

Technical and vocational skill training

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 11

and lifelong learning includes targets, which directly address education and training for skills development. These are:

4.3. By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university education.

4.4. By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship.

4.5. By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations.

4.6. By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy.

The 2020 target of full female literacy repeats past 'illiteracy eradication' targets, which were repeatedly missed and not very meaningful.

At the national level, government plans and programmes as reflected in the 7th Five Year Plan of Bangladesh (2016-2020) include:

1. Emphasis on promoting labour mobility in both farm and non-farm sectors to expand employment and increase vocational/ICT training for youth

2. Enrolment in TVET raised to 20 percent by 2020 from the present 14 percent

3. One million trained people for the ICT industry by 2020

4. Promote gender equality in TVET; by 2020, increase female enrolment in technical and vocational education to 40 percent; and reduce current female income inequality ratio

5. ICT training facilities for youth/adult; improved tele-density to 100 percent; 100 percent internet penetration and 50 percent broadband coverage of population

6. 30 percent of primary schools and 100 percent of all secondary schools to have an ICT laboratory; expand digital services, financial services, health clinics (tele-consultation); most vital government services made available at Digital Centres—all of which will expand demand for digital skills and employ-

ment in digital services.

7. Once again, a target of 100 percent literacy is announced with target date of 2020. A plan for establishing a network of community learning centres is mentioned, but not specifically linked to literacy and lifelong learning.

A few pertinent observations about SDG goals and government plans can be made:

1. The emphasis on the mobility of workers and on the service sector, especially digital services, shows a much deserved recognition of the change in the employment structure and new opportunities.

2. Present overall TVET participation is low—lower still for females. It is characterised by low outreach and high gender disparity, especially in non-formal/flexible shorter courses. There is no major programme for skill training for informal economy jobs; and there are very limited formal/informal apprenticeship opportunities.

3. It is questionable if expansion within the present structure without significant reforms will help to reach the targets set.

4. Despite primary and secondary education gender parity in enrolment, disparity remains in completion and transition at secondary level and beyond; disparities persist in TVET and higher education.

5. The 2020 target of full female literacy repeats past 'illiteracy eradication' targets, which were repeatedly missed and not very meaningful. Adult literacy gender disparity has narrowed, but not been fully eradicated. A viable

approach are needed. The emphasis has to be on ensuring quality and relevance rather than just expanding existing institutions and programmes.

The potential of digital technology
Speaking at the Digital Leaders' Policy Meeting on Jobs at the 2017 World Economic Forum 2017 in Davos, Switzerland, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina presented a bold and forward-looking vision for the future of the skills and jobs front. She said Bangladesh wanted to expose millions of its youths to the most advanced technologies, knowledge, and skills. "Our aim is to bridge the knowledge and technological gaps within our societies, as well as with the outside world," she said.

The Prime Minister said Bangladesh would continue to have a youthful population for at least the next three decades. In terms of strategy, she stated that Bangladesh is employing technology and related knowledge solutions to: (a) enhance human capital and skills, (b) deliver critical services effectively, and (c) create the right synergies between knowledge, skills, and employment (*Asian Age*, January 21, 2017).

As essential elements of the political vision—Vision 2021 (graduating to middle income country status) and Vision 2041 (becoming a developed nation), the Prime Minister listed various steps that have been initiated:

1. A National Roadmap on ICT in Education with a focus on ICT for education, not just ICT education, to develop our children's competencies through digital learning contents. For



PHOTO: STAR

developed by teachers are shared. The plan is to sign up all 900,000 high school teachers by 2021.

3. A wider e-learning platform, *Mukto Path*, is to be established as Bangladesh's Coursera (an on-line platform which offers free courses from a consortium of top US universities), which will help Bangladeshis anywhere develop skills, create jobs and diversify their skills portfolio.

4. The government is assessing changing patterns of work, analysing the market situation, and prioritising skills development, by dynamically linking with manufacturing and service industries. An 'inclusive' approach embracing

all skills development initiatives across sectors. A revamped and rebranded TVET with a 360 Degree Human Development Media Platform is in plans so as to make TVET "exciting, recognised, dignified and current."

6. Over 4,500 Union Digital Centres, connecting every nook and corner of Bangladesh, have created a new economy, and every month, these centres deliver over five million services which have saved poor citizens over half a billion dollars since 2010 and created 10,000 new digital self-employment opportunities. Today, Bangladesh has a pool of half a million IT freelancers and the government is encouraging more women freelancers to join the pool.

7. Over 600 pilot initiatives across healthcare, education, crops, fisheries, land, and human rights have been supported through a Service Innovation Fund. These are to be scaled up with 'one-stop services' offered by self-employed entrepreneurs (*Asian Age*, January 21, 2017).

The Prime Minister's statement offers a vision of skills and capability enhancement befitting an aspiring middle income country. The overall situation of basic education, skills and jobs described above has to be addressed to fulfil the ambitions and expectations the Prime Minister conveyed in her speech at Davos.

The writer is Professor Emeritus at the BRAC University Institute of Educational Development (BRACU-IED), of which he was the founder-director. He has been Chair of the Bangladesh Early Childhood Development Network (BEN), and has served for over two decades in senior positions in UNICEF, including as Senior Education Adviser and Country Director in China, Ethiopia and Japan.



PHOTO: REUTERS

programme for literacy as the foundation for lifelong learning through networks of community learning centres (CLCs) and wide and equitable access to ICT is yet to be developed.

Diverse skills' formation opportunities, which are market responsive, with a strong private-public partnership,

example, Bangladesh now has over 23,000 multimedia classrooms in secondary schools; and around 14,000 are to be set up in primary schools.

2. Around 150,000 high school teachers countrywide are registered under a unique online social platform called Teachers' Portal in which contents

Diverse skills' formation opportunities, which are market responsive, with a strong private-public partnership, approach are needed. The emphasis has to be on ensuring quality and relevance rather than just expanding existing institutions and programmes.

formal and informal sectors and the disadvantaged groups across the economy is to be pursued.

5. A National Skills Development Authority is to be set up to address the entire ecology of skills and work, with a unique 'Skills and Employment Dashboard' to coordinate and monitor

