

A look at technical education in bangladesh



The People's Republic of Bangladesh is a country in South Asia which became independent in 1971 after a glorious nine months of liberation war with Pakistan Army who killed three millions Bangalees. Bangladesh literally means " The Country of Bengal". Lying north of the Bay of Bengal, on land it borders India and Myanmar, and it is a close neighbor to China, Thailand, Nepal and Bhutan.

Bangladesh is surrounded by India in The West, North and North-East and Myanmar to the South-East. It is situated between 20°34' and 26°38' North Latitude and 88°01' and 92°41' East Longitude. It has an area of 147, 570 sq. km. and a population of nearly 140 million. It has a population density of 948 persons per sq. km., which is the highest in world.

As the name " The Country of Bengal" suggests that Bangladesh is an ethnically homogeneous country. Among the different ethnic groups Bengalis 98 % and the remainder are mostly, Santhals, Chakmas, Garos, Biharis, Oraons and Mundas. Variations in Bengali culture and language do exist of course. The estimate of religious makeup from the 2001 census reported that the population was 89. 58% Muslim, 9. 34% Hindu, 0. 62% Buddhist, 0. 31% Christian and 0. 15% Animist.

With the highest density of population in the world and slow economic progress, the people of this country are trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Over 50% of the people who live below the poverty line are not able to provide for their basic needs and amenities. With 140 million people, Bangladesh is the eighth largest in the world in population. It is also one of the most densely populated countries and endowed with limited natural

resources. Bangladesh has to rely, more than most developing countries, on its human resources for progress and prosperity.

Educational Structure of Bangladesh

The present education system of Bangladesh may be broadly divided into three major stages, viz. general education, madrasa education and technical education. Here I am discussing about technical education in Bangladesh.

Technical & Vocational Education

For the students whose interests are not strictly academic may find technical-vocational programmes more interesting and more valuable for their future. Government tries to ensure that the course curriculum should be relevant to students' interest and aspirations while at the same time it should address the needs of the job market.

a. Primary level. There is no technical-vocational institution in primary level of education. Ebtedayee in the first level (Primary level) of madrasah education has no scope for technical-vocational education. Accordingly, technical - vocational education in Bangladesh is designed in three phases under two major levels of secondary and tertiary level of education.

b. Secondary level. Vocational courses starts from secondary level. The certificate courses prepare skilled workers in different vocations starting from ninth grade after completion of three years of schooling in secondary school. At this level the courses are diversified in different vocations spread over 1 to 2 years duration. Recently, 2 years duration vocational courses have been introduced at the higher secondary level in government managed

vocational training institute (renamed as Technical School & College).

Diploma courses prepare the diploma engineers at the polytechnic institutes.

This course spread over 4 years duration after passing the secondary school certification examination. There is a technical education board called Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), which grants affiliation to the technical institutes. It conducts examinations of the students completing different courses in different vocational and technical education, and awards certificates to the successful candidates.

TVET System in Bangladesh: An Evaluation

Strengths

Entrance is reasonably competitive at all levels of formal skill training. Well-developed exit standards exist, i. e., skill testing and certification is well developed and managed.

The Technical Education Board (TEB) is small, self-supporting and a relatively effective organization for developing curricula and trade tests.

Good models exist for skill training by non-government institutions (including UCEP and MAWTS). There are also good models of industry involvement in providing child labor not only with basic education, but also with vocational training through non-government institutions, including both UCEP and a similar but cheaper model, Suravi.

TTCs and VTIs have become more flexible in their non-regular programs by offering short term training programs on a cost-recovery basis in the afternoon and evenings to those who have completed their formal schooling.

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Several comparatively good quality public training institutions exist, including some of the TTCs under the Ministry of Labor and Manpower, The Surveyor's Training Institute under the Ministry of Education and some of the rural training centers of the Ministry of Youth.

Weaknesses

The overall impact of the formal TVET system within Bangladesh is minimal. The output of technical/vocational education at the certificate level amounts to only 1.8 percent of the graduates at SSC level, and the output of diploma technicians is only 1.4 percent of the output of HSC holders. Moreover, formal training is miniscule in relation to the informal ways the people actually become skilled. The outputs of the formal system account for only a minute fraction of the occupational skills acquired each year. Moreover, relatively few of the graduates of formal VTIs enter local employment, at least in trades. TVET has a poor record in terms of placement of graduates in employment, including only about 60 to 65 percent for TTCs and about 40 percent for VTIs. Unemployment is also common among graduates of polytechnics. Those who do not get jobs are often employed overseas as unskilled labor in jobs that do not require their specific training. Those who do not find jobs often seek further studies at higher levels if they are eligible. The public system is not contemplated by a widespread or vigorous system of non-government vocational training (non-government institutions and proprietary institutions).

External Efficiency

The main problem is lack of sufficient linkages with employers and the labor market. Employers typically do not participate in determining content of training programs. Courses tend to be offered in response to social demands not based on labor market surveys and analysis. Labor market information is not collected systematically.

Employers complain that the government is unable to change curricula quickly (i. e., introduce new courses, expand those in demand and reduce or close those for which demand has slackened) to keep up with technological changes in enterprises (TEB, for example, updates curricula once every five years). Polytechnics, in particular, were slow to integrate computers and instrumentation as integral parts of training in all fields.

The clientele of formal vocational training (VTIs and TTCs) tends to be inappropriate. Those with grade 8 qualifications often aspire to further education and white-collar occupations; many have little or no intention of entering the job market and practicing the trade skills acquired.

Training institutions lack linkages with local labor market surrounding the institution. This is caused by excessive centralization and rigidity in the system. The heads of training institutions must follow uniform training programs and cannot alter curricula to meet local circumstances. Financial controls are also inflexible and institutional managers cannot give incentives and rewards for good teacher performance. In short, there is a lack of delegation of authority to the heads of training centers.

Training institutions do not carry out occupational analysis of the skills in demand in the local area.

Training is rarely provided for upgrading those already employed in occupations, including skills in the non formal sector.

Few girls are being provided the opportunity to learn skills needed for formal sector employment; reasons include lack of hostels and secure transport, as well as traditionally low demand by employers for female workers.

Women in the labor market have few places where they can receive training for raising their incomes through productive activities.

Underprivileged youth tend to be screened out of the education system before qualifying for entry into vocational training.

Stipends in technical and vocational education are provided on the basis of merit rather than need.

Internal Efficiency

Training is virtually free and heavily subsidized. Most students receive stipends and many receive subsidized hostel accommodation which adds to the cost per student of training. Substantial resources are wasted in technical and vocational training at present, even though the system is underfunded. Student – teacher ratios are only about 10 to 12: 1. Training courses focus on certification and last longer than strictly necessary for occupational purposes. Over centralized administration makes it difficult for institute directors to economize on resources. However, recent introduction of the SSC and basic trades programs for students in TTCs/VTIs has led to increase in the internal efficiency of institutions. Underutilization of physical capacity is no longer a problem, and completion rates are better than they

were easily in the 1990s. Still, the operating costs of vocational training are high, probably in the order of \$300/student per year (24 times the cost of a student in primary education).

Effectiveness

Low quality is reflected in relatively low pass rates for many vocational and technical training institutions. About one-third of those who finish technical-vocational courses fail to pass the final examinations. Several factors account for the poor results. The managers and instructors of training institutions lack incentives for good quality teaching. Over centralized control means school directors take few initiatives. Instructors lack accountability, as evidenced by poor attendance rates. Most instructors have not had industrial experience in the skills they are paid to teach. Funds are lacking for in-service training of teachers or industrial attachments. There are few promotions possibilities to provide incentives to staff. Many instructors have occupied the same positions for decades without any opportunities for updating or enrichment. Dead wood tends to accumulate among teaching staff with few, if any, opportunities for recycling. In theory, 60 percent of the time is devoted to the acquisition of practical skills, but in practice it is much less. Most VTIs, polytechnics, and specialized degree programs suffer from outdated, obsolete, and worn out equipment. No budgets are provided for maintenance of equipment, and little for consumable supplies. The share of total revenue spending allocated to TVET declined by about 17 percent, from 2.4 percent in 1990/91 to 2.0 percent in 1996/97. It declined further to 1.5 percent in 1997/98. Capital investment in TVET virtually dried up in the 1990s. Within the institutions students receive group, rather than individual,

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training. Lesson plans and job sheets are rarely used in the training. Institutions, consequently, cannot properly impart the intended practical training. At the diploma level, intended internships for students at the end of their studies are often not implemented. As a result, polytechnic graduates have not acquired practical shop floor skills. The outcomes are that most graduates of vocational and technical programs are not skilled, and few go into appropriate occupations.

Government Plans and Policies

No national policy exist on the long term development of occupation training, but two recent documents, the Fifth Five Year Plan and the proposed National Education Policy, point to directions of intended changes. The Fifth Plan calls for enrollments in technical and vocational education to be increased from 3 percent at present to about 20 percent of the total at secondary level. Accordingly, the plan emphasizes expansion of the number and capacity of training institutions in line with emerging technologies. Specifically, the government plans to build dozens of new polytechnic institutes, VTIs and TTCs. In addition, it intends to establish other textile and leather degree colleges, a technical teachers college, and a vocational teacher training institute. By 2002, enrollments are projected to increase from 4, 500 students in polytechnic institutes to 20, 000; from 2, 600 in other technical and vocational institutes to 44, 000; and from 12, 800 in basic trade training to 30, 000. The Fifth Plan also calls for diversification of course offerings in line with emerging technologies. Private involvement is to be encouraged in the delivery of technical vocational education. In addition, the Plan proposes creation of an adequate base for labor market analysis and

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research on TVET, strengthening staff development programs, and forging closer links between training institutions and local economies.

The draft National Education Policy, which was prepared without consideration of fiscal constraints on the recommendations, calls for “ the major portion of the education budget to be shifted towards TVET”. Under the policy, all secondary schools would have vocational streams; NFE would be provided for all school dropouts at existing training institutions after hours, and short courses would be introduced for those – particularly technicians – in the job market. The structure of diploma training would be extended by six months and the internship by three months. A credit system of student accounting would be introduced to facilitate progression of graduates to the next higher level. Individuals and private enterprises would be expected to share the costs of training, although it is not explained how this would be accomplished. In service training for teachers would be provided systematically. Finally, an overall industrial advisory council would be established to coordinate service offerings among the many government and non-government providers.

The Fifth Plan and the proposed National Education Policy touch on many of the critical issues in TVET. Positive features include explicit reference to the need for enterprise linkages at the central and institution levels; emphasis on training provision for new clientele, including upgrading and out-of-school youth; diversification of programs, including training in entrepreneurship; and encouragement of private involvement and beneficiary financing by students and employers. These are important priorities. The next step is to plan to accomplish them.

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The main weakness of the plan and policy are their emphasis on expansion and greater public financing of TVET. Without needed reforms, plans for across-the-board expansion risk imposing existing rigidities on even larger numbers of trainees. Such expansion would dilute the capacity of the public sector to service adequately the existing institutions and may exacerbate unemployment among the graduates. Apparently no demand studies were done as a basis for selecting the new fields of study. Where needed, expansion could be accomplished at lower cost by expanding existing institutions (e. g., the textile and leather institutes) rather than creating separate new facilities. This underscores the impression that expansion is being sought for political rather than economic reasons. As stated in the 1995 ADB review, “ IT is possible to conclude that the present intake and training programs are more admissions-oriented than based on real industrial demand”.

Priority Issues

Among all the problems in the system of TVET, four overlapping issues stand out as the most important. They are discussed in sequence below:

Lack of linkages with the job market. The TVET system tends to be disconnected from the job market both formal and informal employment. Employers do not participate in setting training policies. Public training institutions do not have mechanisms for consultation with employers, and no incentives are given to managers or instructors to establish them. Moreover, the centralized system of training – in which curricula, staff, and resources are all controlled from Dhaka – also limits the possibilities of capitalizing on

local responsibilities and initiatives. When there are not enough jobs for graduates, programs should be geared more to gainful work in the informal sector, e. g., livelihood skills, entrepreneurship, and self-employment. In sum, a key objective for TVET should be to forge closer links with formal and informal job markets.

Lack of impact on poverty reduction. This is a question of the clientele of the system. TVET is almost exclusively geared to in-school male youth in grades 9 and 10 as part of SSC Vocational. The effectiveness of this approach should be evaluated. Similar programs have not proved cost-effective in other countries. Many of the graduates of SSC Vocational have no intention of entering the occupations for which they have been trained. Technical education is also narrowly focused on in-school clientele, whereas surveys show that only one third of practicing technicians have ever received formal education in the field. This calls for more in-service and upgrading training for those in the workforce. TVET needs to diversify its clientele. Vocational training, in particular, has the potential to make a greater impact on poverty reduction by helping trainees become self-employed or generate income. Another main objective for TVET should be to broaden its impact through diversification of clientele and programs.

Ineffectiveness of training support and delivery. One of the main constraints on solution of problems in TVET is the prevailing view that the government must finance and provide training through a centralized system of control rather than seek an efficient division of responsibilities with the private sector. In contrast with the relatively weak performance of the government financed and operated institutions, the non-government sector has

demonstrated – albeit on a very small scale – the capability to develop local needs-based curriculum customized to the experiences of trainees. Above all, several non-governmental institutions have established effective links with employers and have achieved impressive employment rates for their graduates. One of the challenges will be to find ways to expand the service delivery of effective non-governmental institutions in vocational and technical education. On the other hand, the government provides key support on which non-governmental institutions must rely. This support includes such things as development of favorable policy environments, training of instructors, development of teaching materials, and research/information on the employment market. A key objective for TVET is to shift funds towards more effective modes of delivery and strengthen the supporting role of the public sector (as opposed to direct provision)

Under-financing. TVET is expensive. It requires more instructors per student than general education because of the requirements for practice in workshops. It requires money for equipment, in-service training and consumable supplies. Most of these necessary inputs are lacking or insufficient in public institutions at present. Most institutions look to the central government to solve this problem, but it does not have the funds. External financing is seen by some as an alternative solution. However, external financing would be unsustainable. In several years, the problems of under-financing of equipment and supplies would reemerge and the problem would not have been solved. An important objective for TVET, therefore, is to mobilize non-public resources in a sustainable way to overcome chronic problems of under-financing.