

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A KEY TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

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RMG industry as the major employment sector

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Take a look at China, and you see a country which is already five years ahead of Bangladesh in this process. There, wages in the textile industry have risen steadily in line with increase in productivity. To emulate the Chinese model, Bangladesh needs to address two areas most urgently—education and technology.

In education, there is a strong need for greater levels of knowledge transfer between education and business. Many western countries have clear and well-developed knowledge transfer partnerships in place which sees ideas developed in colleges and universities being shared with the industry. Strong links have been forged between academia and industry, with spin-out of companies formed in universities often going on to achieve international commercial success. Many of the companies that have now become household names: Google, Facebook were conceived in universities. Bangladesh needs to learn from such examples.

A country which is more than 83 percent dependent on one industry needs to place more emphasis on developing tomorrow's leaders for that industry. The apparel industry in Bangladesh needs to draw the attention of the youth of the country, to show them the huge career opportunities that are to be found in the RMG sector. This could include a stronger emphasis on providing young people with a basic understanding of the sector, including the various levels of employment opportunities at the floor level, to merchandisers, designers, product developers and beyond.

Bangladesh also needs to think carefully about how it can develop an education system to provide the RMG sector with the industry leaders of the future who will allow the sector to compete at the higher end of the value chain and address the need for compe-

tent middle management. It is unfortunate that the RMG industry in Bangladesh often hires managers from neighbouring countries such as Sri Lanka and India when there is an abundance of potential talent domestically available—if only they were nurtured the right way. Current industry leaders have a vital role to play here, visiting schools and colleges and providing input to government agencies about the

long-term needs of the RMG industry. There is an urgent need to develop a cadre of upper level managers. The country's business schools, in cooperation with BGMEA and BKMEA can develop training programmes for lower level managers to become upper level managers. We should stop our dependence on expatriate managers. We now have a second generation of young manufacturers and leaders who I

believe are smart enough to leverage our underemployed university graduates.

Our RMG sector is now at a pivotal moment. The post-Rana Plaza industrial upgrading has placed the sector in a very good position for the next decade, but this process of improvement must continue, embracing education, technology, and sustainability. This will not only lead to more jobs

than the four million jobs the industry already provides, but will also lead to better jobs. That, surely, is what the whole country should be aspiring to.

Mostafiz Uddin is the Managing Director of Denim Expert Limited. He is also the Founder and CEO of Bangladesh Denim Expo and Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE). Email: mostafiz@denimexpert.com.



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