



Skill ecosystem for progressive skills economy in Bangladesh



DIDARUL ANAM CHOWDHURY

Didarul Anam Chowdhury
is the Director of
Programme and
Innovations at UCEP
Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has been moving forward to consolidate its status as a developing country and achieve the SDGs.

Aiming at becoming a developed country by 2041, transformation from cheap labour-based economy to a skill-based and knowledge-based economy is necessary. Our national goal and strategies have been spelled out in the national priorities and perspective plan for skills economy by 2041. Ongoing mega projects and economic zones are some of the clear reflections which require a holistic approach to create many opportunities for quality skills promotion.

To amplify and strengthen the skill-based economy, there is no option other than promoting "skill eco-system" in every region/division, which requires special focus both on formal and informal skills sector.

In response to the growing economic zones, mega projects, Rohingya crisis and overall rising challenges and opportunities due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the landscape of skills demand in different regions have been changing significantly at scale and diversity. However, there is a huge gap between demand and supply of skilled workforce to address the potential demand, opportunity, and challenges of the intended mega projects and growing skill economy.

Annually, around 2.2 million people are entering the labour market, but only 1.9 percent of them receive formal skills training. Moreover, mismatching of skill mix on different occupational courses and standard of training centres with traditional equipment and machineries are other major concerns to meet the modern and advanced skills need.

Furthermore, lack of regional focus with functional dynamics is a huge gap in skills promotion, especially in terms of quality training opportunity and formal accreditation. The eventual manifestation of these drawbacks, spelled out through poor performance, disregard of skills recognition, low wage and poor retention in the jobs are incompatible with the

national aspiration.

Key priority economic growth sectors identified by the government have been targeted by the project to improve entry-level job skills, along with up-skilling of the existing workforce, to ensure required skills meet industry standards. The priority sectors are: (i) ready made garments (RMG) and textile; (ii) construction; (iii) information technology (IT); (iv) light engineering/manufacturing; (v) leather and footwear; and (vi) ship building. In addition, demand of some other promising sectors has also been rising in the Covid-19 pandemic, such as health, care-giving and other service sectors.

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effort among key stakeholders.

To promote skill ecosystem at regional level, public and private institutions and corporate agencies need to work through an integrated approach to functionalise the value chain system. In a skill ecosystem, the coordinated effort among industries, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutes, skills authorities, skill councils, and corporate agencies helps to better address the demand, challenges and opportunities in economy of a region to achieve the common goal, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The "Regional Apex Body for Skill Ecosystem" needs to be led by vibrant leadership, preferably from the industry sector to plug-in their proactive role and investment to implement the progressive skills promotion plan with ownership. It would require a policy framework to operationalise the skill ecosystem at regional level that will help build clear understanding among key stakeholders to set the common goal with shared interest. The framework will guide to establish apex body at national and regional levels.

The ecosystem will uncover the huge potential of industries in a region to invest their resources to help build capacity of TVET centres and achieve the required skilled workforce through quality training. In addition, "on-the-job up-skilling training" at respective industries would add value to leverage the skills promotion through providing opportunities to their workforce. This will influence role up-gradation, better wage, and better retention of the workforce which could be geared through buyers' compliance indicator. Similarly, the skill ecosystem would also work closely with buyers to promote "work place well being" as an effective mechanism to influence the industries through compliance indicator in favour of decent employment.

All donor-funded projects need to be steered to promote the skill ecosystem through focusing potential areas as per the interest of concerned donors and development organisations. Effective mechanism to channel the CSR fund from industries and different corporate houses in a region would be one of the potential

options to finance innovative projects to promote and strengthen different segments of the skill ecosystem.

Under the guidance of the apex body, meaningful investment is essential in terms of resource mobilisation and coordination of effort among the key stakeholders in the following aspects:

1. Capacity building of TVET centres/institutes with required equipment, lab facility, and human resource is one of the prerequisites which needs to be achieved through mapping of regional TVET centres, prioritisation of strength and need assessment. About 90 percent of the technical training centres are private out of 3438 centres in Bangladesh, however, strength and quality is a concern.

2. Registration or accreditation of TVET centres by the national authority at regional level to streamline the quality is necessary; classification of the occupational strength of the training centres on different sectors would help in quality output.

3. Demand driven quality assurance would be one of the prime responsibilities of the working group through:

a. Periodical skills demand analysis through survey and research to forecast demand and for proper planning,

b. Ensure occupational skills training curriculum with renewed Competency Standard (CS) and required Competency Based Learning Material (CBLM),

c. Professional human resource development as a continuous process to get competent master trainer and assessor.

4. Ensure quality skills training with certification from a formal authority.

5. Industry-based up-skilling intervention would be a prime responsibility of industries in addition to "apprenticeship" and "on-the-job training" for continuous skills promotion.

6. Quality assurance framework needs to be adopted as one of the prime focus of the Regional Apex Body through meaningful engagement of experts from BTB, NSDA, industries, and TVET institutes.

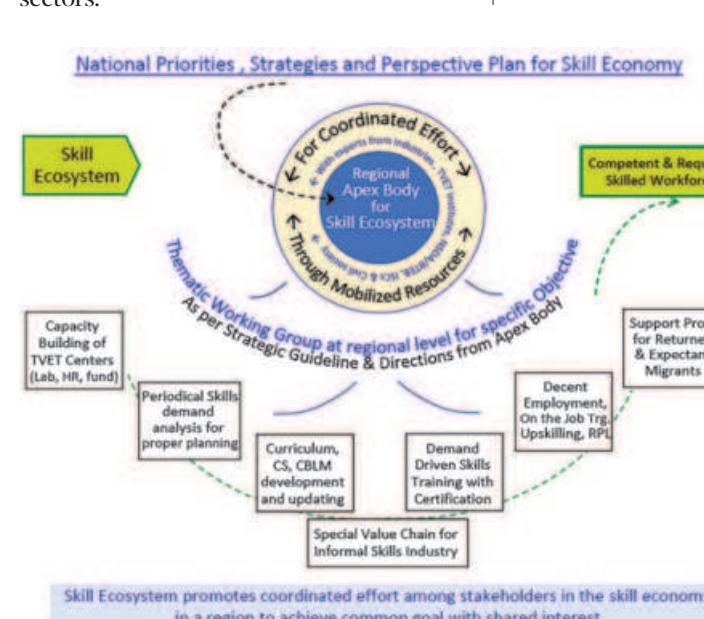


Figure: 1

Projected training targets to meet the skills demand of priority sectors in the next two decades will be around 7.20 million by 2025, 9.75 million by 2030 and 17.14 million by 2041, which will help to reach the ultimate milestone and graduate as a "developed country". It is only possible to make the dream come true through skill ecosystem in all regions of Bangladesh, which could be geared through structured and coordinated