



International
Labour
Organization

A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE FOR BANGLADESHI APPAREL WORKERS Certified training within the national skills development framework

Since the 1980s, the ready-made garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh has experienced exceptional growth. Today, the sector is the largest generator of foreign income for the country and employs around 4.2 million people. However, most of the people who work in the industry are low-income women. In this sector, there is a high turnover of employees and an acute skills shortage at all levels. Meanwhile, 45 per cent of the population of Bangladesh

are underemployed or unemployed, giving rise to a large number of working poor.

The training available to workers in the garment industry is neither market-responsive nor industry-driven. The failure to implement the 'National Skills Standard' may be attributed to shortcomings in both coordination and capacity.

FACTS AND FIGURES

Partners:

Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) AB, The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida)

Beneficiary country:

Bangladesh

Timeframe:

1 January 2014 – 31 December 2016

Budget:

USD 1,547,276 (as per November 2013 exchange rates) with H&M's contribution amounting to approximately 50 per cent of the overall budget

THE RESPONSE

The Centre of Excellence for Bangladesh Apparel Industries (CEBAI) is a replicable model of an industry-driven training and support service that aims to meet the sector's labour force needs. The initiative seeks to increase both the employability and wages of the working poor. This initiative is a part of a global ILO-H&M partnership, which draws on the company's considerable expertise in providing training to its workers.

The goals of the project are to:

- Establish a 'Centre of Excellence' that enhances employers' commitment to training;
- Increase the capacity and effectiveness of technical training centres, technical schools and colleges, NGOs and enterprises;
- Increase the use of assessment and certification in RMG, linked to better documentation generally;

- Improve access to training and higher wages for the working poor.

The Centre of Excellence brings together key industry associations and relevant stakeholders, including brands and buyers, workers' representatives and the Government. It acts as the nodal agency for skills development, research and planning, to create a stronger and more efficient ready-made garment sector.

The Centre may be viewed as a sustainable, self-funded approach to training, labour market expertise and investment among a group of enterprises and training providers. This approach builds on a number of successful examples in training, such as the inclusion of persons with disabilities.



"This training was excellent, timely and eye-opening for me. It has changed my thought of operating machines differently. My management is very happy with me now. The training is very effective too. After the training I have been placed at a higher grade by my company. Now I get Tk. 1000 more than I used to get."

Ms. Sharmin,
Machine Operator
at Russel Garments,
Osman Group



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RESULTS

The project aims to benefit almost 5,000 women and men in Bangladesh:

- 3,480 new entrants/helpers will be trained within the industry and placed in operator-level positions, pursuant to increasing the capacity of factories;
- 60 supervisors will be trained in key leadership skills and responsibilities (including occupational safety and health, disability inclusion and workers' rights);
- 800 workers will be assessed by means of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process, with a view to improving their wages;
- Ten enterprises will benefit directly from the project by starting 'Enterprise Based Training (EBT)' on their factory premises. Three technical institutions and three NGOs will be given EBT so they can deliver competent operators in clusters.

Most of the project beneficiaries will be women, considering that they account for the majority of the labour force in the RMG sector. There is a target of ensuring that at least 5 per cent of beneficiaries are people with disabilities.

The Centre was opened in December 2014 by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in Ashulia, a major RMG cluster close to Dhaka. The operational costs of running the Centre have also been secured – mainly by the industry. In addition to this, the Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (BSEP) Project, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation (SIDA), the ILO-IFC Better Work Programme, and the University Grant Commission have come together to fund training activities, a placement cell, a knowledge repository unit and research activities. They have also pledged to provide support for training and apprenticeship programmes and to boost industrial relations.

The Enterprise Based Training (EBT) component of the project is currently under way. So far, a total of 48 trainers and assessors have received competency-based training and assessments. To date, 188 women and men have been trained as part of the EBT and, as a result, all have been promoted to operators – where they can earn higher wages.

In-house training at the Centre of Excellence started in March 2015.

BENEFITS OF PARTNERING

The ILO brings considerable experience and expertise to this project – not only in terms of vocational education and training reform – but also in terms of involving private sectors in skills and industrial relations initiatives. The ILO also provides guidance and technical support with a view to developing comprehensive curricula and competency-based learning materials that are aligned with national standards. Meanwhile, companies benefit by ensuring that the skills of their workforce conform to the national qualification framework – thus, in turn, enhancing their image. The Centre of Excellence will help build a close network between relevant stakeholders, services and skills initiatives, and productivity-related services. In addition, the ILO serves as the coordinating agency between the Industry Skills Council, the Bangladesh Technical Education Board, the Bangladesh Department of Technical Education and the Bangladesh Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.