



▶ Market-based solutions aid social cohesion in Cox's Bazar

ILO's ISEC project in Cox's Bazar is facilitating the use of market-based solutions to drive long-term economic prosperity and foster social cohesion between the climate-vulnerable marginal host communities and Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar district. Dive into the [full article](#)



▶ Ambassador Irma van Dueren from the Netherlands Embassy visits the ISEC Project

On 16 July 2024, ILO welcomed Ambassador H.E. Irma van Dueren from the Netherlands Embassy in Bangladesh to Cox's Bazar. During her visit, Ambassador van Dueren visited a livelihood skills development training program funded by the EKN. She had the chance to meet with trainers and Rohingya beneficiaries who were learning food processing skills. She also explored homestead gardens, visited the Women's Market, and visited an FAO aggregation center that showcases sustainable agriculture practices.

In Hatimura, Ukhiya, she observed 35 farmers participating in a half-day training session on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and Good Labour Practices (GLP) under the ISEC project conducted by the ILO. She also awarded certificates to agri-machinery operators in Ramu who had completed their upskilling training on Agri-Machine Operation and Servicing. Throughout her visit, Ambassador van Dueren engaged in meaningful conversations with managers, trainers, and beneficiaries, gaining valuable insights into the community's efforts to promote good labour practices and skills development. Watch the [full interview](#)



The ISEC Project offers BNQF training of 15 courses in Cox's Bazar

Improving Skills and Economic Opportunities for Cox's Bazar (ISEC) project of the International Labour Organization (ILO) aims to enhance the employability of young women and NEET (not in education, employment, or training) people aged 18-35 in Cox's Bazar. The ILO has partnered with the Department of Youth Development (DYD), Cox's Bazar, and Cox's Bazar Polytechnic Institute (CBPI) to implement Bangladesh National Qualification Framework (BNQF) training for young people, especially girls. The DYD CXB and CBPI are implementing 15 courses in the first batch together with local skills training providers in 7 sub-districts of Cox's Bazar. In total, 458 trainees are receiving these training while above 40% are female and 3% are person with disabilities (PWDs), ensuring inclusivity.



The training programs last 520 hours over four months, with three months of institutional training and one month work place based training. Courses include Electrical Installation and Maintenance, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, Poultry Rearing, Housekeeping, Plumbing, Welding, Masonry, Sewing Machine Operation, Sewing Machine Maintenance, Consumer Electronics, Graphic Design, IT Support and Services, Tour Guiding, Baking, and Front Office Management at various BNQF levels. Competency-based training and

assessment (CBTA) national certificate-IV certified trainers are conducting these BNQF training while maintaining competency-based learning materials (CBLMs). The project will also provide job placement and post-training support to the trained trainees. The project uses learning materials developed by the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) following BNQF. Addedly, a two-day workshop across 30 trainers from 10 Skills Training Providers (STPs) participated to finalize training delivery and session plan and equipped them on how to maintain these learning materials.

Breaking Barriers: Gender Mainstreaming Training for Principals and Trainers and its partners in Cox's Bazar

In May 2024, the ILO and BRAC conducted a transformative gender mainstreaming training for TVET managers in Cox's Bazar to address the underrepresentation of women in skills development. The two-day workshop equipped managers, principals, and trainers with tools to foster gender-inclusive environments and boost women's participation in skills training. Key sessions focused on gender equity, workplace stereotypes, and implementing gender-sensitive measures. Participants engaged in discussions and activities that challenged traditional gender roles and explored the impact of social norms on workplace dynamics.

The training concluded with participants drafting action plans to implement gender-inclusive strategies. TVET managers and principals are committed to breaking gender barriers, empowering women to access better employment opportunities, and fostering an inclusive workforce in Cox's Bazar. Additionally, a consultative workshop on September 10, 2024, finalized gender mainstreaming action plans for skills training providers as part of the ISEC project to improve economic opportunities for women and youth in the district.



"Participating in the gender mainstreaming training was transformative. It equipped us to create inclusive environments and challenge traditional gender roles. I feel empowered to ensure women have equal opportunities in our programs and workplaces. This training strengthened my commitment to breaking gender barriers and fostering an equitable workforce in Cox's Bazar," **Rafia Sultana, TVET manager**

Empowering farmers in Cox's Bazar: A leap towards safer and fairer workplaces

In a significant stride towards enhancing the livelihoods of farmers in Cox's Bazar, ILO has rolled out a comprehensive training program focused on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) and Good Labour Practices (GLP). The ISEC project aims to uplift women and youth's economic and social conditions in Cox's Bazar district. Funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the program seeks to instil sustainable farming practices, improve productivity, and ensure fair treatment of workers. It also emphasizes the adoption of safety measures, ethical labour practices, and community-based resilience in the local horticulture sector.



As part of the ISEC programme, 19 training sessions were conducted over 9 days in July and September 2024. These sessions brought together 644 farmers from various aggregation centres in Ukhiya and Ramu, including 275 women. The interactive sessions focused on workplace safety, hazard prevention, and fair treatment of workers. Participants engaged in hands-on learning, including field visits and safety demonstrations. They also explored ethical labour practices, such as fair wages and workers' rights, ensuring a healthy, productive work environment. Feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive, particularly regarding the comprehensive training content and effective delivery. The initiative not only equipped farmers with essential knowledge and skills but also empowered them to incorporate these practices into their daily work. As the program continues to evolve, ongoing engagement and support will be crucial in ensuring these efforts' long-term success and sustainability, paving the way for a safer and more equitable agricultural sector in Cox's Bazar.

From challenges to change: Humaira's journey from silence to success

In a small village in Cox's Bazar, Humaira Akhter, the youngest of five siblings, was born with both speech and hearing impairments, as were most of her family members. Growing up in a close-knit household, her family relied on gestures and lip-reading to communicate. Despite their love and support, poverty forced Humaira to leave school after the 7th grade. With her elder brother becoming the sole provider, the family struggled to make ends meet, and Humaira's future seemed uncertain.

Everything changed when BRAC's skills development program reached Humaira's village. Initially, her family hesitated due to concerns about her safety in the local market area where training would take place. However, BRAC's commitment to inclusivity and security reassured them. With her mother's encouragement, Humaira decided to seize this opportunity.



In January 2024, she began training in mobile phone servicing. After six months of hands-on learning, Humaira secured a job at Borhan Telecom Mobile Service in Cox's Bazar, earning a monthly salary of BDT 5,000 (\$42). Reflecting on her journey through sign language, she shared, "I'm helping my family live a better life. I dream of opening my own shop where other girls will work, breaking free from poverty."

► Safeguarding Against Sexual Exploitation and Abuse: Training for ILO staff and its partners

In a significant move to address sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA) in Cox's Bazar, the ISEC project held workshops to provide project partners and staff with the necessary training and resources. These workshops, which addressed the topic of 'Prevention of Sexual Exploitation and Abuse' (PSEA), were conducted on July 7 for ILO staff and on July 11, 2024, for its partners. These were jointly facilitated by the ILO and ISCG PSEA trainers. These were attended by project partners and ILO personnel. The sessions emphasized the importance of creating safe and secure environments for women and girls.

"PSEA training equipped us with crucial tools to prevent and respond to SEA, reinforcing the importance of creating safe environments for women and girls. This experience has strengthened my commitment to promoting a zero-tolerance policy for abuse and contributing to the well-being of our community in Cox's Bazar."

Sumaya Akter, TVET manager



The workshops covered SEA and PSEA topics, including reporting and response systems. Participants learned prevention and response techniques through interactive sessions, case studies, and group exercises. Facilitators Mr. Joy Das Gupta from ILO and Mr. Rajib Rahman, PSEA Network Coordinator, provided insights on challenges and effective approaches. The sessions promoted a zero-tolerance policy for abuse and equipped participants with tools to handle SEA incidents.

► Enhancing Gender Mainstreaming and Safeguarding Skills for BRAC ISEC Project Staff

From August 19 - 22, 2024, BRAC's gender mainstreaming team, in collaboration with its skills development division under the ISEC project, organized an impactful two-day training on gender mainstreaming, Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA), and safeguarding. Held in Cox's Bazar, the training aimed to deepen participants' understanding of gender equity and safeguarding, essential for creating gender-responsive interventions. The interactive training included group discussions, role-playing exercises, and practical experience sharing, ensuring active engagement and real-world application.



Participants reported a significant shift in their perspectives, with a renewed commitment to applying gender equality practices in their work. The training heightened awareness of safeguarding protocols, equipping staff to better protect vulnerable individuals from exploitation and abuse. Bappy Kumar Ghosh, field training officer, noted that the training expanded his understanding of gender concepts, while Sanjida Rashid, a career hub officer, described the sessions as "extraordinary."

► ISEC project promotes gender equality in local markets

BRAC has launched a series of awareness sessions to make local marketplaces more inclusive and welcoming for women and people with disabilities. These sessions, part of the ISEC project, are aimed at market committee members—key business leaders in the community who greatly influence how the market functions. By teaching these committee members about gender equality and safeguarding, BRAC hopes to create safer, more supportive environments for women who are entering the workforce after completing BRAC's skills development programs.

So far, 468 participants, including 11 women, have taken part in 39 meetings. The sessions covered topics like encouraging women to enter non-traditional trades and ensuring workplaces are inclusive for everyone. As a result, market leaders are now more aware of the importance of gender-friendly spaces, making it easier for female graduates to thrive in their chosen fields. This initiative is not just helping women find jobs but is also building a future where markets are more inclusive and fair.



Gender assessment data collection in Cox's Bazar



BRAC's gender mainstreaming team, under the ISEC project, has successfully completed the data collection for a joint gender assessment in Cox's Bazar, in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and A2i. This comprehensive analysis aims to explore gender-responsive market dynamics, addressing ultra-poor graduation, skills development, and employment opportunities in local markets.

The ILO's focus was on evaluating the capacity of government and market actors to support gender-responsive entrepreneurship and employment in sectors such as tourism and hospitality. The assessment also identified challenges like gender stereotypes that limit opportunities for women, youth, and persons with disabilities. A2i's efforts were geared towards assessing the gender responsiveness of labour market platforms and career guidance

services, ensuring women have better access to employment and skills training.

A total of 71 qualitative sessions were conducted through Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews, and 96% of the quantitative data was gathered from 1,008 respondents across Cox's Bazar Sadar, Ukhiya, and Teknaf. Data was collected from Cox's Bazar Sadar, Ukhiya, and Teknaf, involving diverse respondents, including government officials, young learners, Market Committee Presidents, local market participants, and persons with disabilities. The ILO focused on entrepreneurs, small businesses, and those in formal skills training linked to the Department of Youth Development. A2i assessed gender responsiveness in labour market platforms and training for Qawmi Madrasahs and pre-vocational learners. The findings will help develop effective strategies for promoting gender equality across all interventions.

Building inclusive marketplaces: UPG intervention promotes gender and disability sensitivity



BRAC has taken a significant step towards creating more inclusive marketplaces in Cox's Bazar through its Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG) intervention under the ISEC project. In collaboration with the gender mainstreaming team, BRAC hosted 13 events titled "Gender Equality, Men's Engagement, Empowerment, and Disability Inclusion for Market Actors." These sessions brought together 264 market actors to raise awareness about gender equality, men's involvement, and the inclusion of persons with disabilities. The initiative aims to address the challenges faced by women, who make up 100% of UPG participants, in male-dominated markets, thereby promoting fair compensation and economic opportunities.

The sessions covered crucial topics such as gender roles, patriarchy, and the specific obstacles women and persons with disabilities encounter in the marketplace. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their behaviours and attitudes, with practical recommendations provided for fostering gender-sensitive and inclusive practices. The positive feedback from participants highlighted a newfound understanding of gender discrimination as a human rights violation and a commitment to creating safer, more accessible markets for all. Through these efforts, BRAC is paving the way for more equitable marketplaces where everyone, regardless of gender or ability, can thrive.

"I didn't realize how crucial it is to use respectful language when addressing women and persons with disabilities. Moving forward, I will be more considerate and encourage others to follow suit."

Hridoy, participant, Teknaf

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