

National Apprenticeship Conference 2022 Strengthening the CMSMEs through Apprenticeship

Outcome Report and Action Agenda

Date: 30-31 March, 2022

Venue: Neeshorgo Hotel & Resort Ltd, Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh

The National Apprenticeship Conference 2022 held in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh dated from March 30, 2022 to March 31, 2022 with an aim to strengthening the CMSMEs through Apprenticeship.

BACKGROUND

National Apprenticeship Conference 2022 was organized by Aspire to Innovate (a2i) Programme in collaboration with UNICEF and Generation Unlimited (GenU) Bangladesh, which brought together representatives from relevant government departments, development partners, skills development agencies, industries and upazila coordinators (apprenticeship) under one platform. It may be noted that, in most upazilas, entrepreneurs from Union Digital Centers (UDC) were employed as the upazila coordinators. Apprenticeship is a globally successful approach to enhance productivity with numerous benefits accruing to apprentices and employers. According to the Bangladesh Labor Law (2006), apprenticeship is any system by which an employer undertakes by contract to employ a young person (between the age of 17-30) and to train him/her or have him or her trained systematically for a trade for a period specified in advance and during which the apprentices is bound to work in the employer's service. Apprenticeship in Bangladesh dates back to 1962 and with course of time, apprenticeship has progressed in response to changing skills demands and evolution in emerging technologies. Evidently it has been observed that apprenticeship programme contributes significantly in reducing the unemployment rate of the country and fostering sturdy economic growth.



Cottage, Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (CMSME) sector plays an impactful role in the economy of Bangladesh. According to the 2013 Economic Census, the country accommodates a

staggering 7.8 million enterprises, providing employment to 20.3 million people. Despite accounting for huge part of employment, this sector is plagued with various challenges regarding skills, finance, market, service etc. To worsen the situation, COVID-19 pandemic forced shutdown of the economy that led approximately 500,000 enterprises out of business imposing huge hardship in their lives. According to a study conducted by a2i, COVID-19 made CMSME sector collapse because around 10 million people faced immediate job loss, 0.78 million entrepreneurs were affected and 30-40% CMSMEs were reduced. To revive the sector, with funding from UNICEF and Generation Unlimited (GenU) Bangladesh, an apprenticeship programme has been undertaken in 40 Upazillas to train 1,600 unemployed marginalized youths with wage-earning skills in the cottage, micro, small, and medium industries. The main focus behind the programme is not only to create job and self-employment opportunities for the unemployed but also to support the CMSME sector to turn around in post pandemic times.

The apprenticeship training phase lasted for 6 months in 12 occupations (Computer Operation, Electrical Installation & Maintenance, Refrigeration & Air Conditioning, Tiles & Marble Fittings, Plumbing, Carpentry, Welding, Mobile Phone Servicing, Motorcycle Servicing, Tailoring & Dress Making, Block Batik, and Screen Printing, and Beauty Care) and has been carried out at the field level under the supervision of Upazila Nirbahi Officer/ Youth Development Officer with the help of 40 Upazila Coordinators.

As a next step, this 2-day long Apprenticeship Conference has been organized on 30th March and 31st March 2022 to disseminate the good practices of the apprenticeship programme. The objectives of the Conference are:

- To identify the roles and responsibilities of relevant government ministries/ departments to expand apprenticeship practices in Bangladesh
- To identify the role of industries and development partners to expand apprenticeship programme
- To identify issues and challenges
- To share case study and experience in informal and formal
- To evaluate the progress of the apprenticeship programme
- To plan for future activities

INAUGURATION SESSION

At the inauguration event of the conference Mr. Dulal Krishna Saha, Executive Chairman of National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) was the chief guest whereas the chairperson was

Mr. Shaiful Islam, the Joint Project Director (Joint Secretary) of a2i programme. As special guests Mr. Md. Ali Akbar Khan, the Chairman of Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB); Mr. SM Shahjahan, the Deputy Director (Course Accreditation) of Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB); Mr. Mohiuddin Helal, the Chairman of Tourism and Hospitality Industry Skills Council; Mr. Md. Shafiqur Rahman Bhuiyan, the Chairman of Agro Food Industry Skills Council; Mr. Mirza Nurul Gani Shovon, the Chairman of National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB); and Mr. KM Akhtaruzzaman, the President of Bangladesh Furniture Exporters Association also graced the event with their spontaneous presences. The keynote speaker of the session was Mr. Asad Uz Zaman, Strategy and Innovation Specialist of a2i.



The keynote speaker Mr. Asad Uz Zaman, in his presentation on 'Apprenticeship Programme in Bangladesh', pointed out some of the challenges that the CMSMEs in Bangladesh are currently facing- almost 33% enterprises have lack of skilled manpower, 50% of the CMSMEs have capital shortage, 34% of them face hassles with bank loans mostly due to high interest rates and absence of alternative credit scoring method, around 55% enterprises have lack of knowledge to market products. To minimize the skills gap for the struggling CMSMEs, if utilized properly, apprenticeship can bring hopes. Through apprenticeship, while the industries can be able to ensure sturdy economic growth through building skillsets and create a reliable next generation of workers at lower long-term costs, the apprentices are able to learn on jobs with payment and after training they will be empowered enough to find work despite lack of experience. He proudly shared that this program has successfully made a huge part of the apprentices become employed in industries or become entrepreneurs. He also mentioned some of the initiatives of a2i that are currently working to benefit some strategic areas of CMSMEs- National Intelligence for Skills,

Education, Employment and Entrepreneurship (NISE) for ensuring access to skills, Digital Financial Services Lab for ensuring access to finance, EkShop for ensuring access to market and myGov for ensuring access to services.

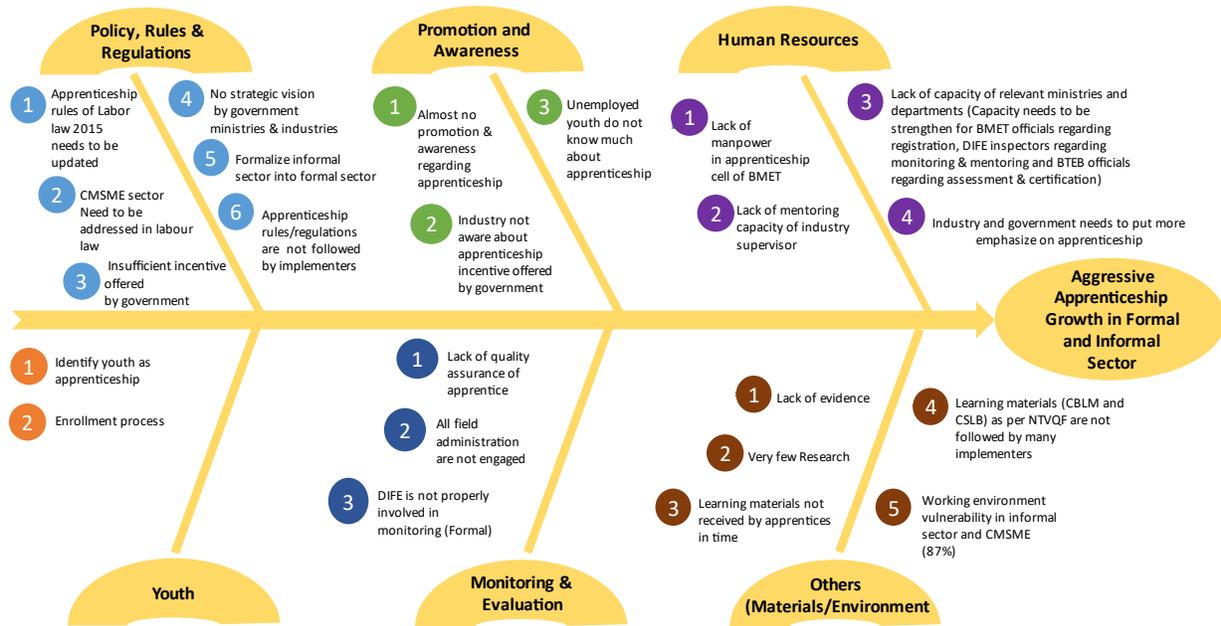
While announcing inauguration of the National Apprenticeship Conference 2022, Mr. Dulal Krishna Saha, in his speech, spoke well of the joint collaboration among a2i, UNICEF and GenU for organizing this apprenticeship program and appreciated the effort of bringing in the relevant stakeholders to participate in this conference because maintaining coordination among stakeholders is vital in achieving the dream of becoming a developed country by 2041. He also noted that apprenticeship opportunity helps a youth to plan his/her career and proposed that such apprenticeship program should also be undertaken in formal industries and ensuring industrial linkage for the apprentices will add more value to the initiative. Mr. Shaiful Islam, in his welcoming speech, put emphasis on scaling up of such apprenticeship program to cover more upazilas of the country as there is no alternative to training the youth if we want to increase foreign remittances through exporting our skilled manpower to abroad legally.

Mr. Md. Ali Akbar Khan acknowledged that apprenticeship is an essential approach to creating a skilled nation and this approach helps the apprentices to get practical knowledge of technical skills when they work under the master craft persons. BTEB is going to support this program through its assessment of the apprentices and certification activities and he expressed his excitement for being able to be involved with this great initiative. Mr. Mirza Nurul Gani Shovon shared that partnership with NASCIB and other private associations in case of future initiatives such as this apprenticeship programme may bring beneficial outcomes for the struggling CMSMEs. He also mentioned that it is the lack of access to information which poses as a big barrier for the CMSME sector and to uplift this situation the upazila coordinators may play crucial role in publicizing important information related to CMSMEs to concerned parties. Mr. KM Akhtaruzzaman stated in his speech on apprenticeship in furniture sector that female participation should be encouraged more to sectors other than just only garments sector to increase productivity because it is proved that work productivity is higher in female workers than in male workers.

TECHNICAL SESSION

The inauguration session was followed by a technical session on the first day of the conference. The session was about conducting group works to identify the key challenges the Upazila

coordinators faced while coordinating this programme, how these challenges could be overcome. The coordinators were divided into five groups for the group works. Based on their group discussions, a fishbone diagram was designed that reflects the summary of the challenges and ways to ensure aggressive apprenticeship growth in formal and informal sector. The fishbone analysis is as follows-



During the group work session, the coordinators identified case studies with success stories. These success stories prove that despite various challenges mentioned previously in the fishbone diagram, many apprentices were able to improve their financial situation successfully. Out of 1600 apprentices, the success stories of 120 apprentices stood out the most. These stories showed how this programme helped these youths to



ameliorate their sorrowful fate by empowering them to be economically independent. Some stories are shared below:

1. “I am Shahnaz Parvin, from Shahjadpur, Sirajganj District. I have my father and a younger brother in my family. I dropped out of my degree college after first semester as my father failed to bear my education expenses. My father is the only earning member and the amount he earns is not sufficient for the family. As my father works at construction sites, he gets works seasonally and when he does not get a consignment it becomes really hard for us to live. As a result, my father has to borrow money from the loan sharks and we owe a huge sum of money to them. On top of that, during COVID-19 our situation turned out really pathetic as my father could not get any job for almost two years. To help my father to repay his enormous loans, I am trying to find a job but it is very difficult to get a job because of competitiveness and employers tend to hire those who have experiences. Last year I got to know about this training program from a relative. I wanted to learn about various computer applications as almost all offices require computer operators. With the help of my upazila coordinator, I got opportunity to receive training in computer trade and after training, by the grace of Almighty, I am working part-time in various govt offices as computer operators such as Dept of Social Services, Dept of Women Affairs etc. and earning more than 15,000/- per month. I would like to give my absolute thankfulness to a2i, UNICEF and GenU for organizing this programme.”



2. “My name is Rezia Kongwaong. I am from Shreemangal, Moulvibazar. I studied till class 8. Being in ethnic minority household, poverty was our continuous companion. That is why I had to be engaged in informal works since early age. Before training, I used to work at betel leaf cultivation field and earn 2,000/- monthly. I felt this was very little amount compared to the labor I am putting into my job. Hence, when I got to know about the apprenticeship program from social media, I immediately applied because I knew to earn more money, I need to get a better job, and to get a stable job amidst the huge competition I have to distinct myself from other candidates with my skillsets. So, I took

training in tailoring and dressmaking and after completing the training I am working part-time in a tailoring shop near my home and now I am earning a consolidated amount of



7,000/- from both tailoring and my previous job. I am really happy that a2i took this initiative with the help of UNICEF and GenU and I believe wholeheartedly if this programme continues, no youth will be left out, all can become financially independent if they complete this apprenticeship program sincerely and successfully.”

3. “I am Asgar Ali, from Poba, Rajshahi District. I am a Kamil graduate. I have just my mother in my family. My father died when I was just three years old. From then, my mother worked really hard to look after our family in multiple jobs as maid or as construction worker. With age, my mother became weak and she can hardly work anymore. I want to become financially independent so that I can look after her. Being educated in madrasa education, I find it really difficult to get jobs, also most jobs require history of



previous experiences or certificates of skills training. While one day I was developing my curriculum vitae at Hujuripara Union Digital Center, the UDC entrepreneur Md. Ziaul Haque informed me about this 6months long apprenticeship program. I took training in electrical installation and maintenance occupation. What I loved the most about this training is the friendly attitude of my MCP (Master Craft Person) and his teaching style. After training I have joined him and he is giving my monthly salary of 18,000/-. I would like to inspire others to join this training program if such program takes place again in future. This training has empowered me to dream about starting my own electrical business enterprise in future.”

4. “I am Khadiza Akter from Chadpur District. I was exposed to the harsh realities of life since childhood, as she comes from a low-income family. My father scrapes together a living with job at a local factory and my mother is a housewife and mother of three children. In spite of poverty, I studied till HSC but could not continue my education after that. During pandemic, the factory my father used to work in was closed down due to nationwide lockdown. That time was the hardest phase of our lives we had to endure. Being the eldest child of the family, I thought it is my duty to support my family but I could not find any job. Then from social media I got to know about this apprenticeship program which not only offers skills training but also gives allowances. This seemed to be great opportunity for me to learn practical and employable skills that in future may help me to get a decent job. I received training



in beauty care occupation for six months and learnt a great deal. After end of training, impressed by my skills, my MCP hired me in her beauty parlor as an assistant and now I am earning BDT 10,000/- per month. I feel really proud when I see happiness in my parents’ eyes when I give them my salary at the end of the month. I cannot find enough words to express my gratitude to the a2i program of Government of Bangladesh, GenU and UNICEF for taking this initiative to uplift the quality of our lives and eradicate poverty and unemployment.”

CLOSING SESSION



The closing session of the conference was held on March 31, 2022. Representatives from both public and private sector were present at the session. Mr. Shaiful Islam, Joint Project Director (Joint Secretary) of a2i - Aspire to Innovate Programme was the chairperson of the session and Mr. Md. Kamal Hossain, Secretary of Technical and Madrasa Education Department (TMED), Ministry of Education was the chief guest. The special guests of the session were Mr. Mohiuddin Helal, Chairman of Tourism and Hospitality Industry Skills Council; Mr. Md. Shafiqur Rahman Bhuiyan, Chairman of Agro Food Industry Skills Council; Mr. Mr. KM Akhtaruzzaman, the President of Bangladesh Furniture Exporters Association; Mr. Sarder M Asaduzzaman, Assistant Resident Representative, UNDP Bangladesh and Mr. Sirajul Islam, representative from ILO. The Upazila Coordinators were given certificates as recognition of their contributions in this initiative in this session.

Mr. KM Akhtaruzzaman hoped that the mistakes from this initiative will not be repeated in next activities and the knowledge and learnings from this two-day long conference will be resourceful for future apprenticeship programmes. Mr. Sarder M Asaduzzaman, in his closing remarks, commented that the policy frame regarding skills development needs to be rearranged to make room for skilling the manpower for the CMSME sector and also special consideration should be given on including training disabled persons for mainstream employment opportunities. Mr. Mohiuddin Helal noted that there are some ethnic crafting trades which are culturally unique and on the verge of extinction; special package needs to be designed to retain these trades to preserve cultural diversity. Mr. Sirajul Islam shared that ILO has jointly worked with a2i and

UNICEF on apprenticeship initiatives in 2012 and 2016. To continue this partnership ILO, with CAD 40 million from Canada, is taking up a project in skilling up the host community of Cox's



Bazar in partnership with a2i, UNDP and BRAC.

WAY FORWARD

The recommendations developed based on the challenges mentioned during the technical session of this conference are as follows:

- Apprenticeship rules of Labor Law 2015 needs to be updated and CMSME sector needs to be addressed in the rules.
- The government needs to offer sufficient incentives.
- Industries should follow strategic visions to promote apprenticeship.
- Apprenticeship Guideline by NSDA needs to be finalized as soon as possible and steps should be taken so that this guideline is strictly followed by implementors.
- Inclusion of gender, persons with disability and other minorities have to be ensured to make apprenticeship opportunities more inclusive.
- Widespread promotion and awareness campaign to popularize apprenticeship is a must need, especially to reach the unemployed youth.

- Attention needs to be given on increasing the mentoring capacity of industry supervisors.
- Capacity needs to be strengthened for Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) officials regarding registration, for Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) inspectors regarding monitoring & mentoring and for BTEB officials regarding assessment & certification.
- More research studies are needed to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of apprenticeship in both formal and informal sectors.
- All implementing bodies need to strictly follow the learning materials (CBLM and CSLB) as per National Training and Vocational Qualifications Framework (NTVQF).