above). Since then, this figure has increased significantly to 67.6 per cent in 2016/17 (109.2 million persons) (BBS, 2018b) with young people comprising almost one-third (32.4 million).

¹ Reported in the Daily Star, 4 February 2019, quoting the findings of the *Mid-term review of the current 7th Plan* prepared by the General Economics Division (GED), National Planning Commission.

² Defined as the population aged between 15 and 29 years old.

Bangladesh's labour force is growing faster than its working-age population due to the increasing participation of young people, and especially women, in the labour market.

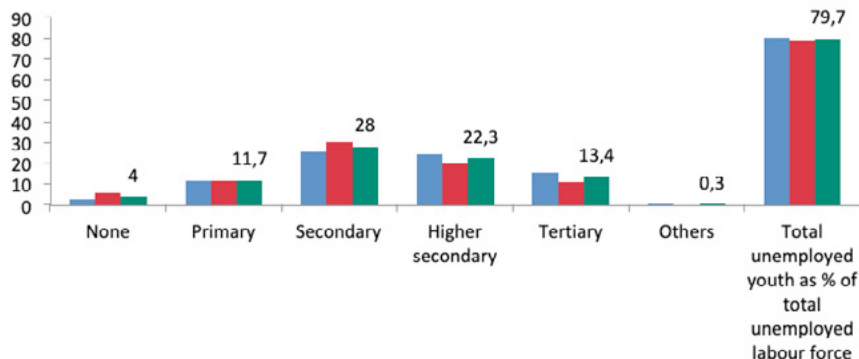
According to Bangladesh's 7th Five Year Plan, the labour force grew at an annual rate of 3.1 per cent over the preceding ten-year period (2005–15) owing to rising female labour force participation, as well as demographic factors. By 2020, it is expected that an additional 9.9 million young people will have joined the labour force since 2016 (GED, 2015a, p.51).

Despite economic growth, unemployment is especially high among educated youth, pointing to a significant skills mismatch.

According to the official estimate of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), the unemployment rate in Bangladesh is 4.2 per cent. However, this low figure is due to the criteria used in defining unemployment and does not reflect the true scale of joblessness in Bangladesh.³ Of particular concern is the high rate of unemployment among youth – estimated at 10.6 per cent – with educated youth most severely affected (BBS, 2018b) (figure 2).

³ According to the BBS labour force survey methodology, employed persons comprise all individuals over the age of 15 years old who were involved in any form of work for at least one hour during the week (i.e. the seven-day period) prior to the survey. This estimate does not capture those who are not fully employed and are available to undertake additional work.

Figure 2. Educational status of unemployed youth and percentage share of youth in total unemployment, 2018.



Source. BBS, 2018b, p. 81.

A large proportion of Bangladesh’s workforce is in vulnerable employment and faces significant decent work deficits.

Successive labour force surveys have shown consistently high rates of informal employment. In 2018, 85.1 per cent of the labour force (or 51.7 million out of 60.8 million employed persons) were in informal employment (BBS, 2018b). A large share of these are classified as own-account workers (26.8 million) or contributing family workers (7.2 million), both categorized as vulnerable employment. Those in vulnerable employment tend to be low skilled, with a disproportionately high share of female workers and a prevalence of child labour. There is therefore a strong case for developing the Bangladesh technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system to address decent work deficits, particularly in the informal economy.

Overseas employment plays a significant role in Bangladesh's economy, in terms of both hard currency earnings and reducing pressure on the domestic labour market.

More than 0.73 million Bangladeshis went abroad for work in 2018, equivalent to one-third of annual entrants into the labour market (BMET, 2018). Workers overseas remitted \$15.5 billion in 2018, constituting 5.4 per cent of GDP.⁴ A major area of concern for policy-makers is the relatively high percentage of low-skilled migrant workers. About 55 per cent of Bangladeshi migrant workers overseas are either low skilled (40 per cent) or semi-skilled (15 per cent) (BMET, 2018, p. 24), rendering them vulnerable to precarious types of work, low wages and exploitation. The Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy 2016 aims to align with the National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) 2011 (MoE, 2011) to promote the skills development of migrant workers to meet the labour market requirements of overseas employers.

⁴ Reported in the Daily Star, "Bangladesh 3rd in South Asia, 11th globally: WB", Dhaka, 10 Apr. 2019, quoting the World Bank's Migration Development Brief.

Recent trends have far-reaching implications for skills development, particularly the demand for newly emerging skills.

Rapid economic expansion has been coupled with the introduction of new technologies and production processes to the country's growing export volume as well as manufacturing and services sectors. For example, industry's contribution to GDP increased from 26.2 per cent in 2001 to 33.7 per cent in 2018. Export earnings have likewise shown a steady and rapid increase, from \$30.17 billion dollars in 2014 to \$40.53 billion in 2019,⁵ mostly led by the garments and leather sectors. These rapid changes have increased the demand for skilled labour from both existing and emerging occupations in various sectors.⁶ A joint ILO and WTO study has shown that skills also play an important role in the promotion of trade and investment (ILO and WTO, 2017). Bangladesh thus faces the challenge of ensuring that its education and training system can satisfy emerging skills shortages in various sectors.

⁵ Reported in the *Daily Star*, 9 July 2019, quoting sources from the Export Promotion Bureau.

⁶ Specifically, garments and textiles, construction, leather, cement, pharmaceuticals, ceramics, light engineering, furniture, ICT, shipbuilding, and hotel and tourism.

Bangladesh has made impressive gains in education enrolment, particularly at the primary level, but the drop-out rate is high.

The net primary enrolment rate increased from 85.5 per cent in 2000 to 97.7 per cent by 2014 (GED, 2015b). Gender parity has been fully achieved at the primary and secondary levels of education. The adult literacy rate⁷ increased from 52 per cent in 2000 to 72.9 per cent in 2017 (75.7 per cent for males and 70.1 per cent for females) (GED, 2018). Despite these gains, the main challenges for the country's education system are ensuring the quality, access and relevance of education for the labour market and reducing drop-out rates at the secondary and higher secondary levels, when the drop-out rate for girls exceeds that for boys.

The number of youth neither in employment nor in education or training (NEET) is high in Bangladesh.

About 12.3 million young people (almost 38 per cent of total youth) fall into this category, according to the BBS estimates for 2016–17 (BBS, 2018b). A high NEET rate means a high rate of joblessness and a significant underutilization of the country's youth potential. A striking aspect of this problem is that females constitute the overwhelming proportion of NEET youth (87 per cent compared to 13 per cent for males).

⁷ Defined as the literacy rate among the population over the age of 15 years old.

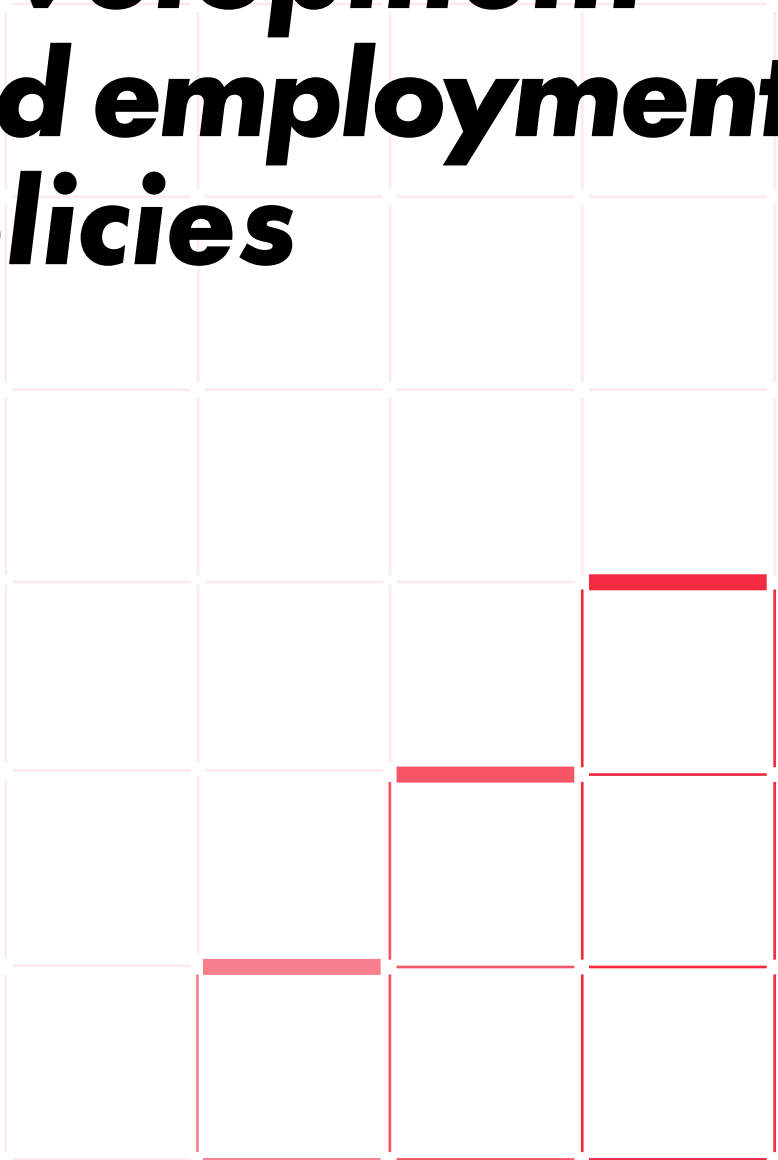
Skills mismatch and skills shortages are emerging challenges to the country's rapid economic development.

Although reliable data on labour market demands are not available, industries and employers repeatedly point to skills gaps among youth as a fundamental constraint to growth. A survey conducted by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) revealed that (a) Bangladesh's major industrial sectors⁸ suffer from a shortage of skilled workers and (b) the country will have to train more than 4 million people by 2021 to meet the skills demands in these sectors.⁹ A joint study by the ILO and the Industry Skills Council for the Tourism and Hospitality Sector (ISCTHS) estimated that demand for various categories of skilled workers in the sector is likely to increase from 165,204 in 2018 to 189,258 by 2025 (ILO and ISCTHS, 2018). Studies carried out by the ILO into the ceramics and pharmaceuticals sectors have shown that these emerging sectors also suffer from skills shortages.

⁸ Namely, garments, agro-food, construction, health, hospitality and tourism, ICT, leather goods, light engineering and shipbuilding.

⁹ Reported in the *Financial Express*, "4m skilled workers needed by 2021: BIDS", Dhaka, 8 Dec. 2016.

Development and employment policies



Bangladesh's development and employment strategy is outlined in two important policy documents, the most pertinent details of which are reproduced below.

Bangladesh Vision 2021 (CPD, 2007)

Goal Three: To become a poverty-free middle-income country

- Accelerated growth in the industry and services sectors.
- A skilled workforce.
- Higher foreign exchange earnings from the export of semi-skilled and skilled labour.

Goal Five: To develop a skilled and creative human resource

- Universal access to education up to the secondary level.
- An integrated/unified education system.
- Necessary infrastructure to ensure quality of education at all levels.
- Analytical and creative thinking by our youth, supported by a core set of values.
- Vocational training for secondary school graduates.

Goal Eight: To be a more inclusive and equitable society

- Ensuring gender equality.
- Provide minimum guaranteed employment opportunities for the resourceless.
- Targeted programmes for the physically challenged.
- Economic and social inclusion of minorities.

7th Five Year Plan – FY2016–FY20: Accelerating growth, empowering citizens

Bangladesh's 7th Five Year Plan is closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning, SDG 5 on gender equality and female empowerment and SDG 8 on full and productive employment and decent work for all (Alam, 2018). One of its main thematic axes is GDP growth acceleration, employment generation and rapid poverty reduction. The Government would like to achieve this by setting the following goals (GED, 2015a, p. 546):

- a reduction in poverty and inequality across all groups and regions;
- an increase in productive and decent employment opportunities for sustainable and inclusive growth;
- a quality education for all to reduce poverty and increase economic growth; and
- the achievement of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.



The TVET system in Bangladesh

Bangladesh's TVET system has undergone a major transformation and expansion since the reform process first started in 2008. Despite this, the National Planning Commission has identified two general deficiencies in the country's skills system, which are highlighted in the current 7th Five Year Plan.

- I.** Skills mismatch and a shortage of skilled workers continue to constrain rapid economic growth and hinder structural changes in the economy. Employers within the rapidly growing industrial sectors complain about shortages of skilled labour, while at the same time millions of young workers are seeking jobs.

- II.** Although the percentage of skilled workers has increased over time, the high share of low skilled (40 per cent) and semiskilled (15 per cent) Bangladeshi migrant workers presents a major challenge for the country's skills system (BMET, 2018).

TVET reform

To address deficiencies in the current skills system, a major overhaul of skills development commenced in 2008 with the launch of a TVET reform programme by the Ministry of Education. An important milestone was reached in January 2012 with the adoption of the National Skills Development Policy 2011 (NSDP 2011), formulated following broad-based consultations with a wide range of stakeholders, including public and private sector skills providers, employers, trade unions, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and sectoral organizations. Under this new reform agenda, Bangladesh's skills development system is comprised of three components:

- I. National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF):** A national system designed to (a) improve the quality and consistency of nationally recognized qualifications; (b) impose consistency on credentials for formal and non-formal skills-based education and training; and (c) provide formal recognition of workplace skills, whether obtained in the formal or the informal economy. The system seeks to improve the alignment of formal and non-formal training programmes with industry requirements and provide a new benchmark for the international recognition of skills and knowledge.

- II. Competency-based training and assessment (CBT&A):** CBT&A aims to design and deliver training which is responsive to the skills needs of the labour market through developing partnerships between industry and training providers and placing greater emphasis on acquisition and demonstration of industry-relevant practical skills.
- III. The Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System:** The system comprises (a) the registration of public and private training providers; (b) the development of nationally recognized units of competency and qualifications; (c) the accreditation of learning and assessment programmes; and (d) the auditing of training providers for compliance with quality standards. The main objective of this new quality assurance system is to ensure that training providers in Bangladesh meet minimum standards for training delivery.

The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)¹⁰ coordinates the skills development activities run by the various ministries and government departments, the private sector, NGOs and others.

¹⁰ Established 1 October 2018 by the National Skills Development Authority Act 2018.

With regard to the future growth of the TVET sector, three key quantitative targets have been set in the NSDP 2011 (p. 37),¹¹ as detailed below.

- TVET to comprise 20 per cent of all secondary enrolment by 2020: Enrolment trend analysis from the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) report shows that the enrolment figure for TVET students reached 13.11 per cent in 2014 and 15.5 per cent in 2015 (BTEB, 2016). Furthermore, based on the current rate of increase in the enrolment rate of TVET students, BTEB calculates that it will reach 20.82 per cent by 2020, making this NSDP 2011 target achievable.
- Total enrolment in TVET to increase by 50 per cent: Between 2009 (i.e. the base year) and 2016, total enrolment of students in the formal TVET system increased from 475,848 to 875,270, representing an 84 per cent increase over this seven-year period and averaging 12 per cent per annum (BANBEIS, 2017, p. 247, table 7.1).
- Women's enrolment to increase by 60 per cent: This target is not remotely close to being achieved; based on the trend over the past decade, women's enrolment as a percentage of total TVET students has remained unchanged at 24 per cent.

¹¹ These targets have reference to 2009 as the base year as per National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction II (NSAPR II), FY 2009–II, Government of Bangladesh, Dhaka, Dec. 2009.

To meet these ambitious targets, the Government has launched initiatives to found new training institutes, including some specifically for women, and introduced new courses in existing public institutions. However, in many cases, this expansion of training provision has not been matched by a corresponding increase in the numbers of teachers, classrooms, workshops, laboratory facilities, and other infrastructure and logistical support. In particular, the quality of available teaching staff remains a notable weakness in Bangladesh's TVET system.

The expansion of institutes in the private sector has been even more spectacular than in the public sector, with an estimated 48 per cent increase between 2008 and 2015 (NSDC, BBS, 2016). One consequence of this rapid expansion is the current lack of monitoring or inspection of the operational performance of a vast number of these institutes to ensure they are providing demand-driven, good-quality skills training that meets labour market needs. A study organized by the National Skills Development Council (NSDC) Secretariat and funded by BTEB showed the performance of TVET institutions to be weakest when under private management (Mia and Rezaul Karim, 2015, p. xiii). Policy-makers need to focus on this area, if quality training for human resource development is to be delivered successfully through the private sector.

“The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of (a) establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law; (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs”.

(© ILO)



– Constitution of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh

Article. 17

Skills development



According to the NSDP 2011, “Skills development is defined as the full range of formal and non-formal vocational, technical and skills-based education and training for employment and or self-employment”.¹² More specifically, skills development includes:

- I. pre-employment and livelihood skills training, including TVET, apprenticeships and school-based TVET;
- II. education and training for employed workers, including workplace training; and
- III. employment-oriented and job-related short courses not currently affiliated with BTEB servicing both domestic and international markets.

The skills development system in Bangladesh can be divided into four broad types of skills provider, based on ownership and management (public, private, etc.), as shown in figure 3.

Figure 3. The TVET system in Bangladesh by type of ownership.

- 1 Public training providers consisting of various Government ministries and the departments under them, offering a wide range of courses of varying duration and type.
- 2 Private training providers, which include (a) those receiving some form of Government subsidy, e.g. MPO and grants, and (b) those operating on a commercial basis or through their own funding arrangements, including *madrasahs* (religious schools).
- 3 NGOs (and not-for-profit institutions) offering TVET courses, particularly for disadvantaged and marginalized groups.
- 4 Industry-based training, which includes institutions managed by industry, and training delivered at the workplace, including apprenticeships.

¹² NSDP 2011, p. 8.

A comprehensive overview of the entire TVET system (formal and non-formal training of all types) was captured in the TVET Institution Census 2015 carried out by the BBS and the NSDC Secretariat (NSDC, BBS, 2016). Its main findings are as follows:

- Between 2008 and 2015, the number of TVET centres increased by 74.2 per cent, from 7,555 to 13,163, with a capacity of 1.7 million students.
- Some 48 per cent were run by individual owners, 19.1 per cent were monthly payment order (MPO) institutes, which are privately owned but government-subsidized, 13.2 per cent were run by government or semi-government institutes and 12.3 per cent by non-MPO institutes and 7.4 are run by other entities (partnerships, corporate/trustee boards and joint ventures).
- In the public sector, there were 23 government ministries and an additional 36 government departments under those ministries which provide skills training.
- Three-quarters of institutions (74.5 per cent) did not receive any kind of financial or technical assistance from either the Government or development partners.
- More than 30 per cent of institutions were not attached to any government agency, consequently operating entirely independently of any kind of monitoring, assessment or certification by an independent authority.

Governance

Currently, the planning, management and delivery, and monitoring and evaluation of skills development are carried out by several governmental entities. These entities can be divided into two broad types:

- I. high-level councils and bodies responsible for the overall formulation of policies, guidelines and decisions relating to skills training that apply to the system in general and cover all types of providers; and
- II. 23 governmental ministries and 36 departments that offer their own formal and non-formal training programmes. This includes those training courses certified by a central authority, such as BTEB.

With regard to the first type of coordinating body, the main institutional mechanisms for the coordination of skills development are operated by the following bodies:

The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA): A newly formed, high-level body whose main functions are to coordinate the implementation of all aspects of the NSDP 2011 in collaboration with a broad spectrum of implementing agencies and partners (Government, NGOs, the private sector and industry associations), prepare skills strategies and draw up action plans for their implementation.

The NSDA has a broad-based membership that represents not only governmental ministries and departments at the highest level, but also private sector associations, NGOs and workers' organizations. It is comprised of three entities:

- A Governing Body (GB) chaired by the Prime Minister. Its membership comprises ministers in charge of the various ministries as well as selected private sector representatives. The GB meets once a year and is the authority's highest decision-making body.
- The Executive Committee (EC), which sits below the Governing Body and is made up of representatives from relevant ministries and departments, the private sector and civil society. The EC meets three times a year.
- The NSDA Secretariat, headed by an Executive Chairperson. Its staff support the planning, coordination and implementation of skills training, including the preparation of an NSDA action plan.

Ministry of Education (MoE):¹³ The Technical and Madrasa Education Division (TMED) under the Ministry of Education is responsible for the largest share of public sector training. It is also responsible for the implementation of the NSDP 2011 and the National Employment Policy (NEP) 2010 as it relates to skills development. Through its Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), it operates the largest network of engineering colleges, polytechnic institutes, technical schools and colleges, glass and ceramics institutes, the Graphic Arts Institute, Survey Institute, the Technical Teachers' Training Institute and the Vocational Teachers' Training Institute.

¹³ Other important ministries include: the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, responsible for promotion, management and regulatory control of overseas employment and ensuring the welfare of migrants overseas; the Ministry of Youth and Sports, which operates youth training centres and is responsible for implementing the Youth Development Policy 2017; and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, which operates short training programmes for women throughout the country.

It is also the primary ministry for implementation of SDG goals and targets (SDG Goal 4) and the Government's action plan for SDG 4. Besides directly delivering skills training through its various institutes, the largest block of private sector and NGO institutes are attached to the MoE – 35 per cent of all TVET institutes (NSDC, BBS, 2016). The DTE plans a major expansion in the number of training institutes throughout the country at the district and sub-district levels.

Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB): The statutory body responsible for the registration of all types of institution (public, private, NGO-led), the preparation of skills standards and curricula, the inspection of affiliated TVET institutes, the conducting of examinations and issuance of certifications, and maintaining skills standards and curricula. Under the TVET reform initiative, one of BTEB's key mandates is the implementation of the NTVQF; thus, BTEB is a major actor in improving the quality and relevance of skills training.

Directorate of Technical Education (DTE): The DTE is the largest public sector training provider in Bangladesh. It manages and operates 119 major, publicly-funded training institutions, including polytechnic institutes, technical schools and colleges, engineering colleges and technical teachers' training colleges. It is at the forefront of the ongoing TVET reform process and the implementation of programmes of formal TVET training funded by both the Government and donors. Its primary focus is on quality improvement and the expansion of the system in the short, medium and long term.

This includes enlarging current capacity and infrastructure, training teachers and introducing new courses and technologies to meet emerging market demand. To enhance the linkage between industry and the market relevance of training, it has introduced public–private partnerships, job placements, careers counseling and guidance, and skills competition in its institutes.

To give an idea of the scale of the DTE’s expansion, its annual development budget increased from 2.66 billion Bangladeshi Taka (BDT) (\$31.3 million) in 2013–14 to 7.85 billion BDT (approximately \$92.40 million) in 2017–18. The DTE manages the MPOs of 18,497 teachers and staff employed in 1,674 private institutes and receives funding from several major donors in Bangladesh, among which are development banks, bilateral donors and UN agencies.

Industry Skills Councils (ISCs): In terms of the number of trainees, the role of ISCs as direct training providers is limited; but, they are increasingly providing valuable support and advice to the TVET system, including vital information on sectoral skills demand, curricula development and skills gap analysis. ISCs were established so that the private sector and industry could participate in skills development as envisaged in the NSDP 2011. As of 2019, 12 ISCs have been created.

They collaborate with BTEB, governmental agencies and departments, various skills providers and development partners to strengthen private sector and industry linkage with the TVET system. This is reflected in the core tasks of ISCs, which are to:

- contribute to the development and review of skills standards and qualifications and participate in the development and review of new training curricula;
- advise key governmental TVET agencies on industry sector demand for skills;
- advocate for and facilitate workforce development activities in industry;
- develop sector skills development plans on a regular basis as required;
- support the strengthening of industrial apprenticeship programmes; and
- develop partnerships with TVET providers and support the improvement of TVET programmes in schools, colleges, industry and private enterprises.

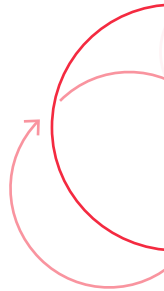
ISCs receive support from the NSDA, as well as from development partners, in arranging direct skills training and apprenticeships. However, their capacity to deliver skills training at scale is constrained by a lack of experienced and qualified staff and training facilities, and inadequate funding.

Social dialogue

Social dialogue is recognized as important in Bangladesh's policy-making, including in its skills policy. Bangladesh has ratified ILO Convention No. 144 on Tripartite Consultation, which constitutes an explicit commitment by the country to the principle of social dialogue. In Bangladesh, the three parties to social dialogue (the social partners) are the Government, represented by the Ministry of Labour and Employment, employers, represented by the Bangladesh Employers' Federation (BEF), and trade unions, represented by the National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE).¹⁴ The NSDP 2011 (p. 12, section 3.7) states: "The social partners have a major role in skills development. In particular, employers and workers are key stakeholders who work with government to develop and implement a vision for skills development." Social dialogue on skills development happens through two main channels:

- Both BEF and NCCWE are invited to contribute to forums, discussion sessions and consultation meetings about various TVET issues, including policy-making. For example, they participated in discussion sessions on the formulation and adoption of a skills policy, a labour policy and labour law, including apprenticeship law.
- Both BEF and NCCWE are represented in high-level policy-making bodies, such as the Executive Committee of the NSDA, the National Tripartite Committee on Labour Matters, National Wages and Productivity Commission, etc. BEF supports the work of the ISCs.

¹⁴ NCCWE is a grouping of 13 national trade union federations representing almost all the organized workers in the country's major sectors. NCCWE office holders are elected on a rotational basis.



Financing

The TVET Census (NSDC, BBS, 2016) reported that three-quarters (74.5 per cent) of all TVET institutes in the private sector do not receive any kind of financial or technical assistance from the Government or development partners. This means that a large proportion of institutes are not overseen by any agency, with the exception of those affiliated to BTEB.

Public sector institutes constitute only 13.3 per cent of all institutions. They are funded through public revenue and development budgets. The Ministry of Finance, in collaboration with the ministry in charge of operating the institute, usually controls budgets. Once the budget is approved, individual institutions have limited flexibility to change the budget composition in response to local needs.

BTEB-approved private secondary vocational institutions receive public funds for a significant share of teachers' salaries. According to the TVET Institution Census 2015 report, 19.1 per cent of institutions receive such MPO support. The remaining private institutes have to manage their own funds and are therefore often underfunded with consequent adverse effects on the quality of training (Mia and Rezaul Karim, 2015). Besides private institutes, there are a number of NGO, not-for-profit training providers running TVET institutions and relying mainly on external funding.

The Government has set up the National Human Resources Development Fund (NHRDF). Although not yet operational, the fund will enable TVET institutions, particularly those in the private sector, employers and ISCs to access funding. The Government has already allocated 3,000 million BDT (approximately \$35 million) over three fiscal years (2016–18) to the NHRDF.



Skills anticipation

Bangladesh's system for anticipating future skills demand is fragmented and uncoordinated due to the large number of training providers administered by different ministries and departments. Most of these agencies are engaged in data collection in one form or another within their mandated area of work. For example, BBS collects a wide variety of labour market data through its regular labour force surveys, as well other kinds of official statistics with implications for the skills system. The Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), under the Ministry of Education, collects and compiles data on training providers, numbers of teachers, student enrolment, etc.

Similarly, BTEB keeps a record of its affiliated institutions, the numbers of enrolled students and graduates of its affiliated institutions, maintains a data management system and collects data on the demand for skills in various occupations.

NSDA is responsible for data collection and analysis and for forecasting the likely skills demand from both national and international labour markets. The Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment collects and maintains data on overseas employment, including periodic surveys on the demand for Bangladeshi workers in overseas job markets. Finally, most of the major donor-funded projects support national counterpart agencies in the collection of labour market data, including skills demand data. This snapshot reveals the poorly coordinated and disjointed nature of data collection in Bangladesh's education and skills system.



Skills recognition and quality assurance

The NSDP 2011 will revise the Bangladesh skills quality assurance system to provide a consistent, widely recognized and credible training and assessment standard on a national scale. In the current TVET system, BTEB has primary responsibility for quality assurance, standard setting, curricula development and assessment. The number of BTEB-affiliated institutions rose from 6,487 in 2012 to 7,773 by 2016, an increase of 20 per cent (BTEB, 2016). The TVET Institution Census 2015 recorded a total of 13,163 TVET institutions in the country. This means that about 41 per cent of TVET institutions (or 5,390 institutions) are outside BTEB control.

Under the 2008 TVET reforms, BTEB is responsible for implementing the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF).

Starting from scratch, BTEB has been able to expand its number of staff and assessors, develop competency-based learning materials (CBLMs) and curricula, organize the registration of Registered Training Organizations (RTOs) and set up assessment centres for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). The following inventory shows the progress made by BTEB, as of October 2018, in implementing the NTVQF:

- number of industry assessors: 2,224
- number of RTOs and assessment centres: 259
- number of certified trainees: 11,502
- number of certified RPL graduates: 29,568 (ILO, 2018).

Although some progress has been made, its scale and impact are insignificant when compared to the size and complexity of the skills system as a whole. There is a pressing need to speed up NTVQF implementation.

Social inclusion

Bangladesh has adopted strategies to promote the inclusion of women. Nevertheless, female participation in the formal TVET system has remained unchanged, at 24 per cent between 2000 and 2016. The share of female teachers, at around 20 per cent, has also remained static (BANBEIS, 2017). The NSDP 2011 has called for a concerted effort to correct the persistent gender imbalance in TVET, particularly within the formal training system.



One positive step has been the formulation and implementation of a Gender Strategy in TVET (NSDC and ILO, 2012) (see box 1).

Box 1. Key measures proposed in the national Gender Strategy in TVET.

- Increase female participation in formal TVET from 24 to 40 per cent by 2020.
- Increase the number of female teachers to 30 per cent and female administrative staff to 20 per cent.
- Increase the number of female managers to at least 10 per cent.

Bangladesh's TVET system remains ill-equipped to facilitate an effective school-to-work transition for disadvantaged youth. As the BBS labour force survey highlights, almost one-third of the country's labour force is comprised of young people (BBS, 2018a). Preparing them for the labour market is of the utmost importance, particularly for those from poorer and disadvantaged families. Since the start of the TVET reform programme in Bangladesh, the ILO and other external donors have supported national efforts to promote youth employment. Despite progress in raising the literacy rate, the educational level of the workforce remains low. According to the 2013 labour force survey, more than one-fifth of the labour force (21.2 per cent) was illiterate and a further 28.2 per cent educated only to primary level. The drop-out rate for students at secondary level is around 36 per cent with the rate for females at over 40 per cent (BANBEIS, 2017).

The majority of these school drop-outs are from poorer families that cannot afford the cost of schooling, who enter the informal economy as underaged, unskilled workers. Although there are no legal barriers to entering formal training institutions, practical barriers do exist. For example, many youth are unable to afford the cost of training and the loss of income during the training period. Moreover, rigid training schedules and admission requirements can be highly discouraging.

Bangladesh's TVET reform initiatives include policies, strategies and practices to support disability inclusion, but there is still much to do. In Bangladesh, approximately 3.2 million youths have disabilities (ILO, n.d.). These young people require support in accessing demand-driven education and training, if they are to find pathways into decent employment. The Government, employers and workers' organizations, with the support of the ILO, have undertaken positive initiatives for disability inclusion. The NSDP 2011 has disability inclusion as one of the core principles of its skills reform process. Other measures include establishing a 5 per cent admission quota for persons with disabilities at all TVET institutions, providing stipends, hostel facilities and transport where necessary and designing accessible training institutes. The Government has implemented a National Strategy for Disability Inclusion and promoted partnerships and networks. The ILO has sensitized employers to the need to establish partnerships with TVET institutes to support training for people with disabilities, prompting the founding of the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network to promote private sector participation for inclusion of persons with disabilities. However, the scale of such initiatives remains small compared to what is required.



Key challenges

The page features a minimalist design with several vertical bars of varying heights and widths in shades of pink and red. Two large, semi-transparent arrows are positioned horizontally: one pointing right on the left side and one pointing left on the right side, both overlapping the vertical bars.

The TVET system in Bangladesh has undergone significant expansion, diversification and capacity strengthening since the beginning of the reform process in 2008. Important successes are the formulation of a well-designed skills policy (NSDP 2011); a spectacular increase in TVET enrolment (from 1 per cent in 2009 to 15.4 per cent by 2018) (DTE, 2018); the introduction of competency-based training and assessment; the implementation of several proactive strategies and policies (RPL, apprenticeships, quotas for women and persons with disabilities) to promote access for disadvantaged groups; and greater industry involvement in skills training through the formation of the NSDA and ISCs. Despite these achievements, however, the country's TVET system faces a number of challenges:

1 The reform process has not been scaled up to the desired level due to the capacity constraints on the major bodies responsible, namely the NSDA, BTEB, DTE.

This has hindered progress in both the implementation of policies and programmes and the monitoring, inspecting and supervising of the expanded TVET system. For example, in terms of the number of beneficiaries, progress in implementing the NTVQF has been slow when compared to the needs of the sector. Similarly, the number of RPL and apprenticeship beneficiaries is negligible in comparison to the size of the youth labour force.

2 The quality of the TVET training is a major challenge.

Policy-makers and key governmental agencies delivering skills training acknowledge the fact that, despite the progress made, the quality of the TVET training on offer is a major challenge due to the shortage of teachers, classrooms, workshops, laboratory facilities, and other infrastructure and logistics.

3 Wide disconnection between the available training and labour market demands.

This is evident in the high unemployment rate among TVET graduates. For example, a tracer study of TVET graduates by a World Bank-supported project found that 32.4 per cent of graduates actually found employment, while 37.7 per cent opted to take further, higher qualifications, 18.4 per cent were unemployed and the remaining 11.5 per cent were not in the labour market (World Bank, 2015).

4 Progress on access for disadvantaged groups has been slow and disappointing.

As an example, female enrolment in TVET has stagnated at 24 per cent for over a decade.

5 Inadequate industry participation in TVET.

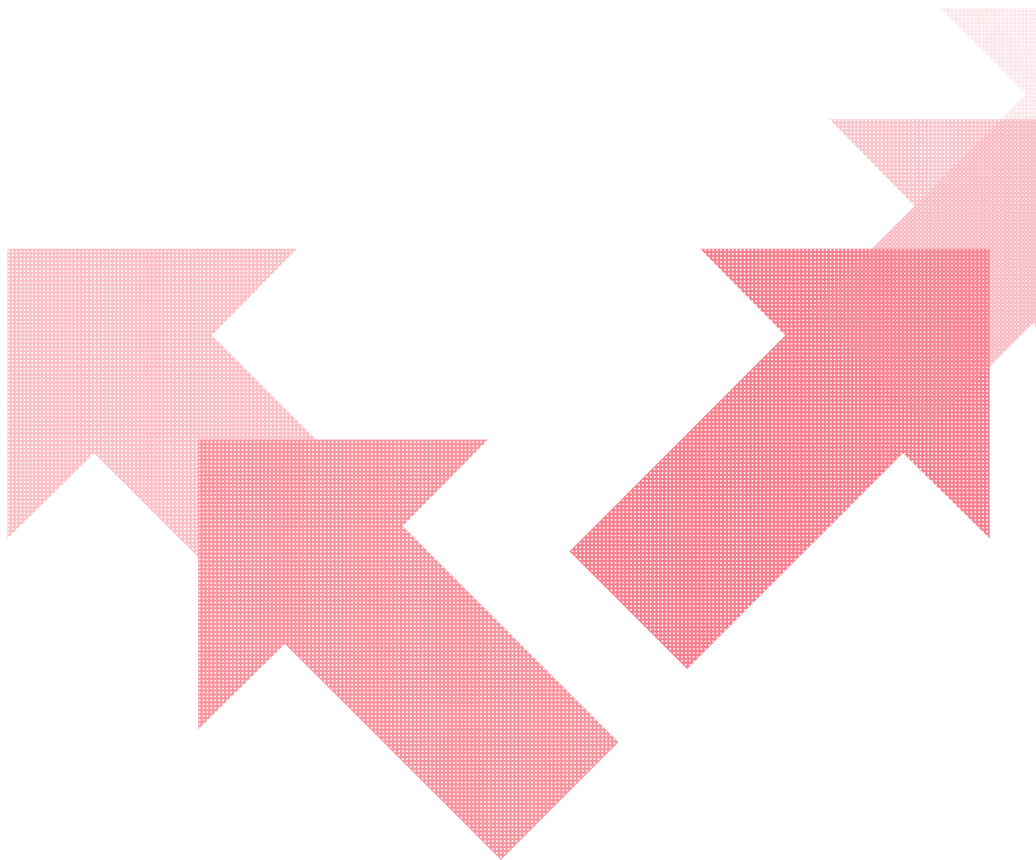
This is due to the limited capacity of ISCs, which suffer from constraints on resources and staff.

6 The National Human Resources Development Fund (NHRDF) is yet to become operational.

7 A lack of effective coordination among agencies.

“In the current system there is a lack of coordination among the training providers. Significant improvements can be made by implementing more effective and nationally consistent policies, system management and quality control” (BTEB, 2016, p. 6).

The way forward





1

Coherence among the various policies.

A well-designed skills system should take account of other policies and initiatives, such as those for education, job creation, industrial development, social welfare, adoption of science and technology, innovation, migration, taxation and public finance. In a modern, market-based global economy, interaction between the various development issues means that determining the demand and supply of skills is complex, rapidly changing and dynamic. It is therefore necessary for the Government to coordinate and make coherent the various policies and development initiatives.

2 More investment in human resource development.

The Government's vision of future skills development is an integral part of Bangladesh's overall human resource development. Concerted efforts by stakeholders, backed by system improvement and increased funding for TVET, will prove a good investment in human resources development, acknowledged in the DTE's TVET vision statement: *Human Resource Development, Economic Development and Improving Livelihood through Technical and Vocational Education and Training* (DTE, n.d., section 1). The Government's strategic goals for TVET include the following (ibid., section 3):

- achieving 20 per cent of all secondary enrolment by 2020;
- capacity building of TVET institutions;
- redesigning and upgrading the TVET curricula;
- in-country and overseas teacher training;
- strengthening industry–institute links;
- TVET research and development; and
- achieving SDG targets.



3

Overall plan for skills development.

Based on the strategic goals listed above, the Government plans a combination of high-level policy commitments and operational level project interventions to achieve the overall expansion, modernization, capacity building and quality improvement of the TVET system (ibid., section 6) as follows:

- **Policy-level commitments:** Targeting a 30 per cent student enrolment in TVET by 2030 (SDG target); establishing a quality assurance system; capacity building of TVET personnel; forecasting labour market demand and supply for domestic and overseas markets; increasing female enrolment in TVET institutions; and strengthening cooperation with development partners.
- **Operational-level project interventions:** Setting up a large number of new TVET institutes of all types, including specifically for women; building capacity at private training institutes; modernizing teacher training and improving the quality of teachers; implementing the NTVQF; and modernizing non-governmental and private training institutes.

Specific areas of focus for future TVET

- **Improving the quality of TVET remains the overarching priority for Bangladesh's education and skills system:** Measures include having qualified teachers, demand-driven curricula, good infrastructure, such as workshops and laboratories, industry involvement in training and an overall improvement in governance capacity to deliver quality training. Also, commensurate with its status as a middle-income country, the Government will need to increase funding for research, innovation and technology, while at the same time being supportive of the private sector.
- **Developing a skills anticipation system:** The disconnect between the training system and labour market requirements is currently wide and must be bridged. The high rate of unemployment among TVET graduates indicates the limited relevance of some skills training to the market. An absence of accurate demand data on current skills requirements and insufficient capacity to anticipate future skills requirements are the two main weaknesses in the country's current TVET system. Moreover, demand and supply data for skills are collected by various agencies in an uncoordinated and fragmented manner. An effective and well-coordinated skills anticipation system is vital for designing a demand-driven and responsive skills delivery mechanism. Ways to improve the skills anticipation system should include: "Sustained dialogue between employers and trainers, coordination across government institutions, labour market information, employment services and performance reviews" (ILO, 2010).

- **Greater involvement of employers and more effective industry participation:** Current participation in TVET provision by the private sector and employers is inadequate when compared to the actual needs of the TVET system as a whole. Future measures may include engaging employers in the TVET system in sustainable ways (incentives, funding, etc.) through public–private partnerships, apprenticeships and other workplace-based training opportunities.
- **Effective implementation of policies to promote the inclusion of women, unemployed youth and other disadvantaged groups in TVET:** The Government, often with support from development partners, has adopted sound and pragmatic policies to increase access and participation of disadvantaged groups in TVET. Although several successful examples have been initiated, more still needs to be done. Specific measures to facilitate improved and equitable access to the education and skills system should include interventions to overcome systemic weaknesses, hidden barriers and rigidities within the formal institutional system in order to attract students from poor and vulnerable families. In addition, effective measures for scaling up programmes like RPL and expanding apprenticeships facilitate access to the skills system for poor and marginalized youth.
- **Building strong institutions and improving governance:** Currently, the public TVET system is centralized and suffers from a lack of qualified technical and managerial staff. Public and private sector institutes alike face shortages of qualified teachers, equipment and other infrastructural facilities. Given these circumstances, the capacity building of institutes and their ability to train staff will remain a priority in the future.

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- **Promoting a sector-wide approach in TVET:** Two interrelated areas in the governance of TVET require attention. One is the issue of the budget and the use of scarce resources to achieve system improvement. The other is the requirement for a coordinated sector-wide approach (SWAp). As the TVET sector expands, a coordinated and coherent approach to bring all the different actors (various government agencies, the private sector and the development partners supporting the national TVET system) together into a nationally recognized system becomes crucial.

It is worth mentioning that the TMED, under the Ministry of Education, has initiated the formation of an inter-ministerial committee on SWAp. One of the Government's ongoing projects, in collaboration with the European Union and the ILO, Skills 21 – Empowering citizens for inclusive and sustainable growth, is supporting this process, which aims to establish a framework for a more conducive legislative, regulatory and institutional approach to TVET to improve skills governance.

- **Monitoring and performance evaluation of TVET:** One of the major weaknesses of the current skills system is the inadequate monitoring of institutes. Monitoring and performance evaluation is a huge task, given the large number of institutes and their widespread locations. Effective performance monitoring systems for public sector institutes, which comprise just over 13 per cent of the total, hardly exist. At the institutional level, systems for record keeping and monitoring of graduates are either weak or non-existent. Due to the large number of institutes in the private sector, a single entity is incapable of regularly assessing the performance of each one. In particular, those TVET institutes located outside the capital city in semi-urban or rural areas are hard to reach with the current institutional capacity. Regulatory and supervisory bodies, such as NSDA, BTEB and the DTE, therefore need to be strengthened and additional offices opened outside the capital.

- **Proactive measures to increase female labour force participation:** In addition to the proactive policies already in place, practical steps are needed to promote female participation in the labour force. These may include measures such as paid maternity leave, a gender-compliant workplace and daycare facilities.

In addition, the introduction of stipends and other financial benefits is being actively considered by policy-makers as an incentive to boost female participation in the TVET system. Finally, intensive advocacy and community mobilization efforts need to continue to remove the socio-cultural barriers that discourage women from participating in the labour market.

- **Adoption of innovation and digitalization:** It is important that Bangladesh adopts new technologies if it is to cope with increased competition in trade and other sectors. Findings from a range of surveys show that employers feel that graduates from technical institutes generally lack effective communication skills, have little knowledge of English and poor ICT capabilities. Training on these aspects therefore needs to be adapted and improved.

- **Advocacy and social marketing of TVET:** The number of formal TVET institutes has grown rapidly over the past decade. According to the BTEB 2016 enrolment report, student enrolment in TVET as a percentage of total secondary and higher secondary students had increased from 13.11 per cent in 2014 to 15.5 per cent by 2015. At the current rate of growth, the target of 20 per cent enrolment will be achieved by 2020. The Government's new target is 30 per cent by 2030. However, to maintain momentum and sustain current progress, there is a need for continuous efforts to make TVET more attractive to both the general public and stakeholders.
- **VET and lifelong learning (LLL):** Access to different types of ICT devices and reading materials and media is considered an important means for LLL. The NSDP 2011 makes reference to the necessity for LLL. Awareness of the importance of LLL is growing with the realization that the advent of the so-called Fourth Industrial Revolution has the potential, among other things, to result in a large-scale displacement of employed workers. Both the NSDP 2011 and SDG 4 make specific reference to the necessity of promoting LLL. However, such acknowledgements and expressions of intent have yet to be translated into practical measures within the skills system. On the contrary, current initiatives on LLL are neither adequate nor visible. In order to move forward, the main question to be asked is: *where and how to start?*



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