



# PROMOTING MARKET DRIVEN EMPLOYABLE SKILLS

Highlights of the Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP) Project, 2014-19



# FOREWORD



As with many other developing countries, it is a challenge for Bangladesh to develop the skills of young people. A better-skilled workforce would enable Bangladesh to take advantage of new economic opportunities and boost the employment options for the country's growing workforce.

The International Labour Organization's (ILO) initiatives in Bangladesh aim to improve the enabling environment for industry skills development, address the mismatch between the supply and demand for skills training and drive the increased employability of young women and men.

The ILO has long worked with the Government of Bangladesh and social partners to reform the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system, thereby improve access for people to increase their skills and employability, in particular, youth, women and people from vulnerable groups.

The ILO initiated a TVET Reform Project in 2008 to strengthen the TVET system in Bangladesh. As a continuation of that project, the ILO launched the Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP) Project in 2014 to further strengthen the country's skills training. The ILO also extended technical support for implementation of the National Skills Development Policy of 2011.

The B-SEP Project to be closed on June 2019 with some stellar achievements: The employment rate of graduates in project institutes increased by 76 per cent – up from 25 per cent in Year . In an internal project evaluation survey , 80 per cent of employers expressed satisfaction with newly hired certified graduates, which indicates a better trained, qualified and competent workforce with increased economic opportunities.

The B-SEP Project improved planning, coordination and delivery of demand-driven, equitable and gender-sensitive competency-based training programmes for workforce segments. It improved mechanisms, programmes and services that strengthen the links between the demand and supply of skills in target sectors. A total of 1,202 students received certification under the new qualification framework, and more than 100 employers introduced workplace learning programmes in their companies. And the project increased access to skills programmes and employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups in targeted sectors.

The project also supported the development of Human Resource Development Fund framework, a 5 per cent admission quota for persons with disabilities at all TVET institutes and the Apprenticeship Strategy 2017.

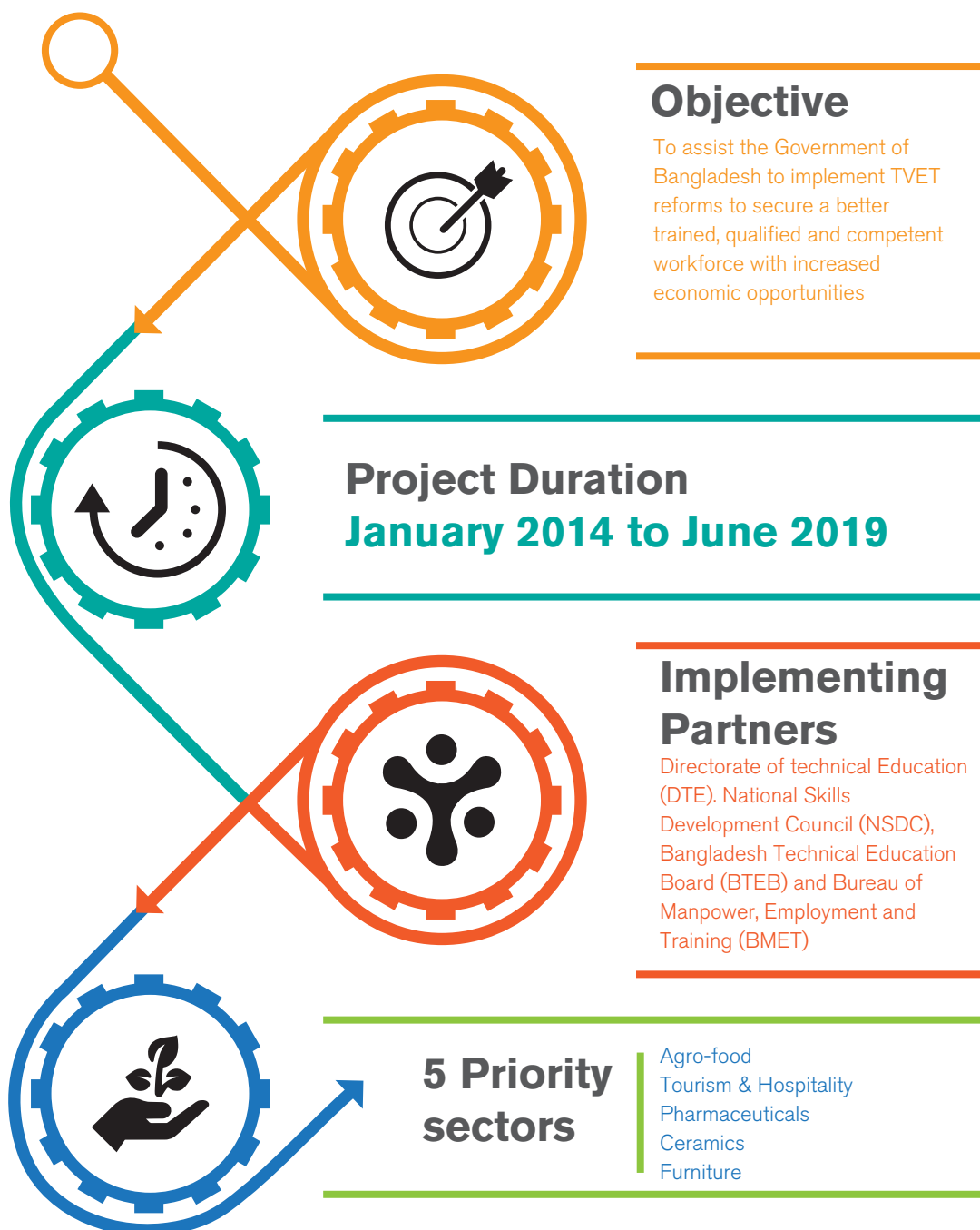
This brochure highlights many of the achievements of the B-SEP Project and its focus on creating a stronger foundation upon which Bangladesh can build the skilled workforce it needs for the future.

**Tuomo Poutiainen**

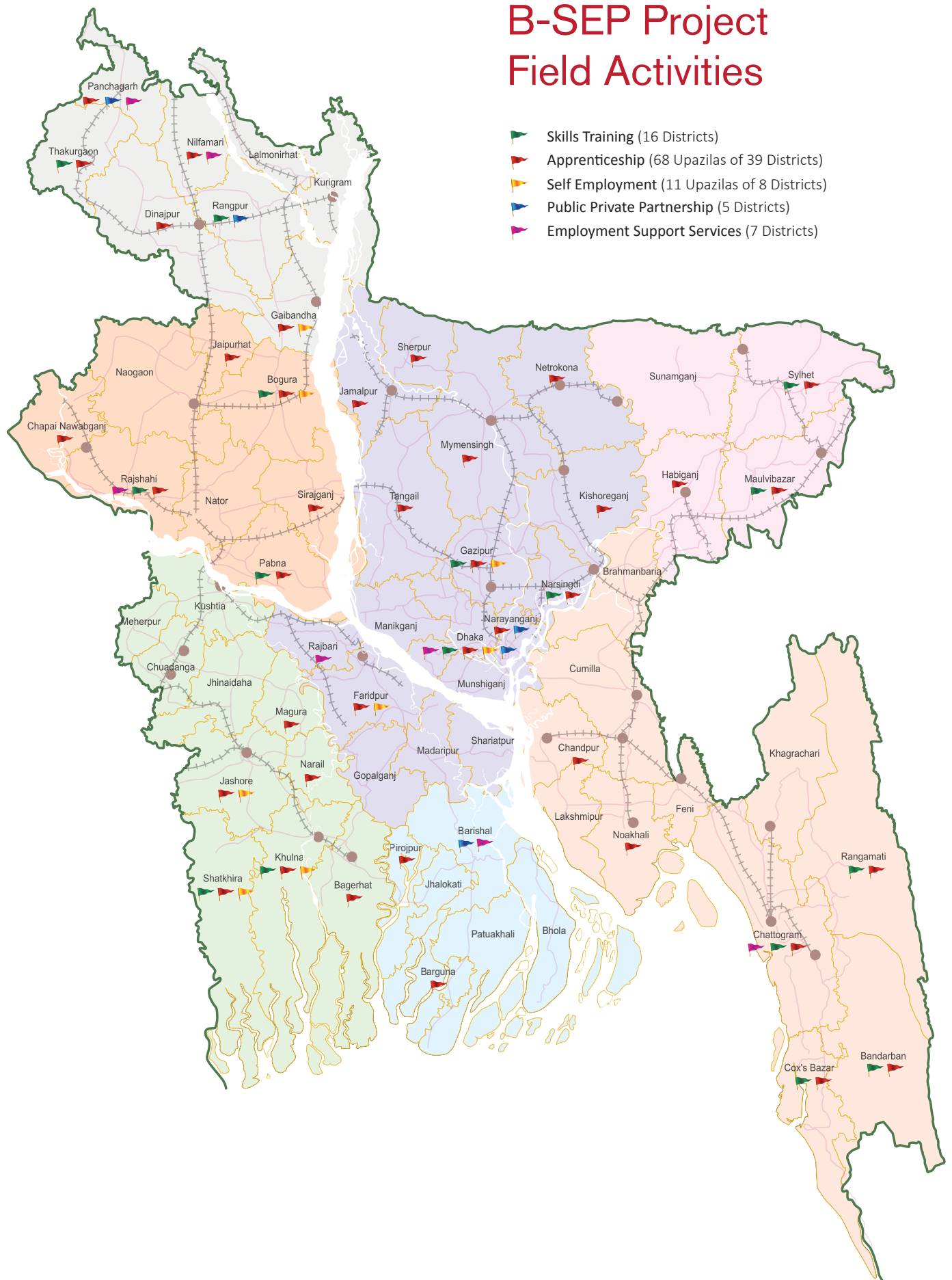
Country Director

ILO Country Office for Bangladesh

# B-SEP project snapshot



# B-SEP Project Field Activities



# Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP) Project

Every year, almost two million young people enter the Bangladesh workforce. There is an urgent need to provide opportunities for skills training that matches the growing needs of industry. In 2014, the Canadian Government teamed with the Government of Bangladesh and the ILO to fund the Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP) Project to deepen skills reform for improved productivity and economic growth.

The B-SEP Project tackled the challenges facing the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) sector by developing institutional capacity of the skills system as well as building industry capacity for improved productivity. This included an inclusive and effective skills system that links institutions and industries, matching supply and demand for skilled workers as well as promoting social inclusion.

By reaching out to youth, especially female youth in remote and marginalized areas, with skills training, the B-SEP Project worked to provide better employment opportunities for young men and women while meeting the changing needs of enterprises. This, in turn, will affect the country's attainment of decent work, sustainable economic development and poverty reduction.



# Building skills, building a better workforce: The four B-SEP project components and achievements

**The B-SEP Project, 2014–19, comprised four areas of activities:**

## Increase skills funding, improve planning and establish employment support services

The B-SEP Project supported national skills policy implementation by introducing mechanisms for skills planning, funding and management systems.

**Directorate of Technical Education to allocate budget to run NTVQF courses** – The National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) supports skills development pathways that provide access to qualifications and assist the transition from training to work. Following advocacy by the B-SEP Project on the merits of the NTVQF, the Directorate of Technical Education agreed to run and fund competency-based national qualifications courses and assessments in its TVET institutes. This commitment is important because it will help strengthen the NTVQF system.

**Five public-private partnerships piloted in TVET institutes** – The B-SEP Project established five public-private partnerships between the Directorate of Technical Education's TVET institutes in Dhaka, Barisal, Narayanganj, Panchagarh and Rangpur divisions and private-sector enterprises. The public-private partnerships demonstrated the pathways for private-sector investment in skills development. They created opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience and technical skills in an industrial environment that prepares them to find jobs upon completion of their training. Based on the success and lessons from these pilots, efforts are under way to roll out the public-private partnership model to more TVET institutes.



**Eight employment support service units piloted** – The B-SEP Project piloted employment support service units in eight TVET institutions that work closely with industry skills councils to create links with various enterprises for job placement. The eight institutes participating in the pilot: Bangladesh Institute of Glass and Ceramics, Rajshahi Mohila Polytechnic Institute, Panchagarh TSC, Rajbari TSC, Nilphamari TSC, Barisal TSC, Underprivileged Children's Education Program Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Korea Technical Training Center. More than 6,000 students used the employment support service in the eight institutes that experimented with this model. Job fairs helped forge links with enterprises.

## Competency-based training and assessment, quality and relevance

The B-SEP Project targeted competency-based training and assessment to improve the quality and market relevance of the country's TVET. Support was provided to the pivotal government agencies – the Directorate of Technical Education and the Bangladesh Technical Education Board – for implementing and regulating new courses, in accordance with the NTVQF.

**25 competency standards developed in five sectors** – The B-SEP Project helped the Bangladesh Technical Education Board to develop competency standards for 25 occupations, including machine operation, industrial machine maintenance, lacquer polishing, housekeeping, tour guiding and ceramic decoration. The competency standards were developed in collaboration with the private sector to ensure that industry needs are met. This helped bridge the gap between the provision of TVET and the skills needed in various sectors.



## Industry skills development

The B-SEP Project worked to strengthen (i) enterprise capacity to improve productivity; (ii) employer-led apprenticeships to improve workplace performance; and (iii) increased demand for and utilization of skills in specific sectors. This included the expansion of apprenticeship systems in both the formal and informal sectors and recognition of prior learning.

**Apprenticeships in formal and informal sectors strengthened** – With the support of the B-SEP Project, the number of formal apprenticeships increased from fewer than 100 in 2007 to more than 12,000 by the end of June 2018. Formal apprenticeship programmes are employer led, demand driven and practical. They greatly benefit employers and trainees alike. Disadvantaged youth often lack the resources to enter into the skills system. The B-SEP Project worked with local governments to implement informal apprenticeship training programmes in 55 upazilas (subdistricts). The informal apprenticeship model has great potential in Bangladesh to help disadvantaged youth gain the skills that will help them find better-paying jobs.



**Five industry skills councils established and strengthened** – Industry skills councils bring together employers, workers and government representatives to provide advice on sector-specific skills priorities. In doing so, they are a critical institutional mechanism to help bridge the gap between industries and TVET institutions. The B-SEP Project worked closely with and strengthened the agro-food processing and leather industry skills councils and helped establish councils for the ceramic, furniture and pharmaceutical sectors. Many member employers of these councils are now taking the lead in implementing apprenticeship programmes in the formal sector.

**National capacity to strengthen recognition of prior learning developed** – A mechanism for recognizing prior learning provides opportunity for workers to have the skills they gain through informal training or on-the-job experience assessed and formally acknowledged. The B-SEP Project developed an operational guideline for recognizing prior learning, which the Bangladesh Technical Education Board is implementing. To date, some 2,500 workers have been certified through this process by registered training organizations.

## Improved access to skills

The B-SEP Project worked on building up the capacity of skills institutions to make skills accessible to disadvantaged groups, such as poor women, persons with disabilities and indigenous youth. It also promoted the skills training of disadvantaged women in non-traditional occupations.

**Enrolment of students with disabilities in TVET institutes increased** – With support from the B-SEP Project, the Directorate of Technical Education (within the Ministry of Education) carried out a number of steps to make its 118 TVET institutes disability inclusive, in line with the provisions of the National Skills Development Policy, 2011. These steps include (i) mainstreaming disability within each TVET institute's annual plan, budget, monitoring system and annual appraisals of their principals; and (ii) developing guidelines for disability inclusion and training vice principals and senior instructors on disability inclusion. As a result, the enrolment of students with disabilities into the TVET institutes rose to 357 persons in the 2015–16 academic year, which was a significant increase from the 56 students enrolled in 2014–15 (prior to the Directorate initiating these measures with ILO support). In 2017–18, 300 students enrolled in TVET institutes.



**Bangladesh Business and Disability Network launched** – Introduced by the Prime Minister in December 2016, the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network promotes disability inclusion in workplaces and provides support to enterprises that are willing to make their workplaces disability inclusive. A job fair organized by the Network in December 2017 helped 150 persons with disabilities find employment.



**966 women skilled in 12 non-traditional occupations** – The B-SEP Project supported six government and private TVET institutes to train 966 women in non-traditional occupations, such as housekeeping, electrical installation, lacquer polishing, refrigeration, air-conditioning, cooking, food processing and quality control. Ninety per cent of these women found a job in the formal sector within three months of graduating from the skills training.

**580 green entrepreneurs supported to create green jobs** – The B-SEP Project promoted green enterprises for the self-employment of disadvantaged groups, such as women and men with disabilities as well as poor women and men, through skills and enterprise training. The green jobs include mushroom production and marketing by cooperatives of persons, mainly women, with disabilities; waste management and recycling; safe food production and marketing; ecotourism and crab fattening. The project also supported the development of competency standards of these occupations.

# Testimonials



“ B-SEP project initiatives to strengthen Bangladesh’s national skills system has led to a shift from outdated skills training to a modern, job-focused training system. ”

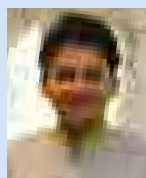
**Md. Faruque Hossain**  
Executive Chairman  
National Skills Development Authority

“ The B-SEP Project supported the BTEB to develop competency standards, competency-based learning materials, development of trainers and assessors and the assessment and certification of graduates through the NTVQF system. ”

**Murad Hossain Mollah**  
Chairman  
Bangladesh Technical Education Board

“ The pharmaceuticals Industry Skills Council organized an apprenticeship program for 600 workers and 35 supervisors. This was useful to them as well as for the industry. The workers became skilled and the company's productivity increased. This is good for both the workers and the industry. ”

**Mosaddek Hossain**  
Managing Director  
Unimed & Unihealth Manufacturing Ltd.



“ I was struggling to find a job and could not raise funds to start my own business. I then decided to take a course in housekeeping at the TVET centre in Dhaka. I now work for a major 5-star hotel and hope to find work overseas in the near future. ”

**Fahmida Abedin Disha**  
Hotel housekeeper  
Amari Hotel, Dhaka



OUR  
**IMPACT**  
THEIR **VOICES**



## When a factory and a college join hands, a region benefits

Gemcon Group set up a jute-processing factory (spinning and weaving) in 2003 in Panchagarh, the economically depressed northernmost district of Bangladesh, to help alleviate poverty there by creating jobs. By 2016, the Gem Jute factory was processing some 60 million kg of raw jute annually for export. There was good potential to boost production further, but several challenges blocked the way. Chief among them was a lack of skilled labour.

Rather than recruit workers from outside the region or, worse, accept the situation and not expand, Gem Jute partnered with Panchagarh Technical School and College (TSC) through the B-SEP Project to develop a greater pool of skilled workers locally. Working together, they designed training courses that responded to Gem Jute's needs and that followed the national competency standard for jute workers. The courses were piloted at the TSC. From that experiment, nearly all of the 200 course graduates secured employment with Gem Jute with what is considered a decent salary for entry-level workers.

"During the training period, I received food and a transportation allowance. That helped me a lot to carry out the learning session. Now I earn almost BDT8,000 per month and can support my family," explains Muhammad Saiful Islam, 22, who lives not far from the factory and was hired to spin jute.

Saiful had seen an advertisement for the six-month vocational training, which was targeting disadvantaged women and men looking for employment but lacking skills. Through the public-private partnership between the Panchagarh TSC and Gem Jute, training was divided. The college manages the academic, theoretical and soft skills portion of the course while apprentice-style practical instruction takes place at the factory. The students learn to use the machinery they will operate in any similar factory, if not Gem Jute.

The public-private partnership is a model of how industries can help resolve the skills gap in Bangladesh.

"We used to recruit workers at the factory gate. However, they were not trained and didn't have any educational background, so this hampered production. Now, from this public-private partnership, we have trained 200 workers. Most of them are working with us, while some others joined another jute mill. If we can continue this initiative along with Panchagarh TSC, we will have skilled workers and this region will benefit," commends Abdul Monayem, CEO of Gem Jute.

Such partnerships can lead to a better match of skills available among the young working population – a win-win situation for all.



## Employment services matchmake skilled graduates with recruiting needs

Before 2016, 30–40 per cent of diploma students from the Bangladesh Institute of Glass and Ceramics (BIGC) remained unemployed. Now, all graduates are finding jobs.

The change in individual fortunes is attributed to an employment support service unit established within BIGC. It offers career guidance and counselling as well as job placement assistance.

When the B-SEP Project reached out to BIGC to upgrade its training system, the institute found a nagging problem.

Under the pilot, the BIGC signed a memorandum of understanding with the Glass and Ceramic Industry Skills Council, which linked the institute with various companies in the industry. This relationship now enables BIGC students to find industrial placements (apprenticeships) during their study, giving them hands-on training in the ceramic industry and boosting their employability in the job market.

To help give its students more information about where to find jobs, BIGC developed a directory that provides information on occupations available in the industry, with job descriptions and details on educational qualifications and experience required.

BIGC also developed a website with an online job portal through which students can apply to vacancies posted by glass and ceramic enterprises.

Thanks to the B-SEP Project, Monno Ceramic also found a solution in this matchmaking service to one of its nagging problems: Although a leading ceramic enterprise in the country that produces a variety of products for the domestic and export markets, Monno has long found it challenging to recruit the 20–25 new factory staff it needs each year. Typically, applicants lacked the quality of skills the enterprise needed.

In 2016, Monno not only found the pool of skills it required through the BIGC employment service but it recruited a total of 40 young skilled workers (twice as many as it annually hires). For instance, promptly upon completion of her diploma course, Shahin Akter Shanta, 24, was hired as a ceramic technician in the Monno Quality Control Department, with a monthly salary of BDT8,000.

“This type of matchmaking between industry and vocational institution helps supply experienced graduates with the skills businesses need most,” highlights Kishore Kumar Singh, Chief Technical Advisor of the B-SEP Project. “This approach should be scaled up so that it encompasses all industrial sectors for the benefit of students and the economy alike.”



## A recipe for Success

She was a baker born into a household with no oven. But Suruj dreamed of cake. And she yearned to make it more than eat it. Although in her Santal community, considered one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable of the 45 indigenous communities in Bangladesh, luxuries such as cake were uncommon. The Santals are one of the oldest tribal populations in the country as well as across South Asia. They have their own religion, traditions and customs. In the far north of the Bangladesh where Suruj lives with her parents and one sibling, employment is scarce. Men like her father tend to earn income as day labourers (an older brother moved to Dhaka but is able to send home only BDT1,000 a month). Her father earns up to BDT300 a day but only works 20 days a month, for about BDT6,000.

In Bangladesh, there is a belief that men are more fit than women for many jobs. Women are not allowed to plough, chisel a hole or fish with a line and hook. Doing so would be considered a deviation from the socially accepted gender roles. Having dropped out of education at Grade 8 due to the family's poverty and the lack of a high school nearby, Suruj spent her days with household chores, like so many young women her age. Yet, she longed to do something to make her life better and to contribute towards improving the family's economic condition.

When she was 17 (a year ago), a neighbour in her Matrigaon village (in Thakurgaon District) told her about a unique course available to young women at the Thakurgaon polytechnic institute in the nearby district capital. For six months, they would teach her to bake cake and breads and other items she had never heard of, let alone tasted, in a course on food processing and quality control. The programme, available with funding from the Bangladesh and Canadian governments, offered a stipend for students to use for transport to and from the training centre and for snacks. Upon completion, she received a certificate of her skill, something likened to gold because it would enable her to apply for jobs within the country or abroad.

Suruj was immediately hired at the Omar Bakery, not far from her village, with a monthly salary of BDT10,000 for her baker position. She remains living with her family, who love eating her cakes, too. But with the extra income, they now eat more protein-rich meals.



## **An informal apprenticeship leads to a certificate leads to big ambitions**

Rabiul Islam dropped out of school in 2014 after his secondary school certificate exam. He was 16. His father is a farm labourer earning minimum income. Education seemed a luxury he couldn't afford. So he left for a job in a motorcycle workshop near his village in Madarganj District in eastern Bangladesh. Because he had no training, the workshop owner was reluctant to pay him.

Then he learned from an announcement about an informal apprenticeship programme through the local NGO Bace offering training on motor mechanics that would provide him with some earnings, in the form of a stipend. Rabiul would acquire the skills for a trade or craft in a micro or small enterprise by working side by side with an experienced craftsperson. Rabiul settled for on-the-job skills training.

Rabiul began his apprenticeship at Bulbul Motor Cycle Service Center, also in Madarganj, in January 2017, with a BDT2,000 salary. After the three-month training course, his salary was increased to BDT3,000 per month. Now he earns BDT5,000 and is considered a reliable employee.

Rabiul contributes to his family's household expenses, including his younger brother's education. He recently bought a refrigerator for his family. "If I get any chance to study, I will start again. I will go for technical education if I get the opportunity," he says. "I want to work in a big company because, through this apprenticeship training, I have received a Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training certificate. Employers give value to this certificate." Rabiul also dreams of opening his own workshop.



## **Serving up inclusion of jobseekers with disabilities in the world of work**

Amid the hustle and bustle of the Angel Chef restaurant, Mohsina “Liza” Begum takes a customer’s order and explains in sign language that it will take 15 minutes for the food to be served. Liza can neither speak nor hear, yet she lip-reads what others say. (A poster with sign language symbols lets customers learn to understand what she is signing.)

Born without hearing, 30-year-old Liza grew up being told that she couldn’t do many things. Through an ILO-funded three-month training programme with the Parents Forum for Differently Abled, she learned to see her capabilities differently. She learned to bake, cook and serve dishes. She was then hired by the popular Swapno retail store chain to work in Angel Chef, located in one of its Dhaka branches.

What has made a difference to Liza and other persons with disabilities like her is not only the opportunity learning a skill but also the growing interest from the private sector to hire them as well as efforts to help change attitudes towards people with disabilities in the workplace.

With 56 outlets and 2,500 staff across Bangladesh, Swapno is an influential presence in the private sector that has embraced the business case for hiring workers with disabilities.

“I do not want to use the word ‘disabled’. To me, these gifted people are differently abled,” explains Sabbir Nasir, Executive Director of Swapno. “To date, we have recruited 84 such staff. This has been a tremendous success, as their performance is much better than that of the average employee. We have now set a quota for differently abled persons to make up 10 per cent of our workforce.”

Swapno also hired Jannatul Ferdous, a mother of two children who lives with a hearing impairment. After completing the food preparation training course through the Parents Forum, Jannatul was recruited as a cashier for Swapno.

Following the death of her husband in 2016, Jannatul learned about the Parents Forum training programme. “That was the beginning, as from then on my life changed. I’m not dependent on anybody and I can earn to support my family and the children’s education,” she says.

The B-SEP Project helped vocational and technical institutes adjust their facilities to accommodate the different needs of persons with disabilities. With that support, 630 persons with disabilities participated in a vocational training course. Of them, 205 graduated from training courses run by the Parents Forum and 174 of them were either placed in a job or became self-employed.



## Mushrooms sprout independence among harvesters with physical disabilities

When she was 10 years old, Fatema's father abandoned his family to marry another woman. She was in Grade 5 and due to the family's poverty, she was forced to drop out of school. Her mother moved in with her brother's family in Jamshing village on the outskirts of Dhaka. But there was no room for Fatema, who has cerebral palsy. An aunt living nearby took her in.

When she was 15, Fatema's mother taught her how to operate a sewing machine and make dresses, for which she earned BDT1,000–BDT1,500 a month. Due to her physical condition, she finds it difficult to sit or stand for long periods of time (she also cannot walk well). Finishing a garment takes her a long while.

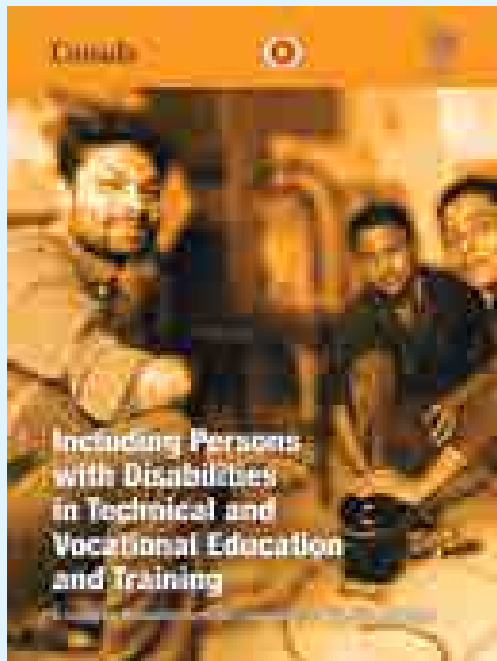
When Fatema heard about the training opportunity for growing mushrooms through the Access Bangladesh Foundation, she was intrigued. It required little investment and little physical care. Through the three-month course she learned the economic and nutritional benefits of mushroom production and how to run a business. After the training, she was provided spawns and BDT15,000 to build a mushroom house. Access Bangladesh operates a cooperative that grows and distributes the spawns and then collects the harvest and sells to markets in Dhaka.

Now 20, Fatema augments her sewing income with the earnings from her mushroom cultivation, achieving an average monthly income of BDT7,000.

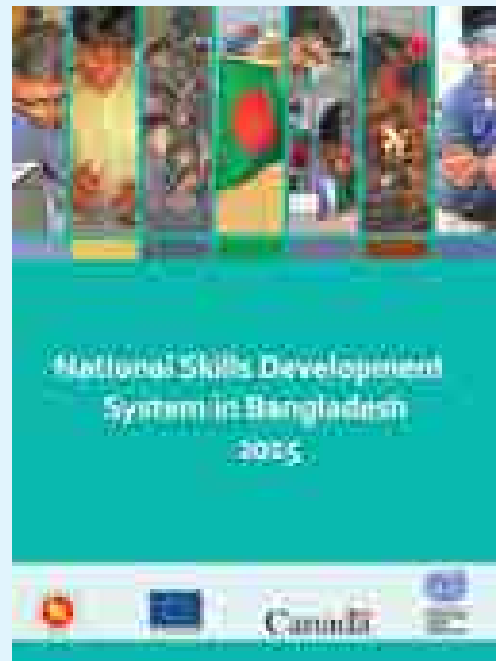
Although she remains dependent on family members, having skills and her own income lets her feel for the first time like an equal member of the household. While life has taught her about the depths of resilience, running her own business has given her strength to stand on her own, even when her feet find it difficult to move.



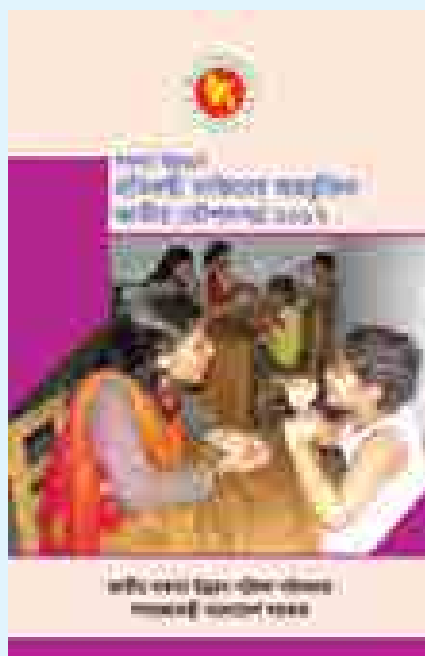
# B-SEP PUBLICATIONS



This guide for administrators and instructors shows how TVET institutions can better attract and serve students with disabilities.



This publication presents the main elements of skills development in Bangladesh.



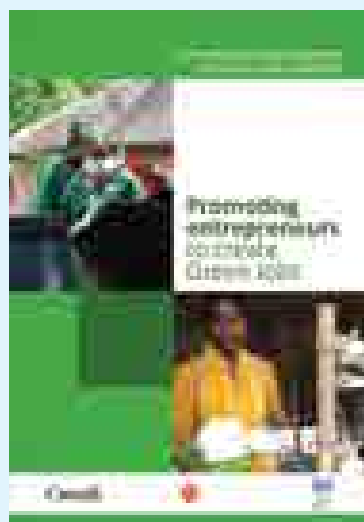
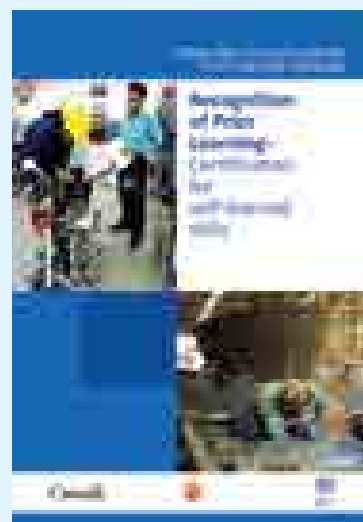
This publication is the Bangla version of national strategy for inclusion of persons with disabilities in skills development.



This study shows what skills are needed for promoting the green jobs.

## Advocacy papers

This project successfully demonstrated some market driven skills delivery systems such as Public-Private partnership (PPP), Employment Support Services (ESS), Apprenticeship, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Green Jobs. These advocacy sheets captured the good practices and shows the path of replication steps and way forward for skills and employability.





This publication is a replication guide for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions.



This publication is the national strategy for inclusion of persons with disabilities in skills development.



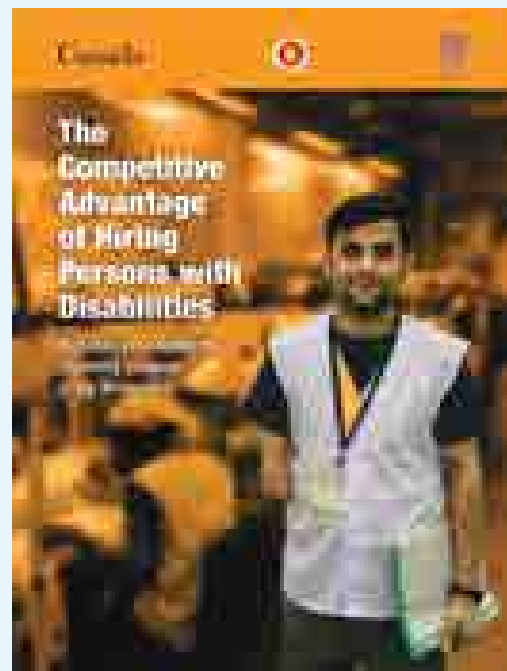
This publication is apprenticeship strategy for the government.



The project produced 113 competency based learning materials.



This publication captures the key achievements of the B-SEP project till 2017 as it works to create a stronger foundation upon which Bangladesh can build the skilled workforce it needs for the future.



The publication highlights to employers the benefits of hiring staff with disabilities and how to do so successfully.



This short publication gives an overview of ILO's approach to disability inclusion in Bangladesh.



This publication is a guide for TVET professionals for Making TVET Gender Equal.



The 15 women featured in this book illustrate the boundaries that have broken down and the massive difference that a basic skills-training programme can make.



This Publication is a brief on B-SEP Project.





ILO Country Office for Bangladesh  
Block-F, Plot 17/B&C, Sher-E-Bangla Nagar  
Administrative Zone, Agargaon,  
Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

Tel: + 880 2 55045009  
IP Phone: 880 9678777457  
Fax: + 880 2 55045010

Web: [ilo.org/bangladesh](http://ilo.org/bangladesh)  
Facebook: [@ilobangladesh](https://www.facebook.com/ilobangladesh)  
Twitter: [@ilobangladesh](https://twitter.com/ilobangladesh)