

Entrepreneurship: a way to combat unemployment

Eva Majurin of International Labour Organisation says

MD FAZLUR RAHMAN

BANGLADESH should find ways to create entrepreneurs that will help absorb the two million people joining the workforce a year, said an expert.

"Entrepreneurship development is extremely important for a country to create employment," said Eva Majurin, an enterprise development specialist of the International Labour Organisation or ILO.

She said entrepreneurship is one of the biggest creators of jobs in the world, and by far, two-thirds of new jobs come from micro, small and medium enterprises.

Majurin was recently in Dhaka to support the entrepreneurship development activities that are taking place in Bangladesh.

The ILO is involved in a programme called "Start & Improve Your Business" or SIYB, a management-training effort of the ILO with a focus on starting and improving small businesses as a strategy for creating more and better employment in developing economies and economies in transition.

With an estimated outreach of seven million trainees, a continuously growing network of more than 17,000 trainers and 200 master trainers in 2,500 partner institutions, SIYB is one of the biggest global management training systems used for micro and small enterprises.

The ILO introduced the programme in Bangladesh last

year. Globally, it has been introduced in over 100 countries.

Under the SIYB programme, 16 trainers have already been trained to create a pool of trainers in Bangladesh, who in turn have trained 200 beneficiaries, more than 80 percent of whom are women.

The ILO country office plans to add another 200 beneficiaries this year.

Another 24 trainers will be trained by the end of this year, said Francis Dilip De Silva, a senior specialist at ILO Bangladesh.

Majurin hopes some forms of strategy can be developed in Bangladesh where this training, in conjunction with other supports being planned in a comprehensive way, can help the ILO take it to a big scale and deliver the support needed for high impact.

Majurin said the programme helps entrepreneurs set up a business and to run it better; for existing entrepreneurs, it helps manage the business properly, in the areas of marketing and accounting and to expand their operations.

In terms of job creation, 30 percent of the trainees have gone on to start their business, which in turn created three jobs on average.

The rate of starting a business after taking up trainings varies from country to country. In China, the programme has up to 80 percent start-up rate; in India, it is about 50 percent.

The UN organisation has employed 15,000 trainers for the field-level implementation



Eva Majurin

programme.

The ILO aims to support the enterprise and entrepreneurship development activities in Bangladesh.

Majurin said SMEs face almost similar difficulties in all countries -- these include access to finance, skills, access to power and registration procedures.

"That is why the SIYB programme has been shown to work in different regions where it has been implemented. A lack of management skills is quite a universal constraint among

entrepreneurs."

Majurin said women face very different types of constraints, including accessing employment, lower literacy levels and access to finance.

As a result, the women's labour force participation rate is lower in Bangladesh as well as in other South Asian nations, compared with men.

"Entrepreneurship is actually a way for women to overcome the social barriers, improve their economic situation and become empowered," Majurin said.

"Of course, women also need specific types of support. Often women are starting from an unequal background, and they do not have the same access to education and other opportunities or finance."

"So, the support measures for women might be different from those for men.

Entrepreneurship is an area where women have great potential where they can often combine this type of work with their traditional role."

Majurin said by empowering women economically, a country can change things such as children's nutrition, health status and education.

"By empowering women economically, we can advance development more broadly."

She said women's entrepreneurship looks very promising in Bangladesh right now: a lot of work has been done here. Bangladesh has been a pioneer in microfinance, especially targeting women.

"The commitment is there. There are a number of training initiatives and support programmes. I think the impact of those programmes must be looked at and efforts needed to be coordinated so we can make sure that women have access to quality support and the required skills."

Bangladesh does not have an entrepreneurship development strategy, and the ILO is working with the government and the private sector to develop one, said Silva.

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Qatar reassures India after Modi raises abuse of migrant workers

REUTERS, New Delhi

Qatar has reassured India that labour reforms will improve the conditions of more than half a million Indian migrants, after Prime Minister Narendra Modi raised concerns of abuses during a weekend visit to the Gulf state, a statement said on Monday.

Qatar is home to 630,000 Indian nationals, the single largest group of migrants in the country of 2 million. Many work in low paid construction jobs, building stadiums and other infrastructure for the 2022 World Cup.

Rights groups accuse Qatar of abusive labour laws and forcing migrants to work under poor safety conditions. Unions and labour protests are banned, and authorities penalise dissent with jail or deportation.

A joint government statement said Modi met with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani on Sunday and discussed the plight of Indian migrants.

"The Qatari side briefed the Indian side on the reform in labour laws which would protect the interest of skilled and unskilled labour in Qatar," said the statement issued by the prime minister's office.

Modi thanked the Qatari leadership for "hosting the Indian community and for ensuring their continued welfare and safety."

Qatar is an important partner for India, with bilateral trade in 2014/15 exceeding \$15 billion, according to the Indian government. It is also one of India's key sources of crude oil.

During a two-day visit to the Gulf nation, Modi addressed a gathering of Indian labourers in Doha, assuring them he would present their concerns to Qatari authorities.

"I am aware of the issues you are facing. I will talk about it when I meet the authorities," Modi told them on Saturday.

"If you have some issues on changing some laws and regulations, I can assure you that I will work with you all to bring about these changes."

Modi's comments come amid growing scrutiny of Qatar over the plight of migrants from countries such as Nepal, India and Bangladesh employed to build infrastructure as Qatar gears up to host the world's largest sporting event.

Amnesty International in March said migrants faced abuses that in some cases amounted to forced labour. Workers reported squalid living conditions, having their salaries withheld for months and their passports confiscated by employers.

Qatar's kafala sponsorship system - under which migrant workers cannot change jobs or leave the country without their employer's permission - is at the heart of threats to make people work, Amnesty said.

Zero Gravity launches e-commerce website sindabad.com



From right, Zeeshan Kingshuk Huq, co-founder and CEO of Zero Gravity Ventures Ltd, an e-commerce company of Ananta Group; Khalid Quadir, CEO of Brummer & Partners Asset Management (Bangladesh); Sharif Zahir, managing director of Ananta Group; Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT; Asif Zahir, a director of Ananta Group, and Shameem Ahsan, president of BASIS, attend the launch of sindabad.com, an e-commerce site, on Sunday.

STAR BUSINESS DESK

Zero Gravity Ventures Ltd launched an e-commerce website—sindabad.com—on Sunday to provide local businesses with one-stop purchasing solutions.

Any organisation can make orders online for their regular consumptions through the website, the e-commerce company of Ananta Group said in a statement yesterday.

With a free sindabad.com business account, one has access to thousands of products at competitive prices—in many cases better than wholesale prices—and the products will be delivered at the doorsteps, the company said.

Customers can purchase stationary, office supplies, house-keeping items, electrical items, IT equipment, safety and security items from sindabad.com at retail and wholesale prices.

People can pay through debit or credit cards, bank transfer, mobile financial services or by cheques or cash, according to the statement.

Zunaid Ahmed Palak, state minister for ICT, launched the website, which currently hosts nearly 6,000 products across five categories, according to the statement.

Sharif Zahir, managing director of Ananta Group; Asif Zahir, a director; Zeeshan Kingshuk Huq, co-founder and CEO of Zero Gravity; Shameem Ahsan, president of BASIS; and Khalid Quadir, CEO of Brummer & Partners Asset Management (Bangladesh), were also present.

The government has taken a wide variety of steps and a number of projects to help the IT sector to be a \$5 billion industry, Palak said.

The growth of local e-commerce will contribute to the journey to a great extent and businesses will be more efficient, save operational cost and enhance skills with the help of business-to-business sites like sindabad.com, the state minister said.

"We hope one day sindabad.com will exceed the Chinese world famous e-commerce site alibaba.com," said Ahsan of Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS).

Small and medium-sized businesses will benefit more from such online shops, said Huq of Zero Gravity.

The website will reduce valuable man-hours, which could have been wasted in product hunt and negotiations, he said.

South African economy not headed for a recession: S&P

REUTERS

Ratings firm S&P Global Ratings said on Monday it does not see South Africa's economy slipping into a recession soon but warned that economic reforms had to be implemented to avoid a downgrade in December.

S&P affirmed the investment grade rating of Africa's most industrialized country on Friday, keeping at BBB- with a negative outlook, but lowered its economic growth estimate to 0.6 percent from 1.6 percent.

South Africa expanded by only 1.3 percent in 2015 and has seen major industries contract as a weak currency, low consumer demand and rising inflation weigh.

On Monday, the agency also said it was concerned that political upheavals could derail the economy and that it expected tensions to intensify ahead of local government elections on August 3.



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