

# Designing an Inclusive Skills Development Programme

## *TVET Reform Project in Bangladesh, Project Team, ILO*

The TVET Reform Project is an initiative of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). It is funded by the European Union (EU) and executed by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in partnership with government agencies. Bangladesh is the eighth most populous country in the world which presents an immense opportunity in terms of labour force. TVET is essential in ensuring the country's competitiveness in the global labour market and ensuring decent work for all.

The ILO's TVET Reform Project in Bangladesh is working on methodologies for enabling access of underprivileged groups to technical and vocational training courses. The pilot programme described in this case study is an important step in encouraging government and employers to consider the rights of persons with disabilities. The ILO's overall objective is decent work for all and programmes such as this demonstrate the benefits of integrating persons with disabilities within mainstream development efforts. This programme also aims to simultaneously reduce other barriers to inclusion such as negative perceptions to disability, confidence and leadership capacity of persons with disabilities.

Talking to people in the field was the first step in the process of developing a training programme for persons with disabilities. Consultation was carried out over a number of months and included government training institutions, private organizations and disability-focused organizations. Consultation was done through a combination of desktop meetings and visits to different areas, to directly experience what people with disabilities face in Bangladesh. Extensive situational research was also conducted, into disability statistics, labour, training and employment in Bangladesh. The quality of the consultation and research conducted was integral in the ILO developing a relevant, industry-oriented, flexible programme.

After looking into these different sectors, the ready-made garment sector was selected for the pilot program. The following factors contributed to this decision:

- Availability of employment after graduation.
- History of successful programs implemented (e.g. Marks & Start)
- Demonstrated industry enthusiasm for including persons with disabilities and underprivileged persons.

- Industry need for skilled workers and scope (through training) to meet this need.
- Contribution of RMG sector to national economy and annual gross domestic product.

Next, there was a glance at the existing programme which focuses on employment of persons with disabilities in the readymade garment sector to thoroughly investigate. In order to plan the training methodology for the pilot, there was a need to look at an existing programme and find out which approaches had been tried, what had worked, and most importantly, what had not worked in Bangladesh.

The focus was on Marks & Start, a program which was implemented in 2006 by Marks & Spencer. A corporate social responsibility initiative first trialled successfully in Sri Lanka, the model offers two months of specialized training for persons with disabilities identified by the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP) in Bangladesh. The program is funded by a group consisting of 22 organizations and is not only a successful example of disability inclusion in TVET in Bangladesh but also a sustainable income-generating activity model. The programme consistently achieves high retention rates and over 200 persons with disabilities have already been successfully trained to date. These trainees have then been employed by readymade garment companies across Bangladesh.

The next step was to select the government and industry partners. This was done early to ensure that all parties were involved in the planning stages as well as in the implemented stages. When selecting partners, there was a lookout for organizations that would be committed to the project's goals and focused on developing a sustainable model which could be replicated by industry. After a series of meetings, the following partnerships were finalized:

- Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed
- The Viyelltex Group
- Interfab Shirt Manufacturing Limited
- Gazipur Technical School & College, Directorate of Technical Education, Bangladesh Technical Education Board, Ministry of Education

Now that the sector had been decided and the partnerships needed to run the pilot had been established, a program outline was planned. The pilot would focus on training persons with disabilities and disadvantaged women for work in the ready-made garment sector and it would have two stages of competency achievement:

- Stage 1: (4 months) Off the job training and formative assessment conducted in the CRP vocational training centre. After summative assessment/training, trainees could exit at this point, graduating with a National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) Pre-Vocational 2 Certificate.
- Stage 2: (8 months) on the job training and formative assessment conducted in the Interfab Shirt Manufacturing Ltd after which they could graduate with an NTVQF Level 2 certificate.

**Three steps were then undertaken:**

1. A basic skill need analysis was conducted to specifically identify what a person needed to know and be able to do to work in that job. Industry representatives were consulted to ensure that the skills attained would be relevant industry-wide, not just for a single organization's needs.
2. This analysis was then discussed with disability experts to identify the combination of skills that would be most feasible for the trainees, given their specific physical limitations. Many factors were taken into consideration, such as maintaining certain postures for long periods of time, repetitive movements using certain limbs, and required equipment adjustments.
3. These finalised tasks were converted into units of competency under the NTVQF and, then, based on this, a Competency Skills Log Book (CSLB) was designed. For organizations considering specifically replicating this woven RMG course, the first step would be to obtain copies of these units of competency and the CSLB, through contacting the ILO TVET Reform Project, relevant Industry Skills Council or RMG Sector Working Committee or the BTEB.

For a new course or a different occupation, the organization would need to work with the relevant Industry Skills Council, Sector Working Committee or the BTEB to develop additional units of competency or consider running a partially-accredited course, using a mix of the nits developed in conjunction with some newly-developed units.

Before procuring equipment, extensive consultation was undertaken involving a number of experts. Both venues were taken into consideration; the facilities for Stage 1 at CRP and Stage 2 at Interfab.

### **Stage 1 Venue:**

The room designated for the course was approximately 600 sft and had previously been used for tailoring and dress making. It contained a number of older model pedestal sewing machines and a few items of basic furniture. When analysing the venue, there were two main challenges:

1. Originally, 20 trainees were to be included in the program but after assessment of the space available, it was found that a maximum of 16 electric sewing machines could be comfortably accommodated. Inclusion of 4 extra trainees would require expansion of the room by approximately 400sft, as well as the installation of a fabric cutting table of approximately 80 sft. To solve this, it was decided that 12 trainees would be included in the course.
2. There was a need for a mini-cutting (rotary) machine with a retractable overhead flexible electrical coil, with a cutting table underneath to cut fabric pieces of 2-3 inches. This was not possible in the space available, and so an arrangement was instead made with industry to supply the necessary pre-cut fabric.

### **Stage 2 Venue:**

Interfab is one of a very few RMG factories in Bangladesh which includes persons with disabilities in its workforce. In placing the trainees in the venue, the only adjustments that were needed were an adjustable table (for a trainee who is extremely low in height), a specific placing on the ground floor for a trainee who needed two crutches for mobility and the implementation of a buddy system for the same trainee, for physical as well as social support. Much work was done however, in terms of capacity building and training of staff involved.

Fire is a significant danger in many factories, due to electrical short circuiting, discarded cigarette butts, heat emitted by machines and the abundance of flammable material. Fire fighting equipment and training are extremely important, particularly when persons with disabilities are employed. Production managers, floor supervisors and general staff need to be aware of what action to take in an emergency situation. Both venues in this program were also thoroughly assessed for any other existing occupational safety and health hazards, which were then minimised as much as was possible. These included inherent risks in machine use and trip hazards arising from cords running across floors. It was also ensured that well-equipped first aid box/s were easily accessible. It is important to remember that special training facilities do not have to be built in most cases; existing facilities just need to be assessed and modifications made if necessary.

Industry involvement was the key to the success of this program; representatives of industry were involved in all consultations and major decisions. Developing the course of line with their needs meant that the skills developed matched current industry needs and so not only were skill gaps filled in factories, but the probability of employment of trainees after graduation was vastly increased.

It is integral that a strong relationship is developed with industry, as much is needed from them as a partner. To build the capacity of all partners, the ILO provided formal and informal training sessions to a number of areas.

In terms of staff capacity development, traditional training is based on knowledge and understanding. The emphasis in competency based training and assessment (CBT&A) is however not just on knowing, but on performing. CBT&A is focused on the development of work skills that have been identified and agreed on by industry. Instead of a theoretical approach, competency-based training and assessment is a practical, workplace-based approach which equips students with the skills that industry needs. It focuses on real work skills which are observable and measurable.

The outcomes of competency based training and assessment are clearly stated at the beginning of the training, so that learners know what they have to be able to do, trainers know what training or learning is to be provided and organizations know the skill level required by people.

An imperative factor in the success of this course was the emphasis placed on building the competency-based training and assessment skills of the staff. This ensured that they understood competency-based methodology and, in addition, that their technical skills were relevant to the current needs of the industry.

Within the NGO capacity, the instructor completed an intensive CBT&A training program and a one-week industry attachment at Interfab. Training coordinator completed an intensive leadership and management development program to equip him with the skills needed to coordinate the training program. A social mobiliser received informal training in the holistic approach of CBT&A.

In the public sector capacity, the instructor completed an intensive CBT&A training program and a one-week industry attachment at Interfab. He also spent four months co-delivering and co-assessing the training in CRP, and experience which will be invaluable in replication.

CRP operates approximately 68 outstation centres in Bangladesh including four fully operational divisional centres. It is in these centres that pre-screening for training suitability is conducted, which includes consulting parents to obtain their consent. After the pre-screening process identified a list of potential candidates, the following process was adopted for the programme wherein it was tested whether the potential candidates met the basic selection criteria or not, then an interview was taken with industry participation. After the selection, the training coordinator must ensure all staff members are willing to execute a coordinated approach to the training program and show respect, care, empathy and sensitivity at all times. Working with persons with disabilities can be very rewarding, but must be planned and documented. The environment must be conducive to positive, integrated learning and adequate support networks must be established. Instructors also need to be aware that they will have to manage a dual role of being a social counsellor as well as a trainer.

The development of the course content took place as the industry needs were first identified, then they were discussed with disability experts and then units of competency were developed. Units were developed in close consultation with industry, to ensure that skills developed would match the current and future needs of the sector. An emphasis was placed on multi-skilling, to ensure the trainees could be flexible in the workplace. Before development of any material began, a thorough analysis of existing training materials in the market was undertaken, to minimise any possible doubling of effort. Competency skill log books were also developed. They were used in competency based training and assessment to record and certify skills attained during training, mainly to benefit persons with low levels of education.

Competency based training and assessment stipulates two fundamental aspects for effectiveness. The first being to develop competency by intensive practice of essential skills and the second being to make the training environment a highly conducive one and to learn with fun! The fun part of it being that a positive learning environment was created through soothing colours, colourful posters and success stories of past trainees, health and safety reminders, sewing displays, finished garments, trainee achievements and artwork. Instructors engaged the trainees in lively information exchanges and participative discussions to take the focus from physical and social constraints to future achievement.

During breaks and allocated free time, instructors joined with trainees to play board games, spend time outside in the natural surroundings, share stories and watch videos together. Regular meals and a nutritious diet were an important part of the program and basic life skills sessions were interactive and included topics like health, water conservation, and maintaining personal hygiene among other things.

### **The Timeline Looked Like This:**

- April 2011: Agreement signed between ILO and CRP
- May 2011: Agreement signed between Interfab and ILO
- May-June 2011: Training facilities upgraded and selection of trainees
- July 2011: Inauguration ceremony and training commencement
- July-Nov 2011: Off-the-job training at CRP training centre for 4 months
- Dec 2011-July 2012: On-the-job training at Interfab for 8 months
- August 2012: Graduation with an industry-recognized qualification and twelve months industry experience (subject to assessment, submission of CSLB, etc.)

This programme has had a huge impact on the lives of the beneficiaries, who have not only experienced immense personal benefit, but are also now role models within their families and communities. They are becoming confident advocates for disability awareness and becoming financially independent. The project has succeeded in creating a model for integrating persons with disabilities into the mainstream workforce of Bangladesh.

This program has further strengthened their commitment as an organization but more importantly, it has strengthened their linkage to industry. The RMG sector is quickly expanding in Bangladesh and one of the major constraints to its growth is the lack of skilled local workers. Persons with disabilities can help to fill this gap, particularly in factories based in less urbanised areas, where workers are increasingly difficult to recruit. As skill needs exist across a number of industries in Bangladesh, it is even hoped that the RMG sector itself will become a model to other sectors in employing persons with disabilities and underprivileged persons.

With the recent approval of the National Skills Development Policy, public training institutions will be updating the programmes which they deliver to meet the requirements of the National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework. This will mean converting all training programmes delivered into CBT&A format, and up skilling all staff to deliver and assess these. It is hoped that the RMG sector will become a model to other sectors and qualifications in different areas in public training institutes will also include persons with disabilities and underprivileged persons.

There were many lessons learned during this pilot programme. First off, this pilot has demonstrated that a mainstream competency-based program can be reasonably adjusted to include persons with disabilities and underprivileged trainees. By networking with industry, successful training models can be developed to provide training and employment opportunities to persons with disabilities. Industry is interested in recruiting persons with disabilities not only to fulfil corporate social responsibility obligations but also because

it makes good business sense. Persons with disabilities across the world face stigma in many facets of everyday life. In developing countries particularly, disability is seen as a sign of misfortune to the family and the community. The confidence that developed with the skills learnt in this programme helped individuals to focus on their ability instead of their disability however, and allowed them to realise that they could become skilled employees of a reputable organization. Their families and their communities realised this, and one of the most basic examples of a change in mind set is that graduating trainees regularly face multiple marriage proposals from local families.

Shuely is one such inspiring individual who did not let her disability stop her from being able. Many persons with disabilities face major barriers to social inclusion in their communities. Many are not able to access mainstream training or decent education and this leads to significantly decreased employment opportunities. World Health Organization statistics suggest that as many as one in ten people are disabled in Bangladesh.

In a year, Shuely became a confident young skilled worker completing her first year of employment as a sewing machine operator in a reputable apparel factory. Shuely does not have the use of one of her legs due to polio, and the two young female apprentices who are picking up their crutches nearby are also persons with disabilities.

Growing up in the rural town of Barisal, Shuely's father was a rickshaw-puller and her mother was a housewife. She managed to pass Class 9 even though she was unable to regularly attend school because of her disability but in Class 10 her family's financial problems forced her to quit her studies and seek employment. Shuely saved money through doing small tailoring jobs for her neighbours and moved to Dhaka to look for employment opportunities. She looked for three months but she was unable to find anything and, with her savings spent, she headed back to Khulna. Shortly after returning, she received a call back from the Centre for the Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed and she was straight back on a bus to Savar to enrol in a sewing machine operator's course for underprivileged women and persons with disabilities. Shuely has now finished her apprenticeship and is a skilled worker with nationally recognize qualifications who plays a mentoring role to other young apprentices as they finish the course she graduated from and they also enter the workplace.

Shuely is a skilled young female who has secured employment through the TVET Reform Project, an initiative of the Government of Bangladesh, executed by the ILO and funded by the European Union.