

ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A KEY TO YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

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Jobs and hope for the future

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Interestingly, the labour force is estimated to be growing at a rate of 1.3 million per year, about half of whom are women. While the number of trainees in training centres match the growth of the labour force, employers report shortage of skilled workers and young people remain without a job.

The Skills Development Policy, 2011 seeks to promote a coordinated effort to contribute to attaining the country's

middle-income status. The policy intends to promote internationally comparable skills for all potential workers, male and female. The aim is also to expand services for the disabled and socially excluded and workers for small and medium-sized enterprises. Enhancing resources for skills development for both domestic and international markets is emphasised.

The implementation of the 2011 policy, with the aim of promoting a coordinated skills development effort,

has itself been uncoordinated and slow. The efficiency and effectiveness of actions taken have not been satisfactory. The expansion of activities which are included in the election pledges can bear fruit only if their quality and effectiveness can be ensured with stronger management, monitoring and accountability.

It is widely recognised that the profile of jobs and skills required for workers will be very different by 2030 from those of today; and that there is at

present huge unemployment and underemployment among youth arising from the mismatch between skills and jobs. But the strategy anticipated seems to be of expanding TVET that exists and raising the proportion of secondary students, including madrasa students, in TVET, though a workable and effective model for this purpose has not emerged.

All evidence suggests that expanding the programmes we have now will not prepare students to be productive and capable workers that the market demands. So the mere expansion of the current programme cannot be the answer. Moreover, the current programmes do not even begin to serve the needs of workers in the informal economy, for which no coherent strategy and plan for skill development exist, but which absorbs over 80 percent of workers.

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.

THE DEFINING CONCEPTS

A number of concepts or terminologies has come into vogue which highlight certain aspects of the complex challenges of offering young people jobs, skills, hope and a sense of pride about the future and the country.

NEET: A term that is a descriptor of a large proportion of young people is "Not in Education, Employment or Training," or NEET in short. An ILO survey ("Decent Work Decade 2006-2015: Asia-Pacific and the Arab States") reported that 40 percent of young people aged between 15 and 24 in Bangladesh fell in this category. The absolute number added up to about 12 million—two-thirds females.

It is a situation that young people are in not by choice. They would rather

be enrolled in an educational institution or be employed in a job that offers a living wage. It is not a situation that fills them with self-confidence or pride about themselves. Drug, delinquency and attraction to extremism are the fallout of this situation.

Jobless Growth: Related to the NEET phenomenon is the change in structures of the economy and development of technology including ICT which have changed the nature of the contribution of labour in the economy. The impact has been particularly negative for young first-time entrants to the labour force.

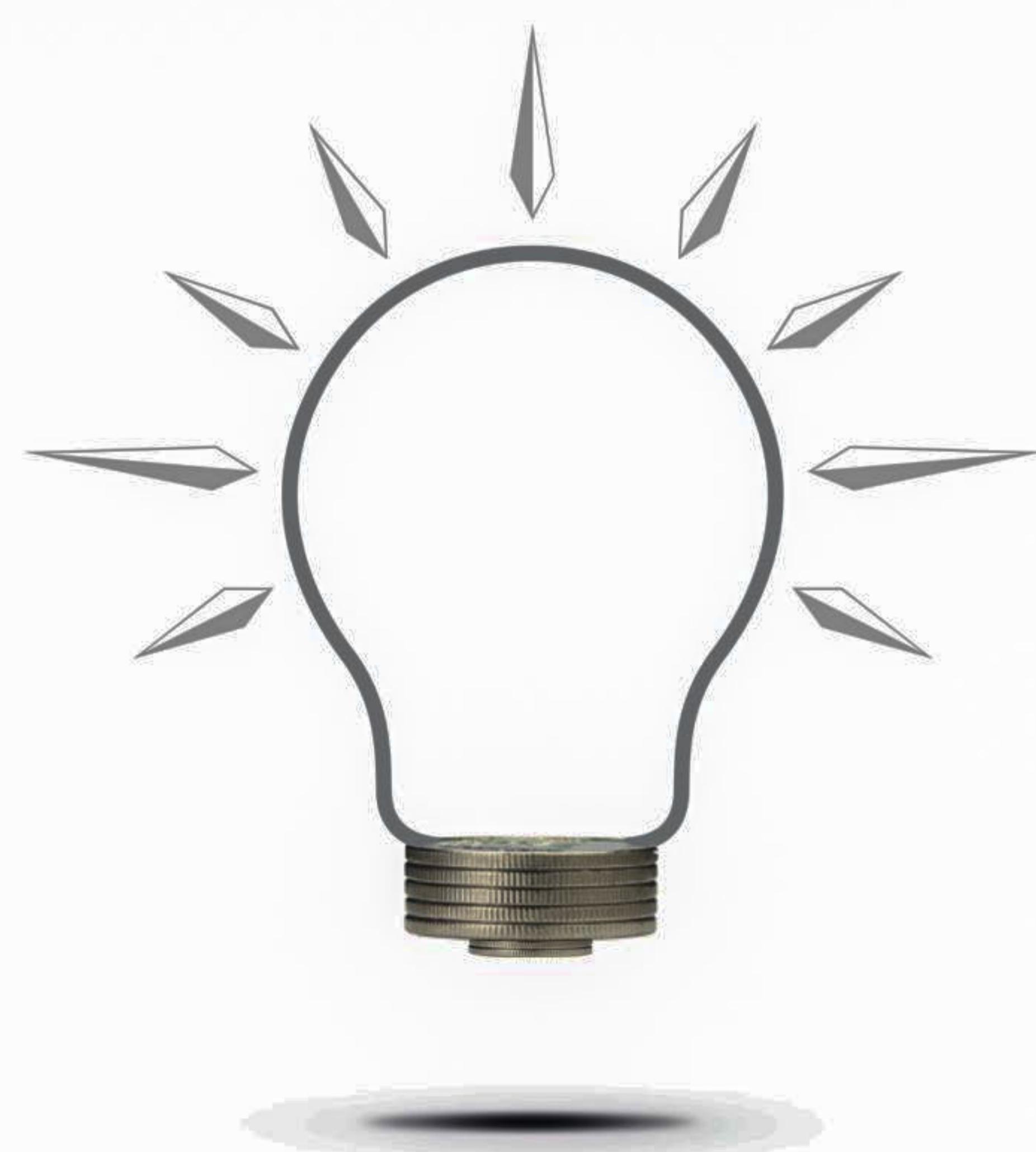
Between 2013 and 2016-17, the average annual GDP growth was 6.6 percent, but the growth of jobs during this period was only 0.9 percent. The employment share of the manufacturing sector actually declined from 16.4 percent to 14.4 percent. This added up to a decline in manufacturing jobs of 0.77 million. More alarmingly, female employment declined by 0.92 million (Bangladesh Labour Force Survey cited by SANEM, 2018).

High annual real GDP growth rate of over 6 percent during the past decade has not been accompanied by sufficient economic diversification that would enhance employment opportunities (SANEM, 2018).

Demographic dividend: It is the phenomenon of economic benefit derived from a high proportion of working age population (15 to 60 years) compared to the non-working age population. Bangladesh is passing through its phase of demographic dividend, which is expected to last up to around 2030.

The current population composition of Bangladesh, in spite of recent decline in fertility rate, is shaped by past high population growth—people born in the past coming of age now and entering the work force.

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JAMUNA BANK