



## From Education to Employability: A Case Study of Bangladesh

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By Sabina Dewan and Urmila Sarkar

December 2017





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## Introduction

Bangladesh, on its path to economic recovery and growth, aspires to join the league of its middle-income neighbors. Its government recognizes that these aspirations depend on building a strong foundation of quality education and skills to harness the productive potential of its population, especially the nation's youth. To this end, it has made remarkable progress in boosting enrolment in primary education, especially for girls, and has made investments in setting up a skills training regime.

Yet, despite these efforts, many challenges remain. The quality of education and its relevance for the labor market is sub-optimal.<sup>1</sup> The nation's education system is under-resourced and it has not kept pace with changes in labor market demand. As Bangladesh works hard to improve its education system, it is developing a skills training regime to make youth more employable and to supply emerging and existing industries with workers. Skills training, the government hopes, will achieve these goals in a shorter time-frame than reforming the education system will allow.

But skills training cannot compensate for years of poor quality education in many parts of the country where millions of children are completing primary education without ever acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy. The evolution of education and skills training systems as silos does a disservice to the youth they aim to serve. Education systems must start grappling with laying the foundation for Bangladeshi youth

***The evolution of education and skills training systems as silos does a disservice to the youth they aim to serve. Education systems must start grappling with laying the foundation for Bangladeshi youth to become employable, and skills systems must be able to rely and build on that foundation rather than try to compensate for it.***

to become employable, and skills systems must be able to rely and build on that foundation rather than try to compensate for it. And the best of intentions to build an educated, skilled and employable workforce must be accompanied by a practical vision, the will and resources to ensure effective implementation. And here, there is some work to do.

To facilitate linkages between education and skills training to ultimately

make Bangladesh's youth more employable, this case study uses secondary and primary research to examine the extent to which education and training systems in the country prepare young people for the world of work. It provides an

overview of the education and skills landscape in the country, highlighting gaps, to ultimately make some recommendations on how the government might improve these systems toward enhancing the employability of its young people.

The JustJobs Network, with support from UNICEF, collected primary data from secondary education and vocational training providers, currently enrolled students, employers and policymakers. In the first phase the team conducted informal

qualitative interviews with stakeholders to understand concerns pertaining to the education and training systems and the state of current and future initiatives. In the second phase, the JustJobs Network used survey data from a subset of students as well as workers in industries with a high proportion of secondary school graduates. This study first lays out the context in Bangladesh using secondary data and then delves into the findings of the primary research.



**Photo credit:** 'The Knit Concern Apparel's Enterprise-Based Training (EBT) Centre provides training to about 100 people per month', by ILO in Asia and the Pacific. Under Creative Commons License

# Context: Education, Skills and the Labor Market

## School education

### A. Primary

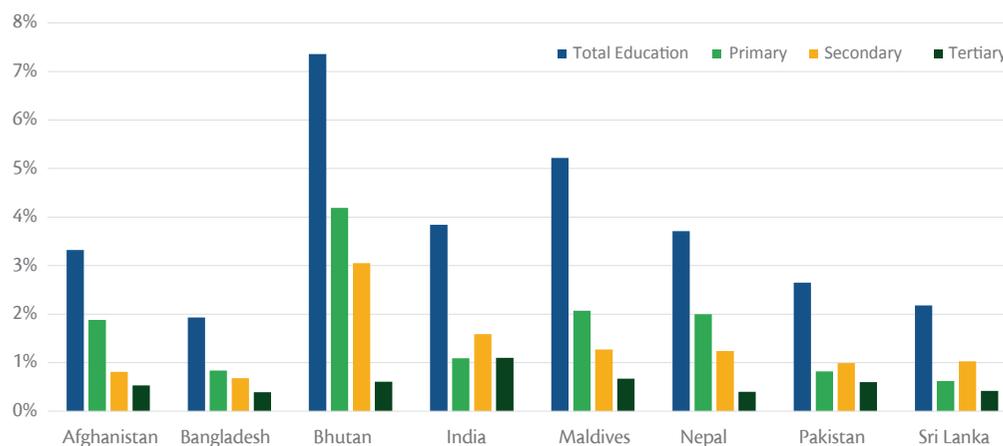
Over the last decade, Bangladesh has enjoyed an average annual growth rate of 6.2 percent.<sup>2</sup> Yet at two percent of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Bangladesh spends less on education than all other countries in South Asia except Sri Lanka. There is scope for improvement.

As a share of total government expenditure, Bangladesh spends 6.96 percent on primary education. This is a higher share than all other countries in the region except Bhutan and Nepal. And the greater resources devoted to primary education have paid off. Bangladesh has made

notable strides in improving net enrolment in primary education, with a rate of 72 percent in 1990 rising to 97.9 percent in 2016. This is especially true for girls with a net enrollment ratio of 98.8 percent compared to just over 97 percent for boys in 2016. Given this success, the government is extending free and compulsory primary education up to grade eight from grade five.

As an outcome of the Primary Education Development Program, in the two years between 2013 and 2015, the rate of transition from primary level to Grade 6 also increased by about 2 percent to 96.1 percent in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1  
**Government Expenditure on Education, as a % of GDP, 2015<sup>+</sup>**

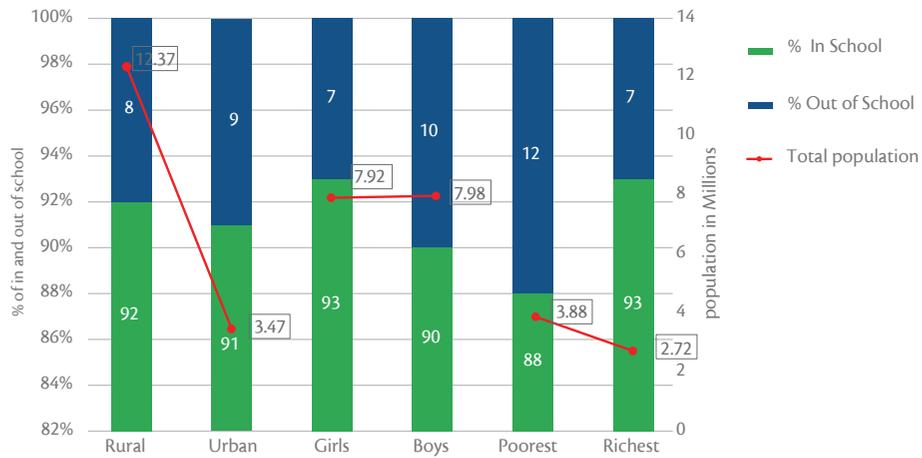


<sup>+</sup> Data for India and Bangladesh are for the years 2013 and 2016 respectively.

Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics

Figure 2

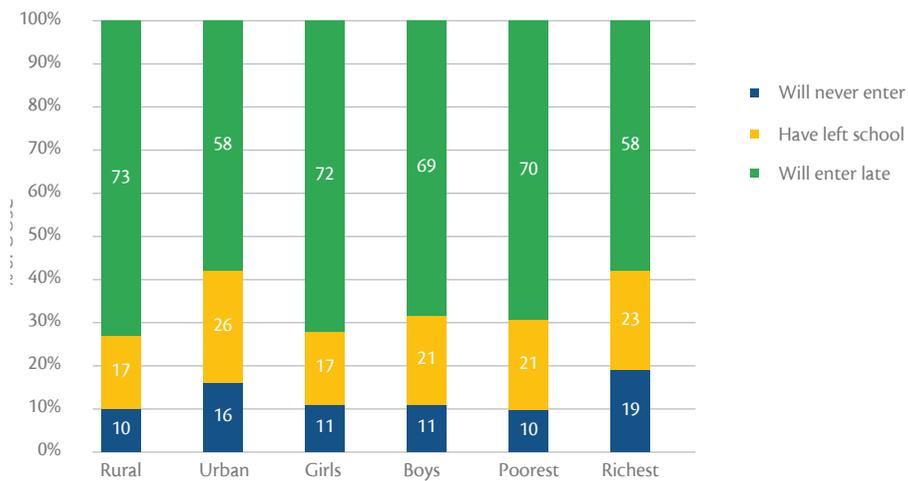
**Proportion of Primary School-Aged Children in and Out of School in Bangladesh**



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, accessed on 1st Nov 2017

Figure 3

**Typology of OOSC of Primary School Age, National Averages, Bangladesh**



Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, accessed on 1st Nov 2017

A great deal of progress has been made in this direction. The Sector-Wide Approach (SWAp) program document reflects plans to improve the curriculum, its relevance, professional development for teachers and governance including targeted programming for adolescents. But there is still a long way to go in conceiving this shift and its implementation. First, much more work needs to be undertaken to ensure that the new curricula reflect the realities of a world marked by rapid change from technology, migration and demographics, to name a few. To date, learning assessments reflect that literacy and numeracy among Bangladeshi students is very low. It is not enough to extend primary education without also improving its quality and making it relevant to today's labor market landscape as well.

Second, not only does the Bangladeshi education system have public and private educational institutions, but it also has a madrasa system that operates in parallel. The Government has established a Directorate of Madrasa Education to look after approximately 15000 madrasas with almost 3.5 million children. These Madrasas use a general education curriculum but also provide religious education. But it is not clear how Qaumi Madrasas – that are not recognized by the government – will handle the extension of primary education to grade eight.

***Better nuanced planning and coordination across ministries will be essential to make this shift successful beyond the provision of primary education, to the provision of effective primary education.***

Better nuanced planning and coordination across ministries will be essential to make this shift successful beyond the provision of primary education, to the provision of effective primary education. And effective primary education is the foundation upon which secondary education and future labor force participation can be built.

## **B. Secondary education**

Even as a majority of expenditure on education is toward primary education, at 43.5 percent, Bangladesh spends 35 percent of the total expenditure on education toward secondary education. The net enrolment rate in secondary education in the country improved from 19 percent in 1987 to 57 percent in 2015. For females, this rate stood at 61 percent in 2015, while for males it was 53.6 percent.<sup>4</sup>

Beyond enrolment, attendance in secondary education improves at higher levels of wealth.<sup>5</sup> Almost 40 percent of secondary school aged children, totaling over six million, are out of school across districts in the country.<sup>6</sup> What's more, 40 percent of the youth population, 15 to 24 years of age, are not in education, employment or training (NEET). Research suggests that while the incidence of out of school children is higher among poorer households, the probability of dropping out rises after nine years of age regardless of socio economic status.<sup>7</sup>

Children that are out of school, and those that are NEET, tend to be from economically disadvantaged households and vulnerable populations. In terms of percentage of Out of School Children (OOSC), female urban slum dwellers above the age of 13 years are more disadvantaged than poor rural girls.

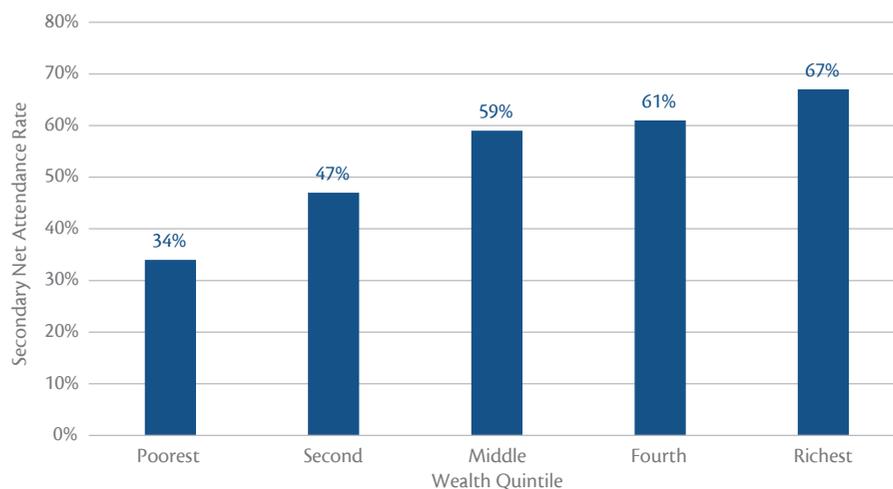
Nonetheless, as Bangladesh urbanizes rapidly, and urban slum populations rise not least because of the deleterious effects of climate change,<sup>8</sup> it is possible that the number of out-of-school children will rise in urban areas. This trend calls for attention to education and training policies with a focus on children of internal migrants that

***While the incidence of out of school children is higher among poorer households, the probability of dropping out rises after nine years of age regardless of socio economic status.***

relocate to urban areas in addition to the current rural focus of policies.

Factors such as poverty, low-level of maternal education, and inequities in access to education are all factors that contribute to children being out of school. Child marriage, child labor, drug addiction, physical and psychological violence and abuse are both a contributor and a consequence for out-of-school children. These out-of-school children have limited options and alternative pathways to improve their employability and economic outcomes beyond frequently exploitative conditions.

Figure 4  
**Secondary Net Attendance Rate (%), by Wealth Quintile, 2014**



Source: UNICEF Global Databases

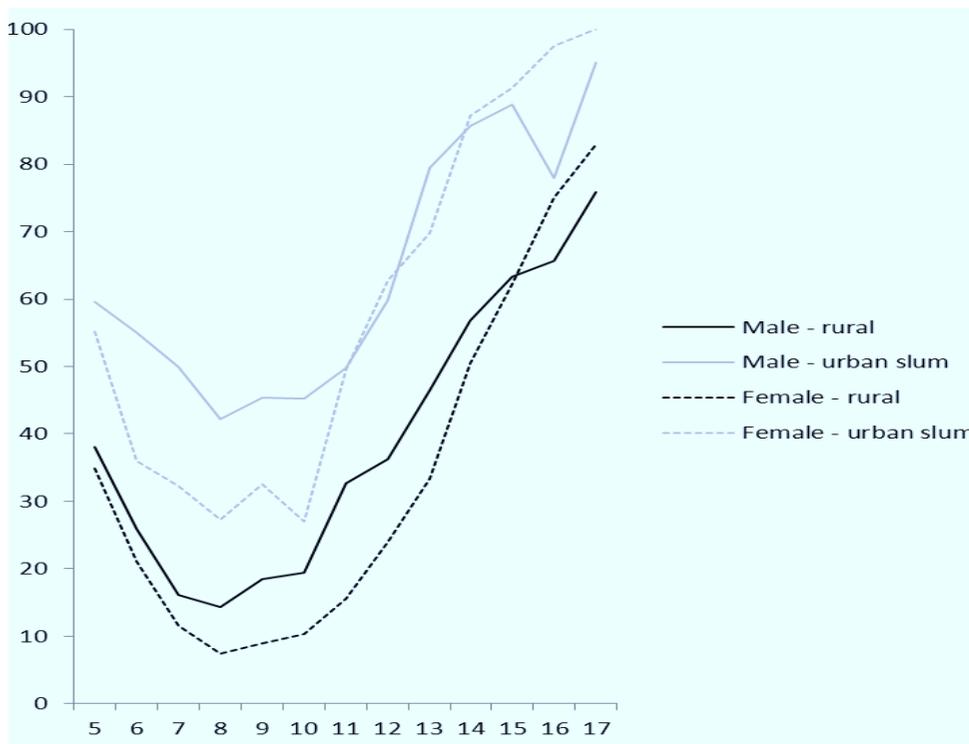
## Labor market

As of 2015, just under 66 percent (106 million) of Bangladesh's population was of working age between 15 and 65 years old.<sup>9</sup> As with other countries in the region such as India, Bangladesh is experiencing a demographic bulge in which the share of its working age population in total population rises, and there is a low dependency ratio.

Over 70 million were in the labor force in 2015.<sup>10</sup> Of those, 2.9 million, or 4.1 percent of the labor force, were unemployed.<sup>11</sup> Just under 88 percent of Bangladesh's employed are in the informal sector. In a country like Bangladesh with high levels of poverty and informality, the prevalence of a low unemployment rate is not surprising. In developing countries, most people cannot afford to be out of work, even if they have to engage in low-productivity, informal work.

Figure 5

### Percentage of Out-of-School Children by Age, Sex and Location in Bangladesh



Source: Bangladesh OOSC report, 2014

At 10.3 percent, the youth unemployment rate is higher.<sup>12</sup> Still, this figure no doubt underestimates the youth that are underemployed and/or in the informal sector. Youth are frequently relegated to the least desirable jobs. This is true worldwide, and Bangladesh is no exception.

The country's major source of employment is agriculture which constitutes just under 47 percent of total employment, followed by the services sector at 35 percent and the industrial sector with 18 percent. But the sector that employs the most people – agriculture – is also the least productive. In contrast, the service sector employs 35 percent, yet it adds the most value to GDP with 56 percent.

Within industry, low value-add, labor-intensive manufacturing, especially garments and textiles, has been an important force propelling Bangladesh's growth.

The fact that so much of Bangladesh's labor force is employed in low-skilled, low productivity work

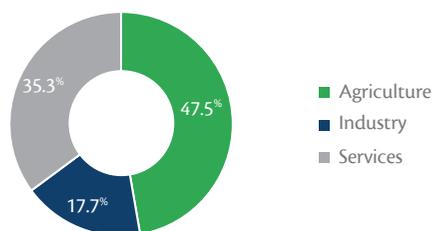
is worrying for its economic growth trajectory in the long-run.

This affects the employment returns to education. Data from the 2010 labor force survey of Bangladesh suggests that unemployment is higher among those with higher levels of education. Among engineering/medical degree holders, 14 percent are unemployed, followed by nearly just under 14 percent of those with Higher Secondary Certificates or equivalent and ten percent of those with a Master's degree or equivalent. The unemployment rate decreases as the level of education decreases.

This data underscores the fact that those from lower socio-economic strata and more vulnerable populations, that have lower levels of education, often cannot afford to be unemployed. As such, they work even if the jobs are in low-productivity, low-paying sectors. These workers, especially youth, tend to be more susceptible to exploitation in the work place. This data also indicates that those with higher education have

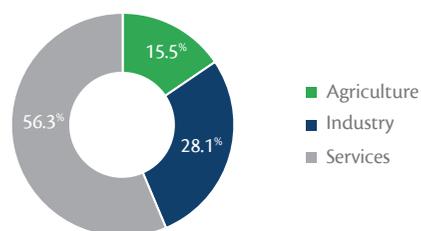
***Youth are frequently relegated to the least desirable jobs. This is true worldwide, and Bangladesh is no exception.***

Figure 6a  
**Sector-wise Share of Employment, 2010**



Source: World Development Indicators

Figure 6b  
**Sector-wise Value Added, % of GDP, 2015**



Source: World Development Indicators

high unemployment rate because it takes them a considerable amount of time to find jobs that suit their level of education and skills. These observations, thus, point to a disconnect between education and the demands of the labor market. Given the low levels of government investment in education, sub-optimal quality of learning, high drop-out rates and out-of-school children, the government must find a way to make its population, especially its large and growing youth population, employable quickly to be able to reap the benefits of this demographic bulge.

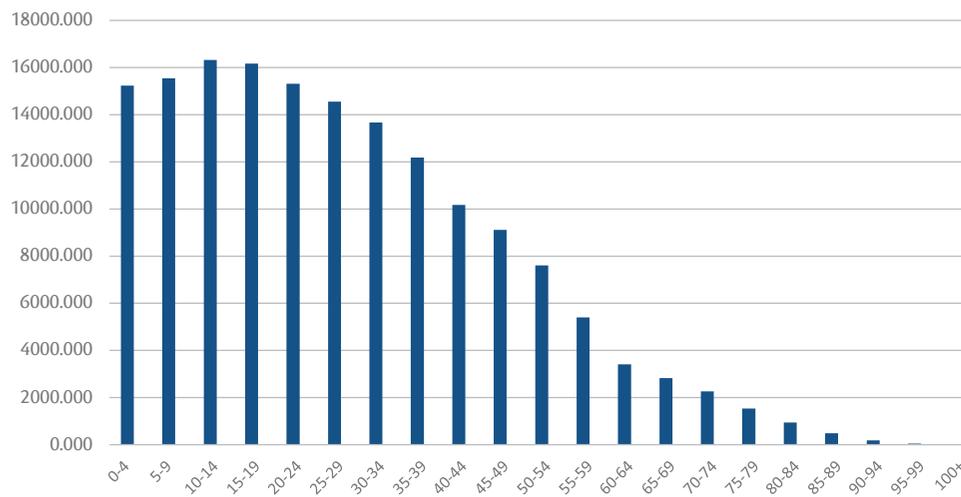
### Skills

Skill training is perceived as a way of plugging this gap. The Bangladesh government has crafted a skills development system with a National Skill Development Policy and Framework (2011), Technical and Vocational Training (TVET) in

schools, a National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework, and centers for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) across the country.

Yet despite the government's desire to skill its population to meet the demands of the market and fuel economic growth, the existing skills infrastructure in Bangladesh has some serious limitations. First, the resources allocated to TVET are sorely lacking. In the fiscal year 2007-08, only roughly three percent of the total budget for education was allocated to TVET. In the fiscal year 2009-10, even though the absolute budget for TVET increased by five percent, its share in the total education budget decreased. Of the total funding that skill development receives in Bangladesh, 45 percent comes from public sources and 55 percent is from private sources.<sup>13</sup>

Figure 7  
**Population Distribution of Bangladesh, 2016**



Source: UN Population Division

Second, the take up of TVET is low. Although TVET has grown over the last 15 years, it still constitutes a small proportion of secondary education.<sup>14</sup> In 2000, only 110,000 people had enrolled for formal technical and vocational training; by 2010 this number rose to 448,000 and to 690,000 by 2014.<sup>15</sup> Females as a proportion of those enrolled in TVET programs has not shown similar growth. One in four females were enrolled in TVET programs in 2000 and this rose to 27 percent by 2014.<sup>16</sup>

Even though the investment in TVET systems in the country is low, the low take-up of training is also partly because there is a lack of information on the training opportunities that people have available to them. A cultural affinity in favor of rote education fuels a low demand among students for TVET, leaving even existing resources underutilized.<sup>17</sup>

The fact that in some places such as Rangpur, the provision of training was low despite high demand, also points to deficiencies in the government's planning of how to geographically distribute training. Training centers situated close to industry establishments should provide training in skills relevant to the industrial sector in proximity. While the national core curriculum

for TVETs could comprise of key desirable skills for employability, training centers should be sensitive to proximate industry requirements for providing technical skills.

More generally, the data reflect difference between skill development in rural and urban areas. The proportion of the workforce that received training in the urban areas was more than two and a half times the proportion of the trained labor force in rural areas.

Third, skills training programs are intended to build on education, but many end up trying to compensate for the lack of foundational education. The Bangladesh Bureau of Labor

Statistic's report from the 2013 Labor Force Survey acknowledges that "[T]he country's development largely depends on having skilled persons and it is imparted through the education system and also through further formal training, which may be specifically related to the requirements of the job." Yet, research suggests that core educational competencies are weak fueling a significant mismatch between qualifications and the marketplace. This is corroborated both by research as in Toufique (2014)<sup>18</sup> which shows

***While the national core curriculum for TVETs could comprise of key desirable skills for employability, training centers should be sensitive to proximate industry requirements for providing technical skills.***

that up to 62 percent of young workers may be undereducated for the work they do, as well as the results of the primary study undertaken here.

Fourth, a diverse range of training providers make it difficult to oversee the quality of training and provide credible certification while ensuring that training is linked to market demand. As a result, despite receiving training, many young people continue to be unemployed or underemployed. Training providers range from private institutions to local and international non-government organizations as well as government institutions

run by various ministries. As of 2015, 50 percent of Bangladesh's technical training providers – a total of 7773 public and private institutes – were affiliated to the Bangladesh Technical Education Board<sup>19</sup> but public institutions were only responsible for 9 percent of the seat capacity.

Fifth, 23 ministries are involved in skills development in some capacity. Overlapping mandates, a diffusion of responsibility and a lack of coordination across these different ministries makes it difficult to manage, provide and promote skills training effectively.

### **Impact of Skills Training on Adolescents: Evidence from UNICEF supported BRAC's Intervention**

In 2012, to address the issue of rising unemployment in Bangladesh, BRAC initiated the “Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR)” program geared toward producing a well-trained and empowered youth group from the grassroots level. This program was developed with the technical and financial support of UNICEF and ILO. Through a training program that encompasses on-the-job, theoretical and soft skills training, supplemented with post-training support, the intervention targets both the trainee and the trainer groups. While the former includes adolescents in the age group 14-18 who drop out of school and are economically vulnerable, the latter refers to master craft-persons engaged in the informal economy.

Developed with the technical and financial support of UNICEF and the ILO, the program supports standardization of the trades in which training is provided as per the National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF).

A research study that estimated the impact of the STAR program found a significant positive impact on employment, income and savings of the participants. The study also found that those who participated in the programme had higher household-level welfare – evident in a positive effect on participants’ savings and household food consumption. Compared to the non-participants, the participant adolescents were also more likely to report higher confidence and capability to start and expand businesses, monitor and guide employees and purchase business materials at negotiable prices. Additionally, they are more likely to report better decision-making capability as well as an increase in empowerment.

It was further estimated that the intervention decreased early marriage by 62 percent along with reducing the habit of substance abuse among participant adolescents by over three times. Finally, it must be noted that the positive impacts were higher on female participants compared to their male counterparts for both economic – as demonstrated by higher monthly incomes – and social factors, which was evident in higher empowerment experienced by female adolescent participants.

The impact of the STAR program has broadly been positive. Moreover, a cost-benefit analysis revealed that the benefits of the program outweighed the costs, thus strengthening the case for its success and expansion.

National Skills Development Policy (NSDP)	National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework (NTVQF)	Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
<p><b>About:</b></p> <p>Building on other government policies including, Education Policy 2009, Non-formal Education Policy 2006, Youth Policy 2003, National Training Policy 2008 and NSDC Action Plan 2008, the NSDP was approved by the Bangladeshi Cabinet in January 2012.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>The primary objectives of the NSDP are to formulate a clear strategy for skills development in the country; enhance the quality and relevance of skills development; establish a responsive delivery mechanism that services the need of labor markets, individuals and community more efficiently; improve access to skill development and motivate participation from industry and businesses; and enable effective planning, coordination and monitoring of skill development activities by ministries, donors, industry, and public and private providers.</p>	<p><b>About:</b></p> <p>NTVQF is a nationally consistent and comprehensive framework for all qualification in the TVET. Defined against nationally-recognized competency standards, the qualifications under the framework correspond to real-life job roles in a workplace in the country. For instance, ‘Supervisor / Middle Level Manager’ qualification corresponds to a worker who manages team(s) in a workplace at a level where unpredictable change exists. The framework has 8 levels of qualifications including two pre-vocational levels and provides an exit point at each level allowing the trainee to enter the workforce. The final level leads to the Bangladesh University of Engineering Technology.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>The framework is aimed at reducing duplication of programs and creating a clear system that indicates the trades that are being taught for each industry and occupation; and enable efficient expansion and development of training courses, based on the domestic and international labor market needs.</p>	<p><b>About:</b></p> <p>Against the competencies defined in the National Technical Vocational Qualification Framework, the RPL program recognizes the knowledge and skills that a person already possesses. In the National Competency Assessment and Certification System, certification is provided either when i) a trainee completes an accredited training course, or ii) based on assessment of his / her existing skills (RPL), or iii) a combination of the two.</p> <p><b>Objective:</b></p> <p>The objective is to enable the trainee to use the certification / credit to either enroll for training for a higher level of competency or join the workforce having been recognized for his / her existing knowledge and skills.</p>

**Source:** National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) Fact Sheet, ILO; National Technical and Vocational Qualification Framework Fact Sheet, ILO; Recognition of Prior Learning in Bangladesh Fact Sheet, ILO

# The Bangladesh Story through Primary Data

## Survey methodology

For the purposes of this study, secondary education is considered as covering grades eight through twelve.<sup>1</sup> These grades include both lower and upper secondary education. The JustJobs Network, with support from UNICEF, collected primary data from secondary education and vocational training providers, currently enrolled students, employers and policymakers.

In the first phase the team conducted informal qualitative interviews with stakeholders to understand concerns pertaining to the education and skills training systems and the state of current and future initiatives.

In the second phase, the JustJobs Network used survey data from a subset of students as well as workers in industries with a high proportion of secondary school graduates. The survey was conducted at two levels: firms and schools.

The data collection was conducted in three districts in Bangladesh: Dhaka, Narayanganj and Gazipur. There are two key reasons behind this geographic focus: urbanization and high economic activity

that suggest that the geography has growing labor demand and labor supply. This is relevant to the overall objective of understanding the mismatch in demand by employers and the skills of the potential candidates.

For the firm level survey, a stratified sampling methodology with three levels was used, namely the type of industry (electronics, chemicals, garments leather, textiles, and food and retail); region (Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur); and size of firm (small, medium, and large). Using the firms registered in the Business Register 2009 as the universe, a total of 200 firms were sampled based on the above stratification. One manager and three workers from each firm (total 200 managers and 600 workers) were surveyed.

For the school level survey the strata were based on: region (Dhaka, Narayanganj, and Gazipur); and the type of school (formal, madrasas and informal schools). From a universe of 6930 schools, 200 schools were sampled; a total of 200 school administrators and 600 students (one administrator and three students from each school) were surveyed.

<sup>1</sup> As per international standards, Grade 7 marks as the beginning of secondary schooling.

## Primary survey findings

### School administrator survey

Schools in Bangladesh are more focused on general rote education, paying less attention to the effectiveness of teaching methods and learning processes and imparting skills that align with the job-market. Even when close to half the schools surveyed had industrial participation on their executive boards, their curriculum was not appropriately oriented toward industry needs.

Only 9 percent of school-administrators<sup>ii</sup> indicated that their respective schools offer vocational subjects or vocational training in addition to regular academic courses. 47 percent of the school administrators<sup>iii</sup>

acknowledged that industry involvement in drafting the training curricula would be a good idea.

The survey also found that the curriculum in schools is not revised often enough to keep pace with the changing economy.<sup>v</sup> As economic structures keep on changing, schools must revisit the curriculum quite frequently, especially TVET. There also needs to be active interaction between school administrations and employers through several ways. Active

interactions would keep school administrations updated regarding changing skill requirements of industrial business.

### Student survey

The results of the primary research reveal that the schooling in Bangladesh not only lacks building the foundational skills such as basic literacy and numeracy at the primary level, it also does not go far enough in aligning education and training to labor market demand at higher levels. What's more, a majority of students had a negative view of the perceived returns to education and training.

Under ten percent of student respondents indicated that their current schools, formally or informally, provide the skills they think are useful in finding a good job and performing tasks at work-place.<sup>v</sup> One out of every ten students felt prepared and skilled enough to find a job after graduation.

***Under ten percent of student respondents indicated that their current schools, formally or informally, provide the skills they think are useful in finding a good job and performing tasks at work-place.***

Responding to the question of whether certain courses (figure 8) were taught by their respective schools, 68 percent respondents indicate that they received a good general education.<sup>vi</sup> But nearly one out of two respondents replied negatively

<sup>ii</sup> F.1. Does the school offer a vocational track, vocational subjects or training program(s) in addition to regular academic courses?

<sup>iii</sup> G.4. Are employers or representatives from the private sector part of the management or board in your school/training institute?

<sup>iv</sup> E.2a. When was the last time the curriculum was revised for the following grades in your school?

<sup>v</sup> Question: D.3. Are the skills you selected in D.2. taught (formally or informally) at your current school?

Question in under D.2. was: Rank the following 9 skills indicating how useful you think they are in finding a good job as well as performing tasks on the job?

<sup>vi</sup> Question: D.4. If answer to D.3. is 2, list the skills being taught (formally or informally) at your current school?

when asked whether scientific and technical courses are offered. 57 percent respondents indicate that the command of language is taught at their schools. Only 55 percent respondents indicate that their respective school provides ICT training. A staggering 62 percent of respondents indicated that their respective schools do not provide knowledge of the business world, and 54 percent indicate that communication skills are not taught at their schools currently. 61 percent of respondents indicated that they had not completed an apprenticeship or appropriate training course.

The education system also lacks tools such as apprenticeship programs, industrial training and career counseling that make the labor market more accessible for the students. When asked whether their respective schools provide

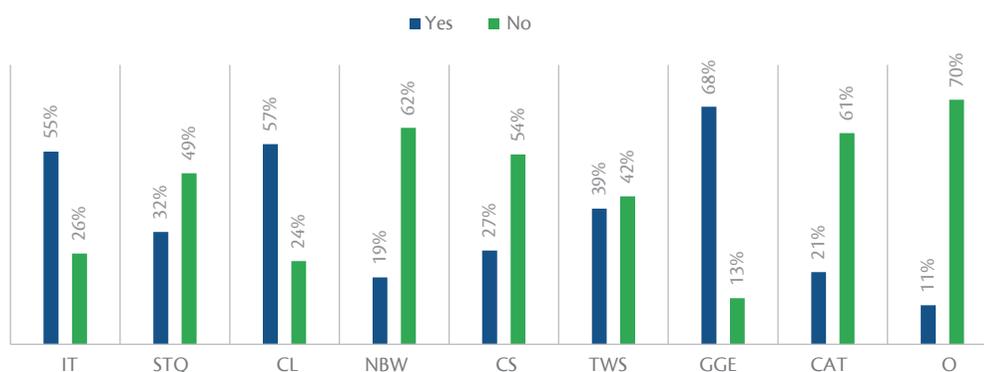
career counselling, financial assistance, and apprenticeships or industrial training, 71 percent respondents indicated that their schools do not provide career counselling. 89 percent of them indicate that their respective schools do not provide any services related to apprenticeship or industrial training.

These results from the 600 student surveys underscored the fact that the current education system does not prepare students for the job market. That students also recognize this fact does not bode well for school or training attendance.

### Employer survey

Employers emphasized work experience, rather than TVET, as an important criterion for hiring, regardless of whether the experience was gained through apprenticeships, internships or a full-

Figure 8  
**Type of Courses in School Curriculum, Student Survey Result**



Source: Author's Calculations

Notes: (a) IT= information technology (b) STQ= scientific or technical qualification (c) CL= command of language (d) NBW= knowledge of business world (e) CS= communication skills (f) TWS= team work skills (g) GGE = good general education (h) CAT= having completed apprenticeship (i) O = other

time position. This not only underscores the importance of including hand-on experience as part of the TVET system but also improving the system's quality.<sup>vii</sup> Very few employers provide opportunities for apprenticeships or formal training. This highlights another gap in the system. There is a need to incentivize employers to be more active participants in the training process, and it is important that TVET systems use this engagement to ensure that training aligns with market demand.

Our results indicate that only a minor proportion of surveyed firms, less than three percent, provide training to employees.<sup>viii</sup> 33 percent of the interviewed managers indicated that workers with on the job from previous jobs perform relatively better in the workplace. A much smaller contingent, just over 15 percent, cited TVET as improving workplace performance.

Responding to the question<sup>ix</sup> of whether TVET courses provide students with relevant skills to be hired in the first place, just under 43 percent of manager-respondents replied yes and 27.5 indicated no, while 30 percent were unsure.

72 percent of the respondents indicated that they were not familiar with the TVET curriculum related

to their respective sectors and did not engage with TVET staff.<sup>x</sup> Only 1 percent of respondents indicate that they interact with the staff of TVETs, helping them in designing the course curriculum.

The survey finds that employers do not provide internship or apprenticeship facilities for students. A majority of respondents indicate that they do not attend campus placement events, nor do they register with them for hiring purposes. All these findings suggest that there is a lack of active interaction between employers and training institutions, which fuels the mismatch between education and training and labor market demand.

### Worker survey

Workers expressed the view that both the education and vocational training systems lack practical and industrial exposure, making a lack of hands-on experience the biggest obstacle to finding a job. The fact that employer engagement in the provision of opportunities for hands-on training is limited, and that education and training systems do not provide practical experience, workers find it difficult to break into the job market. The information gap between job-seekers and employers is evident. The role of placement

***Employers emphasized work experience, rather than TVET, as an important criterion for hiring, regardless of whether the experience was gained through apprenticeships, internships or a full-time position.***

<sup>vii</sup> Germany's dual track system, post-secondary school, is composed of two or three days in school and the remainder working on the job.

<sup>viii</sup> D.1. Do you provide any training to your employees or have you provided any training to your employees in the last fiscal year?

<sup>ix</sup> D.11. In your opinion, do TVET courses provide students with the relevant skills required to get the job?

<sup>x</sup> D.13. Do you or any other persons from the firm interact with the staff of TVETs in any of the following

agencies and a labor market information system is vital for efficient demand-supply matching.

The Labor Force Survey 2010 shows that 38 percent of the population in Bangladesh do not possess any formal education. Those with engineering/medical or technical/vocational degrees constitute just 0.2 percent of the total population aged 15 years and above. Similarly, less than two percent of the population possess master's degree/equivalent or other degree/equivalent.

Responding to the question of whether<sup>xi</sup> the following skills were taught as a part of the curriculum in the last or current educational institute attended, over 85 percent of worker-respondents indicated that ICT, trade and sector skills, and business acumen were or are not taught in their respective schools. Similarly, 61 percent of respondents indicated that team work and leadership skills are not taught. 48 percent of respondents noted that discipline is not taught.

These findings further highlight that the schooling system in Bangladesh focusses mainly on academia and rote learning to the neglect of foundational skills, improved teaching methods

and job-oriented education and training. This has negative implications for both the students and for industrial business.

A staggering 98 percent<sup>xii</sup> of worker-respondents indicated that they were not required to complete any industrial training or apprenticeship as a part of their curriculum at the last educational institute they attended. On the other hand, 82 percent of worker-respondents indicate<sup>xiii</sup> that they have not received or are not receiving on-the job training in their current or previous respective jobs.

A lack of industrial training and apprenticeships as part of secondary school and the unwillingness

***A lack of industrial training and apprenticeships as part of secondary school and the unwillingness of employers to provide on-the job training to workers exacerbates the underemployment and unemployment among youth in Bangladesh.***

of employers to provide on-the job training to workers exacerbates the underemployment and unemployment among youth in Bangladesh. Employers tend to hire experienced youth, while inexperienced youth either confront unemployment, or

accept sub-optimal informal sector positions to generate some income. This phenomenon, in turn, tends to drive the drop-out rate in urban areas upwards. The perceived return on investment in higher education is low for boys, and even lower for girls as they have access to only low-productivity low-value jobs.

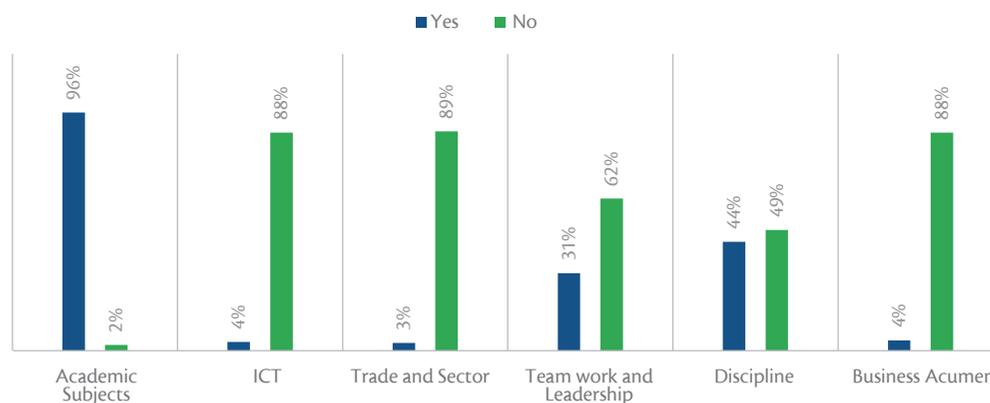
<sup>xi</sup> C.6. Were the following skills taught as a part of the curriculum in the last educational institute you attended or are currently attending:

<sup>xii</sup> C.7. Were you required to complete any industrial training/apprenticeship as part of your curriculum at the last education institute that you attended?

<sup>xiii</sup> C.9. Are you receiving (and/or have you received) any on-the-job training in your current (and/or previous jobs)?

Figure 9

### Skills as a part of School Curriculum



Source: Author's Calculations

In this context, an initiative of providing industrial training or apprenticeship opportunities to students in educational institutions as a part of the school curriculum would go a long way to facilitating more and better employment for young people. This would also narrow the gap between the skills needed by employers and those supplied by the schooling system in the country.

One of the reasons behind high unemployment problem in developing countries, as cited by researchers in labor economics, is imperfect information between employers and job seekers. Due to lack of perfect information, employers are not able to quickly find workers with right skills, and job seekers are not able to find employers who need their skills. In this regard, the role of placement agencies is vital. Yet 92 percent

worker-respondents<sup>xiv</sup> in this survey indicated that they were or are not registered with any placement agencies. Interestingly, 81 percent of respondents<sup>xv</sup> indicate that they were available or actively looking for a job for less than a month before finding their current job. Only 14 percent of respondents had to wait for more than three months to get a job. However, of this, about 16 percent respondents had secondary education or higher. More than 60 percent of the respondents with less than secondary education have been able to find employment within a time span of 1 month, of which 50 percent were able to find jobs in one week. This implies that it is more difficult for people with better education to find employment that matches their skillset.

A lack of experience and a lack of information are major obstacles to finding a job.<sup>xvi</sup> A high

<sup>xiv</sup> D.1. Have you registered with any placement agencies now or in the past?

<sup>xv</sup> E.10 How long were you available and actively looking for work before finding your current job?

proportion of the respondents<sup>xvii</sup> indicated that they found on-the-job training that they received through their previous employment very useful in their job search in contrast to education degrees and vocational training. Less than one percent of respondents indicated that vocational training was very useful in search for jobs.

### The gender dimension

Women in the country continue to struggle with the social barriers in accessing training.<sup>20</sup> As per the Labor Force Survey 2010, the literacy rate among the Bangladeshi women is under 53 percent which is lower than that of the men, which stands at just under 58 percent. The labor force participation rate of females stands at 43 percent, much lower than the 81 percent of men.

While there is greater gender parity in enrolment in primary and secondary education, when it comes to training, the picture is very different

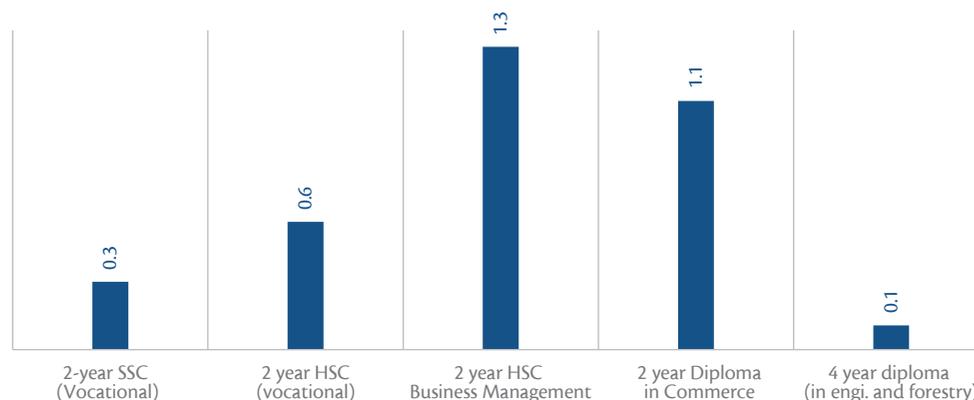
for females and males.<sup>xviii</sup> The ratio of female to male enrolment in these institutes is presented in figure 10.

The figure shows that the average enrolment of females relative to that of males is considerably lower in 2-year SSC (vocational), 2-year HSC (vocational) and 4-year diploma in engineering and forestry courses. It is higher in 2-year HSC Business Management, while in the 2-year diploma in commerce, the ratio is closer to 1.

The primary survey's findings align with much of the literature on female labor force participation in Bangladesh that highlights the relatively lower value society attributes to technical training of women. A lack of awareness and social barriers are ranked as the major obstacles to women's participation in TVET. These are reflected in the poor consumer attitude in approaching women for assistance in non-conventional trades.

Figure 10

### Ratio of Female to Male Enrolment in TVETs



Source: Author's Calculations

<sup>xvi</sup> E.11. What do you think was the main obstacle in finding a job? (Single Response)

<sup>xvii</sup> E.13. How useful were the following in your search for the current job?

<sup>xviii</sup> B.7b. How many students were enrolled in the following grades/courses in your school at the end of last fiscal year?

## Recommendations

The Government of Bangladesh is making noteworthy efforts toward improving the access to education, and improving gender parity. But despite these efforts, there is an urgent need to improve the quality and relevance of both education and training in Bangladesh. For Bangladesh to reap the benefits of its demographic advantage, attain equitable growth – especially for the most marginalized – and modernize its economy to grow to middle income status, it must undertake significant quality education reforms to strengthen the education-to-skills training continuum. The following recommendations are gleaned based on the findings of both the secondary research, as well as the qualitative and quantitative interviews.

### 1. **Allocate more resources to education and training**

Despite 6.2 percent average GDP growth over the last decade, Bangladesh spends just over two percent as a share of GDP on education and training as part of the school system. Meanwhile, it continues to face a demographic bulge. Strides in enrolment are clearly not enough to generate positive employment returns. The government must improve the quality of education and training and this demands resources to better align these systems with labor market demand. Such investment should be based on evidence that helps in identifying and prioritizing areas that require immediate attention, ensuring gender-responsive and equitable action.

### 2. **Ensure standard in quality of education that builds strong foundational and transferable skills, and revise the core education and training curricula to align better with labor market requirements especially emphasizing on-the-job training and practical experience. Schools should impart strong foundational and transferable skills that governments and the private sector can then help build providing pathways for young people that include TVET, not just tertiary education.**

The findings of this study suggest that the education system of the country is deficient in equipping students with basic literacy and numeracy. There is, additionally, a serious mismatch between both the requisite education level of young people as well as the skills they possess. What's more, employers cited on-the-job experience as an essential criterion in hiring decisions. This points to the need to not only better align education and training to market demand but also promote internship and apprenticeship programs that provide more hands-on experience. Immersion courses that provide students exposure to the industry, building their business acumen, should be included. Appropriate career counselling and structured placement mechanisms will also help in addressing this mismatch.

### **3. Provide appropriate incentives to engage employers in the process**

Engaging employers to provide input into the types of courses that would enhance employability and to provide more opportunities for on-the-job training is critical. It is in the best interest of employers to participate so that they can also reap the benefits of a workforce that is able to meet their demands. A National Apprenticeship strategy has already been drafted. It has undergone a consultation process and is now going through final approval. This Strategy will expand the opportunities for job training and apprenticeships. But there are learnings to be had from the experience of other neighboring countries such as India, where such strategies exist, but uptake has been low. Incentives for business need to be carefully crafted for such strategies to be successful.

### **4. Increase efficiency of placement agencies**

The government must invest resources in establishing a comprehensive labor market information system and better use its NTVQF and RPL programs. A lack of information on the availability of training and its benefits is a key barrier to participation, especially for women.

### **5. Improve coordination across the government ministries and the agencies that are involved in training**

There are 23 different agencies involved in some respect to the provision of education and skills in Bangladesh. Such a vast number of institutions, poor coordination and communication across them makes it difficult to implement initiatives. One commission that is responsible for oversight and execution of initiatives would be helpful in managing and provision of education and skills programs. Or at the very least, a clear delineation of responsibilities, eliminating overlaps, would go a long way.

### **6. Go beyond gender parity in enrolment, especially to enhance female participation in training**

While Bangladesh has made strides in improving gender parity in enrolment in school, female participation in TVET is very low. This is indicative of the lower social value placed upon the economic participation of women. More information to help overturn cultural stereotypes, and incentives to encourage female participation and hiring are needed.



## Endnotes

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