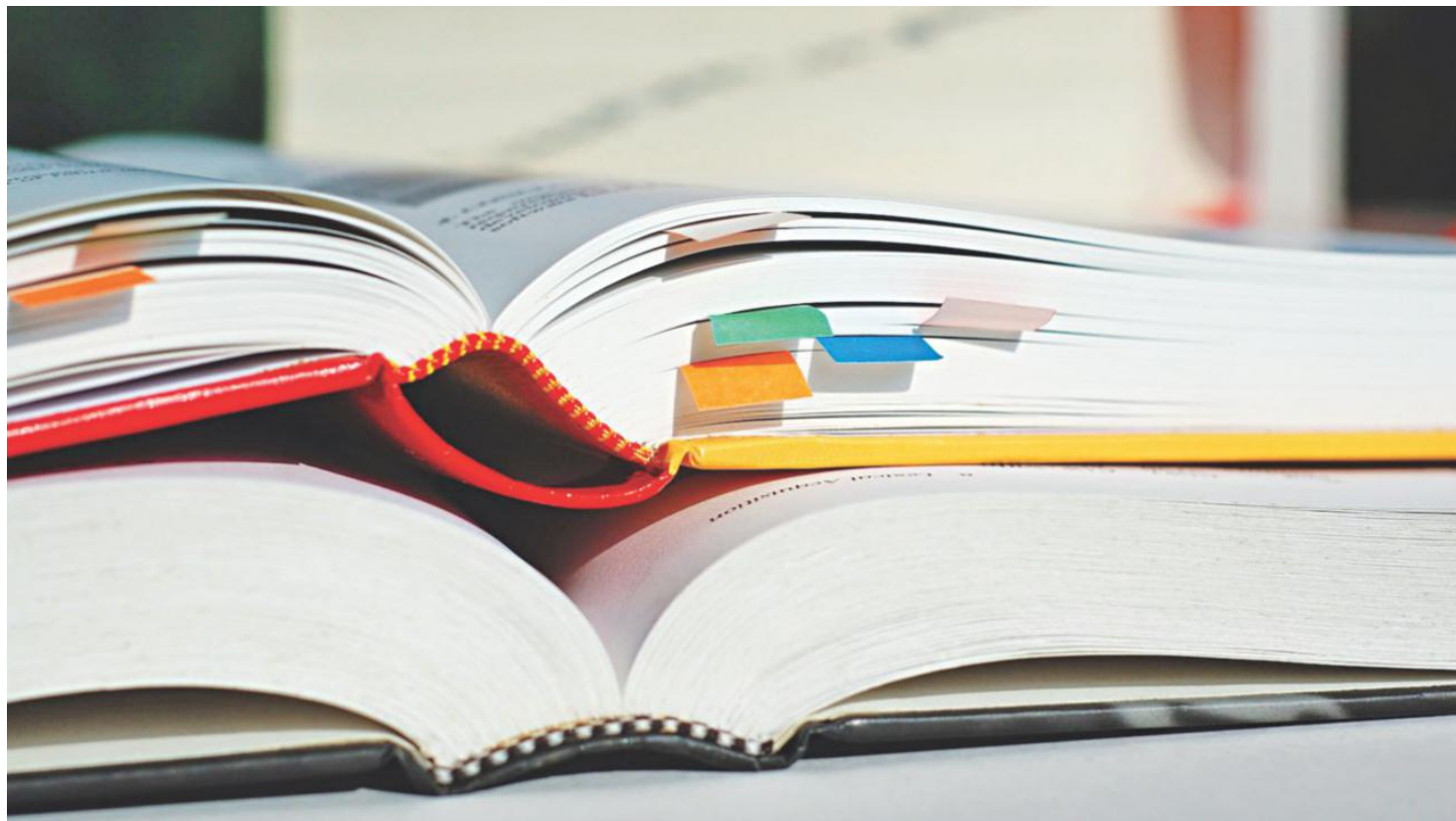


Matching education, training, skills and jobs

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What is the dilemma?

Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET), or even a broader concept of Technicals-Vocational Skills Development (TVSD), alone does not guarantee productivity gains or job creation. A blend of cognitive and non-cognitive skills supported by favourable policies in economic and social spheres can enhance the country's competitiveness and contribute to social inclusion, increased employment and alleviation of poverty.

Many employers do not seem to value skills acquired in existing TVET and emphasise transferrable and soft skills, which TVET or general basic education do not offer effectively. There appears to be a low-skills equilibrium in which the economy and the private sector are trapped. The economy seems to have adjusted to a state of low skill and low productivity of workers at the cost of low productivity of the economy, and generally low earning and underemployment among workers, with or without skill training.

Under these circumstances, investment in expanding the existing system, even with some tinkering with efficiency issues and the call for larger numbers of young people to participate in TVET may not produce the desired results. Structural changes in the system and new thinking about governance, management, resource provision and use, and capacity building at different levels are required.

Researchers have coined a new terminology for the situation of young people caught in a fix due to stagnating economy or jobless growth both developed and developing countries - not in education, employment or training (NEET). This state of inactivity characterises a third of the young people worldwide of roughly age 15 to 24 years, according to ILO estimates. A report by a consortium including ILO, World Bank and Rand Institute titled Towards

Solution for Youth Employment (S4YE) attempts to address the dilemma (S4YE 2015).

How is it in Bangladesh? A binary definition of employed and unemployed does not portray the reality in Bangladesh and other developing countries. The poor cannot afford to remain unemployed. The large majority of them are actually under-employed in the unregulated informal economy eking out bare subsistence from insecure, vulnerable and low-wage work. The challenge is to link education and training with skills and jobs in a way that contributes to creating a sufficient numbers of “decent jobs”.

The Workforce in Bangladesh

The workforce in Bangladesh adds up to about 60 million. Over two million young people are entering the workforce each year. Although access to education has grown, the vast majority of the working population is without general education or occupational skill training.

The Labour Force Survey 2010 showed that 41 percent of the 56.7 million workers in the domestic labour market had no education at all and 23 percent had not completed primary education. Thus almost two-thirds of the work force had no education or less than five years of primary education. (BBS, Labour Force Survey 2010).

The total skills training opportunities at diploma, certificate and short courses with some formal education pre-requisites serve currently under 500,000 trainees each year. These are affiliated with Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB). Another half million is served by short, flexible duration courses with diverse contents, mostly not regulated by BTEB, and offered mostly by NGOs and private providers. Out of this million participating in various kinds of skills training, approximately 75 percent, according to BTEB estimate, are expected to complete the courses, which means the output of trained workers in a year stood at about 750,000 (SDC, Skills Snapshot, 2012).

Three points stand out from these numbers:

- i) For a national work force of around 60 million (and half of these in the 15-24 years' age group), the low and mid-level skills development provisions for about a million trainees (and 750,000 completers) per year cannot be considered adequate.
- ii) The balance between diploma and certificate/basic level training is clearly a problem. With workers overwhelmingly engaged in low-skill work, only a small fraction of such workers are served by the training provisions.
- iii) Inadequacies in numbers and balance in training are symptomatic of weaknesses in market-responsiveness, quality of training and relevance of the training courses, discussed further below.

Skill Development Needs and opportunities

One way of looking at the spectrum of skills development is that it should include foundational skills (literacy, numeracy), transferable and soft skills (basic and generic personal and social skills), and technical and vocational skills (directly related to jobs). These skills are mutually complementary and are acquired in different ways—through formal education and training at different levels; on-the-job through work experience and vocational/technical training; non-formal training, and informally through family and community and via the communications media.

TVET enrolment is estimated to be fewer than 5 per cent of post-primary formal education enrolment. There is a wide array of informal skill development through on-the-job experience and traditional apprenticeship that has no link with the formal training system. Arguably, the national economy would come to a grinding halt without the informal and traditional skill development network. However, there are concerns about the extent, relevance and quality of these activities as well as the question of protection of young trainees from abuse and exploitation, highlighted by study of CAMPE titled “Skills Development in Bangladesh” (CAMPE 2013).

To increase the proportion of secondary level enrolment in the vocational-technical stream, a vocational/technical

secondary level stream has been created for students after grade 8 general education since the 1980s. But the results are at best mixed. The general international experience shows that "vocationalising" formal secondary schools raises the cost of the school without corresponding benefit in skill development or better employment prospects for students.

There has been a tendency to look for and prescribe easy solutions for the complex problem of preparing young people for the world of work and meeting the changing skills needs of the economy. The easy prescription is to insert courses in practical and vocational skills in secondary or even primary schools. Curriculum change and investments with this end in view mostly have not produced the desired results (Lauglo and Maclean, 2005) International experience also suggests that the most useful vocational/occupational preparation in the secondary school is building a sound foundation of communication skills, mathematics and basic science, which make young people trainable for the employment market (UNESCO-GMR 2012).

The labour force survey conducted in 2010 indicates that employment in what is called the informal economy in Bangladesh is estimated to be around 90% of the total jobs in the labour market. This is work with unregulated work condition and wages, often in exploitative condition and includes work in family or individual enterprises. It is more prevalent in the rural areas. Women are also more likely to be under informal employment arrangements. The informal sector accounted for more than 40% of the total gross value added in Bangladesh economy in 2010, with the highest contributions in agriculture, fishery, trade, and other labour-intensive industries..

Recent policy initiatives

The government has prepared three separate policy statements which have relevance to skills development: (i) Non-Formal Education Policy (NFE) Policy 2006, (ii) National Education Policy 2010, and (iii) National Skills Development Policy 2011. All these are related to objectives and strategies regarding different aspects of formal and non-formal education and training opportunities for young people. They also converge in recognising the importance of skills for life and livelihood through lifelong learning with a poverty reduction emphasis (MOE 2011).

The policy initiatives, while pointing at the right direction, are yet to show concrete results in transforming TVET to address the problem of a mismatch between skills and jobs. The problem originates from a combination of two kinds of factors: a) deficiencies in basic foundational skills arising from primary and secondary education quality and the quality of vocational training on offer, and; b) Inadequate market linkages characterised by a limited participation of the employers in designing training (NORRAG-BIED 2015).

Moreover, the TVET system as it exists has not developed the capacity to address the skills need of the informal sector which accounts for up to 90% of employment.

Another area of concern and policy weakness is the lack of a sufficient and systematic effort to prepare workers for overseas employment and raise their skills profile to improve their earning and working condition.

Some half-a-million male workers and 100,000 female workers are estimated to have gone overseas in 2015. Their annual remittance has topped USD 15 billion, ensuring a healthy foreign currency reserve for the country. The large majority of these workers going abroad are of low skills, thus working with low wages and in vulnerable conditions. For ensuring demand-supply matching for migrant workers from Bangladesh in terms of skills and competencies, it is necessary to develop relevant training structures that will be responsive to the needs of the destination countries

The National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) has been developed in order to assess comparability of qualifications acquired from

different institutions and by different means. This is also necessary to align the qualifications acquired by trainees with the changing occupational and skill profiles in both domestic and international labour markets. The Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) has the task of exploring the skills demand in major destination countries for our workers. It is also trying to assure that the current needs for short-term courses for the workers

migrating abroad are met well. Further specific efforts are needed to develop skills that match the demand and are relevant to market practices in destination countries

Strengths and weaknesses of the TVET sub-system

Reform and development initiatives have led to some flexibility in the public training system through non-regular short-term training on the basis of cost recovery. The Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) administers well-developed exit examinations, though the focus remains on the theoretical aspects of training. Some training providers have established linkages with industry. Availability of short market-responsive courses to those not finishing grade 8 has increased. (ADB 2012).

Examples are growing of industry initiatives in training through public–private partnerships in skills provision especially in the apparel sector. The technical training centres (TTCs) under the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) display several departures from an over-centralised bureaucratic pattern. TTCs are free to market their products and use the income generated. (Ibid.)

On the other hand, constraints, often carried over from the past, of different kinds have impeded desired progress. Recent studies including those of World Bank and Asian Development Bank (ADB) identified these weaknesses, which can be grouped under several headings (World Bank 2013).

- Top-down organisation and management in skill training programmes and institutions
- Quality and relevance deficiencies
- Weak market responsiveness
- Disparity and inequity in training opportunities
- Teachers' numbers, skills and performance
- Inadequate resources and ineffective use of these resources
- Information and data system limitations for effective management
- Misdirected and mismatched student motivation and expectations.

Priorities for Action

A broad definition of skills development as a part of human capability enhancement requires comprehensive and coordinated attention to the spectrum of skills comprising foundation skills, transferrable skills and job-specific skills. This broad view needs to be taken as the conceptual framework for exploring policies and actions in the TVET sub-sector (or more appropriately, the TVSD sub-sector). Within this framework, specific action areas can be identified.

Intensified efforts on policy responses and actionable strategies are needed in four areas: TVET financing, shortage of motivated and qualified TVET instructors, strengthening links to industry, and the capacity and determination to implement the planned activities effectively.

The National Skill Development Council (NSDC) Secretariat has been engaged in preparing an Action Plan and Road Map for skills development. The priorities of the Secretariat include developing a TVET data system, undertaking a national skills provision and skills providers' survey; forming at least 20 sector-wise Industry Skills Councils (ISCs), adoption of an NSDC Act; and establishing pilot model institutions in the seven divisional cities.

The work of NSDC in these vital matters is in progress but continues at a slow pace. It is hindered by limited staff and resources as well as its working mechanism in carrying out its responsibility of coordination among all the ministries involved in skills training. These obstacles need to be removed to enable NSDC to do its job. Similarly, BTEB and BMET also need to be supported to carry out their assigned roles effectively (NORRAG-BIED 2015).

Finally, it should be mentioned that education, training, skills and employment have been featured prominently in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 2030 adopted by UN in September 2015. Goal 4 on education and lifelong learning have two targets on “equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical and vocational and tertiary education” (Target 4.3) and substantial increase of “youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent job and entrepreneurship” (Goal 4.4).

Goal 8 is to “promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all.” The targets under this goal includes “full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for young people and persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value (Target 8.5); substantial reduction by 2020 of youth “not in employment, education or training” (Target 8.6); and, by 2020, developing and operationalising a global strategy for youth employment and implement what is called the “Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organisation.” (Target 8.b) (UN 2015).

The SDG 2030 agenda pose the challenge and the opportunity for redoubled efforts to address the dilemma of matching and linking education, training, skills and jobs.

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