

Social Inclusion in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET): An Assessment on Selected Partners of the “Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP)” Project Implemented in Bangladesh

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.8110240>

Received: 14 November 2024; Accepted: 20 November 2024; Published: 21 December 2024

ABSTRACT

Social inclusion in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is now extensively discussed as Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) stress people's equitable rights by ensuring no one will be left behind in the country's development. Therefore, young people, including low-income people and disadvantaged people, should be trained with appropriate skills and placed in jobs. The Bangladesh government, jointly with the Asian Development Bank (ABD)'s funding, implemented the Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP) project from 2014 to 2023. The SEIP enrolled .796 million youths, provided hands-on training on technology-based skills, and ensured at least 60% of trainees' employment. This project focused on the segment of the population from disadvantaged backgrounds, like helpless women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), ultra-poor, ethnic minorities, transgender, etc., to be included in the training program and secure job placement for them. So, this article assesses the role of government-funded TVET programs in addressing inclusiveness in skills training and creating employability for those marginalized people. Data from 3 major partner associations/organizations among the 28 SEIP implementing partners have been analyzed, and the accessibility of marginalized people to skills training and their engagement in employment after training have been assessed. Data was collected from secondary sources. Moreover, a discussion was held with the concerned employees of selected partner associations/organizations that worked with SEIP, and the database named ‘Trainee Management System (TMS)’ of those associations/organizations was considered to collect the required information highlighting the collaborative nature of the project.

Keywords: Skills training, Enrollment, Job placement/Employment, Marginalized people, Persons with disabilities, Ultra-poor, Ethnic minorities, Transgender.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social inclusion has given importance to the global policy agenda of SDGs, focusing on the "Leave No One Behind" agenda and concern about societal inequality (Das et al., 2017). Social inclusion means enhancing people's capacity and chance to engage in society on equal terms, irrespective of their identity or origin. It means differences such as race and ethnicity, gender, class, or geography will not cause a barrier to a person's right to achieve their full potential in life. Instead, a socially inclusive society is based on a mutual sense of equal rights and respect. We often see that some groups face barriers that keep them from fully engaging in every nation's social, political, and economic life. Legal systems, land, labor markets, and stigmatizing or discriminatory attitudes and beliefs exclude certain populations. Gender, age, place of residence, employment, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship status, disability, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) are some of the factors that frequently contribute to disadvantage. People who are socially excluded lose their security, dignity, and chance to live better lives. It's crucial to understand that inclusive, sustainable growth is not just a goal but a necessity. Promoting such growth and quick poverty reduction will be difficult unless the underlying causes of prejudice and structural exclusion are addressed (World Bank, 2020). COVID-19 caused a widespread effect around the world. In Bangladesh, the hardest hit by COVID-19 are mostly wage and self-employed people whose livelihoods depend on their daily income. So,

the marginalized people suffered a lot in the long run. Enhancing TVET in Bangladesh is an emerging phenomenon that promotes employment rates, matches global demand for smart employability, and overcomes post-COVID-19 effects (Islam and Banerjee, 2022).

Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bangladesh aims to develop qualified and skilled human resources for national and international job placement. Bangladesh has enormous potential for economic development as a developing nation by transforming its sizable population into a skilled labor force through internationally demanded technical and vocational education. Technical education curriculum objectives are generally set to provide domain-specific competencies relevant to an occupation (Rauner, 2007). Thus, TVET has flourished to create employment among the country's unemployed youths. TVET is creating good opportunities for the low-income people to improve their livelihood. However, this will not significantly impact unless the people from disadvantaged backgrounds and deprived of human rights get equal access to training and employment. So, social inclusion ensure that all people will have the best opportunities to enjoy life and do well in society – and minimize all sorts of exclusions. In 1967, when the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB) was established, TVET in Bangladesh began. According to a report on enrollment analysis of BTEB, there are two forms of TVET nowadays in Bangladesh - 1) Formal training and 2) Informal and Non-formal training. Formal training under BTEB generally includes short course training (360 hours), secondary level, higher secondary level, diploma, and other professional courses (BTEB, 2016). From the onset, TVET was primarily intended to provide hands-on training on basic trade courses for those who dropped out of higher education due to financial incapability. Significant key developments in TVET reform were found in the 2020s and beyond. During that time, significant advancements in TVET reform were made to address the difficulties of delivering high-quality TVET, adapting or aligning TVET with evolving industrial demands, and improving private sector involvement. In light of inclusion and the growing significance of IT and digital capabilities in the contemporary economy, the government has a long-term strategic strategy for expanding and integrating TVET with digital skills and Industry 4.0 technologies. Since then, it has been seen that the majority of government-funded TVET programs have placed an increased emphasis on providing short-term training to the nation's children (ADB, 2020). The Bangladesh National Qualifications Framework (BNQF) and TVET systems are undergoing significant revisions to better align education and training with the demands of the labor market, which is another substantial upgrade. In June 2021, the BNQF was formally authorized. To guarantee quality and offer clear pathways between various educational and employment levels, the BNQF combines technical-vocational, higher, and general education into a single system. Ten (10) levels of qualifications are included in this framework, which is based on the growing complexity of knowledge, abilities, and attitudes. Through credit transfers, recognition of prior learning (RPL), and flexible certification pathways, the BNQF aims to enhance employability and promote lifelong learning (The Daily Star, 2021). The BNQF Levels 1 through 6—which contain six national-level skills certificates—are covered by the TVET and Skills sector. The evaluation and certification procedure known as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) formally acknowledges an individual's knowledge and abilities about a specific competency. Based on proof of skills and knowledge acquired throughout their lives, RPL enables people to show they are competent in performing particular jobs or working in specific industries (Islam, 2015). Before BNQF, the National Technical and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF), which was started in 2008 as part of Bangladesh's TVET reform, used a competency-based training and assessment (CBT&A) methodology and included Recognition of Prior Learning/Recognition of Current Learning (RPL/RCL). Independent competency units provide the training requirements for NTVQF certifications (Haolader et al., 2017). In order to satisfy the demands of the domestic and global labor markets, the Bangladeshi government has recently concentrated on developing and expanding TVET. The creation of Industry Skills Councils and the Competency-Based Training and Assessment system are essential initiatives. According to Bangladesh's Eighth Five-Year Plan of 2021-2025, the TVET system wants to boost enrollment from 17.18% in 2021 to 41% by 2041 (TVET@ Asia, 2024; Press Xpress, 2024).

Since inclusive growth is essential for economic development, the government of Bangladesh has implemented the long-term demand-driven "Skills for Employment Investment Program (SEIP)" project from 2014 to 2023 using a Public-Private Partnership (PPP) approach. The project was funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and focused on competency-based training. By providing jobless youths with skill training, it sought to improve employability. Therefore, an investigation was made that the government-funded

TVET program in Bangladesh covered people of low-income families and disadvantaged backgrounds who were socially excluded from education, training, and, most importantly, employment. These categories of people included disadvantaged women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), ultra-poor, abandoned youths who were parentless and living in misery, ethnic minorities, transgender or third gender, etc.

An Overview on SEIP project

Human resources are one of the significant components of Bangladesh's economic development. The need for a skilled workforce increases as the country's economy grows. The Eighth Five Year Plan of the country emphasized creating skilled workforces by imparting technical training to the unemployed and backward youths of the country as there is a need for trained and skilled workers in almost all industries, especially in the emerging and promising sectors in Bangladesh, where the desired economic growth is not possible due to lack of skilled workforce. Accelerating the country's economic development is only possible to create skilled human resources. Skilled human resources are the main driving force for the country's development (PKSF-SEIP, 2024). Therefore, large-scale investment is necessary to make the unskilled workforce efficient. A country with a skilled workforce also attracted foreign investors. In this perspective, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) signed a Multi-tranche Financing Facility (MFF) Agreement with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in 2014 to support long-term and comprehensive skills development efforts in Bangladesh, assessing its potential contribution to higher GDP growth by skilling and up-skilling a large number of working age people in priority sectors. The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) also co-financed the program in the first tranche. The Finance Division of the Government of Bangladesh was the executing agency of the SEIP project, which was run for 10 years and successfully ended in 2023. The objectives of the SEIP project were to increase access to training for poor people, increase capacity through appropriate skills development, and ensure job placement of trainees. The total cost of SEIP was BDT 37,123.3 million, and it achieved a 0.796 million youth enrollment target, including gender/ethnic equity. It certified and secured jobs for 0.728 million (91.45%) and 0.514 million (70.60%) trained youths, respectively (SEIP, 2023). According to set criteria, the project had a binding goal of ensuring the job placement of at least 60% of targeted youths by 2023. All the trainees received training free of cost. The achievement of the SEIP project was highly commendable. Under three tranches, the SEIP supported ten priority sectors (like Readymade Garment and Textile (RMG), Construction, Information Technology, Light Engineering, Leather and Footwear, Ship Building, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Agro-Processing, Transport-Motor Driving, Nursing and caregiving) and formed a robust partnership with 28 industry associations/organizations to implement this project (SEIP, 2023). The SEIP project mainly provided competency-based 360 hours (3 to 6 months) training with an assessment system on basic trade courses during the last decade for new entrants. This project included disadvantaged and marginalized people. The SEIP project was implemented in 3 tranches over the decade from 2014 to 2023. Training Statistics of the SEIP Project (Tranche 1, 2, and 3) are depicted in Table 1.

Table:1

SL	Association/ Org.	Total Target	Enrollment		Certification		Job Placement	
			Total	Female	Total	Female	Total	Female
1	Association of Export Oriented Shipbuilding Industries of Bangladesh (AEOSIB)	19,585	19,431	1,275	17,221	1,201	12,980	636
2	Bangladesh Association of Call Center & Outsourcing (BACCO)	27,785	28,000	11,201	26,903	10,871	18,315	7,429
3	Bangladesh Association of Construction Industry (BACI)	60,335	59,726	8,155	58,656	8,085	46,243	5,203

4	Bangladesh Agro-Processors' Association (BAPA)	29,000	26,400	11,795	25,219	11,239	25,182	11,228
5	Bangladesh Association of Software & Information Services (BASIS)	37,520	37,807	6,764	37,452	6,685	25,043	3,750
6	Bangladesh Bank SME Project (BB_SME)	12,564	12,498	4,270	12,246	4,188	9,428	3,208
7	Bangladesh Engineering Industry Owners Association (BEIOA)	28,030	28,132	2,235	27,372	2,186	24,058	1,667
8	Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)	84,055	82,023	50,314	78,096	48,084	59,950	36,652
9	Bangladesh Institute of Governance & Management (BIGM)	735	737	215	728	214	0	0
10	Bangladesh Industrial Technical Assistance Center (BITAC)	9,600	9,687	1,280	8,676	1,215	7,022	971
11	Bangladesh Jute Mills Association (BJMA)	2,160	450	136	435	135	426	131
12	Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA)	56,131	56,721	31,652	54,580	30,580	47,615	27,679
13	Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training (BMET)	176,260	172,707	41,409	151,012	37,272	84,993	23,460
14	Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation (BRTC)	42,000	39,193	2,534	34,059	2,178	4	0
15	Bangladesh Textile Mills Association (BTMA)	57,500	58,072	22,024	56,645	21,442	55,015	21,050
16	Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI)	8,000	8,075	8,050	7,942	7,919	6,794	6,783
17	Directorate of Technical Education (DTE)	42,040	41,692	10,962	33,426	8,465	14,802	5,238
18	BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD), BRAC University (EDC BRACU)	793	922	124	793	106	659	83

19	Bangladesh University of Textiles (EDC_BUTEX)	895	935	88	776	70	779	65
20	East West University (EDC_EWU)	600	644	129	529	111	394	56
21	Institute of Business Administration (IBA) (EDC_IBA)	990	1,029	87	881	76	423	45
22	Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL)	525	175	7	175	7	99	3
23	Kumudini Welfare Trust of Bengal Limited (Kumudini)	1,225	1,233	660	863	494	725	405
24	Leather goods And Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB)	25,000	25,984	15,531	22,931	13,553	20,555	12,157
25	Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)	39,150	38,633	8,176	38,007	7,990	28,516	5,928
26	Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh (REHAB)	21,000	21,206	5,158	20,763	5,111	17,102	3,322
27	Tourism & Hospitality Sector (ISC TH)	9,985	10,206	2,534	9,649	2,437	7,868	1,813
28	Trust Technical Training Institute (TTTI)	2,640	2,640	87	2,485	86	0	0
Total		796,103	784,958	246,852	728,520	232,000	514,990	178,962

Source: <https://seip-fd.gov.bd>

The table above shows the association/organization-wise trainees' enrollment, certification, and job placement information of the SEIP project at completion. However, here a few of the SEIP project's implementing partners' activities reviewed to explore the inclusion of marginalized people (like women, persons with disabilities, ultra-poor, ethnic minorities, etc.) in TVET over time.

Objective of the study:

This study aimed to review the accessibility of skills training through TVET for marginalized people, such as women, persons with disabilities, ultra-poor, ethnic minorities, etc., and their employability in the country's job sector.

Rationale of the study:

The field of TVET has generated substantial attention in both academic and development literature for its pivotal role in creating rapid employability of the youth. For the on-going benefit of demographic dividend, Bangladesh has now a large youth population, but it has not yet reached the optimum level to produce a skilled workforce for all so far. The marginalized people are yet to get easy access to education, training, and even

employment. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in Bangladesh centers on creating equitable opportunities for all individuals, regardless of socioeconomic background, gender, disability, or geographic location. Social inclusion in TVET is crucial because it addresses the barriers that have historically marginalized certain groups, preventing them from accessing quality vocational training and, subsequently, decent employment opportunities. Integrating social inclusion into TVET programs is essential for achieving sustainable economic growth, poverty alleviation, and the development of a more skilled, inclusive workforce in Bangladesh.

One important primary reason for social inclusion in TVET is economic empowerment of marginalized people. In Bangladesh, a significant portion of the population lives below the poverty line, and traditional education pathways do not adequately equip all young people for employment (Qayum, N. and Samadder, M., 2013). By making TVET accessible to underserved communities, including women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, the government can provide these groups with the practical skills needed to participate in the labor market in the country, even in abroad. This, in turn, enhances household income, reduces dependency, and fosters economic resilience across marginalized populations. It can be verified through this study.

Another key rationale of the study is reviewing gender equality. In Bangladesh, women are often underrepresented in the formal workforce, partly due to cultural norms and a lack of access to vocational training in non-traditional fields. By promoting social inclusion in TVET, more women can gain skills in diverse sectors, increasing their employment opportunities and breaking gender stereotypes (Rahman, T. and Ahmed, S.O., 2019). This not only contributes to their economic empowerment but also accelerates broader social changes towards gender equality. Social inclusion in TVET also supports national development goals by aligning with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (Worldwide, C., 2022). By promoting inclusive education and vocational training, Bangladesh can make significant progress towards these global targets, fostering a society that values equal opportunity and diversity. This review explored how government sponsored TVET triggered marginalized people to turn into skilled workforces.

METHODOLOGY

To assess the impact of the SEIP project on marginalized populations, a mixed-method approach was adopted, integrating quantitative analysis with qualitative insights. This methodology enabled a holistic understanding of the project's performance, challenges, and outcomes.

Data collection and analysis

Quantitative data were retrieved from the SEIP's Trainee Management System (TMS) [<https://tms.seip-fd.gov.bd/>] and employment records. These datasets provided critical information on enrollment, certification, and job placement rates across various demographic groups, including women, persons with disabilities (PWDs), ultra-poor individuals, ethnic minorities, and transgender individuals. Secondary data from implementing partners and relevant publications were also utilized to supplement the analysis.

Key metrics, such as enrollment percentages and job placement rates, were analyzed using descriptive statistics to identify trends. Comparative analyses were conducted to evaluate the project's progress against its inclusion targets, such as achieving 30% women's participation. These data allowed for a deeper exploration of SEIP's approaches to inclusion, providing insights into the unique strategies applied for marginalized groups.

Qualitative insights

Qualitative data were obtained through Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with representatives from three implementing partners: two private organizations and one public entity. The selected partners represented three critical sectors supported by the SEIP:

1. Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) – Ready-made garments and textiles.

2. Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB) – Leather and footwear industry.
3. Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) – Inclusive development programs.

The interviews provided nuanced insights into the challenges, successes, and overall implementation experiences of these organizations, enriching the findings from quantitative data.

Inclusion criteria for marginalized groups

Special attention was given to analyzing the inclusion of marginalized groups. To achieve this, the following identification strategies were employed:

- Ethnic minorities were identified based on trainees' residential locations in hilly districts, as recorded in the TMS database.
- Ultra-poor individuals were identified by comparing their pre-training daily income against the World Bank's definition of poverty.

These criteria allowed for a focused examination of SEIP's strategies, including specialized programs for PWDs and transgender individuals and targeted enrollment initiatives for ultra-poor and ethnic minorities.

Limitations and challenges

The study encountered notable limitations during data collection. The data of marginalized people were not readily available. Implementing partners reported incomplete or inconsistent data entry, particularly for marginalized groups other than women. All these tasks involved an exercise to arrange the training data for marginalized people. For instance, specific information on ethnic minorities and ultra-poor individuals often required additional processing to extract meaningful insights. These challenges underscore the importance of improving data collection practices for future projects.

Scope of the review

As the study primarily relied on secondary data, determining a sample size was not applicable. Instead, the entire data-set from the selected implementing partners was included to ensure comprehensive coverage. This approach provided a robust basis for evaluating the SEIP project's inclusivity and its ability to meet equity-focused objectives.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Inclusion of disadvantaged women

The total population of Bangladesh is more than 160 million, and women constitute half of the total population. However, most women still need to catch up in education, training, and employment in the country. It is the first time a project like SEIP has determined a target to cover 30 percent of women from disadvantaged backgrounds in its training program, with retention in employment for at least 3 months after the end of training. It was a unique and challenging condition, but the project finally achieved its goal. 28 industry associations (IAs) and organizations were engaged in SEIP and were responsible for meeting the target. According to the target, the project could enroll .246 million women i.e. 31.45% of total enrollment target (shown in Figure 1). Of them, .232 million women were certified and 77% were employed. It was noticed that all the trades for skills training under SEIP were not women friendly, nevertheless the industry associations/organizations met the hard challenges, which was commendable. Among the industry associations, women's participation in training was greater in Readymade Garments and Textile (56.02% to 61.57%), Leather and Footwear (59.10%), and Agro-Processing (44.56%). Women's inclusion in the SEIP was entirely satisfactory as it met the condition above target. In the future, the experience of SEIP will be noteworthy that meeting the target of women enrollment in future skills training programs, the government

must consider the appropriate category of training that will best suit women and inspire them to participate more and more. Some women-friendly trade-based training may be enhanced, such as fashion garments, beautification, etc., that will be exclusive to them. The women's batch will be separate from traditional co-education. It will encourage females to join in the skills training more in the days ahead.

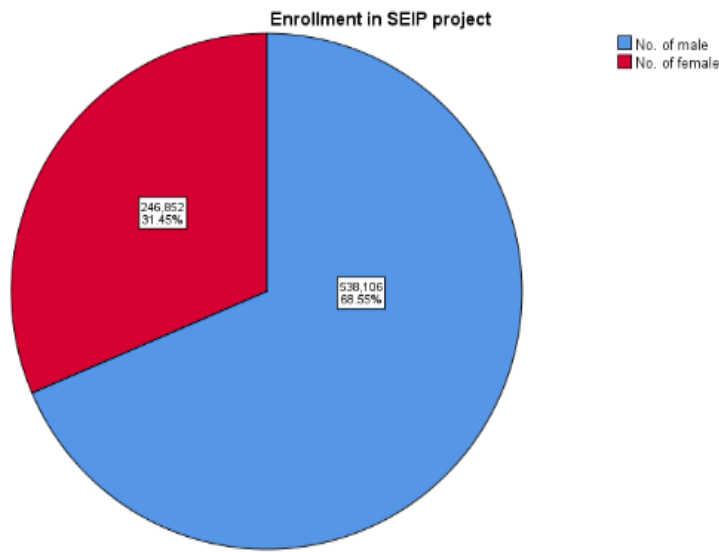


Figure 1: Women participation in skills training of SEIP (From year 2015 to 2023)

Inclusion of Persons with disabilities (PWDs)

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that approximately 15% of the world's population, or around one billion adults and children, are living with some form of disability (WHO 2011). The majority of persons with disabilities experience substantially higher rates of poverty in every region of the world. They encounter discrimination, marginalization, and exclusion in many settings, including employment (International Labor Conference, 2020). Bangladesh is not an exception. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), persons with disabilities constitute 9.01% of the population. However, opportunities for PWDs to participate in the mainstream development component are limited in Bangladesh (BBS, 2015). PWDs are lagging behind their justified needs and rights in society. They fail to access education, training, and the job market. As a result, PWDs in Bangladesh remain predominantly poor and marginalized in society. The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has identified some of the pathways in the population monograph through which the government undertook actions like increasing access to education and training and increasing access to employment for mitigating the suffering of disabled people in all cross-sections of society (BBS, 2015).

Since the beginning of 2014, SEIP did not have any separate focus on skills training for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs). While reviewing the data of implementing partners of SEIP, it was found that PWDs' training and employment got less attention over the period. The Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB), one of the implementing partners of SEIP, trained 78 PWDs, including 36 women among 25,000 trainees enrolled, and 66 were employed throughout the project. The number is negligible, indicating no extra drive was given to address this group. The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), one of the implementing partners of SEIP, enrolled only 165 PWDs, including 85 women, out of a total enrollment of 56,131 youths for training over the 10-year project period. Among them, 107 were employed (71.81%). It was not a significant number compared to their total training participants. In 2022, SEIP emphasized a separate program for PWDs and started to pilot a specialized program with Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), one of its implementing partners. Unlike non-disabled persons, PWDs training required a special arrangement due to the physical challenges of disabled persons, both for the suitability of training and for a working environment that would be convenient for them. So, this was a very small-scale program with PWDs having mild disability like hand loss, leg loss, etc. Some PWDs' friendly trades, like fashion garments, IT support services, mobile phone servicing, etc., were selected to train them. According to the Trainee Management System (TMS) of SEIP, out of the total enrollment target of 39,150 in regular training programs under Tranche 1, 2, and 3, PKSF trained up to 287 PWDs, of which 86

were female. Among them, 212 were employed. It was 73.86% of the trainees' enrollment.

This figure implies that PWDs needed to be adequately focused in the regular training program of SEIP during the 10-year project period. However, over time, emphasizing the socio-economic aspects of disabled people, the SEIP began a specialized PWDs skills training program operating from 2022 to 2023. With this training program, the SEIP trained 396 PWDs against the target of 400, including 152 women (38.38%) collaborating with its only implementing partner, PKSf. Of them, 290 PWDs, including 122 women, were employed, which was 73% of the enrollment, and it is impressive. It is noteworthy that PKSf has successfully met the enrollment and job placement targets, demonstrating the program's effectiveness. Most were engaged in IT support services, mobile servicing, and tailoring. It was found that among the implementing partners of SEIP, PKSf covered a maximum number of disabled persons to bring 683 PWDs in skills training and ensured employment at the optimum level. PWDs enrollment and job placement of the three associations/organizations are shown in Figure 2.

However, it is essential to note that selecting appropriate trade-based learning and training institutes with all different types of infrastructure facilities suitable for PWDs is key to the successful implementation of PWDs training. Without proper infrastructure and a PWDs-friendly environment, it would not be easier for training institutes to run short-course TVET.

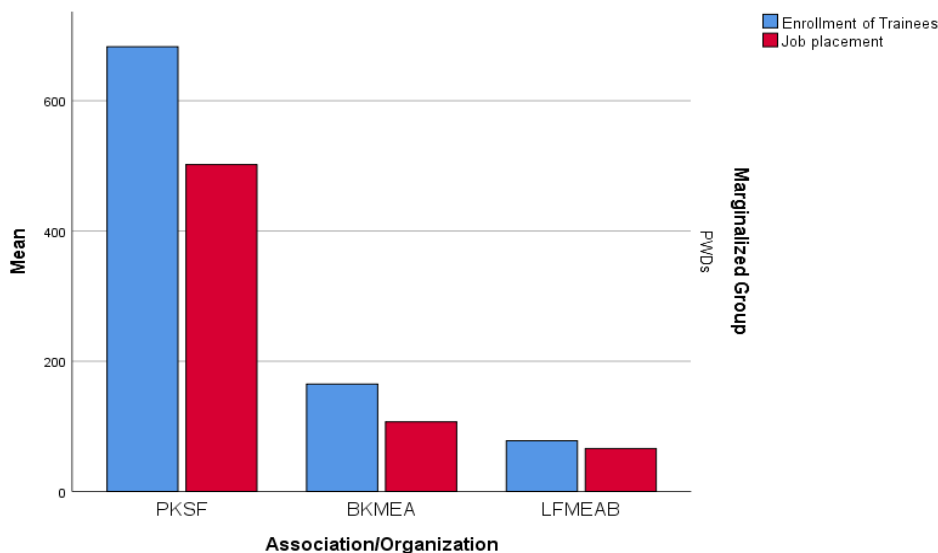


Figure 2: Enrollment and job placement of PWDs (From year 2022 to 2023)

Inclusion of Ultra-poor

The term "Ultra-poor" refers to the world's poorest and most vulnerable individuals who are living in extreme poverty. They frequently struggle to achieve their necessities and are caught in a poverty cycle that can be inherited by future generations (World Bank, 2022). According to the definition of the World Bank, their income falls below \$ 1.90 per Day. It is one of the widely used criteria to identify ultra-poor. They hardly have access to government services, education, or basic social safety nets and are socially and economically isolated (Tambe, S., 2022). The SEIP project has covered the ultra-poor and positively changed their lives through employment after skills training. However, tracing them from the trainees' data as preserved in TMS software by the implementing partners of SEIP took some work. It could have been better if it were more easily distinguished in that database. Therefore, they have been picked by verifying their prior training monthly family income compared to per Day income of \$1.90. As data was not readily available, concerned project staff of three implementing partners viz. LFMEAB, BKMEA, and PKSf were discussed, and the information provided was reviewed to determine the ultra-poor participation and existence in tranches 1, 2, and 3 of SEIP. According to the SEIP's database, LFMEAB covered 25,000 youths in tranches -1, 2, and 3 under the SEIP project, among which ultra-poor were 22,211, including 14,055 women. It was 88.84% of the total enrollment of trainees, which is commendable. Women were increasingly selected from the ultra-poor group, which made an essential focus on social inclusion exceptionally. Another remarkable achievement was the job placement of

17,663 (79.52%) ultra-poor after the end of the training. Another implementing partner, BKMEA, has gained vast experience in including the ultra-poor in the SEIP project during a 10-year tenure. Out of the total enrollment target of 56,131 trainees, the number of ultra-poor was 32,387 (57.70%), including 19,055 women and 27,485 (84.86%) ultra-poor, including 16,674 women were finally employed.

On the other hand, PKSf, an apex organization working for poverty alleviation, has had a long experience working with the ultra-poor by allowing them access to microfinance through its mainstream and project activities since 2003 (PKSF, 2022). So, PKSf has focused on addressing the ultra-poor since the beginning of the implementation of SEIP. In 3 tranches, PKSf trained 29,570 ultra-poor, including 5761 women in the SEIP project, which was 75.53% of total enrollment. Finally, 22,264 (75.26%) ultra-poor were placed in respective jobs after training. Ultra-poor enrollment and job placement of the three associations/organizations are shown in Figure 3. All three implementing partners had a good achievement in including ultra-poor compared to the total number of trainees enrolled. Therefore, a good portion of trainees' enrollment in SEIP from the segments of the disadvantaged background was primarily represented by the inclusion of the ultra-poor.

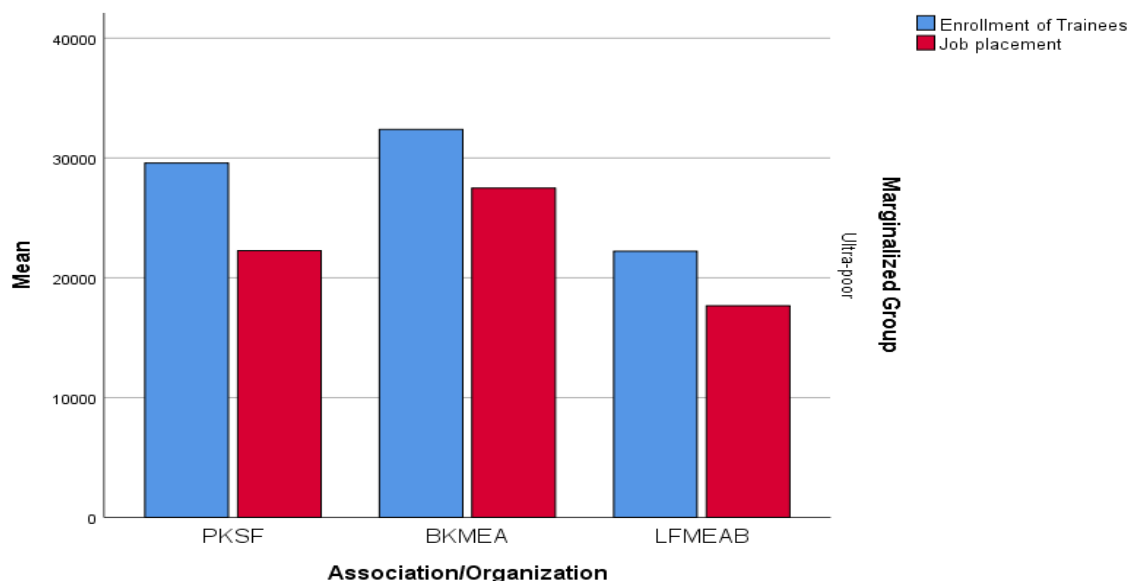


Figure 3: Enrollment and job placement of Ultra-poor (From year 2015 to 2023)

Inclusion of Ethnic Minorities

According to the ethnology, there are 36 indigenous living linguistic communities in Bangladesh (Bangladesh Ethnology 2016). There are 1.65 million minority people in Bangladesh, according to the Population Survey of Minority Tribal Community of Bangladesh 2022. Of these minority groups, the majority of people are Chakma (4,83,299), Marma (2,24,261), Santal (1,29,049), Tripuri (1,56,578), and others (Population and Housing Census 2022). The majority of these communities are often at a disadvantage in comparison to ethnic Bengalis because Bangladesh was established as a Bengali nation-state instead. Bangladesh's ethnic minorities speak their own languages and have their cultural customs (Global Briefing, 2016). The SEIP unveiled the scope to include ethnic minorities and provided them with technical skills, but there was no specialized program focusing on the needs of these communities. According to the project's TMS, the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturing and Exporters Association (BKMEA) trained only 140 ethnic people, including 85 women, out of its total enrollment of 56,131. The job placement rate was remarkably high, at 80.15%. However, regarding inclusion, this number of trainees was insignificant compared to the ethnic community's population size. Another implementing partner, the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF), covered 1,664 ethnic minorities, including 376 women, out of its total enrollment of 39,150. Similar to BKMEA, the job placement rate was high at 75.35%. The Leather Goods and Footwear Manufacturers & the Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB) completed training of 290 ethnic minorities, including 172 women, out of its enrollment of 25,000. However, as usual, the job placement rate was 85.51%, like others. The job engagement rate indicates that ethnic minorities have good acceptability in the country's job sectors. Ethnic minorities' enrollment and job placement of the three associations/organizations are shown in Figure 4.

It is noteworthy that the inclusion of ethnic minorities should be more concentrated in TVET in the days ahead according to the geographical location of the country. The employment rate of ethnic minority people could be higher through TVET.

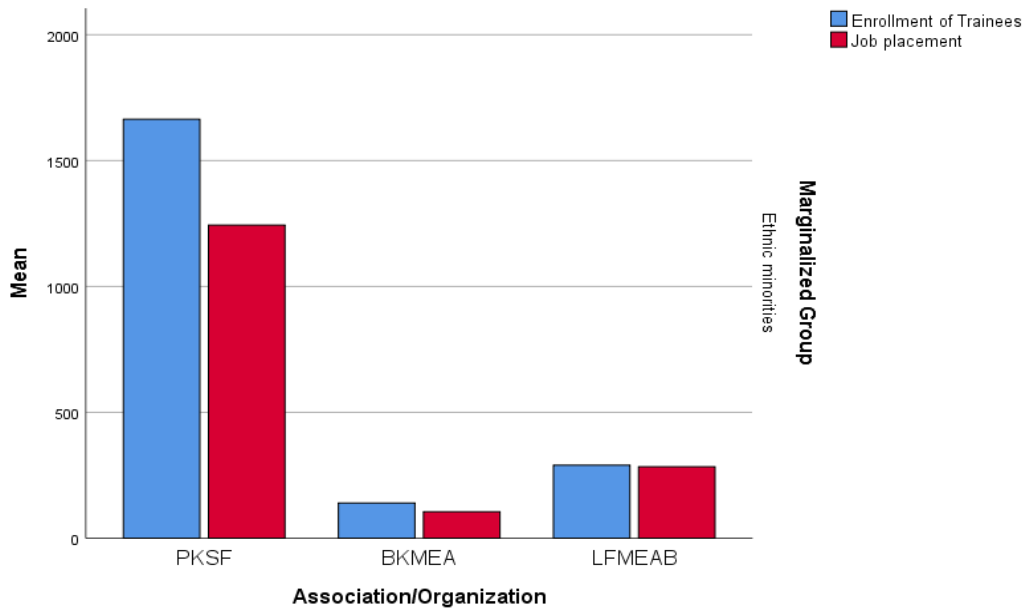


Figure 4: Enrollment and job placement of Ethnic minorities (From year 2015 to 2023)

Inclusion of Transgender

Transgender is generally found in less than 1% of the worldwide population (M.H., 2017). The transgender community is one of the most marginalized and neglected minority groups in Bangladesh. According to the Country's first digital Population and Housing Census 2022, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) has primarily reported 12,629 transgender people for the first time as a landmark step to ensure equity for this community at all state levels (BBS, 2022). In the local language, they are known as the "Hijra" community. Bangladesh officially recognized them as '3rd gender' in 2013 (Fariha A. and Sarker. M. A. R., 2022). This declaration is regarded as a milestone in the establishment of human rights for the third-gender or transgender population. Transgender communities living in the country basically cannot participate in any social activities. They live as an isolated community in a society that is totally against human rights. They are rarely fortunate to access any social and political activities, income-generating activities, and even formal job markets (Winter, S., & King, M., 2018). TVET could be an effective solution to ensure a dignified life for these people in society. Inclusive development ensures that all human beings enjoy the same rights and opportunities. The transgender should not be left behind. But the challenges faced by transgender people in every sphere of life are many more. Several significant challenges must be addressed when considering the transgender community involved in skills training programs. They are-

- i. Transgender individuals in Bangladesh face widespread discrimination and stigma. They are generally denied education, employment opportunities, and basic services. This discrimination creates major barriers to take part in skills training programs. They might face psychological oppression, bullying and resistance from other participants of the training institutes.
- ii. Many people in Bangladesh have lack of knowledge about transgender identities which generates hatred and misunderstanding against them. This lack of awareness might create an uncomfortable environment in skills training programs for transgender individuals and they may be reluctant to join or continue the training program.
- iii. Transgender individuals in Bangladesh have limited access to basic education and employment opportunities due to discrimination. It can limit their scope in skills training. In addition, the lack of separate programs only for them is a major reason for unavailing the training opportunities.

- iv. The transgender community in Bangladesh often faces violence and harassment, both in public places and within their own family and communities. It can be difficult to involve them in skills training unless their safety and security can be ensured.
- v. Continued facing of odd experience of discrimination, rejection, and violence may lead to adverse effects on mental health of the transgender. These mental health issues badly impact on them to become engaged in skills training programs effectively.
- vi. The lack of supportive policies and legal protection for transgender individuals in Bangladesh further exacerbates the present challenges and problems of transgender community. Without adequate legal framework, ensuring and protecting their rights and bringing them in this platform of skills training programs becomes difficult.

To overcome these challenges above, mass awareness about transgender issues, and creating safeguard needs to be focused. Skills training programs will have to be designed in consideration with all-inclusive and culturally sensitive issues for full participation of transgender trainees. More importantly, they will also need to provide support for mental health and ensure psychosocial well-being. Therefore, the SEIP project piloted a very small-scale transgender training program under Tranche-3 with its only implementing partner, PKSf, as it had proven past work experience on multidimensional approaches for poverty alleviation. PKSf implemented a special training program for transgender trainees through one of its leading partner organizations, TMSS, on the Fashion Garment trade under the SEIP project (PKSf Annual Report, 2023). According to a database of SEIP, 50 transgender trainees were trained, and 34 (68%) persons engaged in the job (SEIP, 2023). As SEIP has successfully experienced some initiatives to bring transgender people into mainstream society, a broader scope to include this country's transgender group in a training network with experienced training institutes can be explored in the future, and a completely separate training program can be designed for them. In order to change the lives of transgender people, appropriate hands-on training and job placement initiatives in different sectors, most importantly in small business, tailoring, and other skills-related jobs, need special attention.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The SEIP project was successfully implemented for youth employment as one of Bangladesh's government flagship projects. It has remarkably achieved its enrollment target and job placement of the trainees, along with an effort to reduce skills gaps at the industry level. Regarding inclusiveness in skills training, the participation could have been higher. However, the SEIP unveiled the opportunity for all categories of marginalized people to access training. The women's enrollment in the skills training program under the SEIP is phenomenal as some associations cover many women according to the industry's needs. Among other segments, the ethnic minorities were attended less as the number of trainees was minimal. An inclusive TVET system can help Bangladesh meet the demands of a changing global economy. As industries adopt new technologies and skills become more specialized, the country needs a diverse and adaptable workforce. By removing barriers to vocational education, Bangladesh can tap into the potential of its entire population including marginalized people, fostering innovation and competitiveness. Social inclusion in TVET in Bangladesh is essential for ensuring that all citizens have the opportunity to develop their skills, contribute to the economy, and improve their livelihoods. It supports economic empowerment, gender equality, and national development, making it critical to building a more inclusive and prosperous Bangladesh. Therefore, the government should undertake specialized programs focusing on the capacity and adaptability of low-income people from disadvantaged segments.

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