



## Building a framework for skill development

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Of the 30 million youth between the ages of 18 and 25 in Bangladesh, roughly three million go on to pursue higher education. For the rest, life is a big question mark. This young population has great vitality, many dreams and aspirations, and untold potential. All they await is an opportunity. If the nation fails to provide them that opportunity, proactively and innovatively, the consequences can be depressing and devastating. Skill development programmes are thus of great importance to social and economic development strategies of Bangladesh, and spell grave political consequences.

According to a report published by the World Bank, the labour force has been growing by an average of 1.3 million every year. The country has significant growth opportunities in light of its demographic dividend. While the youth unemployment rate is around nine percent, increased access

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to education has contributed to female labour force participation in increasing numbers. Vision 2021 of the government of Bangladesh gives highest priority to building a large base of skilled workers in order to achieve a poverty-free middle income country. The skilled labour force must not only contribute to the growth and structural transformation of the economy, they must meet the demands required of workers migrating to the global economy.

**Towards a new horizon**  
Bangladesh has witnessed its best times in terms of economic growth in the last decade or so, speeding on its way to lower middle income status. Now is the most opportune moment for further innovative growth by efficiently focusing on the skills gaps in various sectors. The government's vision declares: "Skills development in Bangladesh will be recognised and supported by the government and industry as a coordinated and well-planned strategy for national and enterprise development." This statement has been backed by numerous skill development projects and fund allocation; strict implementation plans have also been laid out, targeting mid-level managers in many sectors where the nation lacks the right kind of employees. A nationwide skill reformation movement is essential, guided by the right type of training in chosen sectors. From an industry-academy perspective, it is important that industry-specific skills are strategically integrated into courses and curricula designed to address jobs for the 21st century.

**Education and skills**  
The education sector in Bangladesh is expecting an exciting paradigm shift in regards to digital transformation. It is important that education or training institutes reform their delivery strategies for the youth accordingly. The National Education Policy (NEP 2010) focuses on equalising education opportunities for all children and building productive workers' skills to compete in the global economy. The National Skills Development Policy (NSDP 2011) provides a scope for ensuring that the skills development agenda is operational and effective. This policy aims to:

- Improve the quality and relevance of programmes
- Establish more flexible and responsive delivery mechanisms
- Improve access to skills development for various groups

- Involve organisations, employees, and workers in skills training

The role of the secondary education system is also of great significance. Teachers of all schools must have an understanding of the 21st century skills that adolescents must acquire to compete in the global context. With proper recruitment and by ensuring continuous professional development, the teachers of secondary schools can become role models and facilitators of change to support the saying: "Your best teacher is your last mistake".

The education system must also have a common vision and a unified goal that goes beyond religious, secular, gender, social class and political interests. Many students in villages and suburban areas do not have teachers with the required subject knowledge. Having large class sizes is a recurrent and disconcerting picture. A teacher's capacity is usually not well-developed; expecting students to learn and make positive contributions to their community in this environment needs to be better assessed and efficaciously developed. Employment outcomes also vary across different types of institutions. As opposed to the average rate of finding employment for all graduates, some groups of graduates exhibit higher performance.

A wide diversity of labour market outcomes across the trades is one of the unique features of short-term training because it ties into the effectiveness of the labour market demand and supply by different types of skills. Prior work experience and academic performance also come into consideration for job placement in addition to the institution or selection of trade, while job and trade selection is highly correlated to gender.

**Building skills from within**  
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A very desirable set of skills that anyone can obtain are human and interactive skills that no training institution can fully provide. It is essential to gather this type of skill to serve one's

basic survival needs and to prepare for the growing competition in a world of turmoil and confusion. This is the time to engage the leaders of tomorrow: our next generation is our only hope and foundation to build upon. In their prime of the lives in the 21st century, they must have the capacity to lead us through the turmoil of the new century. Human and interactive skills will gain primacy in this evolving environment.

The phenomenon of social entrepreneurship and youth-led business idea competitions have also begun in right earnest. Initiatives like running co-curricular activities with students to develop their skills in communication, collaboration, leadership, and citizenship, empowers them to dream big and challenge any skills gap in their career path. It is time to collaborate and put our youth in focus, allowing their ideas to flourish and expand their reach into the knowledge revolution of the era.

**Institutionalising the skill development framework**  
The skills development sector is highly complex due to multiple service providers, a vast spectrum of target audiences, a large range of modalities of service provision, and varied emphasis on skill level and types that has opened up opportunities for many private and public training institutes and positive income opportunities for the consultants and training centres too. The local delivery partners are tagged with international donor agencies in implementing skills delivery.

The skill development training modules must be made available physically as well as on virtual platforms to provide access to anyone who wants it. Technology must not be taken for granted; granting access to information with the power of technology may be the way to go today. Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) is a World Bank-supported project, which started in 2010 to contribute to Bangladesh's medium to long-term objective of developing its human resources as a cornerstone of its strategy for poverty alleviation and economic growth. The training programmes focussing on skill development should make the job matching mechanism more functional as STEP introduces job placement cells in all institutions.

**The way forward**  
There are a number of things that may be done to enhance skill development programmes:

- Connecting formal education to technical training, technical training to labour market entry, and labour market entry to the workplace, and from thereon to lifelong learning for the labour force

- Ensuring "continuous" communication between employees and training providers so that training meets the needs and aspirations of workers and enterprises

- Integrating skill development policies with other policy areas—not only labour market and social protection policies, but also industry, investments, trade and technology policies, and local or regional development policies

- Improving access to quality training for employment opportunities

- Coordination among different stakeholders, both internal and external

- Strengthening the skill delivery framework with the help of donor agencies and consultants

- Determining key performance indicators and approaches to measuring skills growth

- Strengthening private sector participation in developing training modules

- Seeking partnerships with institutions in neighbouring countries to facilitate better training

- As the economy demands an increasingly wider skill base, it is important that short-term training is provided to the disadvantaged youth who otherwise end up entering the labour market without any significant saleable skills. Finally, the youth must be made aware of training programmes, and institutes must come forward in making learning useful and target-driven.

Not only should skills in the potential sectors be elevated, such skill development initiatives must also be monitored. The earnings from increased skills will hopefully be devoted to improving one's quality of life. How one uses the skills to bring positive changes to one self and his or her community at large, especially whether it is sustainable or not, should also be addressed by these skill development programmes.

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