A Case Study On

SkillFUL’s Contribution to

Gender Mainstreaming in Vocational Skills Training

DEVELOPED BY

COMMUNICATIONS, ADVOCACY, AND MONITORING AND RESULTS MEASUREMENT TEAM

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>BTTTC</td>
<td>Bijoy Tailors Tailoring Training Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>BWCCI</td>
<td>Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry</td>
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<td>CMES</td>
<td>Centre for Mass Education in Science</td>
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<td>DAP</td>
<td>Differently Abled People</td>
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<td>CS</td>
<td>Community Society</td>
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<td>CSSC</td>
<td>Community Society Service Centre</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<td>ILO</td>
<td>International Labour Organisation</td>
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<td>MRM</td>
<td>Monitoring and Results Measurement</td>
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<td>NSDP</td>
<td>National Skills Development Policy</td>
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<td>PCMU</td>
<td>Placement Counselling Monitoring Unit</td>
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<td>RRF</td>
<td>Rural Reconstruction Foundation</td>
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<td>RMG</td>
<td>Ready Made Garment</td>
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<td>SFD</td>
<td>Satabdi Fashion Designs</td>
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<td>SIMS</td>
<td>SkillFUL Information Management System</td>
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<td>SDF</td>
<td>Skills Development Forum</td>
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<tr>
<td>STC</td>
<td>Sunamganj Training Centre</td>
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<td>SDC</td>
<td>Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation</td>
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<td>TSP</td>
<td>Training Service Provider</td>
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<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical Vocational Education Training</td>
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**Glossary**

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<th>Glossary Item</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<td><strong>Beneficiaries (of training)</strong></td>
<td>Under the SkillFUL Project, these were unemployed and underemployed poor and marginalized (with regards to gender, physical disabilities, physical access to training) youth and young adults with minimum educational qualifications from Class 5 and up to Class 8.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Campaign</strong></td>
<td>Activities and events through which beneficiaries are informed about skills training and its benefits. Campaign tools comprise rickshaw tin signs, street dramas and courtyard meetings, among others.</td>
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<td><strong>Courtyard Meetings</strong></td>
<td>Interactive information events conducted in a gender-segregated setting. These events informed about skills training, its benefits with regard to employment and hence economic opportunities where social norms and practices are adhered to. Potential female beneficiaries and their families were gathered and informed in neighbourhood backyards, whereas potential male beneficiaries were informed in the local marketplaces.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Emerging Occupations</strong></td>
<td>Occupations in which demand for services and hence labour is rapidly increasing such as Beautician, Lacquer Polisher, Upholstery Worker, among others.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Flexible Training Hours</strong></td>
<td>Flexible training hours were implemented by TSPs to allow convenient access to training for beneficiaries. Training was offered during morning, afternoon and sometimes evening shifts.</td>
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<td><strong>Gender Mainstreaming</strong></td>
<td>The Economic and Social Council, UN, 1997/2, defines Gender Mainstreaming as “…the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality”. However given the already existing gender disparity in skills development, SkillFUL Project specifically paid attention to promote and engage females into skills training and employment.</td>
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<td><strong>Outreach Centres</strong></td>
<td>Temporary training set-ups located away from the main training centre in rural / more remote areas. They bring training to the people.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Rickshaw Tin Signs</strong></td>
<td>The Project’s skills development campaign message printed on a sign board and installed at the back of rickshaws for easy visibility by other road users.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SIMS</strong></td>
<td>SkillFUL’s monitoring and management system developed to collect and analyse Project data. All data is gender-segregated. This case study uses SIMS data last updated mid-2014.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Street Dramas</strong></td>
<td>Entertaining and interactive skits enacted for groups of potential beneficiaries through which skills training, its benefits with regard to employment and hence economic opportunities were promoted.</td>
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<td><strong>Target Group</strong></td>
<td>All direct and indirect beneficiaries of SkillFUL Project’s interventions such as (potential) trainees, graduates, families of (potential) beneficiaries, TSP management and instructors, employers, financial institutions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Traditional Occupations</strong></td>
<td>Occupations that traditionally have been considered “female-oriented” and have been around for a long time such as Handicrafts, Tailoring, Embroidery.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Women Economic Empowerment (WEE)</td>
<td>Naila Kabeer’s SIG Working Paper 2012/1 (Women’s economic empowerment and inclusive growth: labour markets and enterprise development) defines WEE as a process which increases women’s real power over economic decisions that influence their lives and priorities in a society. WEE can be achieved through equal access to and control over critical economic resources and opportunities, and the elimination of structural gender inequalities in the labour market including a better sharing of unpaid care work.</td>
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Abstract

The Project *Skills for Unemployed and Underemployed Labour, SkillFUL*, has facilitated training for over 20,000 poor and marginalised youth and young adults in Bangladesh enabling over 80% of them to avail employment and achieve increased income. Although in excess of 12,000 of these employed graduates are females engaged in either wage or self-employment, addressing under-employment of these beneficiaries remains a persistent challenge.

This paper is an internally conducted case study based on both qualitative and quantitative data. It takes a closer look at the different social dynamics for women with regard to skills development, within the 6 districts where SkillFUL has been facilitating training. The study finds that adequate infrastructure of Training Service Providers, easy access to training, availability of finance, safe training and workplace environment, advocacy among the larger community inclusive of local governments, religious & community leaders, family members of potential trainees & their neighbours, are all instrumental factors to instigate and encourage training and subsequent employment of women. Keeping in mind the gender mainstreaming agenda, the objective of the case study is to analyse the following from Project perspective: key challenges in skills training for women; designed interventions to cater to these challenges; results and lessons learned from these interventions.
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Background

Objective of the Case Study

Keeping in mind the gender mainstreaming agenda, the objective of the case study is to assess:

- key challenges in skills training for women
- designed interventions to cater to these challenges
- results and lessons learned from these interventions

Methodology

The case study has used both qualitative and quantitative data from primary and secondary sources. Primary data has been obtained through in-depth interviews with 12 women graduates of SkillFUL training programmes, 3 owners of partner Training Service Providers (TSP)\(^1\) and 3 prominent members of the local communities. The 12 women graduates were selected randomly from the list of sample graduates who were also chosen randomly for an earlier study.

The in-depth interviews were conducted by guided questionnaires that were tested in Dhaka before the Project staff applied them in the 4 districts Dhaka, Sunamganj, Jessore and Nilphamari. No interview was conducted in Bogra and Kurigram as the social and traditional context in these 2 districts are similar to those in Nilphamari.

Secondary data was obtained from Project surveys, reports and SkillFUL’s Information Management System (SIMS) and used to inform readers about the country background, the wider context of the Project and its interventions, and to provide quantitative information. Information obtained from the primary data also served to substantiate or contrast information obtained from secondary data.

Country background - Dimensions of the Bangladesh Labour Force

The Labour Force Survey (LFS)\(^2\) 2010 of the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics states that the working age population of the country stands at 95.6 million people (F: 49.8 %, M: 50.2%) of which 56.7mn (59.3%) are classified to be within the labour force and 38.9mn (40.7%) outside of it\(^3\). Of those within the labour force 54.1mn (95.4%) were reported to be employed and the rest 2.6mn (4.6%) unemployed. Out of the employed labour force 37.9mn (70%) are males and 16.2mn (30%) females, depicting a gap of 40% in favour of the males.

According to the LFS the unemployment rate of the country is a mere 4.6% - this in itself is a gap in the measurement of employment and unemployment, for 40.7% of the working age population are not even considered a part of the labour force. Even if exceptions can be understood with regard to

\(^{1}\) TSP selection has been chalked out in Annex 1.


\(^{3}\) The LFS specifies the following working age population outside the labour force: unpaid household workers, students, beggars, retired persons, disabled persons.
students who are unemployed due to pursuing their degrees, the fact that unpaid housework and activities such as begging are not inclusive of the labour force, results in employment and unemployment to be projected in a distorted manner. Of the entire employed population of 54.1mn only 12.5% are working in the formal sector whereas 87.5% are engaged in the informal sector.

The graph shows the difference between informal and formal sector employment. Additionally it can be observed that the female to male employment ratio is about 1:2 in the informal sector and 1:4 in the formal sector.

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International Labour Organization (ILO) believes Bangladesh has progressed in gender equality in the education sector by closing the gender gap in enrolment ratios (ILO, 2012). However, this success is far from being achieved in the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector which is characterized by gender inequalities in enrolment and stereotyping in occupation selection. The labour market also shows occupational segregation posing barriers for effective female employment in different sectors (especially true for technical occupations), thereby resulting in unequal earning opportunities for males and females.

The National Skills Development Policy (NSDP) states that the government plans to develop a “consolidated picture of the number and location of training centres, the training programs they deliver, and how those programs match local employment opportunities”. Delivering training programs which respond to local employment opportunities has always been Swisscontact’s way of implementing skills development projects, such as in Bangladesh under the SkillMARK (2009-2012) Project and the SkillFUL (2011-2015) Project.

**What is a Sustainable Skills Training Market?**

A skills market is defined as an arrangement of 3 main actors: Trainees, TSPs and Industry. The industry seeks qualified workers in the labour market. If they are unable to do so, they will ask TSPs to provide them with skilled graduates and pay the TSPs adequately for this service.

Trainees, on the other hand, get trained in occupations that they perceive to be in demand. They are willing to pay for the training as they can recover the training fees from well-paying jobs they expect to find once they graduate.

However, current ground realities are very different from the above ideal situation, especially for lower level skills training and for the sort of trainees who are beneficiaries of the SkillFUL Project.
Industries do not want to invest in training, as they perceive this to be the responsibility of the government. Since better qualified workers also find better jobs, workers might leave their existing jobs after training. Employers are therefore also reluctant to invest in training for their workers.

Trainees are not willing to pay for training and expect that such training should be free of charge as it has been the case for (too) long under many different projects; or trainees are not able to pay for training upfront and fully for the training.

Above description of the skills training market is simplified but shows the main impediments of the skills training market to function in a sustainable way without external (donor, project) support. In order to trigger a paradigm shift away from heavily subsidized training to more business-like and hence more self-sustained skills training, the SkillFUL Project initiated specific interventions and approaches for training delivery and financing.

**Project Overview**

SkillFUL is a skills development project that aims to contribute to poverty reduction by promoting sustainable training and consequent employment and therefore income to the Project’s ultimate beneficiaries. The Project which started in March 2011 and has continued to 2015, focuses its activities in six districts of Bangladesh—Dhaka, Kurigram, Bogra, Jessore, Sunamganj and Nilphamari. SkillFUL has been implemented by Swisscontact in collaboration with Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES) and is jointly funded by the European Union (EU) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC).

In order to understand the gaps in demand and supply of labour in specific location, the Project with the support of research organizations, assessed the markets for occupations in demand, as well as the skills gaps of potential trainees. Based on the training requirements and the objective to be more market-oriented, the Project, through careful selection, assigned mainly private TSP for training delivery. The Project also facilitated capacity building of TSP instructors and staffs, development of modular training courses in demand, stimulated demand for training through awareness building among target groups, established post training support to place graduates in jobs, and piloted access to financial services for training providers, potential trainees and graduates.

**Gender Mainstreaming in SkillFUL**

SkillFUL aimed to mainstream gender within Project interventions by sensitising stakeholders at all levels. Because women are generally more disadvantaged than men within the skills training and employment market, gender mainstreaming needed more focus on improving the situation for women.

The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) has clearly defined parameters for projects and programs which have adopted gender mainstreaming according to the WEE approach.

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4 Target group is defined by the Project as direct and indirect beneficiaries of the Project and external stakeholders

5 Projects and programs explicitly integrate women’s economic empowerment into all aspects of the program cycle. E.g. conducting gender-responsive market research, gender-responsive sector and intervention selection, identifying key entry points for women in targeted value chains, strategies for enhancing women’s participation and leadership, and a gender-responsive results measurement system. Interventions aim to facilitate change for female and male beneficiaries.

such as gender-responsive market research, sector and intervention selection based on gender and a gender-responsive results measurement system.

SkillFUL Project, on its own accord, has incorporated all of the parameters suggested by DCED for gender mainstreaming from the planning stage to implementation, as well as monitoring and evaluation.

Designing Gender-sensitive Interventions

The Project Logical Framework Approach (LFA) matrix contains clear gender indicators on outcome and output levels such as ratio and number of male and female trainees and employed/unemployed graduates. Consequently these targets had to be translated into subsequent activities. The Project had undertaken various surveys in the Project areas’ to identify “female-friendly” trades in demand and with higher possibility for female employment and to design appropriate communication means to reach female training participants and others. In the first quarter of 2013, the Project also facilitated a study identifying the constraints preventing women from employment opportunities in skills-related occupations. Detailed information regarding these assessments and studies can be found under “Demand and supply of jobs for women in target districts” in Annex 2.

A gender guideline was developed by an expert jointly with the Project team. Each partner TSP was required to assign a gender focal person. Gender-sensitizing workshops were conducted to inform TSPs on the gender guideline and to initiate its implementation.

Forging Effective Partnerships

The Project partnered with Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI) since November 2012 with the objective of “Enhancing entrepreneurship and business skills of female trainees and graduate for sustainable income and employment”. Before BWCCI embarked on development and provision of training, they undertook a gap analysis among TSP management, graduates and trainees about their capacity to develop and run a business. The findings revealed that women faced a number of challenges which include lack of business knowledge, lack of entrepreneurship skills & marketing abilities, limited social capital, lack of access to financial institutions, insufficient modern technology for quality production, lack of technological skill, lack of infrastructure, lack of confidence, and social & cultural barriers. Based on these shortcomings BWCCI developed and conducted 12 capacity building workshops for interested participants to assist them in developing their capacity to establish and run their business and/or respective institutes (TSPs). BWCCI also recommended more lobbying to be done with the Bangladesh Bank to create easier access to affordable loans for aspiring women entrepreneurs from the SkillFUL target group or the likes.

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7 Target areas of the Project are Dhaka, Kurigram, Bogra, Nilphamari, Sunamganj and Jessore.
8 BWCCI is a non-profit and non-political organization supporting women entrepreneurs of Bangladesh in undertaking business and trade activities. The organization has a strong community voice, lobbying for macro to micro women entrepreneurs to assist their growth and to improve their social and economic prospects.
9 Social capital may be defined as the network of social connections that exist between people, and their shared values and norms of behaviour, which enable and encourage mutually advantageous social cooperation.
Project Findings

Through information analysed from the Project database and the in-depth interviews, challenges preventing women from joining training and employment were identified. Some of these are: family responsibilities such as household chores and child-rearing; lack of finance; transport issues to training centres and/or workplaces; lack of female-friendly facilities at training centres such as separate washrooms, seating arrangements; prevailing conservative social norms both at the community and family level; lack of awareness about significance of training and employment opportunities. In the sections below we will look at some of the challenges more specifically and how the Project has tailored interventions to mitigate these and the results achieved thus far.

People’s Mindset

In a country like Bangladesh where families are close-knit, the members directly or indirectly have a strong effect on each other’s lives. This becomes apparent when looking closely at the 12 in-depth interviews conducted with female SkillFUL graduates. Taking charge of domestic chores and being the primary care-giver of the family are something that women are traditionally expected to do in Bangladesh; social norms have over centuries dictated these as the duties of a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. Men are not expected to bear responsibility in sharing household work, which leave women in charge of it all, thus depriving them of the ability to be able to go outside the house and earn a living too. It was noted that 1/3rd of the interviewees faced difficulties in managing household responsibilities during the training period. A graduate from Jessore had to discontinue her job after 1.5 months as she got married. Ms. Mahmuda, TSP owner of Satabdi Fashion Design (SFD), has stated that for the majority of female trainees it was difficult to attend training for more than 4 hours at a stretch daily, due to family obligations. Such “mindset constraints” can only be overcome through fostering an environment of mutual respect, trust and understanding between beneficiaries and their families, TSPs and employers.

Counselling

Ms. Mahmuda Khatun, TSP Proprietor of Satabdi Fashion Designs (SFD), said that she chose the location of her training centre in an area surrounded by slums and that she conducted intensive counselling with the women and their families, community leaders, as well as other prominent members of the neighbourhood. Through counselling she was able to convince those interested to visit her centre. When they observed that there were segregated training sessions for males and females, some of the initial reservation was overcome and interested women were able to join the training.

Supportive Environment

Mr. Azad, Training Coordinator at Rural Reconstruction Foundation (RRF), Jessore, stated that he mobilized RRF’s field level staff and small local village groups to raise awareness among the beneficiaries and motivate them to take training. 4 out of 5 graduates interviewed decided to start their own business and were financially supported by their families, who helped them to buy machines and consistently boosted their morale. But women to be successful, even from their homes, would initially have to venture out. Thus the message RRF staffs conveyed to potential beneficiaries and their families, was that women would
have to come out of their houses at least during the training periods. They also informed them about the provision of outreach centres within the vicinity of their neighbourhoods, which would make training more easily accessible. RRF staffs further informed that for married women with children, who could not leave them at home, makeshift “day-care” centres were created in a safe environment with a few toys and children’s materials; according to them this encouraged more women to participate in the training sessions.

**Awareness and Advocacy**

The Project facilitated 3 campaigns in the target districts during its 4 year phase. The first two campaigns were of more general nature and promoted the importance and benefits of skills development among the target groups. The 3rd campaign was more geared towards raising awareness in the direct vicinity of the TSPs and encourage potential trainees to enrol in these training institutes and training courses they offered. Campaign tools such as “Miking”10, Billboards, Leaflets and Rickshaw Tin Signs were widely used informing communities about the locations of TSPs and the different trainings offered.

TSPs reported that two campaign tools were especially effective in reaching potential trainees: Street Dramas and Courtyard Meetings. Over ¼ of female Project beneficiaries who enrolled in non-traditional occupations such as Beautician, Sweater Linking Operator, Lacquer Polisher and Mobile Phone Technician were informed through the 3rd campaign about training and employment opportunities in these occupations. Given the fact that the 3rd campaign was only of 3 months duration, the percentage of beneficiaries who enrolled in these occupations was impressive when compared with the total Project duration so far. Overall, creating awareness needs to be undertaken continuously, especially when trying to break through social barriers and convincing women to independently become a part of the national economic cycle.

**Occupation Selection and Customized Training**

Although partner TSPs were encouraged to enrol women to take training in non-traditional trades, the Project was aware that in some locations social barriers were too high for this to succeed during the Project’s duration. In these cases, the Project chose to focus more on traditional occupations for women such as Embroider, Tailor and Karchupi Fitters for which there was market demand. However the Project also explored newer, less conventional occupations which were acceptable in the socially more conservative areas such as Beautician, Vegetable & Fruit Carver, Food Processing & Preservation Worker; there was demand for these skills and opportunities for respectable, decent employment – both self and wage.

SkillFUL facilitated development of modular training courses for 21 occupations. The Project’s keenness to attract more women into skills training is apparent in the inclusion of 12 women-friendly occupations which were selected based on the result of the market and training need surveys. The trainings also contained helpful, common content on “Small Enterprise Development” and the Project also organised “Business Development” workshops. In total, around 3,400 women benefitted from Enterprise and Business Development initiatives and went into self-employment and started their own business and/or worked from home.

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10 Mobile advertising through megaphones
**Training and Infrastructure Capacity**

Taking relevant findings of surveys into consideration, the Project aimed to develop the capacity of partner TSPs with regard to “female friendliness”. Some of the issues are discussed in more detail below.

**Female-friendly TSPs**

In all 6 target districts, the Project carefully chose and partnered with TSPs (of which 6 were headed by women) where management understood the inherent importance of engaging and developing female trainers as many beneficiaries and/or their families were not comfortable with male ones.

Throughout the Project lifetime, 110 of the 255 instructors trained on training methodology, were females. Some were engaged in occupations which are generally not female-oriented such as Upholstery Worker, Electrical Housewiring Technician, Electro-mechanical Technician and Mobile Phone Servicing Technician. It was observed that the availability of female instructors was one of the main reasons women beneficiaries were comfortable and felt motivated to enrol in these currently male-dominated training programs. To encourage more female participation, the TSPs were also supported to improve their infrastructure such as providing separate washroom facilities and appropriate seating arrangements for women.

**Flexible Training Hours**

Partner TSPs were mandated by the Project to offer flexible training hours (morning, afternoon, evening shifts). The objective was to attract beneficiaries into skills training who required flexibility to attend training due to time and social constraints, especially women. As per SIMS, out of 11,500 female graduates, 79% completed their training in daytime shifts, while 21% in evening sessions. It was observed that 94% of all graduates from Bogra, Nilphamari, Sunamganj, and Kurigram attended daytime shifts whereas for Dhaka and Jessore, this figure was around 50% only. This might reflect the difference of the more traditional social context of Bogra, Nilphamari, Sunamganj and Kurigram compared to Dhaka and Jessore and the significance of having training modes available as per the social dynamics and requirements of the different regions.

**Training Locations**

Partner TSPs were mandated by the Project to reach out to more rural areas informing target groups about the opportunities and benefits of skills training and provide training through outreach centres. According to SIMS, around 5,725 female graduates received training through outreach centres. If this number is segregated by locations we observe a positive correlation between the graduates who have availed training during daytime shifts and who have used outreach centres. For Bogra, Nilphamari, Sunamganj and Kurigram combined, 91.8% of the female graduates received training in outreach centres closer to their homes, whereas for Dhaka and Jessore this figure is only 35.7%. This reflects that even in a more traditional social setting, given the opportunity to attend training closer to home, women do enrol for training.

**Tackling the Transport Issues**

As outlined earlier, community members must feel comfortable and reassured about the security of their females attending training. This includes transport to and from the training venue.
A few respondents from Dhaka and Jessore claimed that they felt secure because they travelled together as a group. Habibur Rahman, Proprietor of Habibur Rahman Sweater Training Centre (HRSTC), Nilphamari, decided to provide travel allowance so that women were able to avail public transport. Akeya Designs, a TSP in Sunamganj, provides transport for their female trainees and workers in a private minivan. Such methods adopted by the women and TSPs, demonstrate that if transport issues are overcome, more women are able to engage in training and/or employment.

**Employment and Income**

This section takes a closer look at the following areas with respect to different occupations and occupation clusters for female beneficiaries:

- employment-type and varying incomes;
- shortage and excess of supply of female labour;
- graduates and employment;
- average income of employed graduates.

**Types of Employment & Varying Incomes**

Analysing employment and unemployment from the SIMS database, it was observed that for Dhaka and Jessore combined, the average wage-employment of women was high with around 70%, whereas only 30% were self-employed. On the contrary for Bogra, Sunamganj, Kurigram and Nilphamari the combined wage-employment was low with around 40% and 60% self-employed. Given the conservative social setting of these 4 locations it is understandable that self-employment would be higher; women and/or their families prefer to adopt the work-from-home approach. Among all districts and self and wage-employment combined, Sunamganj had the highest rate of woman unemployment at around 10.5%; the average rate of unemployment was around 7%.

But employment and income for different occupations of female graduates allow more in-depth understanding. The following graph depicts the difference in types of employment (wage or self) and average incomes for the following sample occupations: Beautician (BTC), Electrical Housewiring Technician (EHT), Garments Machine Operator (GMO), Machine Embroidery (ME), Jam Jelly Pickle and Sauce Producer (JJPS) and Tailoring (TL).
Overall in can be observed that the monthly average income for wage-employment is higher than self-employment for all occupations except for BTC. Only 3 out of 6 occupations analysed, result in an average income of above BDT 3,000, namely wage-employment for EHT and ME, and wage/self-employment for GMO. This means that out of the total 4,143 employees in Figure 4 only 1,155 (28%) have average incomes of more than BDT 3,000. For the rest of 72%, the average income from wage/self-employment is below BDT 3,000; for 8% even below BDT 2,000. Only wage-employment for GMO and ME show a high number of graduates’ employment, and a high average income compared to all other occupations.

Wage-employment for GMO shows the highest average incomes with BDT 5,755 and has the second highest employment number, depicting the booming RMG sector of Bangladesh. Although self-employment in the GMO occupation offers a “decent” average income, the self-employment number is very low probably for the reason of lack of capital investment.

Wage-employment is lowest where the respective average income is 2nd highest, namely in the technical occupation EHT. Although EHT seems to be an occupation with a good income for women, the low employment number might indicate low acceptability of women in wage-employment for this technical occupation. For EHT self-employment, the employment number as well as the respective average income, is lowest amongst all occupations. Again this might indicate the low acceptance of women electrical housewiring technicians in the society.

Almost one fifth of all wage/self-employment is in the occupation of ME. The number for wage-employment supersedes self-employment by almost 66% and offers a “decent” average income with BDT 3,179 in contrast with BDT 2,120 for self-employment which is 2nd lowest for all occupation for self-employment.

The occupation of BTC depicts overall 14% of wage/self-employment, a relatively high employment opportunity for women. This is an occupation which needs little capital investments and offers with self-employment, high mobility (providing the service at home or at the customer’s home). But it is also an occupation with a low average income; for wage-employment it is in fact the lowest. For self-employment the average income is around 13% higher than for wage-employment.
The occupation of JJPS shows a low number of employment but also a low average income for both wage and self-employment. Self-employment is about 320% higher than wage-employment. The occupation has potential for more self-employment (including for work from home) and better income provided the entrepreneurs get it right with regards to the products, quality (food safety) and access to the markets.

The occupation of TL absorbs almost 50% of all wage/self-employment albeit with an average income that is low for both wage and self-employment. The average income of BDT 2,500 for wage-employment is only 9% higher than that for self-employment. The low average income might be an indication of oversupply of tailors. The high number of self-employment (30%) more than wage-employment) indicates high acceptability of this occupation in the society as well as the ease with which women can work from home. The average income for self-employment could possibly increase if women, besides having basic skills, were able to broaden and advance their skills and hence services and had access to finances allowing them to purchase more inputs and invest in measures to improve productivity.

**Analysis of Occupation Clusters**

The following table shows occupations clustered for Emerging, Technical, RMG and Traditional occupations. The graph beneath the table shows total number for graduates and the unemployment rate.

**Figure 4 Occupation Clusters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Technical</th>
<th>RMG</th>
<th>Traditional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beautician</td>
<td>Electrical Housewiring</td>
<td>Garments Machine Operator</td>
<td>Block Batik &amp; Printing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Technician</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lacquer Polisher</td>
<td>Electromechanical Technician</td>
<td>Sweater Knitting Operator</td>
<td>Hand Embroidery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upholstery Worker</td>
<td>Mobile Phone Technician</td>
<td>Sweater Linking Operator</td>
<td>Karchupi Fitters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 5 Graduates versus Unemployment in Occupation Clusters**

The Traditional Cluster contributes with 3,370 graduates (67.5%) the main bulk to the overall graduate number of 4,986 in this figure and is a projection of the prevailing labour force dynamics for women in the target districts. The RMG and Emerging Cluster contribute similar ratios of 16.7% and 15.1% of graduates respectively. The unemployment rate for the
3 clusters is similar and hovers around 5 to 6%. This is low and hence the 3 clusters seem from this point of view, suitable for training and employment of women (the issue on incomes is discussed above). The Technical Cluster contributes a meagre 28 graduates (0.56%) to the overall graduate number and the 18% unemployment rate is the highest among the 4 clusters. This supports again the finding above, of lack of social acceptance for women in technical occupations and indicates that much more efforts will be required to overcome this.

This graph shows the average income of employed graduates as per the occupational clusters. The RMG cluster with the second-highest proportion of graduates, offers the highest average income with BDT 5,730. The Emerging and Traditional Cluster offer similar but much lower average incomes (around 50% only of the RMG Cluster) with BDT 2,650 and BDT 2,680 respectively.

As described earlier for EHT, it can be observed that although employment in the Technical Cluster is still minimal (number wise), thus far it offers an average income level that is around 30% higher than the Emerging and Traditional Clusters. It is also encouraging that there is little income discrimination in this cluster with the average income of males being BDT 3,900 or only around 13% higher than for the females.

### Results of SkillFUL Project up to December 2014

- 12,560 female beneficiaries enrolled in skills training
- 48% beneficiaries received training through outreach centres
- 89% graduates successfully employed
- 49% engaged in wage employment, 38% in self-employment and 13% engaged in temporary employment\(^{11}\), of all graduates who are successfully employed
- Average monthly income of all employed graduates combined BDT 2,600 (US$33)
- Increase in average monthly incomes of previously employed graduates BDT 2,743 (US$35)

Although much positive change has happened and many results have been achieved by the SkillFUL Project, deep-rooted challenges continue to prevail in the skills market especially with regard to women. A table highlighting the challenges and way forward in the skills market, with regard to women, has been attached in Annex 3.

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\(^{11}\) Temporary employment could be either self or wage – it is seasonal employment, e.g. for Karchupi Fitters, there is more employment/income opportunities during holiday and festive seasons.
Towards Empowerment

TSP proprietors and management voiced concern regarding the ability of women to participate in training and subsequent employment without approval from their families and acceptance at the local level, especially in regard to community members and leaders. According to some of the TSPs, some women took part in the training without informing their husbands and other family members, as they were unsure of how they might react. According to unmarried girls who attended training male members in their families, especially brothers, are more opposed to the idea of women going out to work and having their own sources of income.

For women to develop a voice within their households and in society, it is vital to be able to share some of the financial responsibilities towards their families with their partners. All employed graduates interviewed, admitted that they had more decision-making power since they have been earning, and the graduate from Jessore claimed that her additional income enabled her family to send the children to college for higher education. A graduate from Dhaka proudly admitted her rise in status, especially in her husband’s eyes, as she no longer had to depend on him for her financial needs and could even assist with household expenditures.

A woman with financial independence also holds the ability to voice her opinion and contribute towards key decisions to be made, leading towards a more progressive and equal society between men and women. In this regard advocacy at all levels is vital to convince members of society of the opportunities and benefits of women working alongside men. With a common understanding, this can be done without compromising the “dignity of tradition and culture”.
Testimonials of Stakeholders

Acceptance and understanding of a working woman needs to start within the family itself. Children, especially boys, need to be taught to respect and appreciate working female family members. For women wanting to step into unchartered territories of employment, and in some cases even just into known employment, it is vital to have the acceptance and support of male family members.

- Juthi Islam, Assistant Professor, Physics Department, University of Dhaka

It is important for women to communicate to their families and friends the need for women to venture out of their households and grab the opportunities that await them. Challenges exist anywhere, the key is to face them.

- Taslima Akhtar, Graduate – Garments Machine Operator, Griha Sukhan

Skills training of women is important as it has the potential to generate more employment and earning capacity within a community. However, it is important to keep gender-segregated classrooms and that women maintain modesty. Islamic law does not prohibit women from working, but it does emphasize on proper cover while interacting with other males at work.

- Md. Enamul Hoque, Imam, Jessore

Lack of industry in Sunamganj makes it difficult to place women in jobs. Religious conservatism prevents women from availing employment, as a result of which most prefer self-employment.

- Shah Badrul Alam, Proprietor, Sunamganj Training Centre

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12 Such a quote helps recognize that even in metropolitan areas like Jessore, for women to be successful and sustainable as part of the labour force, there exist an acceptability threshold of changing norms, for many sects of society still
References

ANNEXES

Annex 1: TSPs selected for survey and their characteristics

Figure 7 Criteria for Selection of TSPs (as per footnote in Methodology)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria:</th>
<th>Name of TSP</th>
<th>Private TSP</th>
<th>NGO</th>
<th>Male owned</th>
<th>Female owned</th>
<th>In Technical Occupations</th>
<th>In Non-technical Occupations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Satabdhi Fashion Design (Dhaka)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sunamganj Training Center (Sunamganj)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural Reconstruction Foundation (Jessore)</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Annex 2: Demand and Supply of Jobs for Women in Target Districts

Under EU donorship, the Project started its operations in Dhaka and Kurigram based on a baseline survey\(^{13}\) which identified existing and potential employment opportunities for targeted females. According to the survey the most popular trades in which private TVET institutes focused training for women were tailoring/sewing, embroidery and bamboo/cane works. The study also identified the following sectors as having the highest market demand for women: Garments, Electronics (such as Air-conditioner Repairing, Mobile Phone Servicing), Tailoring, Hand Embroidery and Computer Technology. When SDC joined the Project in 2012 as the 2\(^{nd}\) donor, SkillFUL expanded to four more districts, Sunamganj, Jessore, Nilphamari and Bogra, with a revised target of training 15,000 additional beneficiaries, of which at least 40% were to be women. A 2\(^{nd}\) baseline survey\(^{14}\) was also conducted.

Under the 2\(^{nd}\) baseline survey, most of the respondents\(^{15}\) from all 4 of the new target districts identified budget for higher quality training, equipment and tools, curricula and training modules and trainers as the areas which needed improvement to produce quality graduates. When talking to the employers as well as current and potential employees, the following sectors were identified as offering the highest number of jobs to women in the 4 target districts: Garments and Tailoring industries, Textile mills, Sweater factories, Jori Chumki industries, Bakery and Biscuit factories, Poultry farming, Livestock and Agro based industries, Jute mills and Dye factories, among others. For self-employment, the occupations identified as the most lucrative in terms of generating employment are listed in the table below.

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\(^{13}\) Assessment of Informal Economy of Sunamganj, Nilphamari, Bogra, Jessore to Promote Marketable Skills and Occupations. Weathermen Research Solutions Limited. 2012. Conducted by Weatherman Research Solutions. The objectives were to assess socio-economic conditions in all 4 locations gender-segregated for: income and expenditure pattern; perception of skills development and training; age and occupation choices among the population; opportunities (trades) for self-employment

\(^{14}\) Conducted by Weatherman Research Solutions. The objectives were to assess socio-economic conditions in all 4 locations gender-segregated for: income and expenditure pattern; perception of skills development and training; age and occupation choices among the population; opportunities (trades) for self-employment

\(^{15}\) Respondents who were interviewed and/or attended group discussions were trade associations, employers and employees of the informal sector, private training centre personnel, trainers, students attending vocational schools
A further study was facilitated by SkillFUL and conducted by MIDAS to identify the challenges and existing/potential solutions with regard to employment opportunities of women in both the formal and informal sector. The study was conducted among 260 employers of private enterprises from all 6 target districts.16

The study identified that common factors discouraging employers from hiring women were high staff turnover rates, eve-teasing, adjustment issues with male co-workers, and the need for additional facilities such as separate washroom facilities and seating arrangements for females. Of the enterprises interviewed, only 36.50% provided additional facilities for women, such as separate washrooms, conveyance compensation, flexible hours, prevention of heavy-lifting work among others. However, when asked about their opinions in regard to hiring female workers, 91% enterprises were positive about women’s participation in economic activities stating that women are sincere and honest in their works; 83% enterprises felt that women are able to work skilfully if related training is provided to them; 74% enterprises expressed that women do not neglect their responsibilities and that they are efficient workers – highlighting employers’ inclination towards specific attributes women bring to the work place.

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Annex 3 - Challenges & Recommendations

The table shows the challenges and way forward grouped according to enrolment of female trainees, problems faced by women while they are in training, and the barriers they counter in the area of employment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Recommendations and Way Forward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enrolment</strong></td>
<td>Lack of Awareness&lt;br&gt;Since women don’t venture out of their homes often, they are not exposed to a lot of information, and so remain unaware of potential training opportunities.</td>
<td><strong>Campaigns</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rather than have few months of campaign through all target districts, it needs to be a continuous effort aligned with the different enrolment times of the various TSPs. Feedback of enrolment as a result of campaigns, and feedback on effective campaign tools that drew most trainees is necessary (this information can be collected from TSPs during admission).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Family</strong></td>
<td>Familial disapproval and hesitation regarding the security and “social image” of female household members, remains a persistent issue when it comes to women leaving the house for training.</td>
<td><strong>Community Society</strong>&lt;br&gt;Social norms often times pose as a barrier to working-women. “Community Societies” (CS) such as (Gulshan Society/Baridhara Society) could be allied with or formed in the localities (both urban and rural) of all target districts. These should be gender-balanced and comprise community representatives from varying backgrounds (local governance, academia, religious sects, industry, among others) and the local people. The idea is to work together with a community group where the power of voice is evenly distributed among the members and both genders. Social norms need to undergo change through discourse and can only then be met with acceptance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training</strong></td>
<td>Transport&lt;br&gt;Transportation to and from the training venue is an issue.</td>
<td><strong>Increased Accessibility</strong>&lt;br&gt;TSPs need to ensure transport arrangements at least for female beneficiaries. There could be some “central” pick-up and drop-off points (feasible as beneficiaries usually live close to institutes and outreach centres) from where minivans could operate. TSPs could have a monthly deal worked out with the vehicle operator. This could be one of the services TSPs offer to their customers for a minimal fee. A buddy-system could also be formed during orientation, where TSPs could pair female trainees in twos or threes, depending on their residence, so they could be travel buddies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Recommendations and Way Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child-rearing</td>
<td>For mothers, leaving their young children behind is hardly possible when wanting to join training.</td>
<td><strong>Flexibility of TSPs</strong>&lt;br&gt;Flexible hours enable more women to enrol for training. Solutions such as day-care centres enable women with children to participate in training. This could also be one of the services that TSPs provide to trainees for a minimal fee, for each child for the duration of the training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household Chores</td>
<td>Women are often expected to be solely responsible for household work and are therefore hesitant to leave their houses.</td>
<td><strong>Community Societies (CS)</strong>&lt;br&gt;If CS is operational, then issues like these could also be discussed. The importance of more than one or two earning members in the family needs to be highlighted and explained.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical Training</td>
<td>Lack of respect for women in “mixed” training sessions.</td>
<td><strong>Gender Sensitivity</strong>&lt;br&gt;Separate training sessions, seating arrangements and work groups should be available for women. Gender-awareness workshops and gender-sensitized management are vital. At the beginning of each training cycle, trainees should undergo an orientation day where they have ice-breaking activities (male-female combined) and are sensitised about gender and social issues. <strong>Explore New Technical Options</strong>&lt;br&gt;Although there is social stigma in some locations regarding women working in technical occupations, new technical occupations are emerging (e.g. in the clean energy sector) where the same social stigma is not yet attached. It is vital that one capitalises on this before it is too late and these occupations become male dominated as well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSP facilities</td>
<td>Lack of facilities such as washrooms, seating arrangements.</td>
<td><strong>Segregated Facilities</strong>&lt;br&gt;Separate washrooms are a must for all TSPs. Besides separate washrooms, separate seating arrangements should also be arranged for women, especially in cases where they have to work in close contact with men. Often trainees as well as their family members feel uncomfortable about men and women attending training at the same time. However, we have to bear in mind that women will later also have to work alongside men and must therefore learn to handle this situation and become familiar with it; the same is true for men.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Recommendations and Way Forward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Wage-employment          | Employer/Industry Perspective  
• It appears from the case study that employers are more inclined to hire men when it comes to technical occupations.  
• Women are not able to work flexible hours like men.  
• Additional facilities for women like separate washrooms means bearing additional costs.  
• Women become “liabilities” at times due to safety issues at the workplace or during travel to and from the workplace. | Advocacy for female employment  
Promote pilot projects and case studies of successful female employment and engage in discussions with stakeholders from the industry to encourage employment opportunities of female graduates.  
Proper selection of training  
In case where women are unable to work night shifts, they have to look for work elsewhere. TSPs should counsel women regarding this. If not acceptable to women they must enrol in training where they are unlikely to do night shifts at their workplace later, or if, then under secure circumstances, e.g. garment sector, hospital nurses.  
Sensitisation of Employers regarding facility segregation and transport for women  
Employers must be sensitized regarding these issues (through Govt initiative, Industry associations). If there is a project, they could be offered incentives to make needed changes to overcome their still existing reluctance for change. CSSC might also have role here.  
Establishment of Community Society Service Centres (CSSC)  
CSSC established by the CS could offer day-care centre, public washrooms/ICT services/transport facilities for women. It would be vital for the sustainability of such a centre, that management is comprised of mostly females. |
| Employee Perspective     |  
• Families are not too keen for women to go out of their homes for employment, due to lack of “gender-friendly” environment.  
• Women are not too eager to leave their homes due to lack of proper washroom facilities | Community Organisations  
CS should work towards initiating change in overall mindset of communities.  
Gender-segregated washroom facilities and transport  
Refer to former section. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
<th>Recommendations and Way Forward</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Self-employment | Lack of Resources/Skills  
Most of the self-employed women are not self-employed in the sense that they are running successful businesses from home. Most have a very basic set up at home, with the bare minimum on equipment and tools allowing them to do simple work. Additionally, their outreach to their clientele is often limited due to their lack of ability to market their goods. | Access to Finance  
Females are more inclined towards “traditional” trades where self-employment offers good opportunities for work – there need to be more feasible loan schemes developed for these entrepreneurs. Higher level advocacy with Bangladesh Bank would be beneficial in this regard.  
Multi Skilling  
Self-employed beneficiaries will have better chances of generating income if they are equipped with training in 2 or more complementary occupations, such as Tailoring, Block Batik and Karchupi – finished products will be of higher quality.  
Business and Marketing Services  
Beneficiaries (esp. females training in potential self-employment occupations) need training on ICT services and marketing (products and services). For this weekly hour-long workshops could be arranged, showing them how they could market their products on the internet (through CSSCs or cyber cafes for those who do not have access to computers/phones, which will probably be majority).  
TSPs which have a PCMU established might offer services in marketing of products and services for ex-graduates being self-employed. The TSPs would offer this service for a nominal fee based on sales. |