



Evaluation Summary



International
Labour
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Evaluation
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Final Independent Evaluation Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity (B-SEP)

Quick Facts

Countries: *Bangladesh.*

Final Evaluation: *17 December 2018*

Mode of Evaluation *Final Independent Evaluation*

Administrative Office: *ILO Dhaka*

Technical Office: *EMP/SKILLS, ILO Geneva*

Evaluation Manager: *Mr. Arun Kumar, DWT-ILO Bangkok.*

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Programme End: *December 31, 2018*

Programme Code: *BGD/12/01/CAN.*

Donor & Project Budget: *Global Affairs Canada (GAC); Project budget of CAD 19.5 Million Grant (approx. US\$ 16.2 Million).*

Keywords: *Skills Development, Employment and Productivity, TVET, Skills Councils, Decent Work, Competency-Based Training, Apprenticeships.*

Background & Context

Background and project description

The present Evaluation Report concerns the Final Independent Evaluation of the project “Bangladesh Skills for Employment and Productivity” called B-SEP. This project aims to create a better trained and qualified workforce with increased economic opportunities in five target sectors to contribute to decent work, poverty reduction, and social inclusion in Bangladesh. Three *immediate objectives* were identified: (i) Increased capacity and effectiveness of policy, systems and institutional arrangements that improve the skills system; (ii) Improved mechanisms, programs and services that strengthen

the links between the demand and supply of skills in target sectors; and (iii) Increased access to skills programs and employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups in the target sectors. Related to the three objectives mentioned above, the project has been implemented along the lines of the following *four Components*: 1) Skills Funding, Planning and Support Services; 2) Competency Based Training and Assessment (CBTA) Quality and Relevance; 3) Industry Skills Development; and 4) Improved Access to Skills. The B-SEP Project aims to improve the national enabling environment for industry skills development and the increased employability of young and adult women and men. It targets government agencies and their staff, employers, workers, training institutions, students and trainees with a particular focus on disadvantaged groups in the labor market. It aims to enhance the market-relevance and effectiveness of the national TVET and Skills Development system, allowing for better quality, more access and an improved capacity to provide and sustain demand driven services.

The key stakeholders in the B-SEP project are: the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) and the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) under the Ministry of Education (MOE); the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) under the Ministry of Expatriates’ Welfare and Overseas Employment (MoEWOE); the National Skills Development Council (NSDC) under the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MOLE); Employer Organizations, Industry Bodies and Industry Skills Councils; Workers groups; National and International NGOs; and Private sector enterprises. Most activities took place in the capital, Dhaka, because most key stakeholders are based

there, but selected activities also took place in most of the Divisions.

The B-SEP Project is funded by the Government of Canada through Global Affairs Canada (GAC) and is implemented by ILO Dhaka based on the Grant Arrangement between them. This five-year Project commenced in December 2013 and will end in December 2018. The total budget for the grant was CAD 19.5 Million (US\$ 16.2 Million). The project is directly managed by a Chief Technical Advisor (CTA) who reports to the ILO Country Director in Dhaka. Four other international fixed-term experts manage the activities in the four components. Technical backstopping has been provided by senior ILO specialists located in the Decent Work Team in New Delhi as well as from Geneva. A Project Steering Committee (PSC) and a Project Monitoring and Coordination Committee (PMCC) are regularly held to monitor progress and provide strategic guidance.

Main Findings & Conclusions

1) *Relevance and Strategic Fit*

The evaluation assessed that the projects' objectives and interventions are closely aligned to the National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) 2011 of the MoE. In addition, all stakeholders interviewed during the mission in October-November 2018 have indicated explicitly that the focus on Skills Development and TVET Reform is very relevant for Bangladesh at this stage of its development. Other important ministries in the area of skills development are MOLE and MoEWOE. The organisation responsible for the implementation of the NSDP was the Secretariat of the NSDC under MOLE, but significantly, the council has been replaced by the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) through the NSDA Act on the 1st of October 2018 and is now under the Prime Minister's Office.

The Employers' and Workers' Organisations have been involved in the project from the beginning, but while Bangladesh Employers federation (BEF) has participated directly in several activities of B-SEP, the trade unions affiliated to the National

Coordination Committee for Workers' Education (NCCWE) were much less directly involved. Nevertheless, they all participated in the landmark Dhaka Skills Summit in December 2016. The projects' objectives and interventions are explicitly aligned with the requirements of enterprises in the target sectors through the attention paid to the development of Industrial Skills Councils (ISC), as well as of Public Private Partnerships (PPP) in particular between public TVET institutions and private sector companies. The projects' objectives and interventions are also explicitly aligned with the requirements of workers for access to skills and employment opportunities, especially for disadvantaged groups in the target sectors.

B-SEP's objectives are closely aligned to ILO's relevant Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCP) for Bangladesh DWCP 2017-2020 (Priority 1). The Project clearly supports and contributes to the overall objectives of the policy of the donor country, Canada, including CIDA's Skills for Employment Programme and presently also remains aligned with GAC's recently adopted Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) which focuses on women empowerment and creating meaningful employable opportunities for young girls and women. The B-SEP project have contributed further to progress both towards the achievement of SDG 4 on inclusive and equitable quality education and of SDG 8 on Decent Work and Economic Growth. Lastly, the Project fits clearly with the UNDAF 2017-20 priorities for Bangladesh, in particular Outcome 1.

2) *Project Progress and Effectiveness*

Overall, the project has already achieved or is well positioned to achieve the large majority of its targets specified in the Logic Model in the Project Document (PRODOC) of B-SEP. This Logic Model is quite coherent, and includes Outcomes, Outputs, Activities and Targets. It does not include an explicit Theory of Change (ToC), but the new DWCP for Bangladesh (2017-2020) specified two ToC's related to Skills Development. Annex 7 of the report provides a comprehensive overview of the project's results and shows that the project has achieved its immediate objectives to a large extent

with an average of over 95 % of achievements on its 30 targets.

Gender issues are generally not automatically addressed in Bangladesh, but the project has made a number of efforts in that regard, such as several female staff members in the project team, clauses in sub-contracts and stimulation of female members in committees, etc. The numerical achievements in terms of gender are relatively modest since the average of the results on the 30 targets is 22.4 % women. The achievements in terms of coverage of disadvantaged groups are mainly confined to one activity concerning design and delivery of specific training programmes for persons with disabilities in target sectors. Recently, the project received international awards for disability inclusion and a national award for Employment Support Service (ESS) at a technical training school.

The B-SEP project encountered several important challenges in achieving the results, such as political disturbances and agitations, slow bureaucratic processes, and shortage of technical experts to develop competency standards. In contrast, there were also a number of success factors in achieving the results, such as the good working relationships maintained by ILO/B-SEP with key stakeholders (in particular MoE), the good participation from the Government when requested for their support driven by the successive National Project Directors (NPD) in the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) under the MoE, the great willingness to participate shown by the industries, the innovations not foreseen in the PRODOC, such as the Bangladesh Business and Disability Network (BBDN), the Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) Foundation and the green job innovation.

A large number of changes in the skills system can be attributed mainly to project outputs, such as DTE's budget allocation for National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) courses, the fact that BTEB of the MoE can now independently develop standards and conduct certification, the increased enrolment of students with disabilities, women skilled in non-traditional occupations, and strengthened apprenticeships. For some changes in the skills system it is more

difficult to assess in how far it can be attributed to the B-SEP project as there are several other projects being implemented in the area of skills development, some of which are much larger in terms of financing, such as the World Bank/GAC funded Skills and Training Enhancement Project (STEP) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB)/Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) funded Skills for Employment Investment Programme (SEIP). As shown in the text of the report the B-SEP project played in each case a very specific facilitating role.

The B-SEP project has maintained throughout a flexible approach and has been responding to changing situations of the country or of constituents' priorities. The project has made different contributions to achieve the goals set for the NSDP, and one of the biggest achievements was to have the NSDP integrally included in the 7th Five-Year Plan. Currently discussions have been initiated for the inclusion of skills development issues in the 8th Five-Year plan.

Both the Employers' and Workers' Organizations (EO & WO) are members in the Project Steering Committee (PSC) and are thus in principle informed about all activities of the project, and jointly they were involved in organizing the Dhaka Skills Summit. However, the BEF has been involved much more deeply into B-SEP interventions (e.g. through ISCs, BBDN, PPP and apprenticeships), than trade unions who have organised themselves in the NCCWE, representing about five million workers, which is led by a Rotating chairmanship with a rotating secretariat. Regarding capacity building of social partners, B-SEP has implemented targeted programs for EO and WO, and they were for example included in training on managing apprenticeships, SCORE, Gender and Disability inclusion, coordination of ISCs and skills funding.

3) Efficiency of Resource Use

Considering the large number of achievements summarized before, it can be concluded that in general the project delivered value for money. The different project resources have also been allocated strategically to achieve the expected results. The largest budget category consists of actual activities,

including subcontracts, seminars and trainings, with over 42% of the expenditures, and another 33% of expenditures was used for the project team with a relatively large number of international staff members. On 31 December 2018, a balance is expected of just over US\$ 270,000 which will be used for a possible no-cost extension. The project managed the finances well, with clear yearly Technical Cooperation Progress Reports (TCPR) to the donor. However, the funding rate could be better by predicting earlier to shift funds from one component to another, which is related to the tendency to consider them stand-alone components. Overall, the project funds and activities have been delivered in a timely manner and by now over 95% delivery rate has been achieved. Relatively substantial resources were allocated strategically in order to mainstream gender-related issues, including the training of women, mainstreaming of the National Strategy for Gender Equality in TVET within three ministries, gender guidelines, gender training to employers, development of Gender Guidelines for TVET administrators, national gender workshop, and training of the 118 TVET institutions under DTE on gender and on gender planning and budgeting. As a result, all TVET institutes under DTE have a Gender Plan and Budget.

4) Effectiveness of Management Arrangements

In general, the Effectiveness of Management Arrangements of the B-SEP project was clearly satisfactory. It concerns a large project with a five-year implementation period and a substantial budget. This required a substantial technical input which was achieved with one CTA for the entire duration, and four international experts each heading one of the four components for at least two years after which the experienced national project staff members could then take over the coordination of these specific components while the CTA maintained overall continuity. This has been a good modus operandi, except that the four components at times were operating independently of each other. Overall, the project received good support from Geneva HQ, from the ILO Decent Work Team in New Delhi (except in the case of gender support), and with ROAP in Bangkok.

The monitoring mechanism set up for B-SEP has been very instrumental for its success, for example it was crucial that the Project Monitoring & Coordination Committee (PMCC) meetings have been held so regularly throughout the five-year project duration, while at the same time there were some initial problems with conducting the Project Steering Committee (PSC) meetings which were solved with the arrival in 2016 of the current TMED Secretary chairing it. Both committees are chaired by the GoB which is crucial because the prioritisation of components and activities in the B-SEP project is established at those committees, and this is therefore an important element of ownership. MOLE was an important part of the project through the involvement of the NSDC. However, since the NSDC will be turned into the NSDA and moved to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), MOLE is not currently represented in either the PSC or the PMCC. The project also included an M&E system, the Performance Measurement Framework, that collected sex-disaggregated data to monitor results. The MTE commented already in 2016 on the fact that there was no dedicated M&E/Knowledge Management officer, following which the project has made a number of adjustments. In addition, a timely Technical Review was undertaken in August 2018 partly also as input to the development of a concept note for a new project.

5) Impact Orientation and Sustainability

Regarding this criteria, the B-SEP project has made a number of important inroads, but much progress needs to be achieved as well. It has made a series of clear contributions to TVET reform. In addition, TVET Reform and Skills Development have been the subject for tripartite social dialogue, such as at the Dhaka Skills Summit in 2016 and its planned follow-up in March 2019. As a result of the fact that the project was from the beginning closely aligned to the NSDP of the MoE, ownership of the Project has been increasing over the years especially at DTE and BTEB of the MoE. The secretariat of the NSDC has also demonstrated ownership, while MOLE was important for the Dhaka Skills Summit and for hosting the NSDC, but its role has decreased in the past two years. The ultimate test of ownership and sustainability is when the government is able to arrange for dedicated budgets

involving of course the approval of the Ministry of Finance, for example to upscale NTVQF, to make the stipend program universal, and to enhance capacity building of DTE and its TVET institutions.

Recommendations

- 1) **Continue activities on skills reform** as it is no less relevant now than it was at the inception of B-SEP, and thereby **continue to ensure support over longer periods of time** from the TVET-R project through B-SEP to future interventions to allow for full development of strategies and capacities and to further enhance productivity and economic growth.
- 2) **Involve more actively the different trade union platforms** especially NCCWE, and thereby **explore the Model that ILO's Ready-Made Garments (RMG) project has developed for the involvement of the trade unions through the setting up of the Workers Resource Centre (WRC).**
- 3) **Provide support to the implementation of the recently passed Acts on NSDA and BTEB** in October 2018, and **continue to provide capacity building to NSDA, DTE, BTEB and BMET** in implementing their programs, and **explicitly coordinate with other donors** (e.g. ADB/SDC and WB/GAC).
- 4) **Liaise with BEF to continue support, including capacity building, of the 20 ISCs** (13 existing one and seven ISCs to be set up in the coming period) to be coordinated with ADB/SDC, and to **enhance awareness among the private sector of potential opportunities through ISCs and PPP**, and for example learn from the PPP pilots.
- 5) **Continue to use and improve the ILO B-SEP modality**, as several stakeholders indicated that B-SEP has shown more impact than other skills interventions with higher budgets, in particular investigate the cost-effectiveness of the relatively high number of international staff, and of the modality to have international staff work together from the beginning with national staff benefiting both in terms of learning, so that halfway through the project the national staff can lead activities on their own.
- 6) **Make sure to provide budget for (part-time) staff dealing with M&E, Communication and Knowledge Management.** Investigate ways of resource sharing with other (ILO) projects in these areas.
- 7) **Continue the regular conducting of monitoring committees such as the PSC and PMCC**, and maintain the good working relationships with key stakeholders, in particular MoE/DTE, NSDA, BEF, and others. Furthermore, **continue to co-chair the SDWG with the NSDC-S (or NSDA) and to lead the Meeting of DPs** in the skills sector in Bangladesh to ensure cooperation and collaboration among the relatively large number of skills development initiatives in order to avoid duplication of efforts or overlap of programs.
- 8) **Make sure to include in follow-up interventions the best practice of the Sustainability Workshop;** it has been considered in the above as a kind of Exit Strategy for the B-SEP programme as a whole. Support the implementation of the findings of the Sustainability Workshop, in particular to set up a Cell in DTE to develop a sustainability plan and implement and monitor it.
- 9) **Investigate ways in cooperation with BTEB and A2i to increase the linkages to industries** (BEF, ISC, PPP, and local chapters of employers' organisations) **in formal and informal apprenticeship programs.**
- 10) **Continue the consultation with the donor, GAC, for another phase of intervention** considering expanding public infrastructure development and future of work due to changing technology and automation and the enhanced attention for gender (cf. Recommendation 11).
- 11) **Align possible new interventions jointly to be undertaken with Global Affairs Canada to their new policy called 'Feminist International Assistance Policy' (FIAP)**, where gender equality is no longer a cross-cutting issue but a major priority, with a focus on empowerment of women and the needs of women and girls. The next phase of intervention will mainly focus on the skills policy with gender target, gender mainstreaming in skills system and on the skills needed in response to changing technology and increasing trade.
- 12) **Identify, support and scale up the effective interventions directed at Persons with Disabilities**, for example through BBDN, Access Bangladesh and Parents Forum for the Differently Abled (PFDA).