

BANGLADESH

The National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF) is currently being implemented in Bangladesh. It was initiated in 2008 as one of the most important building blocks of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Reform Project, funded by the European Commission (EC) and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh¹ (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The NTVQF is intended to cover the existing workforce and those entering the workforce. The framework allows for the recognition of skills workers have acquired in the informal sector, and includes post-secondary qualifications up to diploma level. The new qualifications are to be offered in formal education and training, as well as workplace training and all training provided by public and private organizations, whether officially recognized or not (Ministry of Education, 2011).

1. CHALLENGES THE NQF WOULD NEED TO ADDRESS

Bangladesh has a large informal economy and an illiteracy rate of 65 per cent. Three quarters of the population is rural; about 31 per cent lives below the international poverty line. This means that every third person is struggling every day to survive.

Bangladesh is highly dependent on the remittances migrant workers send back to the country (indeed, these constitute the largest source of foreign capital (Ministry of Education, 2011)). Numerous government reports and industry bodies have called for improvements to the skill levels of Bangladeshi workers so that the value of these remittances will increase (BMET, 2008).

The technical and vocational education and training sector is beset by a number of difficulties. These include insufficient quality assurance; lack of autonomy for training centres to adapt courses to local needs; overly rigid traditional school-based curricula and vocational standards; excessively long course durations; lack of continuing professional teacher training; lack of access to skills for underprivileged groups; lack of regulation and certification of informal apprenticeships; and insufficient recognition of existing skills and informal learning, preventing labour mobility. The government recognizes that these shortcomings lead to a serious wastage of skills in the economy (Ministry of Education, 2011).

At present, underprivileged youth and adults constitute the majority of the workforce in export-oriented industries (such as the garment business, light engineering, electronics, construction, services and transport), where they frequently underperform or remain underemployed because they lack the requisite skills (ILO/Mia, 2010).

¹Ministry of Education in coordination with the Ministry of Labour and the Ministry of Overseas Workers.

2. MAIN POLICY OBJECTIVES

The NTVQF, an essential component of the government's National Skills Development Policy (Ministry of Education, 2011), is intended to accomplish a wide range of goals in relation to TVET reform, the introduction of competency-based training and assessment, and quality assurance. The NTVQF aims specifically to:

- expand the number of qualifications available to reflect the changing occupational and skills profiles in both domestic and international labour markets;
- support stronger integration of skills training in community organizations, schools, training institutions and the workplace by providing a common national benchmark for qualifications up to, but not including, university degrees;
- provide formal recognition of workplace skills obtained in both the formal and informal economies;
- improve employability skills and increase their productivity;
- provide a new benchmark for international recognition of the skills and knowledge of Bangladeshi workers, who are recognized as an increasingly important export for the country;
- introduce consistent naming of credentials for formal skills-based education and training;
- encourage employers to participate in the development of the NQF;
- improve the alignment of formal training programmes with industry requirements;
- support lifelong learning by providing recognized pathways for workers to raise the level of their knowledge and skills throughout their working lives and beyond (Ministry of Education, 2011).

The NTVQF is aligned with other broader national policies for the expansion of TVET opportunities at post-primary level, focusing on improving the employability and income level of adolescents, youth and adults (of both sexes), child labourers, those with low levels of literacy, and those in rural areas (ILO, 2009). These other national policies are the Education Policy of 2009, the Non-Formal Education Policy of 2006, the Youth Policy of 2003, the National Training Policy of 2008 and the NSDC Action Plan of 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2011).

3. INVOLVEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS

The Government of Bangladesh is committed to working with the International Labour Organization and the European Union to develop the NTVQF. The International Labour Organization (ILO) is working in coordination with the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET) as well as several NGOs. These organizations are now familiar with the NTVQF. A new project with the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) will expand the implementation of the NTVQF into another four industry sectors.

The NTVQF was developed through a series of consultations and meetings in late 2008 and 2009. During the development of the NTVQF a number of reference documents were produced by the TVET Reform Project. At present nine Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) have contributed to the development of standards in at least nine industry sectors (ILO, 2013.) Technical committees on all nine ISCs have developed measurable quality benchmarks which must be achieved for domestic and international recognition. ISCs are responsible for aligning their skills needs in accordance with the NTVQF levels and occupations. They are also responsible for the Skills Data System, which has been operational for three years, enabling training institutions to prioritize courses with high industry demand.

The National Skills Development Council (NSDC) replaced the old National Council for Skills Development and Training in 1979. The Council oversees and monitors all skills development initiatives including the NTVQF, particularly in relation to its market-responsiveness. The Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), under the direction of the NSDC, is the major implementing authority for the NTVQF and will be responsible for its periodic review. To safeguard the integrity of the NTVQF, the Technical Education Regulations of 1975 will be revised to ensure that the BTEB is

empowered to take action against private training organizations that inappropriately use either the new NTVQF qualification titles or the nationally recognized training logo.

Competency-based courses are registered with the BTEB. Major government line ministries have now accepted the NTVQF as a model for future development of qualifications and have made moves to change their old curriculum-based courses into fully recognized competency-based ones. Approximately 50 per cent of training providers are registered with the BTEB and are delivering recognized competency-based training and assessment. Recently the BTEB also accepted the competency-based qualification for the training of trainers. As a result, industry-based trainers are for the first time outnumbering TVET institution-based trainers. The BTEB is also implementing the Skills Quality Assurance System and reports to the NSDC twice yearly. Private training providers who wish to issue nationally recognized qualifications under the NTVQF must be registered and accredited under the new Bangladesh Skills Quality Assurance System (ILO, 2013). The NSDC will work with key institutions, including the National Productivity Organization (NPO) under the Ministry of Industries, to ensure that skills upgrading translates into high performance work practices and improved productivity.

4. LEVELS AND DESCRIPTORS AND USE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES

The National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework consists of six levels plus two pre-vocational levels, making it an eight-level framework (see Table 1 below). The descriptors for each of the six main levels are knowledge, skills and responsibility. The table also illustrates the relationship of the NTVQF to the existing qualifications structure.

Table 1. Bangladesh National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework

NTVQF Levels	Pre-vocational education	Vocational Education	Technical Education	Job Classification
NTVQF 6			Diploma in engineering or equivalent	Middle-level manager
NTVQF 5		National Skill Certificate 5 (NSC 5)		Highly skilled worker/supervisor
NTVQF 4		National Skill Certificate 4 (NSC 4)		Skilled worker
NTVQF 3		National Skill Certificate 3 (NSC 3)		Basic-skilled worker
NTVQF 2		National Skill Certificate 2 (NSC 2)		Basic-skilled worker
NTVQF 1		National Skill Certificate 1 (NSC 1)		Basic worker
Pre-Voc. 2	National Pre-Vocational Certificate NPVC 2			Pre-Vocational Trainee (2)
Pre-Voc. 1	National Pre-Vocational Certificate NPVC 1			Pre-Vocational Trainee (1)

Source: ILO, 2011

The two pre-vocational levels cater to the underprivileged and low-educated groups in society who have not completed eight years of school (eight years is the minimum to gain entry into a vocational training institute) and who lack the basic literacy and numeracy skills necessary to enter the lowest level of the qualifications framework. The following five levels, NTVQF 1–5, lead to certificates that closely align with existing TVET programmes for school students. Under the NTVQF, registered training organizations will also be able to conduct training for specific units of competences.

In general education, a new system of dual certification will be introduced so that students who achieve the skills component of vocational education programmes will receive an NTVQF qualification in addition to, and separate from, the school qualification (Ministry of Education, 2011).

4. PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING

Many Bangladeshis leave school before completing Grade 8 of general education, and as a result are not able to enrol in formal skills programmes. In order to overcome this barrier, the government will work with its partners to introduce reforms to remove the Grade 8 prerequisite from formal courses and replace it with course-specific entry requirements and challenge tests in which workers are challenged to demonstrate what they say they know with respect to the courses they expect to be admitted into. They help to determine the level of the qualification the worker is expected to acquire and the courses they get entry into.

In this way the NTVQF will allow those with limited education to undertake formal courses leading to nationally recognized qualifications.

The NTVQF is related to the existing qualifications structure. This permits transfer between general education and TVET. Students who fail the academic component of the Senior Secondary School Certificate (Vocational) or Higher Secondary School Certificate (Vocational) may nevertheless be assessed as competent in the National Skills Certificate of the NTVQF. They will receive the appropriate NSC award and can continue their studies to gain National Skills Certificates at the higher NTVQF levels. Vocational education programmes in schools such as the SSC (Voc), HSC (Voc) and HSC (BM) will be revised to ensure that their vocational components are based on industry competency standards, and that students only receive NTVQF qualifications if they have been assessed as competent. Pre-vocational Levels 1 and 2 are available in all training institutions to encourage students with low education levels to enter skills training courses.

The NSDC with the support of the BMET is improving the level of skills in the informal economy. In coordination with the ILO, a project on the recognition of prior learning has been undertaken. This is a sub-component of a larger project dealing with increased access of underprivileged groups to TVET (Arthur, 2009). The NTVQF is expected to provide a uniform framework for establishing course assessment requirements and entry points. The RPL processes for the informal sector should result in the recognition of competences gained but not previously recognized in the informal sector of the Bangladeshi economy. This should provide some of these participants with opportunities to enter formal sector employment that had previously been unavailable to them. In this way, RPL processes should result in access to both employment and qualifications or credits towards them (especially in the light of Year 8 requirements to access formal skills courses). Arthur (2009) draws attention to the importance in the informal sector of the portfolio system called the Competency Log Book. This documents evidence of competences using master craftspeople, technical training and skills centres and NGOs as assessors, and incorporating reasonable adjustment processes for informal sector workers.

Skills acquired through informal and non-formal training have been identified each year since 2011 and more than 100,000 people per year are having their skills recognized. In the future, it is predicted that this figure will rise to at least 200,000 per year. Trainers are equipped to identify and assess all new students for skills they already possess and to support them through the RPL process. Assessment centres are available in a number of locations. Some centres stand alone; others form part of existing TVET institutions. 75 per cent of government training institutions have been restructured to offer flexible learning options through courses scheduled at night (ILO, 2013).

Currently about 80 per cent of new formal apprentices are enrolled in an NTVQF qualification with the BTEB; 90,000 informal apprentices are also registered for a qualification. These are people who have been assessed as competent in one or more standard units (making up a full qualification) through an RPL process, and who have the option in future to complete a full qualification (ILO, 2013).

Barriers are being removed for skilled workers who want to migrate overseas, or who want to move back to Bangladesh and have the skills they gained overseas recognized. A number of host countries now recognize NTVQF qualifications. Skilled workers returning to Bangladesh are offered RPL assessment to recognize any new skills they have gained overseas. Under the 'ladderisation' system, they receive either a formal qualification or credit towards one. The processes of workplace learning, recognition of learning and certification can be repeated in several cycles until after some years the skilled worker is able to move into a supervisory role. This 'ladderisation' system will be based on modularised competency-based training within the NTVQF (Ministry of Education, 2011).

It is hoped that public sector training will change greatly. Job descriptions are now required to feature descriptions of opportunities for training and promotion. This requirement includes general TVET-level qualifications in management, planning, leadership, budgeting and communication. Private providers affiliated with the BTEB will be required to offer RPL to all prospective students.

5. REFERENCING TO OTHER REGIONAL FRAMEWORKS

The experts and consultants who worked on the NTVQF project claim that it draws on similar frameworks in Sri Lanka and the Maldives, which together with Bangladesh are members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The NTVQF is also similar to the frameworks of Vanuatu, Sri Lanka and Malaysia (ILO/Mia, 2010, p.30).

6. LESSONS LEARNED AND FUTURE PLANS

The present NTVQF initiative represents a significant step towards meeting national goals of poverty reduction and economic development. The Bangladesh NTVQF supports a nationally consistent and transparent system for skills training and qualifications that is acceptable for both national and international employment.

The NTVQF has generated enthusiasm amongst stakeholders, which include not only government and NGOs but also industry skills councils. There was some initial scepticism about going to scale (i.e. full implementation across all occupations, curricula and institutions) (ILO/Mia, 2010). In the future Bangladesh will take the following key steps to implement the NTVQF:

- Create awareness raising and social marketing campaigns to promote the NTVQF for industries and parents of secondary school students.
- Include relevant targets from Policy Review Sector Papers (PRSP) in the NSDC Action Plan, whose most important component is the NTVQF. These targets are: that TVET students should comprise 20 per cent of all secondary school students (they currently comprise 3 per cent); that total enrolment in TVET should increase by 50 per cent; and that women's enrolment should increase by 60 per cent.
- Formulate a new approach to the management of skills development, including a skills development investment plan which clearly links the NSDC Action Plan (including the NTVQF) to government budget allocations (ILO, 2013).

MAIN SOURCES OF INFORMATION

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