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► Assessment of gender equality and social inclusion gaps in the skills and TVET sector of Bangladesh



► **Assessment of gender equality and social inclusion gaps in the skills and TVET sector of Bangladesh**

Promoting Gender-Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems (ProGRESS) Project, ILO Bangladesh



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► Foreword

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh ensures affirmative action aimed at promoting women's rights and maintaining the principles of justice and equality. This commitment has been further strengthened by numerous legislative measures, policies, and action plans that have been developed and implemented. However, women and other vulnerable groups remain prone to insufficient protection against discrimination. ILO Conventions prohibit discrimination based on one's identity. ILO in Bangladesh, in partnership with the government, employers and workers organizations, leads various initiatives to end gender-based discrimination in technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and skills and in the world of work.

The Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) under the Technical Education and Madrasah Education Division (TMED) of Ministry of Education has the mandate to create skilled human resources through expansion and improvement of technical education. DTE has partnered with ILO to implement Promoting Gender-Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems (ProGRESS) with funding from Global Affairs Canada.

ProGRESS project is working to support the Government of Bangladesh, social partners and other involved actors in achieving their targets and promoting gender-responsive enterprise development and TVET. This assessment was conducted as a part of this project, involving multi-tier stakeholders in TVET eco-system including policy makers, teachers, principals, students, social partners and ILO experts. It reveals that deep-seated biases and stereotypes contribute to a scarcity of opportunities, safety issues, discriminatory vocational education and training placements, and unfavourable perceptions from employers and the entrepreneurial landscape.

The Assessment highlights the need for significant improvements in gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) within Bangladesh's Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system through a coordinated approach, involving various stakeholders. It provides evidence-based and time-bound recommendations for equitable and inclusive skills development ecosystem.

The ILO and DTE are proud to share this Report to all the stakeholders to inform and guide them in the policy formulation and programming towards achieving government's targets under gender equality and social inclusion.



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► Abbreviations

BRAC	Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee
B-SEP	Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity
B-SkillFUL	Building Skills for Unemployed and Underemployed Labour Project
ILO	International Labour Organization
MSME	Micro, small and medium-sized enterprise
NSDA	National Skills Development Authority
NSDP	National Skills Development Policy
ProGRESS	Promoting Gender-Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems Project
SEP-B	Skills and Employment Programme Bangladesh
SEIP	Skills for Employment Investment Programme
Skills 21	Empowering Citizens for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth
Sudokkho	Skills and Employment Programme in Bangladesh
TVET	technical and vocational education and training
UCEP	Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme



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► Executive summary

Introduction to the assessment

Bangladesh has made tremendous progress in economic growth and social development over the past several years, which includes strides in women's empowerment. The Government has prioritized gender equality and women's empowerment through various initiatives and policies. Yet, there are challenges in achieving gender equality and social inclusion in skills training and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programme enrolments, in labour force participation, in the labour market and in entrepreneurship.

A gender equality and social inclusion gaps assessment was conducted as part of the six-year Promoting Gender-Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems (ProGRESS) Project, which is funded by the Canadian Government and implemented by the Bangladesh Government, with assistance from the International Labour Organization. The project is working to support the Government, social partners and other involved actors in achieving their targets and promoting gender-responsive enterprise development and the TVET sector.

The assessment entailed a review of policies, barriers and ongoing reform efforts, which then led to recommendations on how to better mainstream gender equality and social inclusion into the TVET sector. It not only looked at gender equality but considered the cultural and normative barriers experienced by marginalized groups. Conceptually, it sought to highlight the need to consider different perspectives and intersectionality. It placed importance on diversity within categories of “women and men”, thus questioning the idea of a singular “normal” while recognizing the diversity within the population.

Assessment methods and process

The assessment employed a mix of research methods to gather information and insights. These

methods encompassed desk research, which involved reviewing relevant policy, study, programme and project documents and other publications. Interviews with informants and group discussions were conducted to gather additional information. Field visits in Dhaka and Sylhet to TVET institutions and enterprises and exchanges with government officials, principals, teacher faculty, social partners, non-government organization staff, parents and trainees provided extensive insights.

The assessment focused on three areas:

1. The persistence of cultural norms and stereotypes that shape the behaviours and decisions of trainees and TVET sector actors.
2. Policies (with evaluation of gaps and status).
3. Processes and sub-processes to understand to what extent policies could be implemented, which is often dependent upon institutional commitment, capacities and resources.

The assessment sought to uncover the visible and invisible barriers. The findings highlight the need for further qualitative and quantitative research to gain a comprehensive understanding and address the depth of the situation. Further research is also essential for informing future actions and interventions to promote gender equality and social inclusion in the country's TVET sector.

Findings from assessing the culture and norms as additional barriers

The assessment looked at which cultural norms and social expectations create obstacles for women and disadvantaged or marginalized groups in terms of occupational choices, skills development access and programme graduation and how they impact labour market participation and equal opportunities. Cultural norms enforce restrictive gender roles and discriminatory practices and hinder women's progress in many avenues. Deeply rooted biases and stereotypes result in limited opportunities, safety concerns, biased TVET placements and biased perceptions from employers and the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Disadvantaged and marginalized groups, including people with a disability, informal workers, religious and ethnic minorities and returnee migrants, face discrimination and limited opportunities due to the biases and negative attitudes in society and in the labour market. These barriers influence their aspirations and choices.

Findings from assessing the policy gaps

The reviewed policy documentation and other literature, along with the interviewees and group discussion participants, recognized the progress made and the ongoing reform process of the skills system. They also pointed to gaps in addressing gender equality and social inclusion in policies and action plans. The gaps stem from the lack of specificity and from neglect of the underlying causes of discrimination. Initiatives targeting specific groups fail to address intersectionality. Additional limitations include:

Limited stakeholder participation: Despite increased involvement of TVET actors in policy design (such as the private sector role in industry skills councils), assessment participants reported feeling excluded from design and implementation processes. They are also uncertain about their roles. Private sector representatives, trade unions, training providers and civil society organizations want a stronger role in policy development, implementation and coordination.

Lack of operational clarity: Stakeholders want guidance on implementing policies due to limited

clarity on how they are to be operationalized, regulated, budgeted and implemented. The National Skills Development Policy 2022 lacks a systematic approach for long-term sustainability. Unpacking the policy and further contextualizing it is necessary to clarify roles, particularly for gender equality and social inclusion.

Gaps in a unified understanding of gender equality and social inclusion: Limited discussion hampers the effective application of interventions targeting the diverse array of barriers faced by different groups in skills development. Addressing intersectionality, especially for women, is necessary.

Lack of unified vision for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming: Even though actors in the skills development and the TVET systems focus on expansion and meeting targets for women and disadvantaged groups, they neglect a gender equality and social inclusion-responsive culture that addresses the root causes of discrimination. Achieving equitable training and labour outcomes requires questioning the conditions for enhancing employability and sustainable opportunities. Developing an enabling environment and addressing barriers through a coordinated effort involving non-government and civil society organizations, the private sector and funding agencies is crucial for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming.

Findings from assessing the gaps in processes and regulations

Governance challenges and lack of a unified framework: Assessment participants acknowledged the ambitious nature of the National Skills Development Policy and the National Action Plan for Skills Development (2022–2027), but they need clarity on regulation and implementation. They emphasized the need for a consolidated framework that includes processes, procedures, laws and regulations. A road map with milestones is necessary for effective implementation and monitoring.

Coordination challenges: Overlapping mandates currently create confusion and fragmentation within the skills and TVET systems. A unified approach is required for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming in the skills development and TVET sector. The assessment participants highlighted the absence of a coordination body to negotiate a vision, lobby for budgets, set milestones and oversee implementation. Overlapping mandates between the National Skills Development Authority and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division leads to confusion. Reviving working groups and empowering government agencies were suggested for effective coordination.

No enactment of or missing legislation for mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion: Assessment participants expressed concern about the current "half-hearted" approach to gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming. They emphasized the need for an overarching policy and binding legislative framework that includes an implementation plan, dedicated resource allocation and monitoring of progress. Intersectionality should be analysed for inclusive outcomes.

Limited application of a gender equality and social inclusion lens in skills development and entrepreneurship development: Traditional trades need rebranding to attract women and persons from disadvantaged groups. Gender equality and social inclusion should be integrated into curricula and training materials. The practical application of labour rights, gender equality (addressing both men and women) and sexual harassment training are lacking. The statutory body responsible for curriculum development struggles with staff shortages and requires technical assistance for gender

equality and social inclusion integration.

Limited engagement with the private sector: Workplace training is crucial. Employers' organizations need to adopt gender-sensitive and inclusive practices. Data collection and monitoring systems require improvement to assess training quality and impact. Awareness campaigns should be evaluated for effectiveness.

Limited institutionalization of safeguarding measures in training provision and enterprises: Gender-responsive training environments should be safe and need improvement, including the addition of childcare facilities, safe transport and occupational safety and health measures. Safeguarding measures introduced in TVET institutions and partner enterprises are not fully effective and should become an integral part of an organizational culture. Dedicated committees and resources are needed for monitoring.

Inadequate budgeting limiting the space for flexible expenditure and mainstreaming: Lack of budgets and budget constraints hinder the flexible expenditure for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming initiatives. A specific budget or fund for mainstreaming is lacking, thus affecting its institutionalization and sustainability. Resources are required for training, mentoring and implementation. Funding should align with gender equality and social inclusion objectives.

Gaps in teacher quality and female representation in TVET faculties: Staff shortages and lack of qualified teachers compromise the delivery of quality training and gender equality and social inclusion implementation. Female representation in TVET faculties and leadership positions is low. Recruitment practices, mobility rules and inadequate facilities contribute to the gender gaps. Gender equality and social inclusion considerations are needed in recruitment and career development, along with support measures to achieve targets.

Recommendations

The recommendations for strengthening gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming in the skills and TVET systems in Bangladesh aim at two prongs: state administration and the business sector.

Strengthening the Government's administration of TVET and entrepreneurship-related policies

Consolidate policies and strengthen governance:

- Support policy and institutional consolidation to implement the National Skills Development Policy, the National Qualifications Framework and action plans by the National Skills Development Authority and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division.
- Streamline policies and clarify roles to avoid contradictions in skills development.
- Facilitate consensus-building through stakeholder participation in policy reviews and implementation.

Build a common vision and allocate resources:

- Engage relevant agencies, including in industry skills councils and civil society and other non-government organizations, to develop a gender equality and social inclusion-responsive skills development road map with clear milestones.

- Allocate adequate resources for policy implementation, monitoring and effective communication with stakeholders.

Support the TVET sector actors in mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion:

- Establish a gender equality and social inclusion task force under the joint leadership of the National Skills Development Authority and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division to coordinate the ministries and departments involved in skills development and TVET.
- Involve the National Council of Women and Children Development as co-chair, along with relevant ministries and committees, to ensure inclusive decision-making.
- Provide sensitization training to foster a gender- and social inclusion-sensitive approach and develop a unified understanding of gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming.
- Review and amend policies to align them with the gender equality and social inclusion framework and develop a comprehensive operational plan with budgets, milestones and indicators.
- Integrate gender equality and social inclusion in training design, implementation, recruitment practices, governance, management systems, curricula, assessments and monitoring.

Establish a gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming mechanism and ensure compliance:

- Review good practices in public and private TVET delivery, counselling and placement services and entrepreneurship provision.
- Review the accreditation mechanism under the Technical Education Board through a gender equality and social inclusion lens.
- Allocate funding for infrastructure and institutional compliance with gender equality and social inclusion standards.
- Build up capacities within the ministries involved in skills development, the National Skills Development Authority, the Technical and Madrasah Education Division, the Technical Education Board and the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training on gender equality and social inclusion and institutional development.
- Make gender- and social inclusion-sensitization training and capacity-building compulsory and continuous across the TVET sector.

Strengthen data collection, monitoring and research:

- Establish a well-functioning data collection and monitoring system that reflects diverse criteria, such as gender, socio-economic status, location, education and other factors that may lead to discrimination.
- Collect and analyse disaggregated data to evaluate the impact of interventions on women and disadvantaged groups.
- Use statistical analysis tools to understand intersecting barriers and assess the effectiveness of training and support services.
- Use data and research results for evidence-based decision-making.

Mainstream gender equality and social inclusion into awareness-raising efforts:

- Review the Government's communications strategy with a gender equality and social inclusion lens and assess the impact of awareness initiatives on specific groups.
- Adopt an evidence-based, inclusive communication strategy that targets a diverse range of actors.

- Continue sensitization and capacity-building efforts with actors in the TVET sector.

Strengthening capacities among employers and trade unions to engage in the TVET sector at the macro, meso and micro levels

Involve the private sector in the TVET sector:

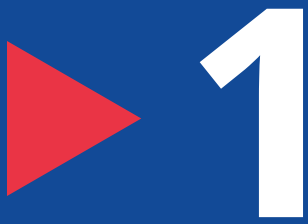
- Encourage the active role of the private sector in human resources planning, training delivery and competency standards development through the industry skills councils.
- Promote workplace-based skills development initiatives, such as apprenticeships and upskilling programmes.
- Explore incentives and public-private partnerships to encourage greater private sector ownership of TVET and investment in workplace-based training.

Support social partners in gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming:

- Scale up gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming initiatives with employers, business organizations and workers' organizations to promote decent work, formalize informal enterprises and provide inclusive TVET.
- Establish collaborative partnerships among industry associations, banks, development partners and other actors involved in skills development and worker certification.
- Develop implementation plans and gender equality and social inclusion policies and procedures, with targets for increasing the representation of women and disadvantaged groups in organizations.
- Build up capacities among management and staff to promote gender-sensitive and inclusive workplace practices.

Conduct research, collect data and monitor progress:

- Conduct research and collect data specific to certain groups to monitor progress towards gender equality and social inclusion targets.
- Use the data to assess the impact and effectiveness of training and support services.
- Foster collaboration with national and local business networks, women-run business networks and workers' organizations to promote gender equality and social inclusion.



Introduction to the assessment

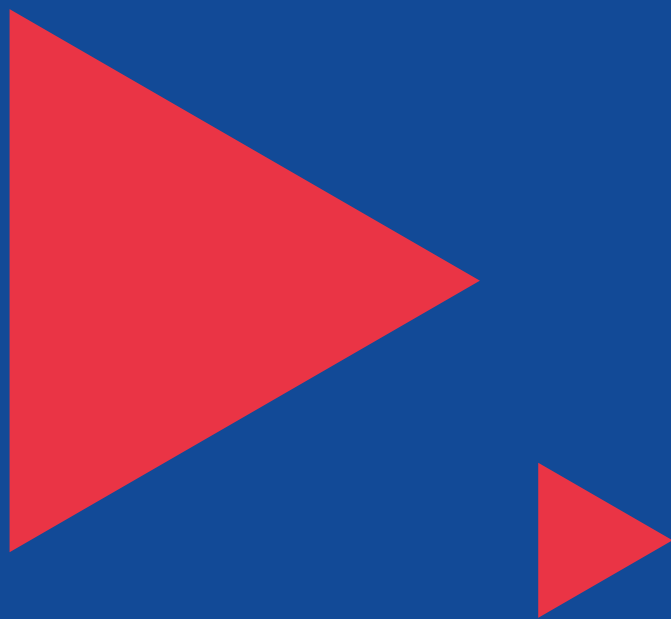




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1. Introduction to the assessment

Bangladesh has made significant strides in economic growth and social development over the past few decades. Recognizing the potential of its large and growing youth labour force, the Government aims to capitalize on the demographic dividend by fully harnessing its human capital potential (BIDS 2017).¹ To continue its rapid expansion and development and remain on track to graduate from the least developed countries list by 2026, Bangladesh acknowledges the urgent need to invest further in its human capital and to intensify its efforts in developing a skilled and productive workforce that can meet the demands of the national and global labour markets.

With increasing integration into international production systems, various industries in Bangladesh, such as ready-made garments, agrifood, construction, health, hospitality and tourism, ICT, leather goods, light engineering and shipbuilding, are experiencing a growing demand for diversification and modernization. The business sector has expressed growing skills needs and skills gaps at all levels and is exploring new avenues of skills development,² including apprenticeships, upskilling and reskilling.³

Bangladesh also faces the challenge of enabling decent employment opportunities for the whole of its workforce, of which more than 82 per cent (in the case of women, 91.5 per cent) is active in informal (hence, vulnerable) employment (BBS 2017). In the case of migrant workers, those in vulnerable employment tend to be low-skilled (at 40 per cent) or semi-skilled (at 15 per cent) and without any formal qualification that would be relevant to industries abroad (BMET 2018).

Because overseas employment and remittances make considerable contribution to the country's economy (with more than 13 million Bangladeshis working abroad: BMET 2022), investing in training and certification is crucial not only for the domestic market but also to position prospective migrant workers as skilled employees for better job opportunities and reduced vulnerability when abroad (BMET 2020 in NSDP 2022: 25). Addressing these skills gaps is essential for sustainable economic growth and, most importantly, for inclusive growth resulting from the empowerment of women and other disadvantaged groups.

1 About 26.82 million youth entered the labour market over the past five years, of which 13.31 million were female (BBS 2022).

2 This assessment refers to the definition of skills from the NSDA Act (2018): "...the knowledge and technique acquired for doing any specific work or the capability and ability to produce goods and services as per required standard of industrial and professional demand of national and international markets" (NSDA 2018: 2).

3 Skills gaps are identified as a major constraint to growth by industries and employers in Bangladesh. Surveys and studies reveal shortages of skilled workers in major sectors, including tourism, ceramics and pharmaceuticals. To meet the skills demands, more than 4 million people need to be trained. See sector studies assessing skills gaps: BIDS 2016 and ILO 2019 for sector studies on hospitality, ceramics and pharmaceuticals.

1.1 Women empowerment for sustained economic growth and equitable development

Ensuring substantive equality between women and men in all dimensions of development is imperative for advancing socio-economic progress and further reducing poverty. Bangladesh has made remarkable progress towards women's empowerment and gender equality over the past 15–20 years and has steadily reduced the gender gap, leading to being ranked 99th among 146 countries (ahead of its neighbours India, Nepal and Sri Lanka) for five consecutive years (WEF 2024). Importantly, significant progress has been made in girls' education and the female maternal mortality rate. Nonetheless, formidable challenges and persistent inequalities remain, particularly in the areas of economic and social empowerment (UN Women, unpublished: 20).

Bangladesh has crossed the threshold value of three sets of progress indicators required to qualify for least developed country status graduation.⁴ But it has been given an extended preparatory period of five years in the area of economic and environment vulnerability to achieve graduation by 2026.⁵ This is because Bangladesh still endures challenges in creating an enabling and safe environment for young and disadvantaged women to access training and decent employment. The following highlights some of the gender gaps indicating inequalities between men and women.

- The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2021 cites an 88 per cent gap between the number of men and women in managerial positions (WEF 2021).

- Overall labour force participation rates for women increased from 36.4 per cent in 2016–17 to 42.7 per cent in 2022; however, women shifted away from industrial urban employment (at 22.6 per cent) to rural agricultural work (at 50.9 per cent). The increase was a partial result of increased income pressure in families due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022.⁶
- Only 1.7 per cent of formal enterprises had female majority ownership, and 10 per cent of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the formal and informal sectors were owned by women. Around 91.5 per cent of women worked in the informal economy, resulting in high levels of vulnerability and wage inequalities (World Bank 2017).
- Women are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and discrimination when migrating and returning.
- Despite the laws to protect women and girls, gender-based violence and sexual harassment at work remain a significant challenge in Bangladesh (see Chapter 3).⁷

To address these challenges, the Government has taken steps to mainstream gender equality and women's empowerment and to promote social and economic inclusion for other disadvantaged groups in policy development and implementation. Since 2009,⁸ this has included gender-responsive budgeting across 43 ministries and integrating the same into

4 Bangladesh has met all three graduation criteria (GNI per capita, the Human Asset Index and Economic Vulnerability Index), but will not graduate until 2026, according to the UN Committee for Development Policy. The Committee has highlighted vulnerabilities that should be addressed beforehand, including diversification of exports, manufacturing, inequality, high levels of poverty and climate change (see "Bangladesh Graduation Status").

5 See "Bangladesh Graduation Status".

6 Arifur Rahaman Tuhin, "Women Participation in Labour Force Rises, Urban Areas See Drop in Female Employment Due to Lack of Opportunities", in Business Post, 26 May 2023.

7 According to the Baseline Study Report on Gender-Based Violence findings (UN Women 2019), 54 per cent of women had experienced domestic violence at least once in their life.

8 The Seventh Five-Year Plan's target for gender budget as percentage of total budget was 30 per cent by 2020. In 2019, the gender budget as percentage of total budget was 30.8 – surpassing the target before 2020 (Eighth Five-Year Plan).

medium-term budgetary frameworks; adopting the National Women's Development Policy and Action Plan in 2011; and developing a gender strategy for the Eighth Five-Year Plan. Significant progress has also been made in favour of working women, including the Child Care Bill and High Court directives to address sexual

harassment. These steps aim to increase women's access to resources and opportunities while enhancing their capabilities and labour force participation (with a goal of increasing participation to 82 per cent by 2026, as stated in the United Nations Development Programme's 2016 Human Development Report).¹²

1.2 Gender equality and social inclusion in skills development and technical and vocational education and training

The Government has long recognized the importance of addressing skills and productivity-related challenges to foster economic growth and employment opportunities equally for men and women, irrespective of class, caste, religion or ethnicity. As a result of technical cooperation projects over the past 15 years, the expansion of TVET and skills-based programmes has been prioritized, along with a shift towards competency-focused and more inclusive skills development systems. In addition, more than 53 government departments now aim skills training to men and women from highly heterogeneous backgrounds and with different learning needs. Efforts were made to making existing trainings more accessible and inclusive. Significant milestones were achieved at the policy and institutional levels towards reducing fragmentation and improving overall coordination in the skills development system (figure 1).

At the policy level, this includes approval of the National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) in 2011 and its endorsement in 2022. The latest NSDP includes a TVET action plan to support its implementation. Other critical milestones are the establishment and roll-out of the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework, the development of a National Skills Quality Assurance System and a system for registering training organizations to run the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework courses. To address access to continuous learning for workers without formal qualifications, a recognition of prior learning system was set up in 2014. In 2021, the BNQF was approved, formally launched in 2023, and became functional in 2024, enhancing access to qualifications and facilitating seamless transitions between education, training, the job market, and lifelong opportunities for all.

9 For 2016–20, the following four targets were formulated: (i) goal to increase from 20 per cent in 2014 to 33 per cent seats of women in Parliament; (ii) reduced percentage of women married before age 18 from 65 per cent to 30 per cent; (iii) increased per cent gender budget from 27.7 per cent in 2014 to 30 per cent; (iv) increased per cent of female teachers at (a) primary (b) secondary (c) tertiary education levels: from 20 per cent in tertiary education to 25 per cent and e) increased per cent of female officers from 21 per cent in 2014 to 25 per cent (see the Eighth Five-Year Plan, table 15.4).

10 The Child Day Care Centre Bill 2021 focuses on establishing safer facilities for children, professionals and working women in government, semi-government, autonomous and non-government institutions in Bangladesh. The implementation will be monitored by the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs ("Bangladesh Parliament Passes Bill to Ensure Safe Child Daycare Centres", Dhaka Tribune, 16 June 2021).

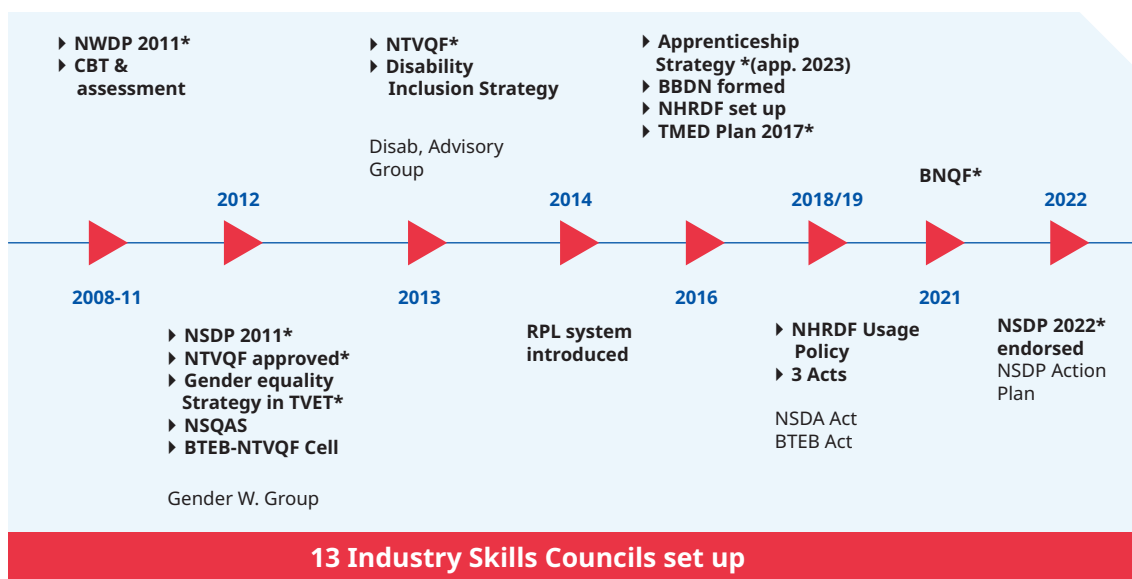
11 See High Court Division Guidelines on Sexual Harassment for Workplaces and Educational Institutions, 2009.

12

13 Some of the main development projects implemented during the past several years have been funded by the Asian Development Bank with the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (SEIP); the ILO with the European Union (B-SEP); the ILO with the Government of Canada (B-SEP; Skills 21); the United Kingdom's Department for International Development with the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (Sudokkho); the Swiss Agency for Cooperation and Development (B-SkillFUL); the World Bank (ASSET). There are other projects funded by the German Agency for International Cooperation, the British Council, the Korea International Cooperation Agency, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the United States Agency for International Development and UNICEF.

14 For details, see the ILO 2024 publication Skills Matter.

Figure 1. Milestones in TVET reform processes, 2008–22



Note: NWDP: National Women's Development Policy; CBT: competency-based training; NTVQF: National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework; BBDN: Bangladesh Business and Disability Network; NHRDF: National Human Resource Development Fund; TMED: Technical and Madrasah Education Division; BNQF: Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework; NSDP: National Skills Development Policy; NSQAS: National Skills Quality Assurance System; BTEB: Bangladesh Technical Education Board; RPL: recognition of prior learning; NSDA: National Skills Development Authority.

The Government has made significant effort to enhance the institutional arrangements for skills development, aiming to bring about a transformative change in how skills training is designed, planned, governed, coordinated and delivered in Bangladesh. This includes setting up the Technical and Madrasah Education Division (TMED) in 2016 and the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) in 2018, which is a high-level autonomous body responsible for the overall coordination of skills development programmes. An Act was also passed for the responsible regulatory authority – Bangladesh Technical Education Board, and further capacity-building was initiated to strengthen the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training to conduct training and recognition of prior learning for successful economic re-integration

of returning migrants. The establishment of 13 industry skills councils¹⁵ for stronger engagement with the private sector and social partners, along with the development of a registration system to extend financial support to recognized TVET institutions and NGOs, demonstrate the Government's commitment to strengthening the skills ecosystem.¹⁶

Over the past 15 years, Bangladesh has experienced rapid expansion of its skills ecosystem. The student enrolment rate in formal TVET streams increased from 1 per cent in 2009 to 15 per cent in 2018, with a target of reaching 30 per cent by 2030.¹⁷ This represents a total projected increase of 50 per cent, with emphasis on achieving a 60 per cent increase in women's enrolment. As of 2019–20, there were 13,163 TVET¹⁸ and skills development providers

15 The 13 industry skills councils cover: agrifood, leather, light engineering, construction, ready-made garments, transport, ICT, tourism and hospitality, furniture, ceramics, pharmaceutical, the informal sector and creative media.

16 See ILO 2024 for the ILO's contribution to TVET and skills development.

17 The Technical and Madrasah Education Division set a target to expand TVET from 17.18 per cent in 2021 to 25 per cent by 2025, 30 per cent by 2030 and 41 per cent by 2041.

18 In the public sector, 23 government ministries and 36 government departments under those ministries provide skills training (Aziz 2023).

in the country (7,776 of them were Technical Education Board-affiliated), with the capacity to train 1.7 million graduates annually. The National Action Plan for Skills Development (2022–2027) projects an annual target of around 2 million trainees over that five-year period to reach 10.7 million trainees in total. According to NSDA survey findings, 16 agencies contributed 90 per cent of the training in 2019–20 (NSDA 2022: 17). These institutions, both public and private, offered a variety of formal, informal and non-formal training courses to different groups and using diverse approaches, modes of delivery, assessment processes and certifications.¹⁹

The National Action Plan for Skills Development projects that the majority of the training will be offered in the following sectors: ICT (20 per cent), agriculture (18 per cent), livestock (6 per cent), fisheries (6 per cent), food processing (14 per cent), construction (9 per cent) and light engineering (9 per cent), while training for ready-made garment factory, leather production and tourism jobs will remain low, at 2 per cent.

Although progress has been made in achieving gender parity in primary and secondary education, the same cannot be said for post-secondary vocational education. In 2019, 40 per cent of enrollees in all types of skills development courses (non-formal and formal) were women and 7 per cent of them were people with disabilities (NSDA 2022). In the formal TVET sector, enrolments are even lower. There was, however, only a modest deviation from the stagnant 25 per cent female enrolment during the past few years due to increased

enrolment of women, at 27.7 per cent. This could be a result of the stipends that were offered and the provision made for women-only education in polytechnics and training centres. However, progress towards achieving gender parity of 50 per cent has yet to be made, registering only 37 per cent (BANBEIS 2022).

Women remain underrepresented in non-traditional and in-demand areas, such as mechatronics engineering, shipbuilding and marine technology, and tend to choose architecture and design, electromedical, computer applications and graphic design. Evidence also shows that women cluster in a few and “typical female” courses of shorter duration, which often leads to low-level certification and low-paying jobs.

The enrolment rates of women and persons from disadvantaged groups and the proportion of female faculty in TVET institutions seems quite uneven across the different types of institutions and management, as shown in table 1. Excluding the fields of medical technology and medical assistant, private institutions exhibit a greater proportion of female trainees and teachers compared to public institutions (BANBEIS 2022). Female trainees have particularly higher enrolment rates in private technical schools and colleges and technical training centres and show much higher enrolment rates in urban areas (at 73.9 per cent) than in rural areas (at 26.1 per cent). Enrolment of people with disabilities and ethnic and religious minorities remains significantly lower than expected (NSDA 2022).²⁰

19 In preparation of the action plan, NSDA collected data from 62 agencies to map current training provision. The NSDA projects the training of 10.7 million people between 2022 and 2027 through diversified courses: skilling (6,810,714), upskilling (665,566), reskilling (1,023,101), apprenticeships (1,389,802) entrepreneurship (734,639) and recognition of prior learning (171,326) (NSDA 2022: 19).

20 According to a 2018 report by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, only 10 per cent of students enrolled in TVET in Bangladesh were from ethnic minority groups, which was lower than the national average of 25 per cent. And, only 5 per cent of students enrolled in TVET were from religious minority groups. This was much lower than the national average of 10 per cent.

Table 1. Proportion of women teachers and students, by type and management, 2021 (%)

Type of Institute		Female Teachers %	Female Students %
Polytechnic	Public	15.6	15.4
	Private	19.1	18.4
	Total	18.3	16.8
TSC	Public	10.4	11.6
	Private	34.8	33.6
	Total	24.3	19.9
TTC	Public	16.1	15.0
	Private	24.0	42.1
	Total	17.3	34.3
Medical Technology	Public	42.9	38.4
	Private	17.5	37.0
	Total	21.2	37.5
Medical Assistant	Public	32.1	41.8
	Private	31.8	52.9
	Total	31.8	42.8
TOTAL	Public	16.4	18.9
	Private	21.5	30.5
	Total	20.5	27.1

Source: BANBEIS 2022: 28–29.

In 2021, 20.5 per cent of teaching faculty in public and private TVET institutions combined were women (BANBEIS 2022). It is feared that the underrepresentation of women in senior positions reduces the likelihood to make institutions more gender-responsive. Adverse work environments, traditional values imposing constraints on professional growth, compulsory transfers linked to promotions and inadequate infrastructure (residential facilities, rooms, childcare facilities, transport) contribute to the challenges that female teachers face (NSDA 2022).

The National Action Plan for Skills Development (2022–2027) and the Eighth Five-Year Plan consequently continue to prioritize women's advancement as self-reliant individuals, aiming to ensure equal opportunities in skills development and in the labour market, with the goal of reducing the gender wage gap and eliminating discrimination at work. Additional programming and budgeting have been allocated to address the discriminatory legal, socio-economic and cultural barriers through

developmental and institutional measures. Strategies that aim to change norms and measure results and progress are also being pursued (MOE 2022: 747). While addressing gender equality and the inclusion of disadvantaged groups in formal TVET and non-formal skills development across ministries and departments, the Government increasingly recognizes the need for targeted group-specific skills and active labour market measures.

To support the Government in achieving this goal, Global Affairs Canada, jointly with the International Labour Organization (ILO) as the implementing agency, launched the six-year Promoting Gender-Responsive Enterprise Development and TVET Systems (ProGRESS) Project to support its constituents in tackling the political, institutional and cultural barriers that disproportionately hinder women and persons from other disadvantaged groups from equitably and productively participating in the labour market in a sustainable and resilient manner.

The ProGRESS Project builds on previous ILO projects from the past 15 years:

- Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP)
- Building Skills for Unemployed and Underemployed Labour Project (B-SkillFUL)
- Skills and Employment Programme Bangladesh (SEP-B)
- Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP)
- Empowering Citizens for Inclusive and Sustainable Growth (Skills 21)
- Skills and Employment Programme in Bangladesh (Sudokkho)

These projects and programmes have promoted the mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion into pilot programmes within the TVET system. The ProGRESS Project will take that small success and try to expand it across the whole sector and thus support the Government and constituents in the following ways:

1. Aligning the TVET sector with the National Strategy on Gender Equality in TVET (2012), the TVET Development Action Plan, the

NSDP 2022 and the national budget and operational systems, which promote gender equality, particularly in terms of digital access, enterprise development and green jobs.

2. Increasing opportunities for the wage employment and self-employment of women within selected value chains and market systems, particularly in the green growth sectors.
3. Improving the availability of accessible, inclusive, sustainable and green skills training opportunities for women, youth, persons with a disability and other disadvantaged groups.

The gaps assessment covered in this report was conducted to review policies, practices and achievements and the barriers and gaps that prevent the various actors from mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion, thus preventing the achievement of associated targets. The assessment's findings are expected to provide the basis for detailed programming and stakeholder dialogues for generating a joint vision and commitment for the ProGRESS Project.

1.3 Purpose and scope of the gender equality and social inclusion gaps assessment

The purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the extent to which the system reforms have created an enabling environment for reducing the inequalities and barriers to social inclusion and to determine areas for improvement. The assessment focused primarily on gender equality but also examined cultural barriers and norms faced by marginalized groups, such as indigenous communities, people with disabilities and returnee migrants.

The assessment covered the macro, meso and micro levels of the TVET sector and covered the following six domains of analysis:

1. What are the roles, structures, systems, tools, programmes and projects in place to meet the gender equality targets in TVET and skills development, reintegration of returnee migrants and employment overall?

And to what extent are these efficient in meeting those targets? Analysis must cover the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities of the existing arrangements and recommendations for ways forward.

2. What are the achievements, gaps, barriers and opportunities towards gender equality mainstreaming and to meet the gender equality targets in TVET and skills development, reintegration of returnee migrants and employment? The analysis of the gaps, barriers and opportunities must be at the levels of policy, institution, programme or system and social and cultural norms.
3. What social and cultural barriers do female workers as well as women entrepreneurs face in terms of skills development (job

related and life skills) and employment?

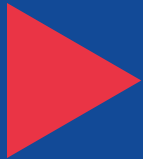
4. What measures have employers' and workers' associations taken to implement policy interventions and to reduce gender gaps in workplaces?
5. Keeping in view the challenges of least developed country status graduation of Bangladesh, meeting the Sustainable Development Goals targets, meeting the Vision 2041 of the Government of Bangladesh and the challenges brought by the COVID-19 crisis, what recommendations are needed for mainstreaming gender equality into skills development or the TVET sector to transform women's economic participation to formal, market-oriented and high-value jobs, including the economic reintegration of returnee migrants?
6. What are the lessons learned and opportunities for scaling up interventions on gender mainstreaming into the skills training and TVET systems?

The assessment had a strong forward-looking purpose, the findings of which became the basis for recommendations.

1. What is the way forward for the Government to meet its gender equality targets in skills

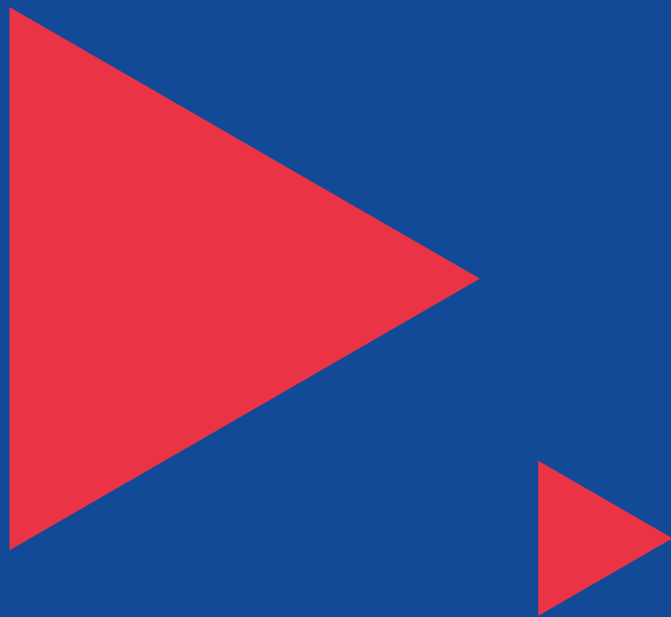
development, for the reintegration of returnee migrants and for employment?

2. What changes are needed in the policies and strategies regarding the gender gap issues in TVET and skills development and for the reintegration of returnee migrants?
3. What changes are needed in the structures, systems, support mechanisms and tools?
4. What institutional changes are needed for creating a gender-responsive learning environment in the TVET and skills development systems?
5. What should be the action plan and strategies for the Technical and Madrasah Education Division, other relevant ministries (Ministry of Education, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs) and employers' and workers' associations in reducing the gender gaps?
6. Which government, private sector and non-government actors should be involved and what should be their roles?



2

Conceptual and methodological framework of the assessment





International Appliance
Refrigerator Quality Check

Serial No: 221 Model: 28 Inspector: [Signature]

Stage	Type Of Problem
Safety Performance Check	Earth Continuity/Insulation Resistance Leakage Current/Low Voltage/120V
Low Pressure Leak Check	Solder Solder Joint Solder Test Probe Point Evaporator Tube Joint Solder Joint 22.5°C
High Pressure Leak Check	Solder Solder Joint Solder Test Probe Point Solder Joint 22.5°C Solder Joint 22.5°C
Cooling Performance Check	Compressor Not Started/Run Long Time/Trapped Fan Switch Not Work/Lamp Problem/Return Pipe Frozen No Cooling/Leak Cooling
Appearance Check	Door Dent/Bulging/Scratch/Deform Body Lint Body Dent/Bulging/Scratch/Deform R/R Door Lint R/R Door Dent/Bulging/Scratch/Deform R/R Body Lint R/R Body Dent/Bulging/Scratch/Deform Gasket Open Joint at Door/Door Door Gasket/Make Hard/Body Door Layered Level Rust/Corrosion/Steel Mixed Thermo Start block Damaged Missing Clean Joint

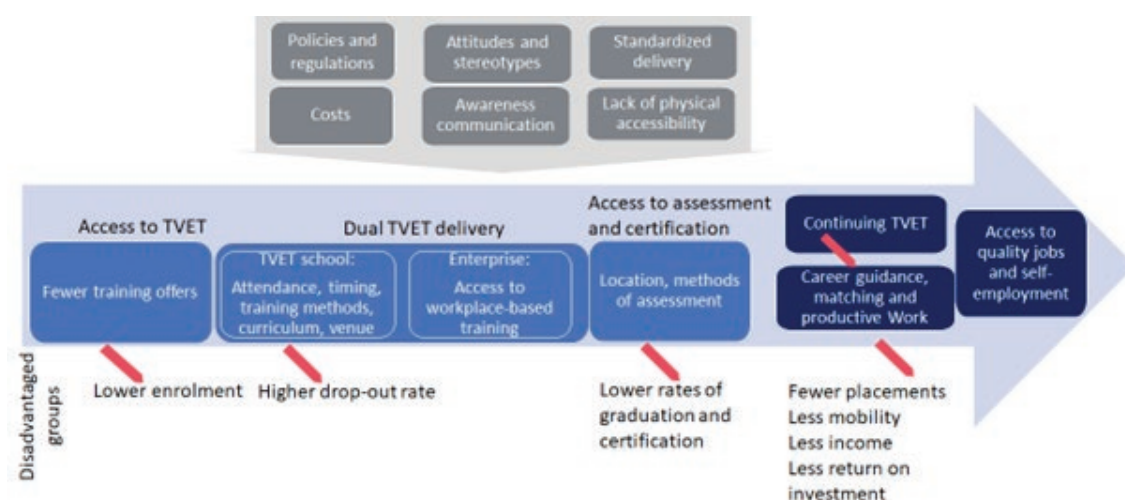
2. Conceptual and methodological framework of the assessment

Following the perspective of “leaving no one behind”, there is a need to acknowledge that many population groups, and women in particular, face multiple barriers or forms of discrimination that need to be considered in policymaking and service delivery to improve their contribution to the country's economic development via increased presence in the labour market and thus in the skills training sector. Interventions must reflect the diversity of the barriers and discrimination that the country's population experiences. The following framework, therefore, uses gender equality and

social inclusion as a reference to address the multiple barriers and forms of discrimination through the lens of intersectionality.

In looking at the intersections of the barriers and discrimination, figure 2 highlights how they can manifest at the macro, meso and micro levels – in policies and regulations, in society (attitudes and stereotypes), in TVET training provision and in the world of work. As indicated by the red arrows, these barriers can lead to lower access and graduation rates and, ultimately, fewer employment opportunities.

Figure 2. Potential barriers in the TVET sector and in the transition to work



Note: VET: vocational education and training; ROI: return on investment.
Source: Adapted from ILO, Guide to Inclusive TVET (2021).

- 21 According to UN Women (2021: 9), intersectionality refers to the hidden structural barriers and supports an understanding of how individual experiences differ, even within already marginalized or underrepresented groups. It is crucial that policies and interventions do not address discrimination as separate or distinct.

The following elaborates on the different levels of barriers in terms of the training sector.

Before training – access: Access barriers to TVET can include policy or regulatory requirements (such as school certificates), language of instruction, restrictions in physical access (distance, lack of ramps, etc.), lack of recognition of prior learning systems, the cost, etc. In many countries, there are social norms at play, such as attitudes or stereotypes that shape the perception of society and training providers in terms of what women and persons from disadvantaged groups prefer as training choices and what they are capable of mastering. This has led to fewer TVET placement for girls and disadvantaged groups and hence lower enrolment rates. And where they exist, these placements are often less resourced and have lower status than the training for “typical male” trades (Smith 2021).

During training – delivery and assessment:

Barriers during the training can include how training is delivered (standardized delivery in training centres) in the learning venue (vocational school or centre or enterprise). It might also be that the specific needs of trainees are not considered, such as the course timing, necessary adjustments or lack of awareness and sensitization of staff. These difficulties often lead to high drop-out rates during the training.

After training – placement:

Due to dominant stereotypes and the lack of targeted and needs-based career guidance, labour market insertion and retention can be additional potential difficulties for women and other disadvantaged groups, leading to lower labour market outcomes, such as high unemployment, low income and few career opportunities and/or low return on investment over their working life cycle (ILO 2020). These issues must be resolved for access and inclusion interventions to be effective.

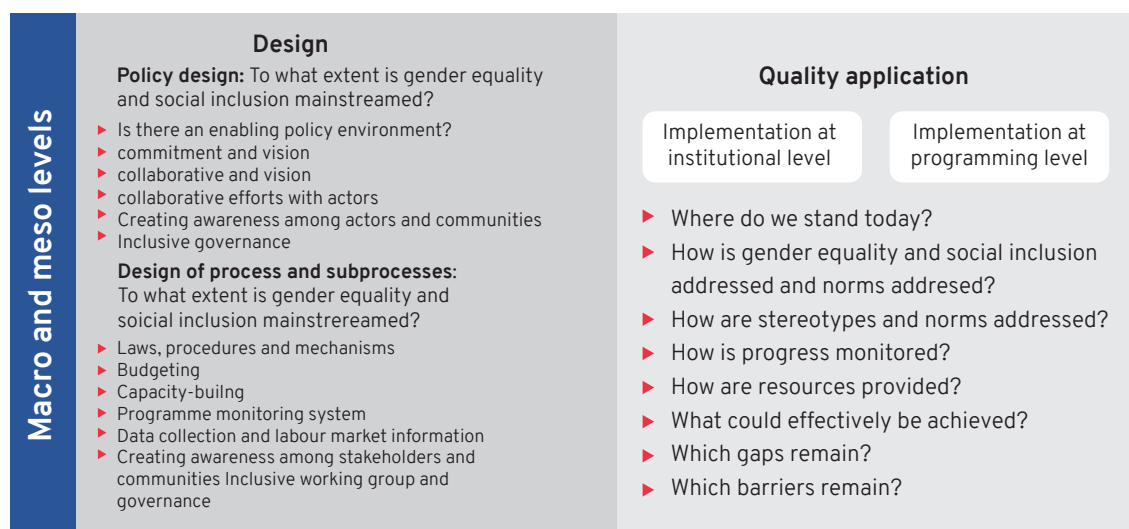
2.1 Policy process and quality application

This assessment examined gender equality and social inclusion gaps at three levels (figure 3):

1. Policy design: The assessment reviewed the extent to which gender equality and social inclusion are reflected in policy design and strategy processes to see what gaps emerged.
2. Design of processes, regulations and tools: The assessment looked at how many processes, plans, regulations, instruments and tools provide clear directive, ensure role clarity and allocate resources effectively for achieving gender equality and social inclusion. This examination included whether these mechanisms function properly.
3. Application and implementation: The assessment looked at the status of implementation and the quality of application of gender equality and social inclusion regulations at the institutional and administration levels as well as within service delivery. It examined how well these regulations are enforced and whether they have achieved the desired outcomes.

Mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion ambitions and achieving change within a system requires not treating either as an add-on but rather changing the culture and the perspective on how barriers and equity are addressed. The assessment also examined the extent to which mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion has been integrated into policy and how it has been operationalized and institutionalized within the Government's administration, the private sector and TVET providers – as opposed to being treated as an additional aspect of training delivery.

Figure 3. Levels of the assessment



Source: Author.

The assessment looked for the following when reviewing the administrative and institutional levels:

- A common understanding of gender equality, inclusion and intersectionality among actors and the implication they have on policy and practices.
- Commitment towards sensitization and capacity-building by leadership and actors.
- Representation of all relevant actors, including representing organizations in all aspects of the system (governance, policy, planning, implementation and monitoring).
- Gender equality and social inclusion-sensitive budgets available at the macro and institutional levels for:
 - mainstreaming within government administration and TVET provision;
 - developing a barrier-free environment; and
- targeting initiatives (stipends) and additional support measures.
- Definition of targets or quotas, the additional allocation of resources and adequate monitoring of progress.
- Systematic, target group-sensitive planning for government administration and TVET providers, including organizational change processes and gender-inclusive budgeting and audits.
- Availability of statistical evidence and analysis to understand the barriers and exclusion occurring in the TVET sector and in the labour market.
- Disaggregated data for monitoring and analysing progress.
- Target group-specific communication and outreach practices to raise awareness and to challenge gender stereotypes in the TVET sector.

2.2 Process

The assessment covered four areas of interest:

- Persistence of cultural norms and stereotypes that shape TVET actors' behaviours and decisions of trainees;
- Policies;
- Processes and sub-processes; and
- Institutional commitment, capacities and practices and their potential gaps.

Persistence of cultural norms and stereotypes that shape TVET actors' behaviours and the decisions of prospective trainees

Although the Government is pushing for better enforcement of the laws and policies to protect women and girls and their basic human rights and to advance their social and economic status, there are several challenges to that success. This includes weak accountability and poor implementation of the laws and policies.

Unpacking the supposed “low interest” of women and disadvantaged groups to enrol into a TVET programme or embark on entrepreneurship requires a deep understanding of how the culture and norms influence individual participation. There are biases in mindsets linked to awareness, understanding, commitment and capacity that must be critically addressed by all actors involved. This report, as the following explains, looks at what influences, for example, choice of trade to train for, access to any training, the graduation rates and the labour market outcomes.

Stocktaking and assessing gaps in policies and strategies

This report starts with an initial stocktaking, examining whether and how the cultural norms and stereotypes have been addressed in Bangladesh and singles out the gaps in TVET that were noticed in the policy and strategy documents and action plans. The assessment looked to see whether and how TVET and labour

market relevant policies and strategies address specific needs of target groups.

Assessing processes and sub-processes and identifying gaps

Central to any effective implementation of policies is a clear legal framework and well-defined processes and procedures, including implementing plans and guides. This ensures that functions and roles are clarified and formally regulated and monitored, leading to consistent implementation. These processes also need to include trained and available human resources, financial allocation for implementation and monitoring and the willingness and capacities of the actors required to carry out this process. Gaps in the processes were assessed, and recommendations are accordingly presented in this report.

Assessing Institutional commitment, capacities and practices and their potential gaps

The qualitative aspects of gender equality and social inclusion awareness, commitment and capacities among TVET providers and enterprise system actors were reviewed. When assessing the capacities of organizations, both intent and reality were considered. Strengths, weaknesses and opportunities were explored at the institutional and programme levels within these organizations

2.3 Methodology

The assessment involved actors at various levels and used a mix of research methods. It started with desk research of policy document reviews, study and programme reports and project document analysis, while applying the gender equality and social inclusion lens. Informant interviews, group discussions and extensive discussions with the ILO project team and their

colleagues were conducted to gather information. Field visits were made to public and private training providers, government institutions, trade unions and private sector stakeholders in Dhaka and Sylhet. The interviews and group discussions involved the following actors.²²

22 See list of people met in Annex I.

Informant interviews during the visits to Dhaka and Sylhet:

- Government representatives (NSDA, Directorate of Technical Education, Technical Education Board, Technical and Madrasah Education Division, Directorate of Technical Education)
- UN Women, Senior Programming Officer in Dhaka
- Women's Chamber of Commerce in Sylhet
- ILO experts and project managers
- Representatives of the Underprivileged Children's Educational Programme (UCEP) Dhaka, the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC) in Sylhet and the Bangladesh–Korea Technical Training Centre in Dhaka (all of which were visited).

Focus group discussions:

- Government agencies (Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training, the Technical Education Board, the Tourism Board, the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Youth, the Department of Women Affairs, the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare and the Ministry of Youth and Sports).
- Bangladeshi and international non-government and civil society organizations (BRAC, UCEP, the Bangladesh Business and Disability

Network, the Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program, ADD International, Helvetas, Bangladesh Mohila Porishod and Dhaka Ahsania Mission).

- Public and private training providers (principals, managers and teaching faculty in Dhaka and Sylhet, including technical training centres, technical school and colleges, polytechnics and private training providers);²³
 - Employers (Bangladesh Employers' Federation), enterprise promotion representatives, including the National Association of Small Cottage Industries of Bangladesh and the SME Foundation;
 - Trade union and workers' representatives (Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education, Workers Resource Centre) and local leaders (tea plantation leaders in Sylhet); and
 - Direct beneficiaries, including male and female trainees in TVET institutions, women tea workers and parents and their daughters.

Discussion and reflection meetings on the findings were organized with the ProGRESS Project team and colleagues from other ILO projects (which led to clarifications). The draft report was analysed in a stakeholder validation workshop in June 2023, with feedback incorporated into the final report.

2.4 Assessment limitations

The assessment served as an initial attempt to uncover the visible and invisible barriers that contribute to unequal opportunities for women and disadvantaged groups in TVET and the labour market. Despite the short time available for the field visits, interviews and group discussions, they provided valuable insights into the policy environment and practices. However, the lack of comprehensive data on training

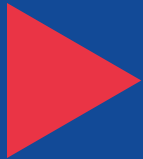
providers, disaggregated by gender and other relevant factors, limited the depth of the analysis. The assessment findings might not reflect enough of the cultural and regional variations and diversity of institutions and partners involved in TVET.

The assessment also examined cultural and social norms because of how they influence

23 Bangladesh–Korea Technical Training Centre, IMT Bagerhat, Mohila Polytechnic Khulna, Khulna TSC and Dhaka Mohila Polytechnic Institute.

individuals' choices and impede progress in training and labour market participation, although largely in a general way. Although the assessment included interactions with trainees, teachers and TVET actors regarding these aspects, the findings underscore the need for deeper examination and understanding of how different barriers influence the choice and behaviours of different groups. By building upon

this initial work, future research and documentation initiatives can delve into the status of mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion through a lens of intersectionality within TVET institutions and assess their responsiveness in overcoming barriers. Such endeavours are crucial for driving positive change and fostering equal opportunities for all in training provision and in the labour market.



3

**Findings from
assessing the culture
and norms that
create barriers**

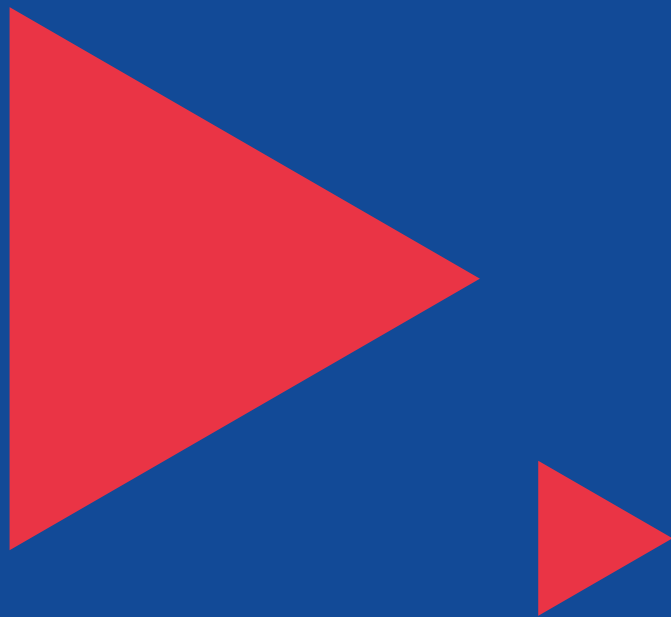




Photo: ©ILO

3 Findings from assessing the culture and norms that create barriers

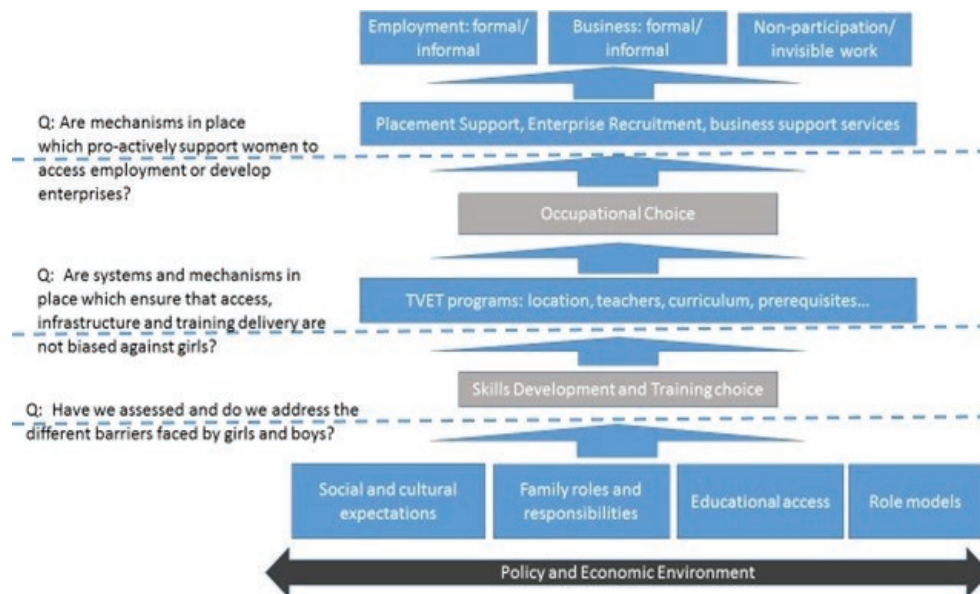
Cultural and social norms can significantly impact people's choices, skills development and labour market engagement. This chapter thus examines such impact on women and disadvantaged or marginalized groups regarding their occupational choices, access to skills development and motivation to enter the labour market.

It is often claimed that girls have less interest in technical education that would lead to less-limited marketable skills. Similarly, individuals with a disability or from marginalized communities are often described as lacking motivation. Today, there is increased understanding among practitioners that “lack of interest” is the result of hidden or obvious discriminatory practices. Yet, and despite political progress, women in Bangladesh continue to be confronted with restrictive gender roles enforced by cultural norms as well as by the inadequate implementation of empowering laws, policies and programmes (UN Women 2022). Ethnic and religious minorities face similar challenges.

The TVET sector and labour market institutions, including the entrepreneurship system, are not neutral: They are influenced by culture, religion and societal structures. Understanding how these factors shape attitudes and hinder equal participation in skills development and labour markets is critical. All actors must foster awareness of how these factors shape policies, processes and implementation.

When identifying new occupations, designing policies and implementing TVET-related projects, the managing actors should critically consider several questions (figure 4) to determine the influence of societal expectations, norms, class and religious identity on all actors' and trainees' choices. Biases and stereotypes must be mitigated to create an enabling environment and support structures that foster equal access to skills programmes and the labour market. Research on labour market mobility emphasizes the influence of these factors on self-image, self-confidence and aspirations, particularly among disadvantaged and marginalized groups (ILO 2017). Understanding individuals' backgrounds can lead to better outcomes in skills development, graduation rates and labour market participation. Figure 4 illustrates the areas that need to be addressed so that a barrier-free environment is created for women to make their own empowered choices when accessing TVET or entering the labour market.

Figure 4. Questions for gender-responsive skills development and labour market transition



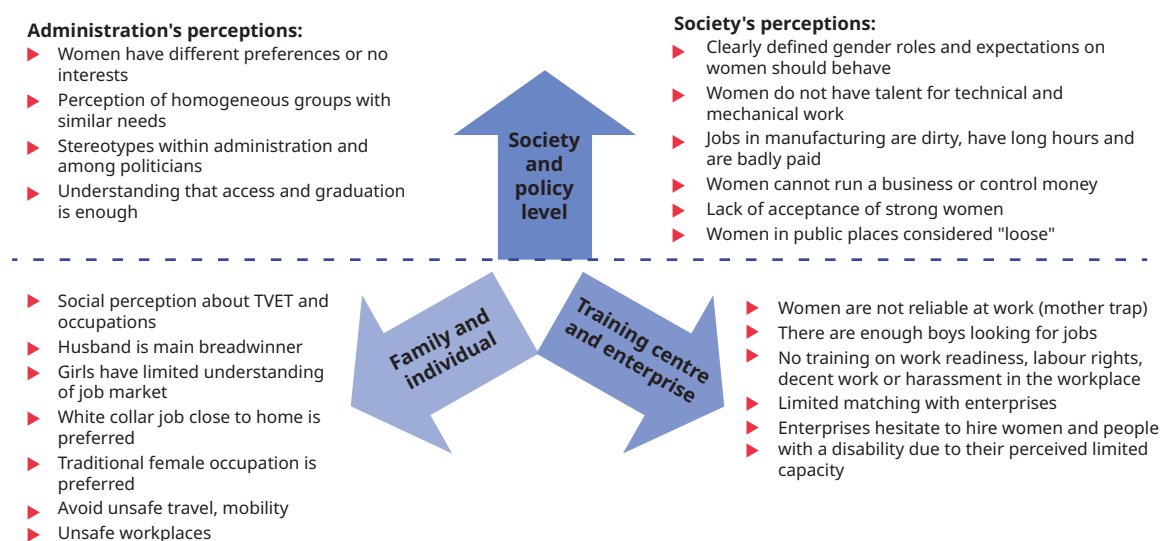
Source: Swisscontact Gender Mainstreaming Guide, internal document.

3.1 Women

Figure 5 summarizes the discussions with assessment participants, including trainees, regarding how they perceive how current culture and norms influence policy and practice in TVET

and in the labour market regarding women's participation and how, in turn, it shapes the preferences, behaviours and decisions of different actors.

Figure 5. Summary of findings on perceptions and behaviours



Source: Author.

Inferior status predominates in society and the traditional division of work.

In Bangladesh, women are consistently seen as subordinate to men (UNDP 2023),²⁴ reinforcing patriarchal norms that assign the role of providers to men and impose caregiving expectations on women. Biases against women in terms of being less capable manifest in all areas, including politics, education and the economy. This pervasive perception severely curtails women's involvement in public life, hindering their access to quality employment and entrepreneurship. Double and triple burdens due to domestic responsibilities also affect the capacity of working women to be fully present at work or in vocational training.²⁵ The internalized beliefs about gender roles and responsibilities have implications for how men's and women's work and labour market behaviours are perceived and portrayed by society, influencing policymakers, training providers, employers, families and young women. The assessment discussions with teachers and trainees reflected that parents or husbands strongly influence most girls' and women's choices. During the group discussions, participants made similar observations:

- There is a perception that women's talents and capabilities are linked to their support roles in society; they are considered less fit for physical and blue-collar work or supervisory and management jobs in industry or the private sector.
- There is a preference for flexible and home-based options, even if they compromise career options and work informally.
- There is limited decision-making power and control over resources within families, which makes women more vulnerable and dependent on male family members.
- Women are often stereotyped as docile and compliant, which can lead to negative

attitudes towards ambitious and more demanding women. Assertiveness usually links to agency, both of which are central features required for management and leadership positions, successful careers and self-employment, as well as entrepreneurship.

- Biased information about TVET options reinforces gender stereotypes and restricts women to socially approved traditional occupations.
- There is limited information on TVET opportunities and misconceptions that TVET leads to unemployment and a low quality of work or income opportunity.
- There is a bad image of working in manufacturing jobs, which leads to reluctance of women to work in factories unless necessary.

The assessment discussions also highlighted that while there are clear commonalities, including that most women add household and reproductive tasks to their work (doing seven times more chores than their husbands, according to BBS 2021), women cannot be treated as a homogeneous category. Social class, traditional values, religion and rural or urban location influence decisions on whether girls opt for general education, how mobile they are and how they can engage in the labour market. In more traditional environments and in rural areas, women's work outside the home is typically considered of low esteem and unsafe.

Decisions are based on perception of safety in public spaces, in training centres and in workplaces.

Gender-based violence and harassment against women in public spaces and at work remain central factors that not only define women's perception about their safety and security but also determine a family's or husband's support for girls or women to attend training or work or

24 According to the United Nations Development Programme's Gender and Social Norms Index (2023), in Bangladesh, more than 99 per cent of people have at least one bias against women.

25 Unpaid work also includes unrecognized economic activities, such as farm-related activities in rural areas, including rice husking, boiling, taking care of cattle or chickens, vegetable cultivation (see BBS and UN Women Bangladesh 2021).

interact in markets as entrepreneurs. Eve-teasing and harassment are regular features that women (according to trainees, teachers and workers who were interviewed) face in universities and vocational training, at work or when using public transport. This not only affects women's mental health but also influences their ambitions and their readiness to travel a distance for better employment or work.

In 2009, the High Court of Bangladesh ordered the establishment of sexual harassment prevention committees in education institutions and workplaces. Despite efforts by the Government, NGOs and some private sector organizations to raise awareness of sexual harassment and discrimination through these committees and focal points, knowledge and access to support remain low (Farhad 2022).²⁶

The education system and training providers continue to offer traditional training, particularly in rural areas.

Assessment participants highlighted during the group discussions that TVET provision is still defined and perceived from a narrow perspective. Although there has been some progress to broaden TVET and skills training placements for women, most courses still link to the narrow idea of “male” trades, which reinforces occupational segregation, particularly in rural areas. Many TVET institutions continue to offer training for women in typically low-level and short-term trade skills in agriculture, care work, housekeeping, sewing, tailoring, some computer training and electronic hardware assembling. The training available in productive and more in-demand industry-based skills, such as mechanical engineering, automobile repair, welding, machine tool operation and electrical repairs is dominated by men (Khan 2019; ADB 2018). With new technologies and jobs emerging, an increasing number of women are opting for more gender-neutral and in-demand trades, including computer software, hardware or mobile phone repair and desktop publishing –

fields that require more focus and should be further encouraged.

Stipends are effective in spurring greater participation.

The introduction of government stipends in post-secondary education, including formal TVET institutions, aimed to increase the retention of women and disadvantaged groups in higher education. Large skills programmes (such as the ongoing Skills for Employment Investment Programme, or SEIP) target a million women and other individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds with stipends to support their participation in public and private training institutions. Government officials and TVET centre principals have indicated that stipends have led to increased enrolment and retention rates, particularly among urban young women, which is an encouraging outcome.

However, the enrolment goals for women (at 40 per cent by 2020 and 50 per cent in the long run), people with disabilities (at 5 per cent by 2020), ethnic minorities (at 3 per cent by 2020) and socially disadvantaged groups have not been reached, suggesting barriers other than financial ones. In the assessment discussions, participating principals, teachers, trainees and parents in Dhaka and Sylhet highlighted the lack of labour market perspectives, safe transportation, hostels, childcare facilities and specific rooms for women as the main reasons for the poor participation. In the case of people with a disability, school management staff reported that accessible infrastructure as well as transport and specific training needs have not been adequately redressed.

To promote greater inclusivity in the TVET sector, it is crucial to understand the multiple barriers at play and that reinforce each other (intersectionality). Using stipends can be powerful if applied in combination with additional outreach efforts and need-based support measures.

26 A 2019 ActionAid survey found that about 84 per cent of students were not aware of the sexual harassment committee at their university and 13 per cent had only heard about the guidelines (Farhad 2022). Haque et al. (2022) found that only four of 160 universities had formed such a committee. These four, however, lacked the competence and resources to deal with the issues. Data generated by RMG Bangladesh revealed that only 4 per cent of garment factories had a harassment complaint committee.

Employers prefer male employees.

In a labour-surplus economy like Bangladesh, women and other disadvantaged groups experience greater barriers or difficulties than women in countries with a labour shortage. This is due to the prevailing mindset that prioritizes married men as the main breadwinners. Despite evidence that women and disadvantaged groups have higher retention rates than able-bodied men, as this assessment study found, employers often view them as unreliable and a potential risk due to assumptions, such as their future caregiving responsibilities. Women's employment in the ready-made garment industry is perceived as limited to the time before maternity, leaving them without employment alternatives other than domestic or agricultural work (maternity trap). This mindset leads to the belief that (able-bodied) men should be given preference in education, skills development, job placements and entrepreneurship support. Employers frequently underestimate the capabilities of women during the hiring process and fail to consider them for promotions to supervisory or managerial positions. This thinking necessitates considerable effort to convince employers of the potential that the other groups harbour. The preference towards able-bodied men in the labour market restricts career options and access to employment opportunities for all women.

To address the challenges of discriminatory practices and mindsets in the business and industry sector, the Government, in collaboration with international partners, NGOs and private-sector organizations, has undertaken many initiatives. By engaging industry skills councils, social partners and the private sector, these efforts need to be mainstreamed and further scaled up. It is crucial to engage stakeholders in gender-responsive and inclusive TVET debate and provide sensitization training and technical support.

By demonstrating the business case for training and hiring women, organizations will start recognizing the value and potential of a diverse workforce. Sharing success stories and creating role models can further inspire collaboration and drive positive change with employers and towards establishing a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

The entrepreneurship ecosystem is biased against women as entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh face numerous challenges in a highly competitive business environment. These include lack of money to save, women's limited control over finances and limited access to business training, capital, savings and social networks, as well as limited acceptance from industry bodies and associations (Solotaroff et al. 2019). Balancing family responsibilities with business demands also presents a major obstacle for women entrepreneurs, resulting in work-family conflicts. Moreover, societal norms dictate that women must seek permission from their husbands or parents to start a business or access funding, further hindering their entrepreneurial endeavours (Afroze et al. 2014).

A survey conducted by Afroze et al. (2014) found that family members, relatives and neighbours would argue that a woman engaged in business creates a negative image in society. For instance, the survey report cited various women who were interviewed: "When I wanted to start my business, my mother-in-law rebuked and blamed my family for not having raised me properly," reported one woman. Another woman was warned: "If you start a business, no one will marry you." The founder of the Women's Chamber of Commerce in Sylhet highlighted that when she applied for a trade licence and loan, she was initially rejected for being a woman. Banks often disregard women entrepreneurs and prefer to interact with their male counterparts instead. Such discrimination discourages many women from seeking bank financing and leads them to rely on informal savings groups instead (Rahman 2012; BWCCI and CIPE 2008).

According to the National Association of Small Cottage Industries and the SME Foundation, women entrepreneurs have limited awareness of regulatory provisions and on how to get a trade license and fulfil tax obligations. Lack of education, skills and financial literacy and limited access to credit due to absence of collateral further compound the challenges, making it difficult for women entrepreneurs to start and grow a business.

The founder of the Women's Chamber of Commerce in Sylhet stressed the need to support women entrepreneurship networks and to invest in interventions that target the socio-cultural barriers confronting women due to their gender but also the intersecting barriers they encounter as women from religious and ethnic minorities, poor households or women with a disability. Providing access to vocational and technical training, facilitating low-interest or interest-free loans, simplifying licensing

processes and creating supportive social networks can help empower women entrepreneurs and foster their economic participation. Additionally, raising awareness and challenging the gender biases in financial institutions, in the entrepreneurial ecosystem and in society at large are crucial to create an enabling environment for women's entrepreneurship.

3.2 Biases against disadvantaged and marginalized groups

The Government acknowledges the vulnerability of disadvantaged and marginalized groups, particularly the women among them, who experience multiple disadvantages that amount to increased discrimination and limited opportunities for education, training and employment. These groups, including people with a disability, urban and rural informal workers, working-poor persons, religious minorities and indigenous populations, like the Chakma, Marma, Santal, Tripura and Khasi tribes (Toufique et al. 2017), experience biases, negative attitudes and exclusion from mainstream society. In 2017, a massive number of persecuted Rohingya refugees sought shelter in the Cox's Bazar district and still live in overcrowded camps with restricted access to services. They are confronted with various social, economic and legal obstacles in their pursuit of training, employment and self-employment opportunities.

People with disabilities

Prejudices and discrimination against persons with disabilities persist in Bangladesh, hindering their equal participation and opportunities. Negative societal attitudes and biases label persons with a disability as incapable, cursed and dependent, resulting in exclusion from education, employment and social interactions. Persons with a disability also experience high levels of poverty and marginalization, with

limited access to microfinance schemes and low rates of economic involvement (SIDA 2014).

One of the most formidable difficulties that persons living with a disability encounter are negative attitudes. The lack of specialized support services, including assistive technologies and trained instructors, hinders their engagement in TVET courses and in workplaces. These attitudes often manifest as beliefs that persons with a disability are incapable of performing a job, leading to statements like: "Why worry about persons with disabilities when [abled-body] people cannot find jobs?"²⁷ Women and girls with disabilities are particularly disadvantaged by negative attitudes related to both their gender and disability. These biases perpetuate exclusion and limit opportunities (ILO 2016a: 10).

Representatives from BRAC and UCEP highlighted that changing outcomes for people with disabilities must be a community process and requires collaboration with parents. People with disabilities often lack foundation skills and confidence to join programmes as a result of the negative attitudes they have experienced. Tackling the negative attitudes and promoting the rights of people with disabilities requires confronting communities to increase their awareness on the harmed potential of anyone with a disability who is denied access to education, skills development and health care.

26 Quote from an entrepreneur met during the fieldwork

Above all, it is crucial to offer need-based responses and specialized mentoring support, alongside TVET and skills programmes and labour market linkages – all within a training environment that is free from barriers.

Returnee women migrants

The migration and gender dynamics in Bangladesh reflect a complex and challenging reality characterized by social stigma and inequalities. In a patriarchal society in which men are traditionally considered the primary protectors and providers for women and their families, the roles and contributions of women as the main earners are often undervalued and, in some instances, women are criticized for neglecting their family responsibilities when working abroad. There is a growing group of widowed, divorced, abandoned or separated women in Bangladesh, comprising around 18 per cent of all migrating women (ILO 2014). These women are commonly referred to as *oshohai* (shelter-less or helpless), which has negative implications. For them, labour migration is an opportunity to improve their circumstances and access options that are typically unavailable to women in more stable family situations. Despite the diverse situations and outcomes among migrant women, negative portrayals and biases against them persist in the media (ILO 2015).

Female migrants often experience stigmatization upon their return to Bangladesh. While abroad, they felt more respected and empowered for sending money home and having decision-making authority. The women who experience exploitation or abuse abroad likely return to derogatory comments and social exclusion, which often forces them to confine themselves at home,²⁸ leading to feelings of humiliation and rejection. In a Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies survey, nearly 15 per cent of returnee female migrants divorced after coming home, while 10.5 per cent were abandoned by their husband. And 29 per cent of them suffered a mental illness. Unfortunately, most of them did

not receive adequate treatment for their condition.²⁹

The absence of specific reintegration policies and support measures for female migrants at the national and local levels exacerbates their difficulties. The lack of a comprehensive registration and tracking system poses challenges in providing financial and social support to returnee women migrants. It is crucial to expand social safety net programmes to include them. An ongoing ILO and Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation project targets these gaps by reaching out to civil society organizations and to local governments institutions and by supporting a one-stop solution, which simplifies registration and support for these women. Providing information and access to skills development training is also vital for their economic empowerment. Ensuring recognition of prior learning, along with financial support, are essential for their successful reintegration into the labour market. These measures might have to be complemented with bridging and rehabilitation measures, including psychosocial support. The Wage Earners' Welfare Fund can be utilized to support these reintegration efforts.

Ethnic minorities

Ethnic minority women encounter barriers and other difficulties in many ways, including restricted mobility, language obstacles and limited decision-making power. The minority groups of Bangladesh live largely on the fringes of society, struggling to achieve greater voice and organization: The very existence of some of these groups remains unrecognized by the State and the size of each minority group is believed to be significantly undercounted. For all ethnic minorities, their undercounting and the other modes of social exclusion impede their agency in all domains of their lives (Solotaroff et al. 2019). It denies them equal opportunities in education and often leaves them with poor employment options and thus prone to exploitation. For ethnic minorities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

28 Naznin Thiti, "Returnee Female Migrants Need Help to Bounce Back in Life", in The Daily Star, 28 October 2021.

29 *ibid.*

region, geographical remoteness creates an additional barrier. Discussions with women tea plantation workers in Sylhet revealed that they possess little awareness and understanding of TVET and skills programmes as well as labour market information (Toufique et al. 2017). They are geographically restricted and heavily reliant on tea plantations for employment and housing, although they live in poor health conditions. There is no option for the community to work in government or for women to access supervisory and managerial positions in the tea plantations. Consequently, they encourage their children to opt for general education or to work outside their area. Particularly in the case of girls, women tea plantation workers expressed a lack of trust in higher education or TVET and had concerns about the safety of their daughters when commuting to a training centre or even within the local area. Their daughters lack information about stipends or, when aware, find it difficult to access them due to insufficient support to navigate their professional orientation and selection process to secure admission to a training centre.

These realities require serious challenging of societal perceptions, extensive awareness-making on the rights and capabilities of ethnic minorities, and women in particular, and proactive promoting of inclusive policies and targeted initiatives. Orientation and information on the benefits of TVET and skills development and the available public and private services, including entrepreneurship support, is essential to overcome the seeming lack of interest among the ethnic communities towards skills development.

Empowering women through education, skills development, including retraining and access to economic opportunities, can help chip away at the cycle of stigma, poverty and discrimination. Efforts should include building up trust by combining skills development and entrepreneurship support with community-based initiatives to better understand local needs.

Ethnic minorities are extremely heterogeneous, and within a community, they are also highly differentiated, which needs to be taken into

account in census and data analysis. Thus, skill development programmes and entrepreneurship initiatives must be fairly targeted, taking into account the variety of difficulties confronting all women (Toufique 2017).

Other marginalized groups

Stigma and discrimination against other marginalized groups, such as Dalits, people living with HIV or AIDS, transgender individuals, hijra community and sex workers, also negatively affect their physical and mental well-being. For employment, Dalits and hijras are segregated into socially stigmatized service sectors that have been traditionally assigned to them. Employment outside those sectors tends to remain out of reach. The occupations “assigned” to them are of low skill and often associated with social stigma of “untouchability”: They include begging, cleaning and scavenging. These occupations need interventions that improve the availability of safe and protective tools, equipment and working conditions to mitigate the hazards. But the employment horizon must be expanded to all marginalized groups, which requires including them in training and other development programmes.

People with HIV or AIDS, transgender individuals, hijra community members and sex workers typically live with discrimination and struggle to access health care, social services and employment opportunities. Lack of knowledge, misunderstandings, misinformation, religious condemnation and punitive laws and practices contribute to feelings of worthlessness and guilt among sexual and gender minority individuals. Consequently, they experience poverty and negative health outcomes, including poor mental health, high suicide rates and increased vulnerability due to low self-esteem and risky behaviours. Like all other socially marginalized persons in Bangladesh society, they deserve targeted inclusion in skills training and other employment programmes.

► 4

**Findings from
assessing policy gaps
through the gender
equality and social
inclusion perspective**

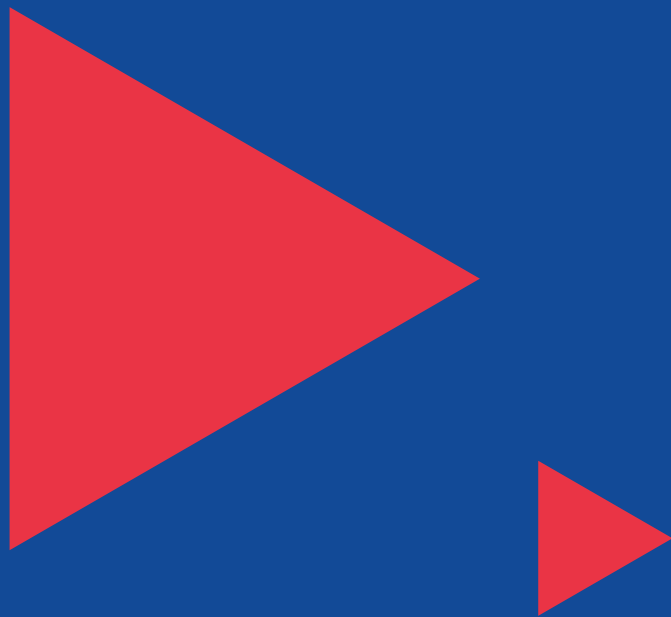




Photo: ©Mohammad Mohebur Rahman/ILO

4 Findings from assessing policy gaps through the gender equality and social inclusion perspective

Skills development and entrepreneurship systems are not isolated but interconnected with public policies. These interconnected policies ostensibly aim to create an enabling environment for accessible and relevant skills development, lifelong learning opportunities for men and women and to meet industry demands for skilled human resources to increase productivity and competitiveness. Thus, the assessment on gender equality and social inclusion gaps first entailed a review of policies, laws, strategies, action plans and implementing tools.

The skills development and TVET sector is guided by the 2022 NSDP, the 2010 National Education Policy, the NSDA Act (2018) and the Technical Education Board Act (2018). The

development strategies (such as the Eighth Five-Year Plan, Vision 41 and the actions plans of the Technical and Madrasah Education Division and the NSDA), policies and laws (such as the Draft National Job Strategy (2019), the Labour Act (2006), the SME Policy, the Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy (2016) and the draft National Reintegration Policy for Migrants) are designed to strengthen the TVET sector's purpose, including decent employment for graduates.

Other policy documents relevant to equitable and inclusive TVET and entrepreneurship that were reviewed in this assessment also reflected gaps and shortcomings regarding gender equality and social inclusion, as this chapter discusses.

Table 3. Overview of government documents reviewed for the assessment

Policy	Regulation or law	Strategy or action plan
National Education Policy (2010)	National Skills Development Authority Act (2018)	Five-year Plans
Non-Formal Education Policy (2006)		National Skills Development
National Skills Development Policy (2022)	Bangladesh Technical Education Board Act (2018)	Authority's National Action Plan for Skills Development in Bangladesh (2022–2027)
National Women Development Policy (2011)	National Labour Act (2006)	National Strategy on Gender Equality in TVET (2012), with ILO support
National Disability Policy (2013)		Integrated TVET Development Action Plan (2018)
National Youth Policy (2017)		National TVET Strategy on Inclusion of persons with Disability (2013), with ILO support
National Job Strategy (2020)		Five-Year Plans
Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy (2016)		
National Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy (2016)		
National Reintegration Policy for Migrants (draft)		
SME Policy (2019)		

4.1 Findings from the stocktaking

The reviewed documents and publications and discussions with assessment participants highlighted general appreciation of the ongoing skills system development and reform process. The NSDP 2022 and the National Qualifications Framework bring together a common perspective and framework that encompasses a broad definition of skills development. The policies are future-oriented and based on a need for strong coordination and involvement of all actors. They emphasize expansion, quality and the importance of the private sector for labour market relevance on one side and accessibility and inclusion on the other.

Table 4 summarizes features of the policy and strategy documents, drawing attention to the Government's commitment (where it appears) towards promoting and protecting the rights of girls, women, migrant women, ethnic and religious minorities and other disadvantaged groups and to addressing discrimination and

social exclusion in vocational education and skills training.

For example, the table refers to special quota targets that were set for women (20 per cent by 2020), people with disabilities (5 per cent by 2020) and ethnic minorities (3 per cent by 2020) for TVET and skills programmes. Specific measures, including stipends, have been provided to increase access to education, decent employment, entrepreneurship and safety. Women's participation in decision-making processes is to be increased, and measures for women's economic empowerment and entrepreneurship and their access to finance and vocational training are to be implemented. Disability is to be mainstreamed in the national planning process, including the budgetary system.

Table 4. Review of policies and strategies on aspects of gender equality and inclusion

Policies and strategies	Women and disadvantaged groups mentioned	Provisions and measures to overcome barriers and discrimination and thus promote gender inclusion	Areas for improvement
Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2021–2041	Women, migrant women, persons with a disability, Dalits, Bede people, sex workers, rural residents	General measures to overcome barriers and discrimination and ease access to education, training, rights entrepreneurship, labour markets	- Gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming should be a focus. - Intersectionality should be mentioned and focused upon. - A differentiated implementation strategy with clear milestones and role for gender inclusion should be included. - More allocation of funds for administration and implementation is required.
Eighth Five-Year Plan 2021–2025	Women, persons with a disability, minorities, Dalits, Bede people, migrant workers abroad, returnee migrants and women working in hazardous and risky occupations	- Focus on capabilities, economic participation, voice, agency and health - Address gender-based violence, discrimination, harassment - Implement all laws and strict enforcement of constitutional provisions - Focus on decent work for women for domestic and international employment - Target outreach and specific provisions for different groups - Promote access to TVET through awareness campaigns targeting marginalized groups and provide appropriate infrastructure and support services to accommodate their needs	- National-level strategies should highlight the need to develop, reform or adopt laws and policies to reduce gender discrimination and discriminatory practices. - Emphasis should be directed to mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion for effective implementation. - Intersectionality should be addressed, with targeted responses.
National Education Policy (2010)	Adults, school drop-outs, women, persons with a disability, poor and rural girls, ethnic minorities	- Access for students with a disability - Proportional budget allocations to TVET trainees - Opportunities for underprivileged persons in privately owned or privately operated institutions - Access to flexible courses for adults and school drop-outs - Financial assistance for youth at risk of dropping out of school - Recommendations for increasing quality through better inputs, including: 12:1 student-teacher ratio - compulsory introduction of ICT - teacher training that is practical and gender-sensitive - provision of books in Bangla language - filling teacher vacancies more quickly by establishing a separate public service commission for TVET teachers	- Intersectionality should be addressed. - Limited target group-specific impact measuring should be reviewed and updated.

National Women Policy (2011)	All types of women with their specific needs	- Holistic approach to women's empowerment and gender-responsiveness, including leadership development, promotion of quotas, career development, women-friendly environments (free of gender-based violence), health - Formalized employment and links to financial services	- Coordination challenges should be addressed for mainstreaming gender equality. - More focus should be given to rural women and girls. - Budgets must be increased. - Data and monitoring must be strengthened. - Gender stereotypes must be addressed.
National Skills Development Policy (2022)	Ethnic minorities, women, children, people with a disability, LGBTI people, people living with HIV or AIDS, religious minorities, people with albinism, people with mental illness, people with drug addiction	- Access to higher education, training and lifelong learning - Training in traditional and non-traditional sectors - Corrective measures in formal TVET (financial assistance or stipends) - Diversified and gender-responsive training options for women to increase their participation - Safe and accessible TVET for girls (infrastructure, hostels, childcare facility, women-only facilities, etc.) - Access to training (apprenticeship, upskilling and reskilling) for workers in small and medium-sized enterprises, the informal economy, in rural areas and in self-employment - Counselling - Recognition of prior learning	- Strategies and plans need to be developed and implemented to achieve gender equality, inclusion and safe environments in the TVET sector through the policy. - Specific barriers and gaps faced by women and disadvantaged groups need to be addressed, especially in the areas of assistive learning support, transport and literacy programmes. - Intersectionality should be addressed.
Integrated TVET Development Action Plan (2018)	Women, children, people with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, rural residents, people from low-income households, people from minority groups	- Increased participation of women in TVET (with stipends, infrastructure, women-only TVET institutions and polytechnics) - Scholarships and financial assistance for women and disadvantaged groups - Special TVET programmes for people with disabilities - TVET institutions in rural areas - Financial assistance to people from low-income families to access TVET - TVET for minority groups	- A clear implementation plan and road map with targeted interventions should be funded and monitored - Specific budget allocation is required for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming. - Actual disaggregated data on the current status in TVET and labour market outcomes and links with the market are required. - A strong monitoring and evaluation system is required to track progress of the plan. - Issues of gender-based violence in TVET institutes should be addressed through specific plans and targets.
National Action Plan for Skills Development in Bangladesh 2022–2027		Targeted and mainstreaming measures for women, underserved and inaccessible areas, the informal sector and entrepreneurship, but without mention of resources	- The limited focus on mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion in the government administration or service provision should be corrected. - Intersectionality should be fully addressed and operationalized. - The lack of budget for implementation, including specifically for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming, should be corrected. - Enactment must be mentioned.

National Strategy on Gender Equality in TVET (2012)	All categories mentioned except informal sector workers	Comprehensive multilevel implementation strategy	• The strategy (approved by the National Skills Development Council) needs to be reviewed and updated to become operational. • The Gender Working Group needs to be revived to ensure functionality and effective delivery. • A budget earmarked for implementation should be allocated. • Insufficient focus on how targets and milestones are achieved needs correcting. • Insufficient attention to intersectionality needs correcting. • Appoint gender and disability focal points who have time to fulfil their responsibility. • Expand the emphasis on monitoring and evaluation for implementation of progress.
National Strategy for Inclusion of Persons with a Disability in TVET (2012)	All categories mentioned (except the informal sector), with reference to 12 categories of disabilities	Comprehensive, multilevel implementation strategy	• Disability is treated as homogeneous and should not be, and the lack of specific training needs, including education needs related to specific disability, should be corrected. • Intersectionality should be addressed. • Include universal design of TVET. • Include enactment and an enforcement mechanism. • Expand the budget to ensure enforcement.
National Disability Policy (2013)			
National Labour Act (2006)	All categories covered	• Maternity leave and no gender-segregated wage structure • Prohibition of discrimination and harassment • Specified work timings, childcare, safe work environment, separate toilets	• The limited reference to formal enterprises should be expanded to the informal sector. • The challenge of enforcement and applicability to the informal sector and rural areas should be redressed.
Draft National Reintegration Policy (2022)	All migrants, regardless of their gender, social status or other factors	• Need-based focus and integrative service provision (social, economic, physical and psychosocial well-being of returnees and families), such as integration, Social Security, social assistance • Link between government support, training provision and civil society organization service provision • Target group-centred services • One-stop centres and case management perspective • Evidence-based perspective • Focus on sustainability at institutional level • Setting up a women's cell	• Clarity is required on how to identify and respond to the needs of the specific groups. • Focus is needed on mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion within service institutions and sensitization and capacities to be built within government administration.

Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment Policy (2016)	Migrants, youth, vulnerable groups, women, returnee migrants	- Inclusive and gender-responsive framework for sustainable integration of returnee migrants, including counselling, coaching, skills development and enterprise support - Setting up a women's cell and increasing budgetary allocation for gender-responsive training and support initiatives - Political leadership and soft and life skills training - Accessible relevant and market-friendly training - Ensuring gender-responsive infrastructure (childcare, accessible, flexible, etc.)	- Inconsistency and incoherence between and among different policy instruments (other policies and laws) should be corrected. - Challenges in governance, planning and implementation of policy, laws and directives should be resolved. - Include reference to irregular migrants.
National Youth Development policy (2017)			
Employment Policy (2022) and Draft Job Strategy (2021)	Women, youth, persons with a disability, rural residents and other discriminated groups	- In-demand sector focus - Focus on non-discrimination and decent working opportunities for all - Support for job creation and employment-rich growth in newly emerging and green sectors - Intensified job and entrepreneurship opportunities, particularly in rural areas - Promotion of safe and skilled migration - Active labour market measures, enforcement of support measures for women (career guidance, childcare, maternity leave, etc.) - Advocacy for attitudinal changes - Safe and enabling workplaces, training and employment opportunities for women	- A gender mainstreaming implementation strategy should be included. - A gender-responsive mainstreaming strategy and implementation plan should be included. - Intersectionality should be addressed.
SME Policy (2019)	Women, disadvantaged groups, including ethnic minorities, persons with a disability and people living in poverty or in rural areas	- Creating environments for all entrepreneurs, including those from disadvantaged groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, people living in poverty - Links and partnerships for outreach access to: - information on starting business, permits, etc., accessing credit and finance - training and management upskilling - business information and market linkages - a Women Entrepreneur Development Fund - scholarships for women	- A gender mainstreaming implementation strategy should be included. - Intersectionality implementation should be addressed. - Specific policies and institutional arrangements are required for training, credit access, networking, market linkages and to address discrimination. - Specific mention of provisions for migrants and returnee migrants are needed.

4.2 Gaps in policies and strategies

The NSDP 2022 and the National Qualifications Framework provide a common perspective emphasize the coordination and involvement of all actors, expansion, quality and private sector relevance for the labour market. These policies and national action plans (of the NSDA and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division) consistently apply the principles of equal access to TVET and opportunities for men and women, to entrepreneurship and to the labour market as priorities and emphasize the need for targeted support measures for disadvantaged youth, ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged groups, including migrant groups and persons with disabilities.

Yet, there are gaps in the policies, strategies and action plans concerning gender equality and social inclusion that need to be resolved to achieve the targets. First, they lack specificity and tend to overlook the underlying causes that create multiple barriers and contribute to income gaps and limited access to education, training, leadership opportunities and entrepreneurship. Second, although target group-specific initiatives have been increasing, they do not address intersectionality adequately. There seems to have been lack of reflection on the planning and policy gaps prior to 2021, as well as on the effectiveness and impact of chosen strategies and progress made in closing these gaps. The following section singles out feedback from assessment participants regarding the shortcomings (to which the recommendations in Chapter 6 respond).

Limited awareness and participation

Much progress and effort has been made to better coordinate TVET actors and systematically involve the private sector (employers' and industry associations), trade unions and other public and private actors in policy design, competency standards and curriculum development. Assessment participants, however, thought that the policy and action plan designing process could be more participatory and consultative. Neither private sector representatives nor private training providers or the civil society organizations with vast practical insight and technical capacities are adequately included in the process. As well, they feel unclear

and uninformed about their roles and the coordination of efforts. Involving the full array of actors is crucial for gender equality and social inclusion-responsive skills development. Partnership with specialized organizations is essential for effective training delivery and should be promoted.

Lack of operational clarity

The assessment participants expressed that national policies should be more forward-looking and should emphasize a demand-driven approach with clear links to employability and labour market outcomes. They urged stronger focus on the connection between need-based education, market-oriented skills, sustainable employment and self-employment. The assessment participants also noted that more guidance is needed on how policies can be operationalized and implemented, given the coordination challenges within the TVET sector. Also, more emphasis should target how training delivery can be better aligned with fast-changing international, national and local skills requirements and how the need for digitalization and green jobs can be effectively addressed.

The operationalization of NSDP 2022 (as with the 2011 iteration) appears ad hoc, and assessment participants specified a more systematic and well-planned approach to ensure long-term sustainability – so that technical assistance remains beyond project duration and is anchored within a system. Further unpacking of the policy is necessary to clarify roles and functions of actors and to facilitate policy implementation and coordination, particularly regarding gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming. Such clarity would enable development partners to complement and support ongoing efforts more effectively and systematically.

Lack of a unified understanding among assessment participants of gender equality and social inclusion

There is a broad understanding of women's empowerment, gender equality and inclusion,

but there is no unified view or definition of each. The debate on the heterogeneity of these groups and their diverse barriers and needs remains limited. The Government distinguishes 12 disability categories but does not specify the need for additional measures. Despite their heterogeneity, ethnic minorities also are considered as homogeneous groups (Toufique 2017). The 2011 NSDP provided a broad definition, whereas the 2022 NSDP excludes certain groups. Non-government and civil society organizations fear that failing to adopt a “leave no one behind” perspective can have implications, leaving particularly vulnerable groups with limited access to entitlements or support measures, such as admission quotas and stipends.

The NSDA Action Plan references barriers faced by 23 disadvantaged groups, with targeted training and entrepreneurship interventions, including stipends. Certain interventions (stipends) might work for certain groups (such as urban poor women) but fall short for others (such as persons with a disability or rural women) who require additional measures (transportation assistance, for example). There is a need to sharpen the focus and develop a unified understanding of the diverse barriers faced by different groups before, during and after skills development. This intersectionality must be addressed for all people. Skills development and vocational policies and interventions should prioritize intersectionality for minority and marginalized groups, including people in the Hill Tracts, persons with a disability, ultra-poor individuals, illiterate individuals and persons living in rural areas. Multiple need-based support measures must be designed, budgeted, implemented and monitored to achieve the expected results.

Lack of a unified vision among stakeholders for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming

In Bangladesh, mainstreaming gender equality by increasing access and creating a gender-friendly environment in institutions is a priority (NSDP 2022). The National Education Policy (2010) also emphasizes the need to increase the availability of training providers for women at the district and subdistrict levels. The

Government has established girls’ polytechnics, maintains quotas for female teachers, management and trainees in public polytechnic institutes and has set up female technical training centres. Stipend support is also provided to female trainees in all polytechnic institutes. These initiatives aim to improve access and opportunities for women in skills training (NSDP 2022; Eighth-Year Plan). Yet, the assessment participants pointed out that the focus in skills development programmes and entrepreneurship support provision is primarily on expansion and increasing participation rates and meeting the targeted percentages for women and disadvantaged groups. There appears to be less emphasis on developing a gender-responsive and safeguarding culture within the ecosystem. This could be the reason for not achieving targets because the lack of gender equality and social inclusion-responsiveness slows the progress towards achieving more equitable training and labour market outcomes for men and women.

It is essential to question under which conditions TVET and skills programmes genuinely enhance employability and lead to better quality and sustainable employment and income opportunities. Achieving true equity in opportunities requires going beyond the current efforts of reaching a certain number of graduates and requires deeper understanding of the impact training has on employability, quality of work and overall agency of trainees.

Changing culture through mainstreaming means developing an enabling environment and addressing all barriers within the system – in administration, programming and delivery. A coordinated effort within the TVET and entrepreneurship system, along with the involvement of non-government and civil society organizations, the private sector and different funding agencies, should be made to develop a common vision and understanding of gender equality and social inclusion. The strategies for gender equality in TVET (2012) and disability inclusion (2013) provide useful starting points for step-by-step implementation. There is a need for sensitization and capacity-building for all actors within the TVET sector to effectively promote gender equality and social inclusion.

▶ 5

**Findings from assessing
gender equality and
social inclusion gaps in
processes, legislation
and institutional
arrangements**

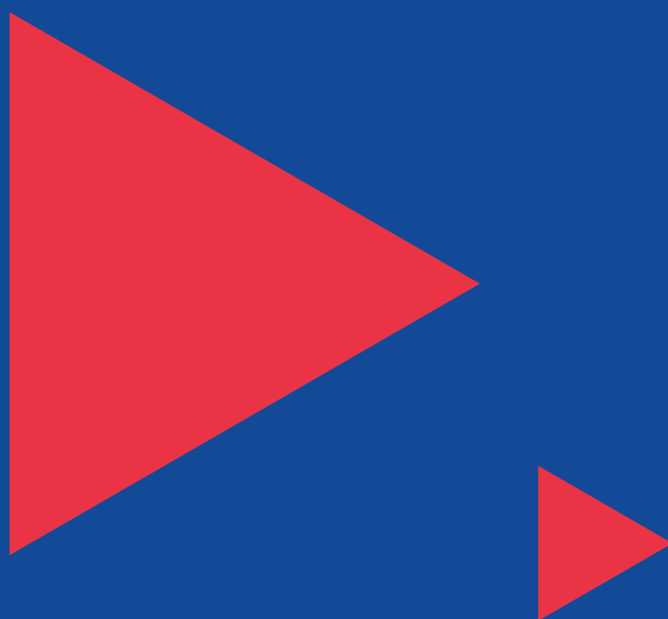




Photo: ©Monon Muntaka/ILO

5 Findings from assessing gender equality and social inclusion gaps in processes, legislation and institutional arrangements

The NSDP and the TVET action plans (of the NSDA and Technical and Madrasah Education Division) are ambitious and forward-thinking, but more clarity is needed on how they will be regulated and implemented. Proper implementation of the policy and laws, including the required institutional capacities of the relevant agencies, remain critical challenges (Khan 2019: 10). Throughout the assessment, there was repeated mention that implementation of the NSDP, its action plan and related policies require a consolidated framework. Previous discussions on setting up a coordinated, sector-wide approach should be revived. This framework should include processes and procedures as well as laws and regulations to clarify how institutional reforms and implementation are to be realized. A road map with milestones that highlight the

envisioned progress within the TVET sector is required.

Actors are seeking guidance on how to operationalize and roll out gender equality and social inclusion across organizations. Specific clarifications are required on governance and the legal provisions and processes. These provisions and processes should define the roles and functions and guide effective implementation. This not only applies to mainstreaming of gender equality and social inclusion but to the entire TVET sector, including the financing of skills development.

The next section discusses what assessment participants perceive as the shortcomings in the operationalization and ongoing implementation of the TVET sector.

5.1 Governance challenges and lack of a unified framework

The NSDP and the NSDA Act are supposed to increase clarity of processes, functions and roles as well as the promulgation of the same, with measurable outcomes. With the introduction of the NSDP 2022, the TVET sector is now governed through two entities: The Technical and Madrasah Education Division, under the Ministry of Education, governs formal TVET and related departments – the Directorate of Technical Education and the Bangladesh Technical

Education Board. As a statutory and apex body, the NSDA has the mandate to implement the NSDP and has oversight authority for coordinating 23 ministries and 37 departments and organizations or industry associations to develop policies, conduct research and oversee skills development and training programmes. Recent analysis on governance of TVET in Bangladesh (Aziz 2023) pointed out challenges, overlaps and duplications (table 5).

Table 5. Overview of governance for TVET and skills development

Instrument operationalization	Data source	Findings
National Action Plan for Skills Development in Bangladesh 2022–2027		Endorsed and under implementation by NSDA, which requires NSDA's proper monitoring and coordination of all agencies dealing with skills training.
Integrated TVET Development Action Plan (2018)	Integrated TVET Action Plan (sections 1–5)	Prepared and approved by the Technical and Madrasah Education Division to achieve national TVET targets, which requires regular monitoring of already implemented and to be implemented actions.
Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework	Levels 1–6	The Framework was approved in 2021 and launched in 2023 by the Ministry of Education. It is awaiting approval of a quality assurance manual for TVET, implementation guidelines and legal framework. The National Qualifications Framework is now in implementation by various agencies: the Bangladesh Accreditation Council for Higher Education; NSDA for skill qualifications; the Technical Education Board for vocational education; and the Ministry of Education for general education.
Technical Education Board Act (2018)	Chapter 6 (Duty of the Board) and Chapter 21	The Technical Education Board Act and the NSDA Act have some overlapping responsibilities.
National Education Policy (2010)	Chapters 5 and 28	The policy requires revision and update to align with TVET-related recent changes of policies and regulatory frameworks.
Bangladesh Labour Regulation (2015)	Apprenticeship Act (1962) and Bangladesh Labour Regulation (2015) (Chapter 17, clauses 328–349)	- Apprenticeship is included as Chapter 17 under the Labour Law (2015) but is not yet operational. - A teachers' recruitment commission has not yet been initiated. - The Teachers' Qualifications Framework has not yet been introduced as per the mandate of the Technical Education Board.

Source: Aziz 2023: 12.

There seems to be a degree of overlap in the functions and mandates of these two skills policies and authorities that need resolving, if possible, through a consensus-building approach (Aziz 2023; Khan 2019). A case in point of overlap relates to recognition of prior learning, where three entities (the NSDA, the Technical Education Board and the Bureau of Non-Formal Education) are each mandated to execute the recognition of prior learning, which was originally under the Technical Education Board. This example is not isolated – there are other overlaps and confusion in mandates,

legislation and functions among the relevant public sector agencies.³²

These challenges need to be clarified and streamlined. Doing so will articulate how skills development will be governed, coordinated and implemented and how the private sector and specialized agencies can assume a more active leadership role in skills development overall and in mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion across the whole TVET ecosystem. Although the action plans (of the NSDA and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division) have provisions and refer to the same policy

32 Addressing the role of the NSDA as an oversight and coordination body, Aziz (2023: 11) made the following observation: "If the NSDA becomes the implementing authority, who will coordinate the TVET and skills development programmes provided by 23 ministries and more than 37 departments."

goals and targets for gender equality and social inclusion, there is no coordination body that negotiates a vision for gender mainstreaming, lobbies for gender budgets, sets milestones and

operational plans for gender targets, builds up capacities among ministries and actors and oversees and monitors implementation of all these things.

5.2 Coordination challenges

Gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming are necessary for the effectiveness of the NSDP and the National Qualifications Framework. Also necessary is an associated unified approach to laws and processes, but there is none. It is unclear if and how the effectively different ministries, departments and training providers address gender equality and social inclusion in their organization and programmes; the same is the case for other TVET actors, employers' organizations, trade unions and funding agencies.³³ To implement long-term strategies for gender mainstreaming and gender equality in the TVET sector, Bangladesh needs a gender equality and social inclusion policy for TVET and skills development that ensures coordination and complementarity.

A Gender Equality Strategy for TVET 2012 was developed and approved under the National Skills Development Council, and the National Strategy for Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities in TVET was developed under the Directorate of Technical Education within the Ministry of

Education, which is the mandated agency for mainstreaming disability inclusion into education. Previous thematic working groups – the informal gender working group under the NSDA and a disability inclusion advisory group, which were set up under the Directorate for strategy development but long ago went dormant – need to be revived under the NSDA and potentially the Technical and Madrasah Education Division (if they continue to operate separately). And committees need to be given authority to coordinate and consult with different departments, donor-funded projects and implementing partners to guide policy formulation on planning, budgeting and implementation and then monitor the progress. The mandated government agency representing women (National Council of Women and Children), people with disabilities (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare) and other marginalized groups and specialized actors must have complementing roles for effective implementation.

5.3 Legislation on mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion

Assessment participants raised concern that the lack of enactment and binding regulations also hinder or limit progress in the mainstreaming of gender equality, social inclusion and safeguarding measures in TVET institutions and workplaces.

The Technical and Madrasah Education Division instructs its formal TVET providers on the

provisions and targets in its action plan regarding quotas, infrastructure adjustments (such as ramps for accessibility) and considering women and other disadvantaged groups in their annual planning and budgets and procurement plans, performance appraisals and monitoring system. Polytechnic institutes and training centres are participating under ongoing projects

33 There is lack of coordination and harmonization among these organizations in their contributions to TVET development in Bangladesh. Without an effective mechanism for coordination and complementation, these projects operate independently (Khan, 2019; ADB 2015: 56).

(SEIP; Skills 21, etc.) that support them in building up their capacities and in institutionalizing gender equality, social inclusion and anti-harassment practices. Through these projects they are tackling barriers, including accessibility and their coaching, career guidance and links to employment and self-employment.

The progress that has been made in gender mainstreaming and entrepreneurship in TVET is important, but it will not lead to systemic change unless there is an overarching policy and binding legislative framework, which will allow for an implementation plan with dedicated resource allocation and the monitoring of progress. Assessment participants characterized the current approach as “half-hearted” and unable to deliver the transformation that is needed. Intersectionality, many of them pointed out, is an important aspect that is being neglected. By

taking an intersectional approach, training providers can ensure that all trainees benefit from TVET programmes and other support measures, regardless of their background.

The same applies for policies related to women's entrepreneurship. The SME Policy does not adequately address the needs of the diverse group of women entrepreneurs. The National Association of Small Cottage Industries recommends that a separate gender-sensitive policy for women entrepreneurs should be drafted that speaks directly to the specific challenges that women entrepreneurs experience, such as discrimination, unequal access to finance and lack of support networks. The policy should also call for reducing or eliminating collateral requirements for loans to women and other disadvantaged groups.

5.4 Limited application of the gender equality and social inclusion lens in skills development and entrepreneurship development

Biases are common in analysis of occupational profiles and in communicating future trends

Assessment participants highlighted that many TVET programmes, especially long-running ones, are perceived as more suitable for male trainees (such as trades in science, technology, engineering and mathematics). However, many of these traditional trades have modernized and digitized, which provides an opportunity to rebrand the occupations as also fit for women and other disadvantaged groups. Newer, more gender-neutral trades are less associated with the “blue-collar” worker image, which is why they increasingly attract more female trainees. Similarly, by applying a gender-sensitive and inclusive lens, newly emerging occupations and job opportunities (green jobs, digital jobs and hospitality jobs) can be positioned as more

“gender-neutral” and thus provide new opportunities with flexible arrangements for women and disadvantaged groups if their specific needs are considered and anticipated.

Industry skills councils and the private sector need to be sensitized and supported to see the business case and benefit from a more diverse workforce.³⁴ When addressing diversity, it is important to remember that women and disadvantaged groups should not be treated as homogeneous. For example, traditional families and women may find it less acceptable to work in the hospitality sector, but it is more acceptable in certain ethnic minority groups, who with their interests and values do not have the moral barriers to training and working away from home. Similarly, certain characteristics may make persons with a disability more suited to certain jobs than other persons.

34 The ILO has developed a rich inventory of best-case practices to show the business case for training and a diverse workforce in business (see ILO 2022c).

Private training providers, such as BRAC and UCEP, work closely with the private sector and the entrepreneurial ecosystem to identify their training needs, then develop courses, curricula according to those requirements, internships and placement support services. They make effort to reach out to communities and provide need-based, holistic programmes, which makes them an important interface between trainees, training providers, the labour market, businesses and local governments.

Inadequate gender equality and social inclusion focus in teacher training, curricula, training material development and teachers' capabilities

The assessment discussions with representatives from the Dhaka Technical Trainers Training Institute, the Technical Teachers' Training Centre, the Directorate of Technical Education and public and private training providers revealed that neither curricula nor training materials adequately integrate gender equality and social inclusion as part of developing professional competence. The same is true for entrepreneurship skills, which are often treated as a separate competence or add-on and should instead be considered as transversal skills. Life skills and technical skills training must reflect these issues. Teaching staff and teachers feel that they lack market-relevant technical skills and experience that would allow them to adequately train and assess trainees. They also find their pedagogical skills are inadequate to assist trainees in applying theoretical knowledge to specific work situations. This is equally true in entrepreneurship, labour rights, safeguarding measures (including against gender-based violence or sexual harassment) and decent work.

Training courses seem to fall short in bringing hard and core work skills together to deliver competency-based training, which integrates higher-level theoretical thinking and subject matter knowledge with an understanding of how to apply such skills in various contexts and situations.

Good examples of integrating gender equality, inclusion and safeguarding or entrepreneurship practices should be reviewed and scaled up (such as B-SkillFUL, Sudokkho, B-SEP and Skills

21). Private training initiatives (by BRAC and UCEP) have started adding additional classes as a way to remedy the gaps. A representative from the Bangladesh Tourism Board pointed to hospitality or care work when describing how the lack of sensitivity and experience can impact customers' or clients' well-being or safety and stressed that all courses and teaching materials should be reviewed with the intention of correcting the gaps. As well, gender-neutral and otherwise unbiased language must be used, and hidden assumptions regarding gender roles and other discriminatory behaviour against other groups must be eliminated.

More attention should be given to the rights and responsibilities of workers, employees and entrepreneurs. This will require training on labour rights, gender equality and sexual harassment, which are only marginally covered as of now as theoretical concepts in classroom instruction and are not integrated into the day-to-day practice of training. Thus, the impact on learning and the capacity of trainees to assert themselves in the workplace is limited.

According to assessment participants, it will be critical to coordinate with the business sector and their support organizations (the SME Foundation, the National Association of Small Cottage Industries and microfinance institutions) to ensure that entrepreneurship training has relevance and that it builds the basis for stronger links between graduates and the labour market. Registration, finance and other credits need to become more accessible.

The Technical Education Board is the statutory body for TVET curriculum development, training materials and quality assurance, including the registration of TVET providers and delivery of training and assessments. The Technical Education Board is struggling with a shortage of qualified staff, which makes expansion of occupations within the training curricula and the regular review of curricula in collaboration with the private sector challenging. The Board is in need of continued technical assistance and capacity-building support to develop a mechanism for integrating gender equality and social inclusion-sensitive curriculum development and assessment into their operations and to monitor progress through the advisory committees. Assessment participants

advised that specialized organizations should participate in curriculum development and their development of instructional materials to ensure that all relevant needs are covered.

Low levels of engagement with the private sector for workplace-based training and attachments, leading to lower labour market outcomes

According to assessment participants, employers' organizations and the private sector feel they are not sufficiently involved in the design, planning and implementation of skills development programmes, despite their increased role in economic growth. Based on their experiences with entry-level and supervisory skills, employers stated during the assessment that short-term competency-based training has responded to some of the skills gaps, resulting in greater employment outcomes. There is still scepticism of the relevance of long-term formal TVET. Pilot initiatives that introduced counselling and placement officers (such as Skills 21, Sudokkho and B-SkillFUL) in public and private TVET providers resulted in higher attachment rates, placement or self-employment outcomes for women and disadvantaged groups. But the training providers emphasized that more sensitization efforts and capacity-building of staff are required to successfully link women and disadvantaged groups with attachments, placements or self-employment. The gender-responsive counselling and placement guidelines developed by the Skills 21 project should be introduced into all public and private training institutions.

Significant efforts have been made to sensitize and build the up capacities of the private sector for gender-sensitive and inclusive workplace-based training, apprenticeships, upskilling, reskilling and assessments. The industry skills councils, employers' organizations and chambers of commerce at the national level have been strengthened through a variety of projects, including B-SEP, Sudokkho and Skills 21. Projects like B-SkillFUL and Skills 21 also have successfully piloted introduction of safeguarding measures and labour rights for trainees and apprentices during attachments and training in small and medium-sized enterprises.

Employers and the business sector need to continue to reach out to SMEs and informal enterprises to promote entrepreneurship, upgrading as well as better access to business development services. Although initiatives have been piloted, there is a need for capitalizing on or devising new strategies for scaling up to a large roll-out. Further capacity-building is required for industry skills councils, employers' organizations, allied business networks and the SME support organizations (such as the National Association of Small Cottage Industries and the SME Foundation) to adopt policies and implement gender-sensitive and inclusive workplace practices and for setting up and institutionalizing safeguarding mechanisms across industries, including the informal sector. Similar efforts need to be made to build up capacities of these organizations for well-tailored gender-responsive measures for women's enterprise development support.

With the shift towards more decentralized and gender equality and social inclusion-sensitive TVET delivery, there is a need for local partnerships between training providers, community organizations, the private sector, business support organizations, mentors and local governments. Building up a local ecosystem should be envisaged as a priority by the Government as an important intervention area amid decentralization.

Need for a more-effective data collection and monitoring system

Data and research are critical for evidence-based decision-making for skills development because they enable more accurate assessments of training quality and the impact on employability and labour market outcomes. It is also crucial to assess the impact of targeted initiatives to ensure that women and disadvantaged groups are benefiting. The Computer Cell of the Technical Education Board collects data from registered TVET institutions, capturing enrolment and graduation information from the registered public and private institutes offering basic, Secondary School Certificate vocational and diploma courses. The Technical Education Board is also responsible for analysing occupational changes. While assuming the overall coordination and research responsibilities for

skills development initiatives, the NSDA collects data from across all ministries involved. The ongoing efforts to set up a national skills portal is an important move towards aligning activities and thus avoid duplications (Khan 2019).

Although obtaining high-quality aggregated data and monitoring remain challenges, institutional capacities for data collection and aggregation and disaggregated analysis continue to improve.³⁵ There remains, however, a need to increase the quality of that data collection and analysis, especially for gender-disaggregated data. Prominent large-scale projects, such as SEIP, Sudokkho, B-SkillFUL and Skills 21, are assisting government agencies and training institutions in setting up their data system and performance measurements. Registered training providers now collect and provide data on enrolment, drop-out rates and graduation rates, categorized by training type, gender and, in some cases, disability.

The B-SEP and Skills 21 projects have supported the Directorate of Technical Education and Technical Education Board in integrating information on disability, gender and disadvantaged groups. The Directorate established a database for enrolment and graduation data specifically for 12 types of disabilities, which has helped strengthen the monitoring system.

Regular data collection also measures the quality of training and its impact on employability and labour market outcomes, especially for women and disadvantaged groups and to assess the rural and urban divide. However, research activities in Bangladesh, including employers' and trainees' satisfaction surveys, tracer studies and impact assessments, typically link to project activities and thus do not take place on a regular basis. Using these data and analysis for monitoring are critical for feedback on industry relevance and to determine whether training should be continued or modified. The information can also determine whether additional support measures are required to

ensure that training is inclusive and leads to equal participation in the labour market.

Such research has led to a better understanding of access, retention and the effectiveness of TVET and placements or entrepreneurship support. But this work, which is a vital source of information for TVET and entrepreneurship planning and monitoring, must be institutionalized and allocated budget resources, and the research capacities within the Government must be expanded to ensure continuity beyond the projects (Khan 2019; ADB 2017).

Gender - responsive awareness campaigns and access to information on relevant skills development and employment for all

The efforts towards increasing public awareness on the benefits of skills development and TVET and certification for employability have been significant. Large projects, such as the B-SEP, Skills 21³⁶ and Sudokkho, have undertaken social marketing campaigns and supported the Government in raising awareness on the benefits of TVET and skills development for employment and income opportunities in Bangladesh and abroad. Many of the projects strongly focus on changing the image of TVET and making TVET more attractive for women and marginalized communities. However, some assessment participants voiced concern about the way TVET is being communicated, suggesting that it perpetuates traditional gender stereotypes, and that outreach is still limited in rural areas and for disadvantaged or marginalized groups.

Although policies and plans highlight the need for more targeted awareness efforts, it remains unclear to what extent the impact of the awareness campaigns and promotional activities have been assessed systematically, keeping in mind the variety and heterogeneity of groups that need to be reached. Therefore, it is important to know whether these efforts have

35 The Government is committed to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal on inclusive and equitable education and increasingly collects and reports data in a disaggregated way. Parity indices (female or male, rural or urban, bottom or top wealth quintiles, as well as disability status, Indigenous Peoples and conflict situations) for all education indicators on this list are being disaggregated (see BANBEIS 2022: 49).

36 The B-SEP Project supported the piloting of a campaign in one TVET institute, while the Skills 21 project supported a national campaign in TVET institutes in all divisions of Bangladesh.

led to increased enrolment and participation and which of these groups have been responsive or unaffected.

Government-run formal training institutions depend on centralized campaigns and efforts because they do not have the capacity for localized initiatives to promote courses. Thus, a localized approach with target group-specific messages that reach out to parents, local elites, religious leaders, community leaders, enterprises and trainees might be more effective.

Lack of adequate safeguarding measures in training provision and enterprises

Adequate measures to ensure the safety and security of women and disadvantaged groups are needed to attract more of them into the formal TVET sector and for them to enter and remain in the labour market. Lack of gender-responsive training and working environments, including lack of safe residential accommodation, inadequate facilities for childcare, unsafe transport and occupational safety and health hazards, keep many women from accessing vocational training, internships or attachment opportunities and ultimately from entering the job market. The Directorate of Technical Education has introduced several safeguarding measures in recent years through the technical support of projects, such as Skills 21, which includes sensitizing principals and instructors and introducing anti-harassment policies and a code of conduct in TVET institutions. TVET providers and government representatives

affirmed during the assessment an increased level of sensitization. Other projects, such as the B-SkillFUL, have introduced labour rights, decent work and occupational safety measures into training enterprises.

The assessment participants also emphasized that although legal provisions and safeguarding measures have been launched, they are not yet fully effective towards improving the gender equality and social inclusion situation. These measures need to be integrated into the organizational culture and the institutional compliance process. Interestingly, assessment participants from public training institutions (the polytechnic institutes, the Dhaka Technical Teachers Training Institute and the technical schools and colleges) reported that adequate efforts are being made to tackle sexual harassment. They also remarked that these issues can be handled informally and, on a case, -by-case basis, relying on trust.

Some of the forward-looking and strong private training providers have institutionalized gender equality, social inclusion and safeguarding measures; and they have broadened the scope for safeguarding in their organizational policy and practice to apply protection measures to everyone, including disadvantaged and marginalized groups. Similar policies are now needed in partner enterprises and their networks that accept trainees for attachments and internships, and dedicated committees that are mandated and well-resourced need to be appointed to actively monitor enforcement of the policies.

5.5 Inadequate budgeting limits the space for flexible expenditure and mainstreaming

The Government needs adequate funding for programmes to recruit qualified staff and to ensure appropriate infrastructure and equipment and that the severe teacher, instructor and assessor shortages are resolved. Despite steady increases in funding in recent years, funding gaps remain, which the Government plans to reduce by incentivizing

private sector investment through tax breaks and land grants. The Government is also seeking funding for TVET from international development partners.

What funding is available to date has been used to expand infrastructure, access and relevance and strengthen the overall capacity of the TVET sector. Despite stipends, improved

infrastructure and dedicated women-only TVET centres, there are no provisions for a budget or fund targeting gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming, which would ensure institutionalization and the sustainability of efforts.

Focal points have been appointed for women's issues and people with a disability. But it is a function in addition to their existing capacity, and thus they respond on an ad hoc basis. Lack of budget allocation and the severe staff shortages result in services that are dependent on individual teachers' motivation and time available. Despite the presence of these focal points and the sensitization training that has occurred, assessment participants acknowledged a need for more systematic effort. A fund should be established, and human resources should be made available to expand the focal points and placement officers and for implementing and monitoring gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming. Additionally, resources for refresher training and mentoring are required so that progress is faster and yields greater results.

Several projects of the Directorate of Technical Education, including the ongoing ILO-supported Skills 21, have supported gender mainstreaming into TVET institutions. These projects have introduced action plans and guidelines, established committees or focal points dedicated to gender- and disability-responsiveness and introduced anti-harassment policies and codes of conduct. The B-SEP project, which was implemented between 2013 and 2016, trained 118 principals in 111 public and

private TVET institutes on gender equality and social inclusion for persons with a disability. These principals then trained and sensitized management and faculty. The Skills 21 and Japan International Cooperation Agency's projects set up career guidance and placement units in nine model institutes and hired and supported placement and career guidance officers. They also introduced guidelines or gender-responsive career counselling and developed tools to collect data and monitor progress.

These initiatives have helped to promote gender equality and social inclusion in TVET institutions. They have also improved the quality of training and increased the employment prospects of women and persons with a disability. Nonetheless, training providers grapple with resource and capacity constraints. Functions like career counselling and placement support rely on project resources and temporarily appointed external consultants. There are no provisions for continuity by the Government. Allocating financial resources that align with agency targets and providing capacity-development support are therefore crucial. The NSDA and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division's action plans should reflect these considerations. To ensure sustainability, it is essential to build upon the approved gender strategy, conduct a review and allocate dedicated resources for mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion into ministries and departments involved in skills development. This includes budget allocation and human resource planning for management, faculty, career counsellors and placement officers.

5.6 Less female representation in TVET faculties and inadequate teaching resources

Assessment participants expressed concern regarding the expansion of the TVET sector and the need for more teachers, especially female teachers with adequate pedagogical and technical skills. The severe shortage of assessors, qualified teaching staff and management, particularly in technical fields,

also hinders the delivery of quality skills development and affects the gender equality and social inclusion efforts. According to an Asian Development Bank study (2015), it takes about two years to fill vacant posts in Bangladesh. More recent studies indicate an 18 per cent filling rate (Aziz 2023). This has resulted

in an imbalanced student-to-teacher ratio of 21:1 in institutes on average, instead of the targeted 12:1, although it varies between institutions.³⁷

Staff transfers also disrupt continuity in institutions, and public training providers have limited control over the selection of instructors and support staff, which is under the control of the central Public Service Commission. Training institutes are left to hire part-time teaching staff at an extremely low salary of 7,000 Bangladesh taka monthly (US\$70), which puts training quality at risk. Efforts to establish mechanisms within the Technical and Madrasah Education Division or the Directorate of Technical Education, such as the TVET university, Teachers Recruitment Commission and the Teachers Qualifications Framework, have not been introduced, which puts considerable pressure on teachers in TVET institutes (Aziz 2023).

The percentage of female TVET instructors remains low, at 20.5 per cent, and significantly lower in technical teaching positions. And female leadership as principals and senior managers in TVET institutions is around 10 per cent (BANBEIS 2022). More motivation and encouragement are required to attract women to manage and teach in TVET institutions, particularly in public institutions. Traditional gender roles and rules regarding promotions and

transfers constrain women's professional growth (UNDP 2012). Assessment participants cited social hindrances, traditional gender roles favouring male employment, lack of suitable accommodations and inadequate transport facilities for women as barriers to women's interest in joining management or a teaching faculty.

The lack of women in senior managerial and teaching positions is also hampering institutional gender-responsiveness and leaving girls and women without role models. Secure residential facilities for female teachers would help motivate them to accept promotions. The private sector involvement in higher education, including the introduction of women-only institutions, provides opportunities for women's participation and leadership and should be expanded (ADB 2017).

The expansion of TVET institutions and the addition of new functions, such as counselling and placement officers for more relevant TVET, is experiencing delays due to a slow recruitment and selection process. It is important for the selection process to consider gender and inclusion factors and to explore support measures to achieve the recruitment targets (Aziz 2023).

37 For 2021, the teacher–student ratio was 1:21 for all types of institutions. This ratio was highest (1:116) in medical technology institutes and lowest (1:4) for marine technology (BANBEIS 2022: 58).



6

Recommendations

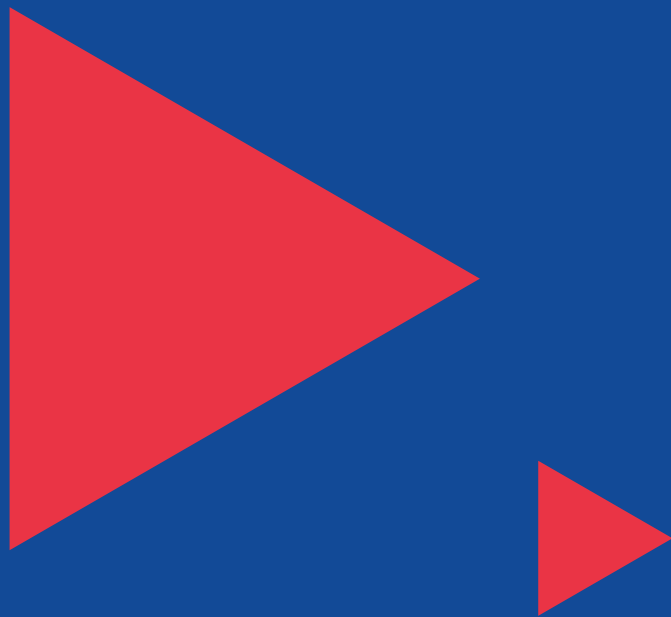




Photo: ©Farhana Alam/ILO

6 Recommendations

The NSDP 2022 and the National Action Plan for Skills Development 2022–2027 provide a thorough and forward-looking perspective for the future of the workforce in Bangladesh. Despite laudable progress made over the years, challenges remain significant, including the slow progress of gender equality and other inclusive dynamics in the TVET sector, which disproportionately affects marginalized girls and women. This includes rural and ethnic minorities and people with a disability in achieving skills and employment.

These challenges require expanded financial and human capital resources, coordination and collaboration. Bangladesh's development perspective is governed by the principles of "leaving no one behind", as are the TVET and entrepreneurship-related policies and mechanisms. However, there are gaps between the vision and implementation that need to be addressed most urgently. Of particular importance is intersectionality. If the TVET sector is not guided by a clear commitment to a gender equality and social inclusion-responsive and safe

environment for all, neither the policies nor the plans will lead to the desired transformative outcomes. Ensuring gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming and safeguarding measures across the TVET and entrepreneur system should be a priority. Equally, they cannot be managed separately because these values need to be internalized within the system.

The recommendations here are divided into two strategic entry points of the skills and entrepreneurship ecosystem:

- Bangladesh state administration, responsible for shaping, coordinating and executing TVET-related policies, strategies and action plans.
- Private sector actors, social partners, businesses, community-based and non-government organizations and development partners involved with TVET, employment and entrepreneurship development and the concerns of women and marginalized groups.

6.1 Strengthening the Government's execution of TVET policies, strategies and action plans

Continue consolidation of policies, legislation and governance to establish a unified TVET sector with a clear vision, regulations roles and functional clarity

1. Support consolidation of policies to effectively implement the NSDP, the National Qualifications Framework and the NSDA's and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division's skills development action plans, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Streamline policies and legislation and clarify the roles and

functions of the 63 ministries and departments and TVET actors to avoid overlaps and uncertainties in executing TVET functions. The policy agenda, covering all skills development programmes (including TVET and entrepreneurship) and the gender equality and social inclusion agenda should not contradict and not be in dissonance with each other.

The NSDA, as the coordinating agency for TVET and skills development, should facilitate this process through consensus-building and policy dialogue. Ensure that a gender equality and

social inclusion-responsive lens, which addresses intersectionality, is applied during this process.

2. Increase stakeholder participation in joint reviews of policies and action plans and in the development of implementing plans and procedures. Without alignment among all actors, policy implementation will be confusing and inefficient. Specific suggestions on how to engage:

- Develop a coordinated governance system that gives voice to both the central Government and decentralized actors in implementing a market-oriented training system. Ensure that policies and action plans are reviewed and amended with active involvement from the private sector, social partners, training providers, civil society actors and expert groups – beyond a consultative role.³⁸
- Build a common vision and commitment among the NSDA, the Technical and Madrasah Education Division, other relevant government agencies, industry skills councils, social partners and non-government and civil society organizations and clarify roles and responsibilities.
- Develop a gender equality and social inclusion-responsive skills development sector road map or masterplan, with milestones and targets.
- Allocate sufficient budget and human resources to facilitate the implementation and impact of monitoring of the NSDP and the action plans, thus ensuring a binding commitment based on a shared understanding and vision that are effectively communicated.

Support TVET sector actors in mainstreaming gender equality, inclusion and safeguarding measures

Gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming needs to be holistically integrated into every aspect of the TVET sector. The Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs' policies and strategies, as well as strategies developed for gender equality and social inclusion in the TVET sector, provide step-by-step operational plans that can guide the mainstreaming into administration and programming and can be reviewed and amended to the requirements of the NSDA and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division. With government priority given to gender-responsive and inclusive skills development and entrepreneurship, dedicated budgets and human resources must be committed to make mainstreaming a reality. A fund for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming should be established. The following recommendations highlight additional features that should be considered.

3. Set up a gender equality and social inclusion task force under the NSDA, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division that has a mandate for mainstreaming oversight. Appoint dedicated working groups and focal points across ministries for policy implementation, with the NSDA, the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division taking a lead in coordinating. Involving the Ministry, the mandate holder of gender mainstreaming, as co-chair of the task force and including other relevant ministries and committees with TVET mandates will ensure that gender equality and social inclusion are not ignored.³⁹

38 The close alignment between these actors is crucial so that future skills needs and underemployment challenge are addressed. It is vital to engage with non-government and community-based organizations because they have ears to the ground and reflect the voice of the people. Government agencies and businesses rarely have that insight, trust and understanding of local communities. Partnering with community-based organizations is critical, to understand the needs of communities and the nuances of culture and norms that are both beneficial and those that are inhibiting for their well-being and development. TVET offering, labour market support or entrepreneurial initiatives have to be strategically applied and should be based on a comprehensive understanding about the needs and the inherent capabilities of target groups and their communities. All this effort will of course have to be directed towards a demand-based intervention.

39 Sensitization training should be provided for all system actors (government, training providers, social partners, businesses, etc.) to foster a sensitive approach that challenges norms throughout the TVET sector and among actors.

- Representatives of groups working on women's rights, disability rights and disadvantaged persons' rights, including women leaders from the private sector, should have a vital role in decision-making at all stages, from planning to design, monitoring and evaluation.⁴⁰
- Review policies and the Technical and Madrasah Education Division's action plans and clarify roles and responsibilities and assign additional specific resources for gender mainstreaming to the Technical Education Board for quality assurance and monitoring.

4. Develop a unified understanding and commitment through the task force.

Sensitization training should be provided across the system to foster a gender equality and social inclusion-sensitive approach that challenges norms throughout the TVET sector and among all actors.

- Define the scope and what is meant by gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming (which should be guided by the understanding of how various forms of discrimination intersect and compound barriers for individuals).
- Generate a gender equality and social inclusion framework for a unified understanding and commitment among all actors, including donors, on what defines gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming:
 - address biases and stereotypes within the skills development system;
 - address the need for anti-harassment and safeguarding measures;
 - address heterogeneity and intersectionality, which lead to multiple barriers and hence require multidimensional interventions;
 - provide dedicated resources for capacity-building and sensitization for all actors; and
 - set up mechanisms, conduct research and monitor impact.

5. Develop a gender equality and social inclusion policy and framework for the TVET and entrepreneurship sector.

- Review and amend policies, in alignment with the gender equality and social inclusion framework. This includes amending policies and laws on TVET, employment, entrepreneurship, gender equality (such as the gender policy for implementing the Eighth Five-Year Plan) and sexual harassment.
- Develop and enact a gender equality and social inclusion policy with binding legal provisions for the TVET sector and entrepreneurship system.
- Develop a road map with intervention areas, milestones and agreed indicators for performance. This should include:
 - clarity of approach to mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion in the TVET sector;
 - agreed goals and timelines;
 - gender equality and social inclusion as criteria for registration, accreditation and funding of TVET and assessment centres;
 - defined type of target group-specific programming that has not been addressed by the Government but should be, from a gender equality and social inclusion point of view; and
 - clarity of roles and responsibilities, governance and accountability mechanism;
- Disseminate the policy, framework and road map widely.

6. Share and capitalize on good practices and innovations for system uptake across the TVET sector.

- Organize knowledge-sharing workshops on good practices regarding how gender equality, social inclusion and intersectionality have been addressed in other countries at the system and programme levels in TVET, labour markets and entrepreneurship.

40 Including governance, management systems, accreditation systems, recruitment of staff, infrastructure development, curricula and training materials development, programme and course delivery, assessments, research and documentation, monitoring and evaluation.

- Review the rich experiences available within Bangladesh and internationally and embed good practices of gender equality and social inclusion into the TVET sector.
- Learn from private training providers and development partners about institutionalizing labour rights and decent work into MSMEs, gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming, safeguarding measures and gender-responsive career guidance and placement support in TVET and enterprise development.
- Review and leverage local initiatives on demand-oriented gender equality and social inclusion-responsive TVET provision, workplaces and enterprise development initiatives involving local governments, associations, partners and TVET providers.
- Communicate these efforts effectively across the skills development ecosystem.

7. Develop a time-bound operational plan.

- Develop a comprehensive operational plan with budgets, including milestones and performance indicators and a monitoring process. The plan should cover governance, management, accreditation, recruitment, infrastructure adjustments, teacher and instructor training, curricula development, programme delivery, assessments, research and monitoring. Include gender equality and social inclusion-sensitization training across the sector. Articulate compliance criteria for TVET institutions and set deadlines for these institutions to meet the process and physical requirements. Review current registration requirements of the training organization registration system.
- Ensure budget allocations to integrate gender equality and social inclusion into the TVET sector. These resources should be utilized to establish a national steering and working committee under the NSDA, with representation from the Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs, the Directorate of Technical Education, the Technical Education Board and the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and

other relevant actors, including local representatives.

- Reduce staff shortages within the Technical Education Board, which will be crucial for quality assurance. The phased implementation plan, starting with capacity-building of the 471 registered training organizations, should include a compliance framework, communication of gender equality and social inclusion guidelines and the appointment of a dedicated team for support, mentoring and quality assurance within these institutions.

8. Set up a gender and social inclusion mainstreaming mechanism within the TVET sector. Gender equality and social inclusion must be viewed as integral to the work of the NSDA and ministries and thus included in all planning and implementation. Hence, a systematic approach must be put in place with an appropriate mechanism to facilitate gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming at the institutional level. This includes supporting departments, ministries and industry skills councils in developing plans of action, with measurable indicators as well as monitoring progress.

9. Mainstream gender equality and social inclusion into training design, delivery and recruitment practices. Gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming needs to be holistically integrated into every aspect of the TVET sector, including governance, management systems, accreditation systems, recruitment of staff, infrastructure development, curricula and training materials development, programme and course delivery, assessments, research, documentation and monitoring and evaluation. Comprehensive guidance for a step-by-step approach is provided in the guides developed by the ILO on gender equality and disability inclusion in TVET.⁴¹ Table 6 elaborates additional recommendations.

41 Several implementation guides were developed by the ILO on mainstreaming gender equality and disability inclusion.

Table 6. Addressing gender equality and social inclusion in various areas

Area of intervention	Target and measure
Gender equality and social inclusion-responsive identification of skills needs and occupations	Make the process for identifying skills needs and developing competency standards gender equality and social inclusion-responsive. This includes assessing reskilling and upskilling needs for groups at risk of losing jobs (such as ready-made garment women workers). Ensure inclusive representation.
<i>Build up capacities within industry skills councils, the Technical Education Board and the NSDA.</i>	
Gender equality and social inclusion-responsive teacher and instructor training	Introduce gender-sensitive teaching practices and student-centred pedagogy. Integrate the concept of gender equality and social inclusion as cross-cutting issues in technical and core work skills. Sensitize actors on intersectionality and how to address learning needs of trainees. Review teaching materials to eliminate hidden assumptions regarding gender roles and other discriminatory behaviour.
<i>Build up capacities within the Dhaka Technical Teachers Training Institute and the Directorate of Technical Education institutions and their teachers by offering continuous learning and exchange, also by establishing a community of practice.</i>	
Gender equality and social inclusion-responsive curriculum development and training materials	Ensure gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming in technical and soft or core work skills. Build up capacities of technical subcommittees and the Technical Education Board. Ensure inclusive representation of specialized experts in the curriculum development process. Topics should address gender equality and reflect roles of boys and girls, gender-based violence, sensitization on harassment, labour rights and decent work. These topics are highly relevant for the development of professional competencies in the world of work and should not be treated as mere add-ons but integrated into day-to-day learning practices and preparation for the world of work.
Gender equality and social inclusion-responsive recognition of prior learning or assessment	Introduce gender equality and social inclusion-responsive practices and safeguarding measures into recognition of prior learning and assessment process. Consider specific needs of disadvantaged groups (flexible timing, accessibility and the cost of delivering recognition of prior learning).
<i>Build up capacities among authorities responsible for recognition of prior learning and certification, such as the NSDA, the Technical Education Board and the Bureau of Non-Formal Education.</i>	
Gender equality and social inclusion-responsive recruitment of teaching faculty and management	Review and introduce gender equality and social inclusion-responsive recruitment and promotion practices of teachers and management. This should cover mobility requirements for promotion, part-time provisions and incentives to increase the numbers of women and persons from other disadvantaged groups. Consider recruiting gender equality and social inclusion focal points and counselling and placement officers as permanent staff in TVET institutions. Explore additional incentives and bridging measures for women and disadvantaged groups where required.
Gender equality and social inclusion-responsive student recruitment	Review student selection practices, including those in Directorate of Technical Education-funded polytechnics, technical training centres, technical schools and colleges, for entry barriers and ensure access to stipends. Explore additional bridging measures for disadvantaged groups where required.

10. Integrate gender equality, social inclusion and safeguarding measures as binding compliance criteria for institutional development. To sensitize the culture of TVET and assessment centres, awareness needs to be heightened in order for practices to change. The integration of gender equality and social inclusion into the process of registration and accreditation would help lead to that change. Ensure that these measures are well-resourced and monitored so that providers create the

enabling environment. Learn from previous projects.

- Review good practices of gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming in formal public and private TVET centres, counselling placement services and entrepreneurship provision (for example, the model centres supported by the ILO-supported Skills 21, the BRAC Career Hub and UCEP's Dhaka Ahsania Mission).

- Review the accreditation mechanism under the Technical Education Board through a gender equality and social inclusion lens and explore a funding mechanism (such as the National Human Resource Development Fund) that can be linked to targeted interventions and the registration and accreditation of training and assessment centres.
- Earmark funding for infrastructure development and institutional development.
- Build up capacities of ministries, the Directorate of Technical Education, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and the Technical Education Board for setting up and implementing a gender equality and social inclusion mechanism, combined with institutional development.

11. Promote continuous training and strengthening of capacities within programming.

- Include gender equality and social inclusion-sensitization training and capacity-building across the sector as a compulsory feature. Organize periodic and systematic capacity-development programmes for staff and among implementing partners and actors for gender equality and social inclusion integration into all dimensions:
 - in programme and project design, activities and implementation through use of gender analysis and survey tools that are gender equality and social inclusion-responsive.
 - in planning and research;
 - in budgeting;
 - in communications and advocacy; and
 - in monitoring and evaluation.
- Address issues of frequent staff transfers, which lead to setbacks in mainstreaming efforts in training and assessment centres. After recruiting teachers, assessors, career and placement counsellors and managers, continuous development (on and offline) through training workshops and fostering cross-learning and exchange (through communities of practice) could be introduced to ensure that gender equality and social inclusion-sensitive teaching practice deepens and continues.

12. Promote active role of TVET providers at the local level.

- To ensure operational effectiveness and broader outreach, ongoing devolution efforts of TVET should be strengthened because they support the more autonomous management of TVET institutes and assessment centres. This shift will grant greater authority to principals, enabling them to expand operations and generate funds from local resources, hire additional staff and reallocate budgets according to the specific needs of their training activities.
- TVET institutions can take on a vital role in strengthening the local economy and creating a more skilled workforce as a result of close collaboration with labour market players and enterprise promotion services. They can foster dialogue and collaboration between trainees, teachers, secondary schools, businesses, local government and other actors in the community. This would help ensure that TVET programmes are relevant to the needs of the community, that trainees can access training and other services and that trainees can find meaningful employment or business opportunities after graduation.
- Partnerships should be formed between training providers, civil society organizations, businesses, local government and programmes associated with training, entrepreneurship and employment support. It is important to learn from successful practices and experiences gained through local funding and collaboration with local government, industry, trade associations and chambers of commerce.
- Scalable local skills and entrepreneurship initiatives need to be reviewed and identified for replication. Examples might include formal and informal apprenticeships and training for migration and reintegration by organizations, such as BRAC STAR and UCEP. Initiatives like UCEP's Uttoron promote public-private partnerships and collaboration with city corporations in Sylhet.

13. Promote evidence-based decision-making based on data and the sound monitoring of systems and research.

- Evidence - based decision - making is essential for successful and relevant skills development and entrepreneurship interventions. This means that decisions about these interventions should be based on data and evidence rather than on gut feelings or assumptions. This requires a well-functioning monitoring system that collects high-quality data. This data should be regularly analysed to identify successful cases and areas for improvement. Data analysis is essential for assessing the effectiveness of programming and interventions.
- Timely and good - quality disaggregated data are critical for evidence - based decision - making. Existing efforts to aggregate and analyse data at the national level need to be further strengthened. This is especially relevant when evaluating the impact of targeted interventions on women and disadvantaged groups. It means collecting data that are disaggregated by gender, age, income groups, various types of ethnicity, religions and disabilities and region.
- It is also important to analyse trainees' performance and outcome data. This data are crucial for assessing graduation rates and labour market outcomes and for identifying whether and why certain groups face barriers in attachment or internships, employment and self-employment.
- It is also important to monitor how well TVET providers engage with enterprises for internships and placement at the local level. This data can be used to identify successful cases, trades and regions and to identify areas for improvement and replication.
- Regular surveys, such as tracer studies and satisfaction surveys of enterprises, trainees and parents, are critical for assessing the effectiveness of programming and interventions. Impact studies assessing to what extent training, placement and entrepreneurship support has contributed

to increased agency and transformation of groups might be undertaken. All this data provide valuable information for evidence-based improvements.

- Undertake qualitative and quantitative statistical research and analysis of data to get a deeper understanding of underlying factors leading to discrimination and barriers or to assess how interventions have changed people's lives. Given the rich datasets and numbers, more statistical in-depth analysis and data modelling can be explored to assess progress made for each target group.

14. Mainstream gender equality and social inclusion into awareness-raising on the benefits of TVET and entrepreneurship.

Well-designed awareness campaigns can be very effective to challenge cultures, norms and practices to foster change. Some assessment stakeholder participants noted that the way TVET is being communicated perpetuates a traditional gender-stereotyped perspective, which may be why certain target groups do not feel represented. It is not known whether the impact of previous or ongoing awareness campaigns and promotional activities, including job fairs, has been systematically assessed or to what extent such an assessment would consider the diversity and heterogeneity of the groups to be reached. It is crucial to know whether these efforts have ultimately led to higher enrolment and participation and which groups felt more addressed. More localized approaches, taking advantage of collaborations with local non-government and community-based organizations and applying target group-specific approaches to attract prospective trainees, families and communities could be more effective (UNICEF 2019). Government-run formal training institutions rely on centralized campaigns due to a lack of resources for localized initiatives to promote their course offer, which could affect capacity for outreach.

Optimizing awareness-raising on the benefits of TVET and challenging stereotypes requires a variety of interventions and capacity-building efforts:

- Review the communications strategy of the Government with a gender equality and social inclusion lens and assess the impact of awareness initiatives on specific target groups.
- Explore evidence-based, inclusive communication strategies to target a diverse spectrum of actors and promote understanding, behaviour change and collaboration among them.
- Continue sensitization and capacity-building efforts with all actors in the TVET sector.

Table 7. Suggested actor-specific awareness-raising efforts

Actor	Intervention areas
Ministries and departments, including local government institutions and training providers	• Build up capacities within the NSDA, the Technical and Madrasah Education Division, the Directorate of Technical Education, the Technical Education Board, the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training and other departments on gender equality and social inclusion-responsive awareness-raising efforts. • Develop a positive approach towards gender equality and social inclusion-responsive TVET and reach out to local government institutions and training providers and assessment centres. • Promote target group-specific case studies and role models.
Employers' organizations and their local industry associations and chambers of commerce	• Present business cases, sensitization and a positive approach towards inclusion to reach out to their members. • Use the business case to develop compelling narratives. • Promote target group-specific case studies and role models.
Entrepreneurship networks	• Encourage the National Association of Small Cottage Industries and the SME Foundation to pilot initiatives and develop a business case. • Explore and communicate incentives and outreach campaigns.

6.2 Strengthening capacities of employers and trade unions to be more engaged in TVET system at the macro, meso and micro levels

- Previous efforts to strengthen business sector involvement through industry skills councils for TVET design and implementation show promising results. According to the NSDP Action Plan, a more active role of industry skills councils, employers' organizations and business associations in human resource planning and training delivery (apprenticeships, upskilling and reskilling) is envisaged. The business sector needs to be in the driver's seat and share responsibility for the effective implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and to take an active part in competency standards development, assessments and certification. Sensitize and build up capacities of the industry skills councils and employers on gender equality and social inclusion for skills needs assessments, occupational analysis and standards development.
- Numerous initiatives have successfully tested workplace-based skills development, including formal and informal apprenticeship initiatives and promoting training and upskilling for women and disadvantaged groups. With their strong local and enterprise focus, scalable initiatives like formal and informal apprenticeship approaches by the ILO,

B-SkillFUL, BRAC STAR and the Centre of Excellence for Leather⁴² or upskilling and reskilling (Sudokkho) show considerable potential for broadening and diversifying TVET provision with strong outreach, flexibility and sustainability – if they are well anchored and promoted within the local ecosystem.

- Policymakers may continue to explore incentives and public-private partnerships for the private sector to take greater ownership of TVET and invest in workplace-based training, upskilling, reskilling and apprenticeships. Learning from successful international experiences offers opportunities to incentivize private sector engagement with women, informal sector workers and disadvantaged groups. A recently published ILO study offers a variety of good practices for incentive-based gender equality and social inclusion initiatives (ILO 2022c).
- Licensing requirements and access to loans and working capital can generate private sector demand for training and certification. An increased number of countries (including India and Nepal) make it compulsory for construction companies to be licensed and, in case of public construction contracts, to hire certified workers. This example illustrates the potential for upskilling and recognition of prior learning for worker certification, leading to improved industry standards, productivity and higher wages.

Support social partners and the business sector at the national and local levels in mainstreaming gender equality, social inclusion and safeguarding measures

The ILO has piloted gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming initiatives with employers (Bangladesh Employers' Federation) and business organizations (National

Association of Small Cottage Industries) as well as workers' organizations (Bangladesh Labour Foundation, Workers Resource Centre, National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education). Sensitization and capacity-building of these organizations to reach out to their members included promotion of decent work, formalization of informal enterprises, inclusive vocational training, gender equality and women's leadership and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace.⁴³

Assessing the impact and scale of these examples should include the development of a strategy for the roll-out of these examples across the business sector (including industry skills councils and the Bangladesh Employers' Federation and their member enterprises, industry associations, National Association of Small Cottage Industries and the SME Foundation) and across workers' organizations and their members, so that gender-sensitive and inclusive workplace practices are adopted and safeguarding mechanisms are institutionalized across their member base, including the informal sector. This requires interventions at the national and local levels.

- Build a vision for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming and intersectionality and sensitizing leadership in employer's (Bangladesh Employers' Federation) and national and local industry associations and business and enterprise promotion networks, including microfinance institutions, the National Association of Small Cottage Industries and the SME Foundation.
- Build a vision for gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming and intersectionality and sensitizing leadership in workers organizations (Workers Resource Centre, National Coordination Committee for Workers' Education) and among their member bases.

⁴² See OECD 2017, Chapter 9.

⁴³ For example, ready-made garment sector projects; and the Japan-funded projects PRIDE/PRS (2020–2022), which supported the Government and social partners to strengthen outreach to informal sector enterprises and workers while addressing gender-related barriers, addressing gender-based violence, sexual harassment and decent work and promoting formalization strategies. Specific sectors included domestic work and construction and agriculture.

- Establish collaborative partnerships between skills development, worker certification, licensing and access to loans, involving industry associations, banks and development partners to promote gender equality and social inclusion. Develop comprehensive implementing plans, gender equality and social inclusion policies and procedures with defined targets for increasing the representation of women and disadvantaged groups in their organizations. Allocate specific budgets and human resources for implementation of plans and monitoring progress. Update guidelines for gender equality and social inclusion in workplace-based training and implement safeguarding mechanisms, drawing lessons from successful initiatives, such as Skills 21, Sudokkho, the BRAC STAR project, UCEP's Dhaka Ahsania Mission, the Centre of Excellence for Leather, B-SkillFUL and ILO ready-made garment initiatives.
- Promote capacity-building of management and staff of social partners and their networks to develop a stronger role in the promotion of gender-sensitive and inclusive training and assessments and entrepreneurship development.
- Continue to invest in women's leadership initiatives and collect good practices and role models to be shared and promoted.
- Support social partners in outreach to other national and local business networks (chambers, industry associations and their members) and organizations representing workers. Proactively support capacities of women-run business networks (Sylhet Women's Chamber of Commerce) and women workers' organizations and networks.
- Collect data, conduct target group-specific research and monitor impact on progress made on the targets and outreach.

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► Annex II Guiding questions for informant interviews and group discussions

Government agencies, training providers, NGOs

1. As one central actor in designing and implementing the TVET Policies and TVET Action plan, how well do you think are your particular needs and challenges been addressed? In areas of gender equality returning migrants, persons with a disability? Where do you see particular gaps and which should be addressed?
2. Which cultures and norms do you think dominate and prevent women and disadvantaged groups from equally participating in training, counselling and the labour market or as entrepreneurs?
 - Society, parents, community
 - Training provision or service delivery in the labour market
 - How have these been addressed in your organization and in service delivery?
3. How would you rate the organizations' understanding and commitment towards gender equality and social inclusion? (To what extent are women and disadvantaged groups treated equally? Can you give an example?)
4. What are some gender equality and social inclusion-related aspects that you have addressed effectively in your organization?
 - At institutional level (gender policy, focal points, budgets, capacity-building)
 - o Policy or action plan or vision and goals
 - o Budgets and human resources
 - o Capacity-building
 - In-service provision (mainstreaming and targeted programmes)
 - o Mainstreaming
 - o Targeted interventions
5. What are some of the major challenges you face in implementing gender equality in your work?
 - Institutional level
 - Service provision
6. Data: Are there sufficient gender equality and social inclusion national and regional data to support TVET planning training?
 - How do you consider gender equality and social inclusion in sector analysis and for future skills like digitization and green jobs?
 - Where do you think your current training offer covers future skills needs effectively?
 - How do you ensure that training placements adequately pre-empts potential barriers when planning or reviewing training programmes? (digitization, green skills as potential male occupations, etc.)
7. How do you monitor progress made in areas of gender equality and social inclusion ?
 - Institutional
 - Programme delivery

Workers and employers

1. As one central actor in designing and implementing the TVET Policies and TVET Action plan, how well do you think are your particular needs and challenges been addressed? In areas of gender equality returning migrants, persons with a disability? Where do you see particular gaps that should be addressed? Where do you see progress?
2. Which cultures and norms do you think dominate and prevent women and disadvantaged groups from equally participating in training, counselling and the labour market or as entrepreneurs?
 - Society, parents, community
 - Training provision or service delivery in the labour market
 - How have these been addressed in your organization and in service delivery?
3. How would you rate your organizations' understanding and commitment towards gender equality and social inclusion? (To what extent are women and disadvantaged groups treated equally? Can you give an example?)
4. How has your organization participated in policy dialogue on gender equality and social inclusion in TVET and entrepreneurship for policy development and programme design and implementation at national or provincial level
 - Have representatives been systematically trained and involved?
 - Have representatives of your organizations the required capacities and understanding to contribute to gender equality and social inclusion in TVET and Entrepreneurship in policy dialogue and programming?
5. What are some key gender and social inclusion related aspects that you have addressed effectively in your organization?
 - At institutional level (gender policy, focal points, budgets, capacity-building, safe workplace practices)
 - o Policy or action plan or vision and goals
 - o Budgets and human resources
 - o Capacity-building
 - Services for members: (gender policy, focal points, budgets, capacity-building, safe workplace practices)
 - In service provision (mainstreaming and targeted programmes) towards members
 - o Mainstreaming vs Targeted interventions
6. What are some of the major challenges you face in implementing gender equality in your work?
 - Institutional level
 - Services for members
 - Service provision or programmes for disadvantaged groups in
7. Data: Are there sufficient gender equality and social inclusion national and regional data to support TVET planning training?
 - Where do you think your current training offer covers future skills needs effectively?
 - How do you ensure that your service offer pre-empts potential barriers when planning or reviewing training programmes? (digitization, green skills as potential male occupations)
8. How do you monitor progress made in areas of gender equality and social inclusion ?
 - Institutional
 - Services for members
 - Programme delivery

Framework for SWOT analysis for gender equality social inclusion in training provision and entrepreneurship services

Strength	Weakness
Please list what your organization is doing well when you address gender equality and social inclusion: • Governance (vision and representation) • Management (vision and representation) • Infrastructure adjustment • Teaching, mentoring and learning • Faculty and staff • Data collection and monitoring • Engagement and linkages with enterprises, government, specialized organizations • Resource allocation • Student services (coaching, counselling, linking for internships, and placements) • others Have you taken specific initiatives on gender equality and social inclusion that you feel had an impact on a) your organization's operations or staff or culture or b) on trainees? Please take into account internal and external factors including green jobs, digitization, linkages to finance, jobs and markets and entrepreneurship development	Please list what your organization is doing not so well when you address gender equality and social inclusion: • Governance (vision and representation) • Management (vision and representation) • Infrastructure adjustment • Teaching, /mentoring and learning • Faculty and staff • Data collection and monitoring • Engagement and linkages with enterprises, government, specialized organizations • Resource allocation • Student services (coaching, counselling, linking for internships, and placements) • others Where does your organization have particular weaknesses which hinders the organization in progressing on gender equality and social inclusion for staff and trainees? Please take into account internal and external factors including green jobs, digitization, linkages to finance, jobs and markets and entrepreneurship development
Opportunities	Threats
Which opportunities do you see within your organization and outside, which must be explored, could better address gender equality and social inclusion in organization and in reaching out to disadvantaged groups? Some areas to be explored • Emerging labour market opportunities • Enabling policies towards gender equality and social inclusion in TVET and Entrepreneurships • Availability of funds and programmes for gender equality and social inclusion • Potential donor and business collaboration • Other Please take into account internal and external factors, including economic, social and cultural factors, or green jobs, digitization, linkages to finance, jobs and markets and entrepreneurship development	Which challenges (threats) have been observed by the organization towards making progress on gender equality and social inclusion? Some areas to be explored • Slow progress in Reforms • Resistance of local stakeholders • Stereotypes and social norms limiting progress • Limited job opportunities.... Please take into account internal and external factors, including economic, social and cultural factors, or green jobs, digitization, linkages to finance, jobs and markets and entrepreneurship development

► Annex III SWOT analysis of visited training centres

The objective of this assignment also included a quick SWOT analysis to test a tool that would assess the progress of gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming in public and private TVET institutes in Bangladesh. Visits were made to four public TVET institutes currently supported by the Skills 21 project, including two polytechnics, one VSC and one TSC.⁴⁴ Two private training providers were visited (BRAC in Sylhet and UCEP-Dhaka). The purpose was to gather initial information regarding their initiatives and performance, which are however, neither conclusive nor representative. This would need a systematic survey of how the public and private TVET institutes address gender equality and social inclusion. The institutes visited, receive project funding support and their faculty and management participate in capacity-building programmes. The public training institutes aim to become centres of excellence or model training institutes. They collaborate with the private sector, engage local enterprises and have implemented measures for gender equality, disability inclusion and safeguarding. They also have established career guidance support facilities and monitoring systems to collect data on labour market outcomes.

However, there are concerns about the sustainability of these initiatives beyond the project duration due to limited autonomy, staffing shortages (particularly in public training institutes) and inadequate availability of funds for operations, training delivery, counselling and placement services and awareness raising activities. As mentioned, earlier, gender equality and social inclusion have not been fully institutionalized and rolled out within the TVET system. There is a lack of a gender equality and social inclusion policy, capacity building and allocated staff to execute these responsibilities. From the interactions with the institutes and staff, there has certainly been a shift towards more gender equality and social inclusion responsive training, resulting from closer interaction with local actors and the private sector and internship and placement support for better labour market outcomes. But more needs to be done.

All principals highlighted the positive impact stipends have on female enrolment and retention; however, in the case of people with disabilities or indigenous groups, stipends have been less effective. There is a notable share of female trainees, particularly in the case of polytechnics in Dhaka and Sylhet but also in TSCs, who highlighted the difficulties they face in getting attachments and employment. Some also see further education in their vocational field as a better option. In the case of TSC in Sylhet, access to career counselling and attachment and placement support have been promising, resulting in a positive response and commitment from the private sector to continue provide internships and hire female graduates (in the case of computer related courses).

In all public institutes, shortage of staff is severely felt, and women are severely underrepresented. Women teachers tend to favour non-technical subjects, and progress in softer trades, like architecture. Although there is a perception that harassment is not an issue in TVET centres, there is no mechanism in place to address it. Gender equality training has been provided to faculty and teachers, but there has been little sharing or follow-up.

Feedback from other actors, however, as mentioned in Chapter 5, highlight that most institutes remain rather supply-driven and have limited teaching capacities, lack actual equipment and infrastructure. With the exception of the model institutions, there is limited interactions with the private sector in programme design and implementation and for linking and placement. The focus remains on enrolment numbers and access, with less attention given to retention, quality and employment outcomes. Teachers highlighted that there is significant need for additional professional training, upskilling in technical but also in gender equality and social inclusion- related and core work skills related matters. Training on gender equality, social inclusion, harassment, gender-based

44 Dhaka Mohila Polytechnic Institute, Bangladesh Korea Technical Training Centre, Sylhet Technical School & College; Sylhet Polytechnic Institute, Sylhet.

violence and workers' rights and responsibility is only marginally addressed and not further deepened. This needs to be adjusted in teacher training and curricula and the training of students.

Overview of SWOT analysis for public TVET institutions



Findings from private training providers (such as BRAC and UCEP) may not be representative of the overall private training provision, as these organizations are known for their innovations, outreach, scale and strong focus on community outreach and labour market outcomes. They have demonstrated more flexibility in budgeting need-based training, human resource allocation and the offering of competency-based short-term courses. They provide assessment services and have strong connections with local labour markets and the business community. These organizations have internalized gender equality, social inclusion and safeguarding measures in their organizational policies. In contrast, government training institutions lack additional resources for local course promotion, while private providers have more flexibility to proactively reach out to families and hence enjoy credibility and trust from communities, resulting in more enrolment and retention.



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