

## **Skill for Empowerment: Break the Cage: Challenges for Open and Distance Learning**

### Introduction

Growth of the economy and employment opportunities in Bangladesh is restricted by skills shortages. The current skills supply systems do not meet the skills demand because of inadequate throughput and a mismatch between skills supply and skills demand. The Bangladesh National Skill Development Policy (NSDP), approved by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in January 2012 and by Presidential Order 1 July 2012, indicates the GoB intention to improve the supply of human resources with the necessary skills and attitudes to meet the industry demand for skilled workers. The NSDP requires that TVET skills development systems in Bangladesh need to be better aligned with industry skills demand. The NSDP also makes it clear that this requires changes in TVET system management, pedagogy, and certification as well as expansion of the system. Expansion of the current human resource supply systems without changes will only result in the replication of the current systems within a bigger frame and the continuation of the problems that exist within the current system but on a larger scale.

### **Economy and labour market performance.**

Bangladesh has continued to make economic gains with an annual GDP growth rate of around 6% over the last five years. This growth has generated new jobs in the service and manufacturing sectors. Remittances contribute about 10% of GDP. Despite these positive trends, the economy and employment face serious challenges. The economic base depends on garments and remittances. Half of the labour force is working in low skill agricultural activities. While unemployment is reported at 5% in 2009, underemployment is at 29% signifying a mismatch between the supply of skills and demand in the labour market. 80% of the workforce is employed in the informal sector experiencing unproductive, uncertain, and unregulated underemployment. The economy needs to diversify and expand. To benefit from the demographic dividend productivity increase of the labour force needs to be accelerated with emphasis on soft skills and market responsive TVET.

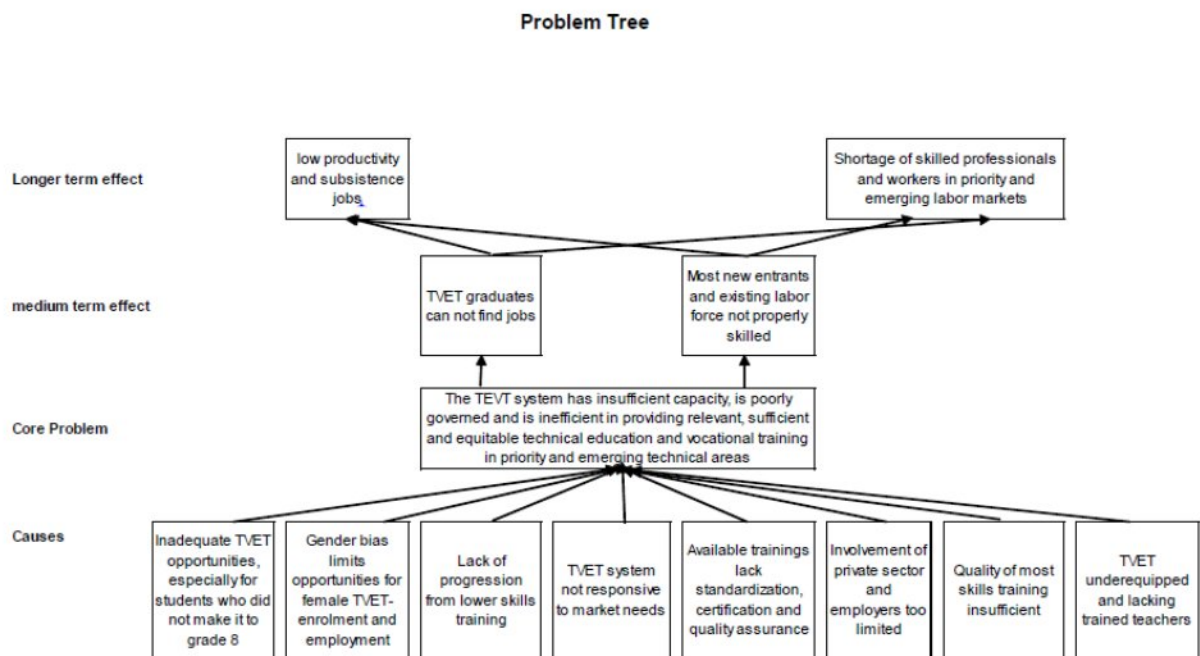
### **TVET Organization and Management**

The NSDP stipulates that the tripartite National Skills Development Council (NSDC) is the highest and apex skills development body which will oversee and monitor all activities of public and private training providers related to TVET and skills training. The NSDP is chaired by the Prime Minister and has an Executive Committee and secretariat. The Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) is responsible for quality assurance, curriculum, certification, examination and assessment. The Department of Technical Education (DTE), the Bureau for Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET), and the Ministry of Youth are the main public TVET providers. Sixteen other ministries also provide skills training. Private providers make up 95% of total TVET institutions and enrol about 75%. Over 3,000 private providers are accredited by the BTEB, about one third receives government support, covering basic teacher salaries. About 500,000 students are enrolled in formal TVET.

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### Problem Tree



### Access and equity

Although near universal primary school intake has been achieved, dropout rates in primary and secondary are very high. Progression to technical and vocational education is 3.3% of secondary school enrolments. TVET is the least funded sub-sector (2.6%of the education budget). TVET is comprised of non-formal short courses (less than 360 hours) and three levels of formal TVET, two secondary certificate levels and post-secondary diploma or degrees courses. Formal TVET runs parallel to the academic programs from grade 8 until 12 and continues in post-secondary education. The rural population has less opportunity to

pursue TVET as most training is in urban areas. Most programs correspond to traditionally male dominated trades. Female enrolment is 17%, mostly in private institutions

Bangladesh has made some great strides in promoting gender equality in the education sector by managing to close the gender gap in gross and net enrolment ratios in primary and secondary education. However, this success has not been replicated in achieving gender parity at the levels of technical skills development and in particular the TVET sector. In fact, the TVET sector is characterized by gender inequalities and stereotyping, reinforcing gender division of labour in occupational segregation in the labour market which is a constraint for women to enter into new, non-traditional and higher income professions. Girls and boys are channelled into different paths, usually resulting in different outcomes and in particular different earnings. The social mindset of families and girls'/women's own views need to be changed, to remove gender disparities in access to opportunities at receiving training in diversified skills so that the life status of both women and men is enhanced.

In 2008, the overall female enrolment rate in TVET was around 24 percent. Similarly, the number of female instructors overall was about one-fifth of the total number within technical institutes. It is also worth noting that the lesser number of TTCs within the variety of technical education providers was more on par with the national averages for women's participation. TSCs were severely lagging behind national averages of gender inclusion by about half (i.e. one-tenth of all teachers and one-eighth of all Students within TSCs were female). By improving the quality of TVET training will create skilled labor force including women and disadvantaged class. It will ensure employment which will help in reducing poverty for the TVET graduates in general and vulnerable group including female to make the system more inclusive. we know students of TVET tend to be from lower socio-economic group than those who are enrolled in universities for higher education. By giving skilled competency training will address poverty indirectly. When the less skilled person will become skilled enough and new students will get skilled training, automatically they will become eligible for high wage employment which will reduce the poverty of the individual and nation at the same time..

TVET in Bangladesh is under-going a major reform initiative with government plans to increase the number of training institutions and development partners contributing to major reforms in policy, credentialing, industry linkages and quality in provision. In the past 15 years, Bangladesh has seen some gains in terms of minimize gender disparities within the broader contexts of society. Although advancements have been made in attaining gender parity in the country (such as educational enrolment rates for young girls, as well as the overall number of women in the workforce); Bangladesh is still lagging behind its regional neighbours in terms of the overall indicators for gender inclusion and equality; and in terms of the overall growth and development of the country. Despite the fact that women's participation in the workforce has doubled since 1995, by comparison to other countries in the region of South and Southeast Asia at 26 percent, still remains extremely low, and moreover, among the lowest figures in the world.<sup>1</sup>(e World Bank-AusAID, *Whispers to Voices: Gender and Social Transformation in Bangladesh*, March, 2007. Low workforce participation further exacerbated by the fact that only 10 percent of employed women (and 22 percent of employed men) receive any wages for their work.

### **Gaps in current provision**

The analysis identified, from a gender perspective, gaps in the areas of:

- Policy and strategy
- NFE Curriculum and teaching and learning materials.
- Program planning and implementation.
- Program monitoring and evaluation system.
- The NFE learning environment.
- Equitable recruitment policies.
- Selection criteria used by partner agencies delivering NFE.
- Capacity of personnel (knowledge, skill, attitude and behavior) at all levels.
- Self and wage employment opportunities and access to financial resources, information and
- Technologies, for livelihoods development NFE courses.
- Women's representation and participation.
- Research and resource management.

The goals of reducing poverty and of achieving gender equality are distinct but interrelated. Poverty reduction involves addressing the constraints that limit people's capacity. Gender inequalities intensify poverty, perpetuate it from one generation to the next and weaken women's and girls' ability to overcome it. Inequalities prevent women and girls from taking-up opportunities which can make them less vulnerable to poverty in situations of crisis. Therefore, elimination of constraints that women and girls are facing is essential to achieve poverty reduction goals. These constraints include mobility, self esteem, and access to basic social services, training, information, technology, and control over resources.

### **Gender Capacity of TVET**

In Bangladesh, TVET and employment programs have been gaining increased attention from policymakers and other stakeholders. At the same time, women are becoming an increasingly important concern in TVET through different project. It is the right of women to participate in education and training on an equal basis with men and it has become part of the internationally-endorsed Millennium Declaration and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)<sup>1</sup>. At present, it has been experienced that in TVET system, women are still unrepresented from all respect. However, it has been difficult to focus attention on equal opportunity efforts specifically within TVET. Whilst considerable amount of knowledge has accumulated during recent decades through research and the practical understanding of the general strengths and weaknesses of TVET, information concerning the role of women in TVET is somewhat limited due to many causes.

- TVET courses are specifically offered for women, is stereotyping and traditional. As for example, in the RMG sectors, food, health service, housekeeping and beauty parlour.
- Lack of motivation and social acceptance in non-traditional trade
- Mistaken conception that women are not eligible for any male-oriented trade , like, engineering, construction etc.

- Lack of gender-friendly atmosphere, like toilet, accommodation and training environment
- Skill training for women from rural or disadvantaged communities is generally offered by NGOs.
- It is remarkable to see that support for job placement and counselling support is absent
- Lack of employment assurance
- Still TVET system is gender-biased in practice; theoretically policy is in favour of gender equity.
- Technical and vocational training options are limited for women in Bangladesh as they lack information on existing opportunities. It has been argued that teaching curricula show a considerable gender bias as it reflects traditional male roles; undermining women's multiple responsibilities at the household level

### **National Skill Development Council and Gender Equity**

- The National Skills Development Policy (NSDP, 2011) for Bangladesh clearly states that “given the current low participation rates of women in skills development, special efforts are necessary to correct this gender imbalance, particularly in the formal training system”. Women’s participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bangladesh is strikingly low, ranging from 9% to 13% in public institutions and 33 % in private institutions, the average calculated is approximately 24%.
- The Government of Bangladesh has unequivocally signalled its commitment to address all kinds of structural, direct and indirect barriers that impede the full participation of women in the economic sphere by ratifying ILO Conventions 100 on Equal Remuneration in January 1998 and 111 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) in June 1972, and the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) in November 1984. The CEDAW Committee<sup>3</sup> has applauded Bangladesh for adopting “a number of policies, programmes and plans of action to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination against women, such as the Policy for the Advancement of Women, aimed at eradicating gender disparities and “Vision 2021” programme aimed at mainstreaming of gender issues. The Committee also praised the establishment in 2009 of the National Council for Women and Child Development, headed by the Prime Minister, and the establishment of Gender Responsive Budget in ten ministries in 2009-2011”.

strategic framework with a clear set of priorities and targets with performance accountability mechanisms in order to increase female participation in TVET through a comprehensive and holistic intermix of social, economic, institutional and systemic transformational measures, leading to improved employment status. A set of specific concrete activities that are provided will be broadly in line with the already approved measures for women in section 14.5 of NSDP. At the same time, the strategy will go a few steps forward and propose innovative methods to achieve wider gender equality goals that will support and complement the main

purpose of achieving gender balance within the formal TVET system. The National Strategy is intended to be incorporated in the NSDP and the NSDC Action Plan

Technical and vocational training options are limited for women in Bangladesh as they lack information on existing opportunities. It has been argued that teaching curricula show a considerable gender bias as it reflects traditional male roles; undermining women's multiple responsibilities at the household level. Women in technical and vocation schools tend to find themselves underrepresented, reflecting their disproportionate numbers in the overall labor economy. However, the options for women to participate in the workplace have expanded, and as mentioned above, in spite of the social stigma and discrimination that has taken place and created barriers for women historically in Bangladesh.<sup>22</sup> Although many of these discrepancies have gone into decline over the last decade, attributable to the overall trend of women's increased participation in the labor economy, there are still many inequalities which persist and keep women in Bangladesh from enjoying full rights and entitlement to decent work as it is defined under the law.

### **Ensure the Gender Capacity in TVET: Role of Open and Distance Learning**

Technical and vocational training options are limited for women in Bangladesh as they lack information on existing opportunities. It has been argued that teaching curricula show a considerable gender bias as it reflects traditional male roles; undermining women's multiple responsibilities at the household level. Women in technical and vocation schools tend to find themselves underrepresented, reflecting their disproportionate numbers in the overall labor economy. However, the options for women to participate in the workplace have expanded, and as mentioned above, in spite of the social stigma and discrimination that has taken place and created barriers for women historically in Bangladesh. Open and Distance Learning can ensure the women participation in TVET, to turn the capability of women in a skill labor force. Open and distance Learning as a flexible and innovative opportunity holder could easily give the world a skilled women labor force. As a technological based University Bangladesh Open University should make the graduates familiar with technology and technology is the most important vehicle for poverty reduction

### **Open and Distance Learning in TVET for Female Trainees.**

In recent years the definition and application of open and distance learning have been evolving in parallel with the arrival of newer and intelligent technologies. Open and distance education embraces any or all of the following:

- Open learning- policies and practices that permit entry to learning with no or minimum barriers with respect to age, gender, or time constraints and with recognition of prior learning. These policies need not be part of a distance education system but are complementary to it.
- Distance education- the delivery of learning or training to those who are separated mostly by time and space from those who are teaching or training. The teaching is done with a variety of "mediating processes" used to transmit content, to provide tuition and to conduct assessment or measure outcomes.

- Flexible learning- the provision of learning opportunities that can be accessed at any place and time. Flexible learning relates more to the scheduling of activities than to any particular delivery mode.
- Online learning and e-learning- terms that have emerged to describe the application of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to enhance distance education, implement open learning policies, make learning activities more flexible and enable those learning activities to be distributed among many learning venues.
- Virtual education- includes aspects of both online and e-learning but goes somewhat further. While it is largely web-centric it does not necessarily limit itself to learners outside a conventional classroom. It uses multimedia and, besides delivering content, also enables a high level of interaction among learners, content, teachers, peers and administration both synchronously and asynchronously
- TVET is identified as an important part of distant and open learning in the recent education strategies. Distance learning methods, including the use of ICT, appear to be frequently mentioned in policies and workshops but not yet consistently implemented.
- TVET in Bangladesh is mostly confined to the formal in nature, specifically for the female trainees. There is tremendous potential for the open and distance learning in TVET in Bangladesh. This will facilitate more participation of female students in various trades in TVET. BTEB has to play an important role in this regard.
- Shortage of training facility in the institutions, accommodation problem for female students and some other social barriers may be addressed positively through distance and open learning. The limitations of distance and open learning lie in imparting skill properly. In this view a special program may be designed to synchronize the skill and theoretical portion which needs to be done in the training institutions.