Coordination among national-international labour market and skills development for growth and equity in Bangladesh

1. Background

Bangladesh is growing enormously in terms of global socio economic indicators. Recently the country has achieved lower middle income status with huge potentiality to reach middle income level by the year of 2021. Thus from every aspects government is trying to focus on employment generation, production and market expansion for sustainable economic growth. Education and skills reform is also taking its shape to accommodate large number of drop-out but unemployed or unskilled youth labour force with open and flexible modality of educating market based skills and training. So National Skill Development Council (NSDC) of Bangladesh has been given target to raise technical and vocational enrollment rate from 8% now to 20% by the year of 2021 at the time of Golden Jubillee of Independent Bangladesh. But the lack of integration and communication between traditional vocational training or skills and national or international labour market demand becoming the major challenges of future progress.

Bangladesh has a total population of 159 million and the lobour force covers 78.62 million1. Lobour force growth is 2.2% per year means 1.7 million more enters the labour market each year. Meanwhile the unemployment rate 4.3% or 3.4 million and underemployment rate 18.7% or 15 million represents high demand of decent job. But surprisingly it is true that data from a survey from 2012 estimated that approximately 80% of the workforce had not received any training and among the 20% that had, only 11% received training which was justifiable under the National Technical and Vocational Quality Framework (NTVQF)2.
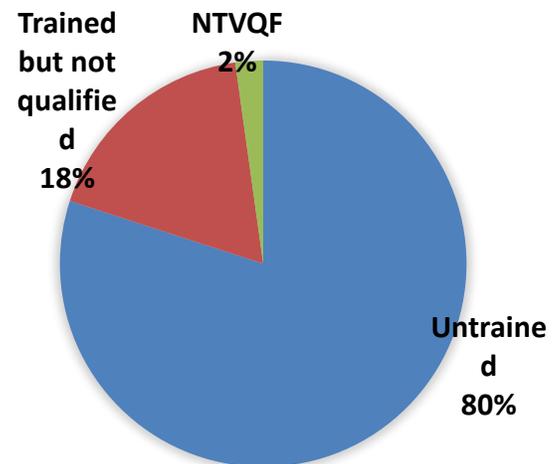

Figure 1: Present Status of Labour Force

Every year about 1 million youth are being trained by govt. and non-govt. skill providers. But industry states that they are not getting expected quality and skilled workers, which is hampering knowledge spill over and entrepreneurship[3]. So there is a huge communication and coordination gap between employers and skill providers (existing vocational institutes) to identify what to train, how to train and for whom to train. Besides this, some mega development initiatives are going to be taken by government where huge employment opportunity will be created. So proper planning on demand based skill development and job placement is a burning issue for the country to leapfrog towards economic development with its huge potential human resource.

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[1] Bangladesh Labor Force, by Index Mundi (2013), http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/bangladesh/labor-force

[2] Bangladesh skills snapshot 2012, National skill survey, phase-1, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_226950.pdf

[3] Bangladesh Labour Market Profile 2014, Danish Trade Union, Council for International Development Cooperation; http://www.ulandssekretariatet.dk/sites/default/files/uploads/public/PDF/LMP/lmp_bangladesh_2014_final_version.pdf

Access to Information (a2i) as a flagship programme of Prime Minister's Office can assist National Skill Development Council (NSDC), Industry Skill Councils (ISC) and other concerned authorities to minimize this gap.

2. Strategic Framework

Considering the situation Access to Information (a2i) programme suggests following strategic framework proposing four priorities:
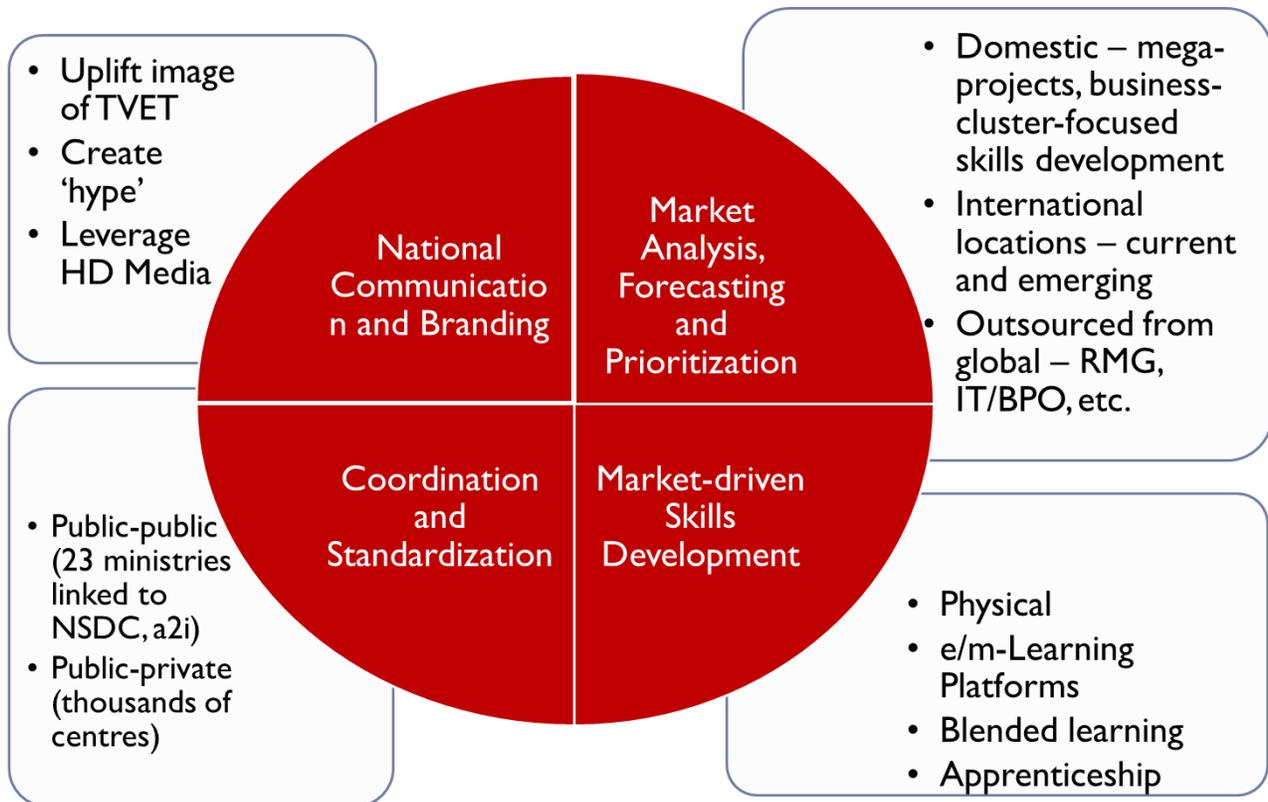
- Uplift image of TVET
- Create 'hype'
- Leverage HD Media

- Public-public (23 ministries linked to NSDC, a2i)
- Public-private (thousands of centres)

National Communication and Branding

Market Analysis, Forecasting and Prioritization

Coordination and Standardization

Market-driven Skills Development

- Domestic – mega-projects, business-cluster-focused skills development
- International locations – current and emerging
- Outsourced from global – RMG, IT/BPO, etc.

- Physical
- e/m-Learning Platforms
- Blended learning
- Apprenticeship

Figure 2: Strategic framework for skill development

2.1 Market Analysis, Forecasting and Prioritization: Demand supply equilibrium; structural-nonstructural adjustment like apprenticeship/internship, targeted employment subsidies, improvement of skills, incentive and labour flexibility will depend upon appropriate market analysis and forecasting. In Bangladesh, the domestic and international markets are not well explored. Many workers are backfiring from middle-east and other countries due to inappropriate knowledge and skills. Training institutions are still providing many traditional courses and methods without prior geographical and contextual need assessment. Recently, the country is going to take mega projects like Padma Bridge, metro rail, elevated express, EPZs etc that will create huge employment opportunity but seek skilled labour from home or abroad. The outsourcing business like RMG, IT or BPO is growing much e.g. Dhaka ranks third in global freelance outsourcing work but to keep up this success, specific skills development for outsourcing is a crying need. So the first strategic priority is proposed to do market analysis, forecast the changing nature and prioritizing the skills.

2.2 Market driven skill development: Every year 400 thousand labours from Bangladesh are entering at international job market having only 25% of them are trained. It is already mentioned that 80% of total labour fource are not getting any formal training. With the present capacity of face to face training, it is quite impossible to cover all the expected skill demand. Thus e/m-learning and blended learning programme is very important to address within capacity building plan. Market based up-to-date and quality learning resources and methodologies need to be ensured for on-training and post-training support. Apprenticeship and internship model with proper partnership among skill provider and industry shows significant impact on employment satisfaction and early job placement.

2.3 Coordination and standardization: There are 23 ministries, 27 departments, about 7002 public and private skill development institutions and many other agencies directly involved in skill development. Though all these institutions are working hard but there is a coordination gap among them causes many overlap of courses, no common skill database, no unique or standard certification system and not integrated properly with labour market. Thus coordination among skill providers/employers/industry and standardization of evaluation and certification is a prior need to economic development. The National Skills Development Council (NSDC) is formed by the Government of Bangladesh, headed by the Hon'ble Prime Minister, with the aim to provide leadership and clear direction to skills development initiatives and to promote workplace learning in close cooperation with industry and handling the routine coordination with all the Industry Skills Councils. Thus a2i can assist NSDC in coordinating and attaining standardization in skill development.

2.4 National Communication and Branding: It is said that Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is the provision of skills, knowledge, attitude and values needed for the place of work. Developed countries like Germany, Switzerland, China and Singapore has tackled down their youth unemployment problem through large focus on TVET. However, in Bangladesh TVET has been left to the fringe and its significance has not really been hugged. Social disrespect to this sector is a major factor of lag behind. So uplifting image of TVET through proper communication and branding should be a major goal of this nation. Above 27 television channels and one upcoming called HD Media shows huge potentiality of creating hype and awareness about TVET and future economic growth of Bangladesh.

3. Relationship to the Strategic Framework

The constitution of Bangladesh in its article no 20 mentioned that "work is right, a duty and a matter of honor for every citizen capable of working and every one shall be paid for the work". Similarly, the article 15 ensures provision of basic necessities, right to work and right to guarantee employment and social security. The article 23 stated "everyone has the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just & favorable conditions of work and protection against non-employment. The goal-4 of SDG also emphasizes on technical and vocational skills for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.

4. Goal and Objectives

The primary goal of this initiative is to increase remittance per capita and ensure decent work for everyone through appropriate planning, coordination and reshaping skill development. Main objectives are:

- To analyze labour market for forecasting and prioritization of skill demand and training
- To develop skill on the basis of domestic and international market demand
- To coordination and standardization of TVET sectors along with all the industries, employers and skill providers.
- To uplift image and create hype of TVET through national communication and branding strategies

5. Expected accomplishments

5.1 Developed a comprehensive and interoperable labour market dashboard, resulting in finding existing national-international skill demand, new employment opportunity and coordination among employers and skill providers for apprenticeship and job placement program.

5.2 Enhanced physical training programme through capacity building, modernizing infrastructure and integrating ICT.

5.3 Developed new short and long courses analyzing the trend of recent and future market demand.

5.4 Integrating m-learning and e-learning with physical training programme for quality learning and easy access to resources.

5.5 Prepared a virtual platform for easily accessible online short course, training and interactive resources for lifelong learning

5.6 Implemented National Training and Vocational Quality Framework (NTVQF) to ensure quality and demand-based skill development and unified certification

5.7 Created a hype and awareness increased the number of enrollment in TVET

5.8 Decreased youth unemployment and underemployment rate and ensured decent work for skilled manpower.

5.9 Increased remittance.

6. Main Activities

Attached.

7. Challenges

Some of the key challenges are unorganized TVET sector; absence of demand driven curriculum; assessment system does not reflect technical skills, inappropriate lab facilities; inadequately trained instructors; very week apprenticeship system; insufficient infrastructure; lack of accountability; no linkage between industry and TVET providers; squat social status of TVET graduates etc.