



Evaluation Summary



International
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Centre of Excellence for ready-made garment to implement certified training within the national skills development framework of Bangladesh (ILO COE Project) – Final Evaluation

Quick Facts

Country: Bangladesh

Final Evaluation: February 2018

Evaluation Mode: Independent

Administrative Office: ILO Country Office in Dhaka

Technical Office: EMP/SKILLS

Evaluation Team: Ms. Katerina Stolyarenko (Lead Evaluator) and Mr. Arafat Hosen Khan (National Team Member)

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Project Code: BGD/13/06/MUL

Donor & Budget: Sida and H&M, US\$1,463,142

Keywords: employment, skilled workers, ready-made garment, public private partnerships

Background & Context

Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The project “Centre of Excellence for ready-made garment to implement certified training within the national skills development framework of Bangladesh (ILO COE Project)” focused on improvement of the productivity, occupational safety and quality of Bangladesh’s RMG workforce by creating an approach to skills training and certification which enables all job seekers, including disadvantaged and disabled, to access skills training and progress to decent employment with

increased incomes. It was initiated after fire in Ashulia and Rana Plaza event to implement certified training within the national skills development framework of Bangladesh. This project was the first public – private partnership in Bangladesh.

The immediate objectives of the ILO COE project were four-fold: (1) Establish a Centre of Excellence that facilitates enhanced employer engagement in training; (2) Increase the training capacities of TTCs, TSCs, NGOs and participating enterprises; (3) Increase the use of assessment and certification in the RMG sector, linked to better documentation, and (4) Improve access of disadvantaged groups and the working poor to training and higher incomes.

Present Situation of the Project

The COE project commenced with some delays due to the time taken for getting the project approval from national authority and security situation in the country. The project completion date has been extended with no additional cost from 31 December 2016 to 31 December 2017. The project underwent an internal mid-term review in March 2015 conducted by the ILO Skills Specialist from DWT-Delhi and ILO official from PARDAV, 18 months after the project start date.

Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

Purpose: The final evaluation focused at identifying the project’s primary achievements, analysing the appropriateness of its strategy, the relevance of the project to the stakeholders needs, the project’s efficiency, effectiveness of gender mainstreaming as well as assessment of the potential for the sustainability of its

interventions and results and identify factors that enable the sustainability.

Scope: The final evaluation considers project activities and outcomes during the whole period of project implementation from January 1, 2014 to December 31, 2017.

Clients: The principle audiences for this evaluation are the ILO, the CEBAI, the Government of Bangladesh and agencies involved in standards setting, assessment and certification, registration, the employers' and workers' organizations in Bangladesh, the participating enterprises, the training providers in the RMG sector within the project area and the donors.

Methodology of evaluation

The evaluation had a participatory character and was primarily qualitative in nature. It was largely based on an Outcome Harvesting Approach and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (TVET OCAT). Data collection procedures included:

- (i) a desk review of literature,
- (ii) preparation of an evaluation matrix with related evaluation questions,
- (iii) semi-structured interviews with key informants and stakeholders,
- (iv) focus groups with new entrants/helpers trained within the industry and placed in operator-level positions, and industry trainers/assessors,
- (v) direct observation during field visits to Bangladesh and site visits to CEBAI Ashulia, two participating EBT factories (Fakir Apparels Limited and Remi Holdings Limited), and one enterprise which introduced an inclusive business policy (Shin Apparels) as well as attendance of the PMCC meeting,
- (vi) de-briefing with the ILO Dhaka at the end of the field mission, and
- (vii) holding of stakeholders' workshop attended by the representatives from the ILO, CEBAI, H&M, tripartite constituents and participating enterprises.

In total, more than 80 project documents have been reviewed, 82 interviews (80%-m/20%-f) with key project informants (implementing partner, donors, employers and workers organizations, agencies involved in standards setting, assessment and certification,

registration, training providers in the RMG sector within the project area, academia, participating enterprises, CEBAI Project Partners), ILO staff and direct beneficiaries of the project.

Major limitations to the methodological approach included: (a) attribution of the project's results; (b) access to work sites, and (c) time limitations.

Main Findings & Conclusions

Relevance: The project enjoyed a high relevance as the project's subject matter – skills development in RMG sector– remain contentious issue in Bangladesh reflected in the 2011 National Skills Development Policy, the 7th five-year plan and Vision 2021. The project was highly relevant both for project partners, donors and direct beneficiaries. The project was aligned with needs of the RMG sector as the industry characterized by the acute skills shortages at all levels, high turnover of employees and poor record-keeping, low standards for working conditions and safety in factories and lack of compliance. The COE project was consistent with the Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) for Bangladesh for 2012-2015 (Outcome 1), SDGs 8 and UNDAF 2012-2016 for Bangladesh (pillars ii and vii). For SIDA Bangladesh, cooperation in the area of the garment sector meets its strategic interest in human rights, gender equality and improving the working conditions. For H&M, the collaboration with ILO is very important as ILO can provide support to the supply chain and ensure compliance with ILO core conventions.

Effectiveness: In general, the Project demonstrated good achievements towards reaching the anticipated results despite a challenging environment. The Project achieved fully the set targets under IO2, while expected results mostly exceeded the set targets under IO1. There were also several unintended results including accreditation for the assessment of NTVQF Level 2 on SMO, preparation of Competency Standards of RMG 4 sub sectors (lingerie, woven, denim, knit) and research on the 'Alternative sources of energy in place of natural gas for RMG industries'. The project faced a number of challenges especially under IO1, namely difficulties with registration of the COE as a not for profit entity, change in BGMEA leadership in 2015, which resulted in low acceptance of the project by the current BGMEA Board, signature of implementation agreement (IA) of ILO with CEBAI a year later than projected, delays with recruitment of CEO for CEBAI for 1,5 years, mismatch of

initial organigram of CEBAI with the funds allocated in the IA and difficulties in securing funds for conducting research on RMG subjects desired by the industries, lack of willingness of the RMG industry to launch EBT at the beginning of the project implementation due to high cost of the model. The CEBAI promoted gender equity and sensitivity through collecting sex disaggregated data for all its capacity building activities and incorporation of women issues in soft skills training. However, gender issues are not reflected neither in CEBAI Business plan for 2018-2022 nor in Articles of Association.

Efficiency: Resources have been allocated strategically and used efficiently to achieve results. Sida's financial contribution focused on training and institutional development, while H&M supported the infrastructure, centre management and inputs from a technical and material side. Overall utilization rate for the period January 2014-December 2017 constituted 94% and the ratio of project direct costs to quality assurance stood on the level 65% to 35%. The strong aspect of project's efficiency is the ability of the project to raise complementary funds and investments from the RMG industry to implement the planned activities. However, the project suffered substantial delays in implementation due to a number of internal and external factors that were for the most part out of its control. The Project duration was revised once, i.e. from 36 months (January 2014-December 2016) to 48 months (January 2014-December 2017); however, the active implementation took place only during 24 months (January 2016-December 2017). The main reasons for delays with COE project implementation were due at first to the postponement on six months in clearance of ProDoc by Economic Relations Division and then lengthy Technical Project Proposal approval by the Planning Commission which took almost two years. These factors cut twenty-four months of the time for project implementation and had implications on ensuring the sustainability of the project's results.

Effectiveness of management arrangements: The project management structure was clear, however not very well-structured because of (i) lack of operational staff; (ii) inability of NPC to establish effective collaboration with national counterparts; and (iii) absence of internal accountability mechanism within the ILO CO-Dhaka to monitor the project implementation. At the same time, ILO demonstrated flexibility to project implementation through direct implementation of many aspects of CEBAI's Implementation Agreement due to

delays with recruitment of CEBAI management and hiring competent consultants to boost the capacity of the project management team. The governance structure of the project was only partly effective as both bodies responsible for the oversight of the ILO COE project implementation (Project Monitoring and Coordination Committee) and supervision of the CEBAI (Executive Committee) did not function properly. The project monitoring system was weak as no mechanism of third party monitoring was established. In terms of partnerships building, a mixed picture could be observed. CEBAI established very good collaboration with ILO, other ILO projects (Better Work Programme) and other development initiatives (ADB funded SEIP Project and Swisscontact funded B-Skillful project), BTEB and all participating enterprises. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of collaboration of CEBAI and BKMEA/BTMEA were limited. BKMEA never participated in the project, while BTMEA was on board as a silent partner. In addition, CEBAI was not able to develop fully productive relations with the BGMEA after the change of the BGMEA Board in 2015. In addition, the project was not able to maintain an effective relationship with all project's donors as the project did not fully meet the expectations of one of the donor both in terms of the way how it was implemented and the extent to which it was able to achieve sustainable results.

Impact orientation and sustainability: The sustainability strategy for CEBAI was developed by the ILO, but at the end of the project implementation and was not discussed and agreed with main stakeholders. CEBAI is only at initial stage of development and further support is needed to make it financially self-sustaining as it does not yet have sufficient own revenue generation sources. CEBAI has limited national/local ownership by the Employers' Associations (in particular BGMEA and BKMEA). The biggest threat to CEBAI's further functionality - a gap in coverage of operational cost of CEBAI after December 2017, i.e. US\$13,000 per month for another 6-8 months to process the commitments of other development partners or other ILO sister projects. Sustainability of EBT and IBP models is quite high in targeted enterprises, but the concepts for rolling out of the EBT training model and Inclusive Business Policy (IBP) in other RMG enterprises are not in place. Sustainability of capacity building activities is very good as the project formed a pool of 137 certified industry assessors and trainers who were trained on CBT&A and could continue to deliver trainings/make assessments for RMG sector and contribute for implementation of national standards

under the NTVQF. Sustainability of knowledge-based products (training curriculum, learning materials, competency standards and research papers) is good as could serve further as a basis for providing trainings consistent with existing quality assurance systems and for evidence-based policy making.

Conclusions

The ILO COE Project should be seen as a pilot initiative with quite limited duration and budget. The project was stretched by unrealistic expectations and an approach in which various strategic dimensions were inadequately developed. The COE project goal was only partly achieved. The Center of Excellence for Bangladesh Apparel Industry was set up, but it is neither fully owned by the industry nor fully operational. In overall, the project was effective at activity and outputs levels, while outcomes were not fully achieved as institutionalization of many initiatives did not take place in the course of the project implementation.

Recommendations

Main recommendations and follow-up

The main recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. To undertake revision of the CEBAI's business strategy in close coordination with all key stakeholders from the apparel sector with achievement of consensus about the vision and role of CEBAI in the context of the current development in the RMG sector. The business strategy shall include realistic targets and shall be accompanied by the clear fundraising plan. It also should include a description of how CEBAI is different from other service providers and ISC.
2. To consider allocation of core support to CEBAI for the period of implementation of the first business plan to ensure a proper organizational set up and sustainability of the center. The focus of CEBAI's organizational development in the upcoming 3 years should be on enhancement of governance structure, branding, organizational management and administration, human resources and financial management.
3. To ensure replication of the project's good practices (EBT and IBP models) to advocate for (1) the legislative changes on the requirements of the employment of PWDs in RMG sector through Ministry of Welfare or Ministry of Industries, and (2)

revision of the policy of the National Skills Development Authority with introduction of the clause that the preferences in employment should be given to the people who are NTVQF qualified.

4. To form a vision within the country office on how the collaboration of ILO and CEBAI shall take place and set clear procedures for that. To consider provision of further technical support to CEBAI for ensuring its sustainability.
5. To introduce a practice of allocation of resources for conduction of researches on the issues which are important for the future sustainability and further development of the sector.

Important lessons learned

The important lessons learnt is the need for realistic time frames, goals, scope, proper management structure and M&E system when planning interventions related to set up an independent institution - the Centre of Excellence for Bangladesh Apparel Industry (CEBAI), which will be able to develop a sustainable strategy for the industry. Administrative and institutional changes take time, and the duration of project is too short (just 36 months including 6 months of inception phase), and goals too ambitious, to achieve intended results. Therefore, technical assistance offered in the field of establishment of a replicable model of an industry driven training and support services Centre of Excellence and meeting the skilled labour force needs of the export oriented RGM industry should be planned for a longer period of time, possibly in the form of a programme rather than projects, to allow for the generation of lasting results and impact.

Emerging Good Practices

A specific feature of the ILO COE Project is its contribution to the improving the productivity and occupational safety of the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Enterprise based training is helpful in producing skill workers under the national skill development policy and facilitates increased skills for workers without losing income or leaving job.

The access of the disadvantaged groups to decent jobs in the RMG sector and their employability could be improved by supporting employers to become more inclusive through introduction of inclusive business policies focusing on persons with disabilities (PWDs) and gender equality.

See the full report for all recommendations, lessons learned and good practices.