Government of the
People's Republic
of Bangladesh

International
Labour
Organization

Skilling the workforce
Labour migration and skills recognition and certification in Bangladesh

Overview

Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country in the world and 60.63 per cent (87 million) of its total population lies in the 15-to-49-year-old age bracket. The availability of such a large workforce is surely a demographic dividend for Bangladesh. However, exposed to a complex socio-economic environment with high rates of unemployment and underemployment, poverty, land scarcity, and low wages for low-skilled and skilled workers, a good number of the Bangladeshi people have sought out overseas employment. Demand for cheaper labour and shortages of semi-skilled and low-skilled worker in the destination countries has created opportunities for the overseas employment of Bangladeshi workers.

In Bangladesh, a variety of actors, such as ministries and other government bodies, private sector institutions, NGOs and industry have been imparting technical and vocational education and training (TVET). The National Skills Development Council (NSDC) is the supreme body for implementing a national policy for skills development, overseeing key reforms, and coordinating activities and TVET. The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) is imparting skill development training in 45 trades in 38 Technical Training Centers (TTCs) in order to facilitate migration of skilled workers. The TTCs, at the end of Dec 2012, had an annual capacity to train about 65,000 trainees.

Skill composition of Bangladeshi migrant workers
(among all migrant workers between 1976 and 2012)

Less-skilled 52%
Professional 2%
Skilled 32%
Semi-skilled 14%
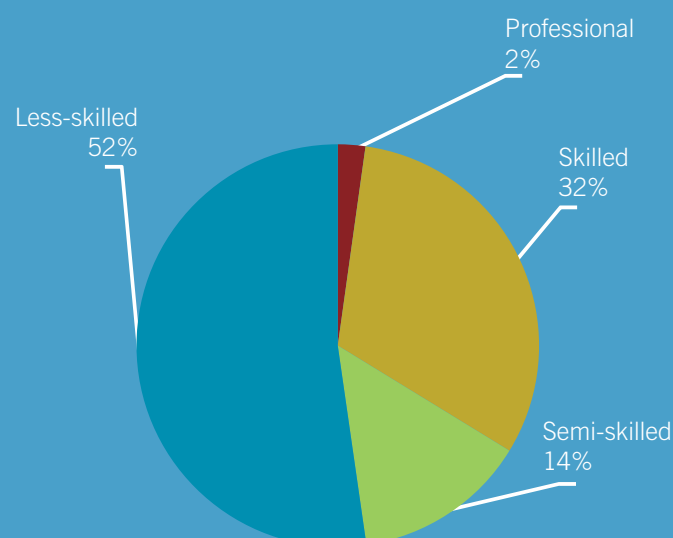
National Skills Development Policy, 2011

Skills development for overseas employment is a major focused area of the National Skills Development Policy. Lack of coordination between the government and non-government bodies is a weak area in skills development. Shortage of coordination between all skills training-providers to establish a common platform is a noticeable feature. And as such, they are unable to meet the growing needs of local and overseas employers' demand. The policy aims to introduce consistent naming of credentials for skill-based education and training, competency-based training and assessment to meet the present and future industry needs, and quality-assurance system. In addition, it encourages strengthening role of industrial sector in skills development, labour-market oriented accurate data for planning and monitoring, recognition of prior learning, and improved access of under-represented group (persons with disabilities, persons with low-level of education, and working adolescents).

In harmony with the National Skills Development Policy, the Government of Bangladesh has framed the National skills development system, consisting of National Technical & Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF), Competency-Based Training & Assessment (CBT&A), and Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System.

The Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BETB) awards diplomas and certificates to learners affiliated with it. It holds the jurisdiction to organize, supervise, regulate, control, and develop technical and vocational education across Bangladesh.

To make the skills development system responsive to the present and future skill needs of the industrial sector, Competency Based Training and Assessment (CBT&A), a programme under which the rigid traditional theory-based approaches will be replaced by a more flexible mechanism, has been introduced. Two new levels of vocational training have been introduced: 1) National Pre-Vocation Certificate 1; and 2) National Pre-Vocation Certificate 2. In addition, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) will be also be initiated, through which people who acquire expertise from their life/work experiences or through informal training will have a chance to have their skills certified.

The Sixth Five Year Plan (FY2011-FY2015) aims to undertake programmes to improve the skill base of Bangladeshi workers. At present, only 35 per cent of Bangladeshi migrants are skilled workers, but under the Plan, initiatives will be taken to increase that ratio to 50 per cent.

To identify priority job markets for Bangladeshi workers in different countries, it is necessary to analyse the trends in Bangladeshi workers' overseas employment. There are several global and destination country-specific factors that control and/or create the need to employ migrant workers. In the recent past, labour migration trends have been noticeably inconsistent. It points to the need to regularly collect and update data about skills demands and the availability of jobs in the international market. The BMET, in recent years, has conducted some basic secondary analyses to find out the migrant labour demand in some countries. Based on this analysis, the following countries seem to be receiving attention: Saudi Arabia, Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Lebanon, Bahrain, Jordan, Kuwait, and Oman. Qatar is likely to get onto the list in the not so distant future.

Challenges

- Because a high proportion of Bangladeshi migrants are low-skilled workers, remittance per worker figures are lower than were anticipated. In addition, low-skilled migrant workers are often compelled to accept 3D (dirty, demeaning, and dangerous) jobs and are subjected to violations of their human and labour rights.

- The enrollment of learners in technical and vocational institutes constitutes only 1.8 per cent of the total student population. Inclusion of female trainees in the technical and vocational institutions is still very low. Women's participation in the formal overseas labour market is increasing gradually but their migration for work remains stigmatized and the participation rate of women remains significantly low.

- A variety of actors are providing technical and vocational training, but the curriculums, standards, and certifications they provide vary and recognition of their certificates remains poor. Though there is a strong push towards application of national standards and quality control, the overall situation remains wanting with regard to coordination.

- For major trades, certifications are usually from the BTEB. The certificates, however, are not given the same value in destination countries due to a lack of relevance in the curriculums as well as concerns over the quality of the training. Training being given in Bangladesh has yet to take into account the skills demands of overseas employers.

- The BTEB is responsible for quality assurance of formal TVET. It has a mandate to organize, supervise, regulate, control, and develop technical and vocational education. However, most private institutions are unaffiliated with the BTEB and try to have their own standards, and due to issues of capacity, the BTEB has not been able to harmonize TVET across the public and private sectors.

- In the absence of coordination, the comparability of certification issued by a range of TVET providers within the country and the comparability of certification by Bangladeshi institutions to foreign institutions remains problematic and unexplored.

Recommendations

- Development of a well-coordinated skills database to serve both the domestic and international labour markets.

- The maintenance of a Labour Migration-Information System (LMIS) on a web portal by the BMET, which would contain quantitative data and qualitative information to provide information about country specific skills demands in major trades, immigration and employment policies, etc.

- Shift towards skills demand-driven training and migration of the workers.

- Migrant worker employment trend analysis in both traditional and non-traditional overseas job markets, particularly to ensure protection of workers who migrate for agricultural work.

- Campaign for the application of the recently formulated National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF), and international accreditation of courses that are of international labour market relevance.

- Training of trainers to ensure that the TVET providers shift from the existing certification to the NTVQF, and introduction of Competency-Based Training & Assessment (CBT&A) in all occupational sectors.

- Industry Skill Councils (ISCs) to be strengthened to meet the demand of the private sector in Bangladesh, as they can help ensure quality training for workers who will stay in the domestic economy as well as workers who intend to migrate.

- Adequate provision for increasing the number and quality of assessors and qualified trainers. Instructor training and certification, competency-based learning materials, and relevant training guidance and CBT&A elements need investment.

- Highest level of quality assurance of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) to instil confidence among overseas employers as well as domestic employers who may want to hire returning migrant workers.

- Advocacy for the development and adoption of a Regional Model Competency Standard (RMCS) that would help South Asian countries compare and contrast their various skill certifications, and which would help employers in destination countries determine the competency levels of workers from South Asia. This could be pilot tested through a bilateral agreement between two countries of origin.

- Overall quality improvement of TVET institutions (e.g. increase student absorption capacity, upgrade equipment/training materials, etc.) is important for improving the utilization rate of these institutions, in particular, of the TTCs.

- New pre-vocational course pathways may be established for less-educated people to enter into formal courses, including apprenticeships, to address basic skills gaps.

- Cost of internationally accredited training needs to be reduced for learners, especially for women and marginalized groups of people, such as persons with disabilities.

- Strong move towards public-private partnership for demand-driven and market-relevant skills training.

- Demand for nurses is to be taken seriously both for the domestic health sector and international labour market. Public-private partnership would help address the issue of capital investment required for increasing the number of training centres and accredited programmes.

- Given the current low participation rates of women in TVET, special efforts are necessary to correct this gender imbalance. Affirmative action, incentives to encourage families to send girls to TVET institutions, post-training placement support, increasing the number and quality of women trainers, preparation of gender sensitive curriculum, and flexible time schedules would go a long way in attracting women to TVET.

- Workers selected for migration need to be advised on how they can record data regarding the skills they will be gaining in the country of destination, and taught how to prepare portfolios of evidence to get certified through RPL upon return.

- Accreditation of TVET courses that are already being offered should be taken up on a priority basis to improve the employability of workers in the international market.

- Set up and operate schools in Bangladeshi foreign missions to impart vocational and technical skills enhancement training to Bangladeshi low-skilled migrant workers who are already in those countries.

- The Technical Education Act needs critical review with an emphasis on worker migration and skills development in order to promote migration for decent work. Rules should be developed to bring a standardized approach to TVET for outgoing Bangladeshi workers. The key issues on which Rules are urgent are: training, certification, and skills development for overseas employment and special facilities devoted to the professional reintegration of returning migrant workers.

- Implementation of the Action Plan of the NSDP within the proposed timeframe is an urgent need to ensure the adoption of a competency framework and implementation of a quality assurance system.