



**Inclusive Futures**

Promoting disability inclusion



# Disability Vocational Training and Youth Employment

## Learnings Summary

# Introduction

The aim of this paper is to bring together the highlights, achievements, and findings of the multiple studies, surveys, and research pieces conducted by the consortium partners of Task Order 12. This learning summary encompasses data and materials from numerous participatory interviews, workshops, focus groups, and qualitative and quantitative data analysis.

The hard work, dedication, and collaboration of these organisations has generated a rich source of insights, testimonials, learnings, observations, and recommendations from staff involved throughout the entirety of the programme, and, crucially, the learners and their family and supporters themselves.

This paper seeks to identify key themes from each of the studies and summarise both the successes and shortcomings that were identified. By bringing together reflections and recommendations from all partners, stakeholders and participants, this learning summary illustrates how the inclusive training programme can be improved further to ensure that even more young people with disabilities have the opportunity for personal development and decent employment.

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## Programme overview:

The Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Empowerment (TO12) programme was designed to build long-term improved wellbeing and increase the equitable access to decent employment for young women and men with disabilities in Bangladesh. This would be achieved by delivering the following three outcomes:

**Outcome 1:** Young women and men with disabilities in Bangladesh have increased income through the scaling-up of the STAR model;

**Outcome 2:** Young women and men with disabilities, including those with deaf-blindness, have increased income, through replication of the STAR Model;

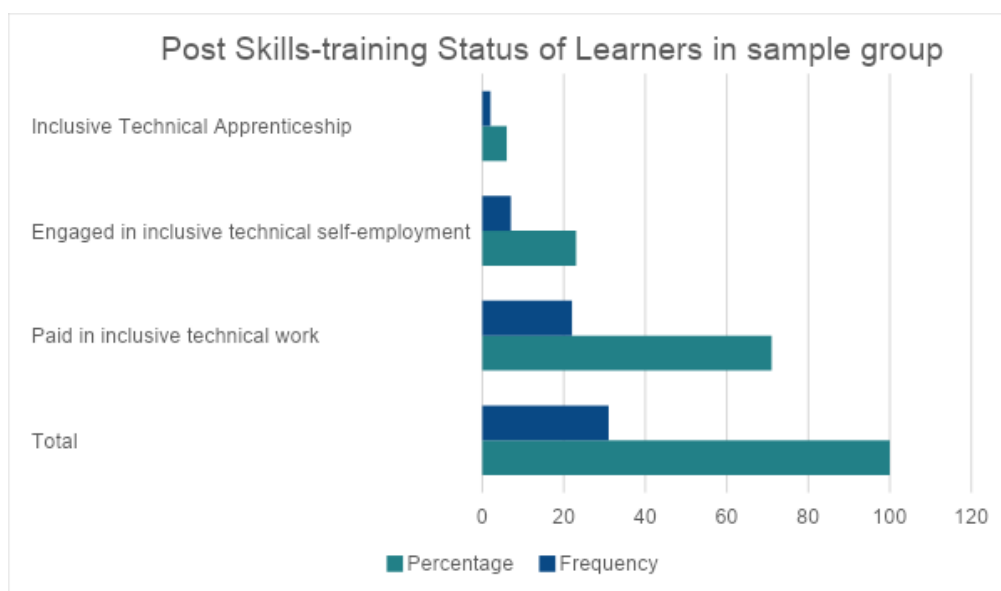
**Outcome 3:** Bangladeshi skills development actors have increased ability and accountability to implement disability inclusive skills training.

## Results:

From 15/11/19 – 31/03/23, the programme involved 6-month training programmes delivered by BRAC, Action on Disability in Development (ADD), and Centre for Disability in Development (CDD)/Sense International. There were two distinct approaches: one scaling up the so-called STAR model to include persons with disabilities, delivered by BRAC's Skills Development Programme, whilst ADD and CDD/Sense International tested an adaptation of the model for young people with more severe disabilities such as deafblindness. Over the entire duration of the programme, a total of 1250 young people were enrolled on the training, of which 1,217 graduated, of which 1,188 successfully secured employment with support from the implementing bodies. Overall, the programme achieved an employment rate of 96% for male participants and 94% for female participants. The average income for participants who were

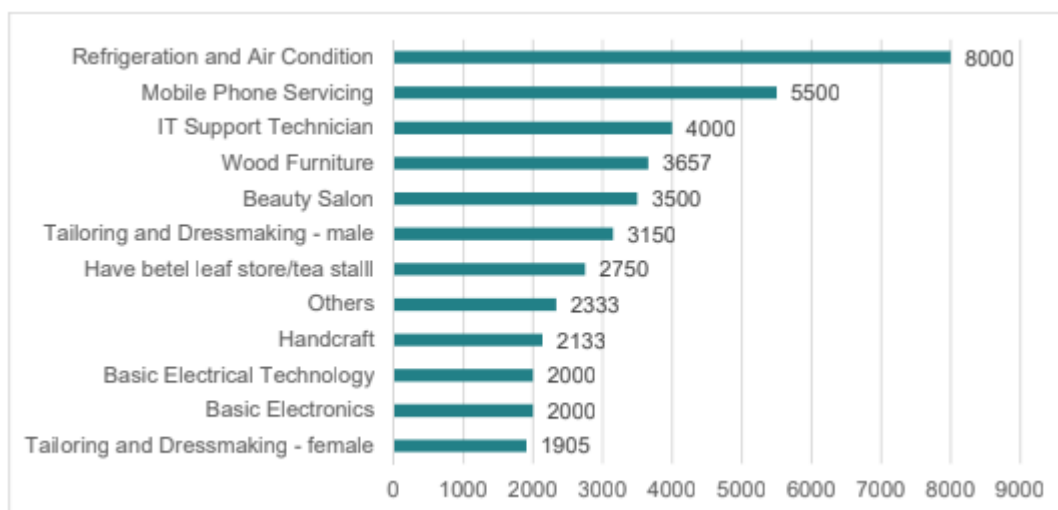
placed in jobs following graduation was BDT 3,012, exceeding the endline target by over BDT 1,000<sup>1</sup>.

The programme was divided into three stages: a pre-training period during which preparations were made, such as training and sensitising the Master Crafts Persons (MCPs) and Technical Trainers (TTs) on inclusive teaching approaches; the training period for participants and a post-training period during which job placements are facilitated and project teams follow up with the graduates. Examples of the results achieved by the participants in the ADD Lessons Learned study are shown below.



**Figure 1: Post-skills training status of Learners in evaluation study**

Of the 31 learners, 23 were doing paid technical jobs as employees, 7 learners were self-employed and 1 was doing an apprenticeship (not in any job so far).<sup>2</sup>

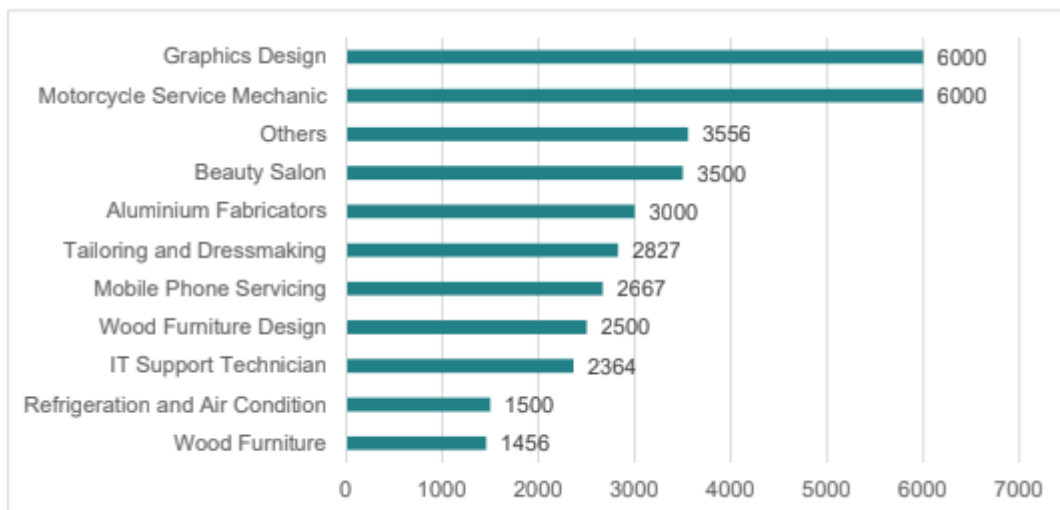


<sup>1</sup> Endline Survey of Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment. 2023. BRAC, ADD International Bangladesh, Centre for Disability in Development

<sup>2</sup> Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment: A Lesson-learned study. 2023. ADD International

**Figure 2: Average monthly income of BRAC’s first cohort of participants by trade**

The participants’ average monthly income after eight months of employment was BDT 2709. Refrigeration and Air Conditioning, Mobile Phone Servicing and IT Support Technician were the most highly paid trades. However, amongst the second cohort, the average income of participants working in these three trades was substantially lower, as shown in Figure 3 below. For the ADD participants, the highest earnings on average were for those working in Mobile Phone Servicing and Beauty Salons.<sup>3</sup>



**Figure 3: Average monthly income of BRAC’s second cohort of participants by trade**

## Key Learnings

### Training and Preparation of Master Crafts Persons & Technical Trainers:

Providing MCPs with a monthly stipend per learner, whilst incentivising them to take on students, also led to an unexpected drawback. There were no restrictions to prevent them from immediately taking on new students once the first cohort had finished. This meant that in some cases, rather than offering employment to the learners they had trained, some MCPs let these learners go and immediately trained a second cohort of learners to receive the stipend again.

Since this created a practice directly at odds with the aim of the programme, upon reflection, programme staff concluded that withholding selection of the same MCP for consecutive training tenures may provide improved job retention and employment rate of learners. This could create a positive incentive for them to provide job placements to their learners, as if they lose connection with the programme, other competitors could take their place.

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<sup>3</sup> Endline Survey of Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment. 2023. BRAC, ADD International Bangladesh, Centre for Disability in Development

## Selecting Learners with Disabilities:

During BRAC's community outreach to recruit learners for their training batches, individuals' responses to the Washington Group Questions would be used to identify and admit persons with disability onto the programme. However, in practice, staff found that some individuals were self-identifying as having a disability when they did not, as they wanted to benefit from the programme. In Bangladesh, a person living with a disability can apply for a Government-issued Golden Citizenship Card (GCC), and their details are added to a national database. As the programme aimed to reach the most marginalised, the team decided to cross-check the responses with the Bangladesh government's national databases. This meant programme teams could identify those most in need, who were living with a disability. This two-pronged approach served to reduce the risk of people with disabilities being excluded.

The team were aware that some individuals may experience challenges to complete the GCC registration process, and that using the national GCC database as the sole identifier of disability could lead to higher systemic exclusion. It is unlikely that all individuals living with a disability in Bangladesh are captured in the government database, and more marginalised individuals are more likely to be excluded. To combat this, assessors also used their best judgement to accept those with a disability into the programme.

During follow-up workshops, family members and caregivers stated there were many more individuals with disability amongst their communities who were not reached by the programme. They felt the recruitment process could be improved by providing more information to the families and by conducting door-to-door surveys to gain a more accurate picture of numbers of persons with disability in the locality.

Many of the participants, in particular female trainees, thought that recruitment should not only involve providing information about the programme, but include efforts to encourage and motivate people with disabilities to sign up. It was suggested that current learners could reach out to their communities or go on home visits to encourage others.



### Inclusivity of the Training Courses:

Almost a quarter of participants said that they would like more audio-visual aids, images and illustrations included in the modules and course materials, as well as banners and posters promoting the course. Audiobooks were shown to be especially helpful to the learners, but were not available for every trade. Going forward, it would be hugely beneficial to see the incorporation of audio-visual aids in the design across all modules and all trades in similar programmes.

Some participants felt information and instructions during the classes could have been “...more detailed, clearer and easier to understand for people like me” (Badaya, sewing trainee, Rajshahi group).<sup>4</sup> Several learners suggested clearer, simpler explanations, more visual demonstrations and more repetition to reinforce previous learnings.

During the IDS disability team’s participatory research, the team worked closely with two focus groups: the first group included participants with deafblindness from Rangpur, accompanied by their families, and the second group was made up of several female participants in Rajshahi and their family members. There was considerable disparity between the two groups regarding the level of content and pacing of the training, with some learners finding it too slow and repetitive, whilst others found it more complicated and challenging - this is partly due to the variation in learners’ impairments and education levels.

Overall, participants agreed the technical training should be fun, and learners would benefit from more regular hands-on and practical demonstrations. It was recognised by participants

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<sup>4</sup> TO12 Bangladesh - IDS report on programme recommendations: Towards improving Disability inclusive Vocational Training for learners with deafblindness and complex impairments, who are especially marginalised. 2023. Shaw & Wickenden

and their caregivers & family members that the classes should have a positive, encouraging tone to best support learners, and pacing should be adapted as necessary.

The financial support in the form of monthly allowance for food, expenses, travel, and resources was a vital component to enable learners to remain on the course, to cover costs and make up for any income they were losing by not working. However, several learners expressed their dissatisfaction at the disparity in costs between trades as some learners had to pay for their materials whilst others did not. In the future, learners thought that all course materials costs should be covered by the financial support.

Several learners felt more space was needed in the workshops, particularly for wheelchair users. For learners with visual impairments, workplace signage and training materials had limited colour contrast so they were more difficult for these learners to read instructions and obtain necessary information.

### **Accessibility of the Training Courses:**

Due to external factors, the available trades were quite widely dispersed throughout the target regions, meaning some learners had to travel far. In some cases, this limited the learner's choice of trade, or even prevented them from selecting the most suitable course, as the fixed allowance could not cover the full travel costs. This was especially true for learners based outside of towns and urban centres, where suitable transport and road infrastructure is particularly limited. This highlights the need for flexible travel allowances to enable learners to take up the trade they are most interested in and best suited to their needs.

Finding a workplace close to home was especially important to women in Rajshahi largely due to child care duties and safety concerns. Some female learners said they would have preferred to walk to work, and did not feel comfortable riding in a rickshaw, showing that financial costs were not the only factor affecting access to the workshops. To combat this, it is recommended that where possible, accommodation facilities be included at the training institutions, along with the necessary accessibility features for persons with disabilities.

Female learners from Rajshahi felt that new learners would benefit greatly from more support to build the confidence to express themselves and build relationships with the trainers and other learners. Some also felt more resources in the course selection phase could be dedicated to motivate and excite learners about the programme.

It was suggested that a short 'induction' period could be designed into the schedule, helping learners ease into the new setting and build understanding before starting the formal training. It is recommended that some of the participatory approaches used by IDS could be incorporated into future programmes and could be especially impactful during these early stages. It was observed that many participants grew in confidence through the workshop activities, and quickly built relationships with each other.

Regarding the course structure, some participants suggested that all classes should have a fixed duration of around 2 - 2.5 hrs max, with adequate lunch breaks so learners have time to rest and recharge between classes and can avoid over-exerting themselves. Providing childcare for mothers with young children would allow female learners more flexibility and improve retention. Most learners were satisfied with the programme length and timescale,

however the participants with deafblindness in Rangpur felt the programme should be longer and could include intermission periods for those who need more time.

The IDS team was highly aware of the large range of impairment severity in both the Rangpur and Rajshahi groups. They noted that some participants had a mild visual and/or a mild hearing impairment, whilst others had severe deafness and blindness and so needed extensive support and unique communication styles. There may have been too wide a range of impairments for all learners to be grouped together in the adapted TO12 programme. Staff identified the potential for learners with minor impairments to join the main STAR programme, with the necessary adaptations. This would enable more young people with severe impairments to take part in the adapted programme, strengthening inclusion of the most marginalised groups.

### Supporting Learners to Choose the Best Trade Skills for their Future:

During the course selection stage, it was noted that learners had little or no knowledge of existing markets and demand levels for certain products and services in their area. In many cases, learners would choose a trade that was not particularly profitable or in high demand, and therefore less likely to provide a reliable income stream. Programme staff concluded that adding specific ‘trade counselling’ to teach learners about business and markets would reduce this knowledge gap and improve results of the programme.

Learners also felt they could make decisions better suited to their individual needs if more detailed information was provided about each trade. Suggestions included workplace visits and demonstrations offered prior to course selection. This would benefit both learners and MCPs, as the learners would be more confident and engaged with their chosen trade.

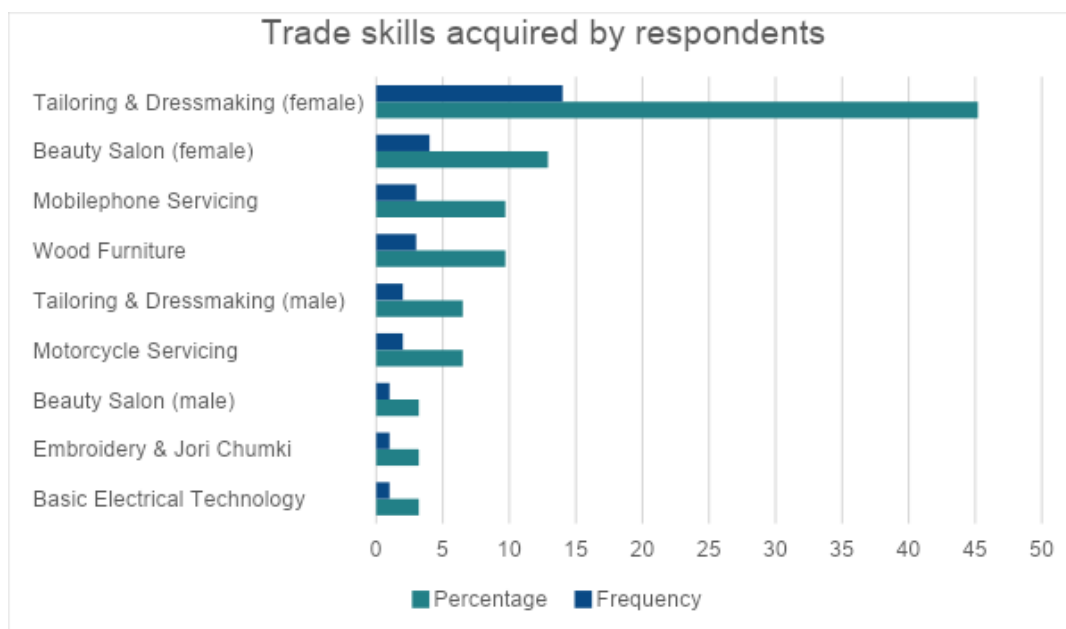


Figure 3: Skills acquired by learners from evaluation study

There was an appetite for more trades to be available in the adapted programme, as learners had 9 to choose from, compared to the 17 trades available under the main STAR programme. As shown in Figure 3, based on the 30 evaluation respondents, tailoring and dress making,



beauty treatments, mobile phones servicing and building wooden furniture were the most popular trades. Learners felt that some of the excluded trades would also be suitable for learners with disability, such as animal husbandry. Unfortunately, some participants felt their course selection was most heavily influenced by their impairment and how accommodating the trade would be<sup>5</sup>.

## Awareness, Attitudes and Behavioural Change:

The Behaviour Change Campaign (BCC) reached 4,226 people (of which 2,307 were women and 1,919 were men). Staff involved at all levels of the campaign felt it was extremely successful in sensitising and changing attitudes within the participant communities. The aim was to tackle stigma and reduce discrimination directed towards people with disabilities, by engaging stakeholders at family, community, market committee, co-worker and business owner levels.

The sessions revealed some rather difficult insights into local people's perception of persons with disabilities. In many cases, family members think persons with disabilities are a burden. Persons with disabilities, particularly women, often face violence from family members. Community members can hold negative views of parents, who are often seen as sinners, so stigma affects the family of people with disabilities as well. Many participants said they felt suspicious of persons with disabilities and may mock them or use verbal slurs.

Many employers perceive that people with disabilities are less productive or lack necessary capabilities to work properly. Other interviews showed that many family members were unaware or unappreciative of the potential for persons with disabilities to participate in economically productive activities. The study revealed that often persons with disabilities consider themselves inadequate and incapable, a view which is reinforced by those around them. These factors are direct barriers to obtaining decent work and employment, and likely lead to the low uptake of inclusive training services.

To tackle the stigma surrounding disabilities and the discrimination of people living with them, it is vital to combat the marginalisation and exclusion they face each day. A holistic approach like that of the adapted STAR programme is crucial. Promoting and increasing awareness amongst young people and their communities of persons with disabilities' right to exist in a society as equals with others. This messaging, as part of basic human rights awareness, should be mandatory across all government departments, educational institutions, NGOs, OPDs, policymakers and part of HR policies across all organizations.

The BCC campaign was not started until halfway through the project, meaning the true impact and benefits of the campaign could only be seen towards the end of the programme. A key lesson from this experience is the importance of ensuring the BCC campaign is initiated at the very beginning, before the training starts, to ensure that local communities are fully aware of the programme activities. The BCC was unable to reach its full potential, but given its success, it is clear that future campaigns could be even more impactful.

In some cases, there were problems with communication in the classes. During the participant workshops it came to light there had been instances of trainers becoming frustrated or even angry with the learners, as well as times when the learners had become angry and emotional

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<sup>5</sup> Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment: A Lesson-learned study. 2023. ADD International

themselves. These incidents were most likely driven by unrealistic expectations trainers and learners place on each other, and some learners may have felt under too much pressure. These insights make it clear that in the future, learners require more specialised support in the learning environment. Participants linked this problem back to the benefit of an initial induction period or taster sessions being integrated into the programme, to help learners and trainers get to know each other and build stronger relationships so they can work better together.

During the pilot project for people with deafblindness, communication with the MCP was a significant challenge for learners. To facilitate better communication, MCPs, caregivers, and learners were provided with the opportunity to learn basic sign language or tactile sign language. This greatly improved communication between learners and trainers and provided a new skill for learners to use in their daily lives, as they often had not received any sign language training before participating in the programme. Optional sign language lessons like this could be incorporated into the wider STAR programme.

## **Policy Environment and Socio-Economic Landscape:**

According to the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) 2021, 2.80% of Bangladesh's population have at least one disability, this is 3% of males and 2% of females. NSPD 2021 shows that only 27% of persons with disabilities are employed, of which 7% are female. The survey also shows that out of employed persons with disabilities, the majority are self-employed. Non-fulfilment of the quota for persons with disabilities, discriminatory clauses, and lack of proper orientation among people on the capacity of persons with disabilities reinforce the exclusion of persons with disabilities.

The extent to which existing policies offer protection, and ensure persons with disabilities in Bangladesh can exercise their right to decent employment is unclear. One cause of this uncertainty is the prevalence of the informal economy in Bangladesh, since there is very little regulation and monitoring of this sector. Only one third of the NSPD survey respondents were employed, 80% of which were male, and the majority of those individuals worked in the informal sector. Over half the respondents felt they did not have access to decent employment opportunities and almost half of those felt this is due to their disability.

Recommendations to reduce socio-economic barriers to decent employment for people with disabilities:

- A focused effort to identify the causes for this non-fulfilment of the existing quota could shed light on further gaps in the existing system that could be improved upon to enhance rates of enrolment in skill development programmes by persons with disabilities.
- Revising existing laws to exclude discriminatory clauses (such as the provision to terminate the employment of workers based on disability acquired during work).
- Introducing mandatory anti-discriminatory clauses at all workplaces and promoting accessibility.
- Existing policies, strategies, action plans must highlight the challenges and way forward for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in the informal economy.

## Preparation and Training of MCPs and TTs:

TVET training institutions' courses do not include modules on respectfully communicating with or adapting appropriate training methods & materials to the requirements of individuals with disability. MCPs in the informal markets especially had little or no training on disability inclusive training and management. In addition to the sensitisation and training provided for MCPs and TTs, the following recommendations were made to strengthen results:

- For future programmes, adequate budget should be allocated to developing sensitisation among employers to encourage them and help them feel prepared to employ people with disabilities
- Further engagement with the private and informal sector
- Existing incentives for employers to hire person with disabilities need to be wider spread and promoted more effectively
- Incentives for informal market sector actors must be introduced
- Further discussions and strategies on how to best introduce standardised sets of guidelines for disability inclusion within the informal economy
- Standardised training methods for working with people with disabilities must be introduced into courses at TVET institution training programmes
- Enhancing and facilitating collaboration between the Ministry of Social Welfare, National Skills Development Authority, Technical Vocational Education and Training institutes, and other disability inclusive training providers can be a means to promote and increase adoption of these training methods



### **Learners' Progress after Completion of the Training Programme:**

Participants were asked about their ambitions following the completion of their training and after working in their new trade for some time. Many said they wanted to start their own business, while others wanted more support and training and others wanted to become trainers themselves. Hiring previous graduates as trainers or to assist MCPs with training future learners with disabilities is worth considering – particularly as representation is crucial for encouraging and motivating other young people with a disability to undertake skills training.

An issue raised during the programme was that some learners with disabilities migrated and the programme could not pinpoint their new location, meaning that learners who migrated during the training programme dropped out and were unable to resume or complete their training and apprenticeship. For those who completed the programme but then migrated, the programme was unable to assist them in finding a job placement.

For future phases of this programme, or similar projects that engage participants over an extended period of time, finding a way to keep in touch with learners who move and helping them to complete their training or to secure a job in a new area would reduce dropout rates. One exciting idea is the creation of an alumni network that would help to keep in contact and track progress of migrating learners during training and assist and support post-training.

During the smaller pilot project using the adapted STAR designed for young people with deafblindness, it was found that involving their caregivers in the apprenticeship as peer learners was vital to the learners' success. As well as ensuring the learners had support and encouragement from someone they were familiar with, this meant they both could learn the

trade together, and in a number of cases had the unexpected result of the learner starting a business with their caregiver.

Another valuable learning from this part of the programme was the impact role modelling can have on changing the mindset of employers. A conscious choice was made that all hired Disability Inclusion Facilitators were persons with disabilities themselves and these individuals became part of the programme team. Working side by side with their new colleagues with disabilities helped staff members to shift their attitudes once they realised the potential and abilities of the Disability Inclusion Facilitators. It is recommended that this practice be replicated in future programmes, to promote inclusion and provide role models for young people.

## Conclusion

Overall, there was a high level of appreciation from participants in the workshop groups for the opportunity to join the TO12 training programme – all respondents said they enjoyed all or at least part of their work. It is clear that incorporating these kinds of participatory approaches is key to engaging and encouraging young people with disabilities to sign up to similar programmes, and ensure they have the full support of their family and communities.

Programme teams responded to challenges and worked to find solutions during the preparation and implementation stages, providing valuable learnings and experience for future programming. There were also substantial insights and learnings obtained from the detailed follow up surveys, analyses and focus groups conducted after the training stages were complete. The participatory workshops were particularly beneficial, as learners and accompanying carers all enjoyed working creatively and talking about their lives.

This summary paper has hopefully shown the potential for this disability-inclusive adapted model of the STAR programme to be improved, built upon and scaled across urban areas of Bangladesh where the most vulnerable communities reside. It is clear that greater adaptation, sensitisation of trainers, and support must be provided to ensure learners with disabilities receive the best quality training tailored to their specific needs. The Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment programme has clearly demonstrated its success in increasing the income levels of young women and men with disabilities in Bangladesh by enhancing their equitable access to decent employment and celebrating their contributions to their local communities.

# Annex: Consortium Learning Documents

- Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment: SDP Learning Document. BRAC SDP, OLA and MEAL departments. 2023
- Baseline Survey of Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment. ADD International, Centre for Disability in Development, Sense International, BRAC, Light for the World. 2021
- Endline Survey of Disability Inclusive Training and Youth Employment. ADD International, Centre for Disability in Development, Sense International, BRAC, Light for the World. 2023
- Behavioural Change Campaign, TO12 Bangladesh. BRAC Skills Development Programme
- Are we leaving youth with disabilities behind? Policy perspectives on the informal employment for youth with disabilities in Bangladesh. BRAC, BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University. 2023.
- Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment: A lesson-learned study. ADD International. 2023
- TO12 Bangladesh – IDS report on programme recommendations: Towards improving Disability Inclusive Vocational Training for learners with deafblindness and complex impairments, who are especially marginalised. Institute of Development Studies. 2023
- Insights from inclusive, participatory fieldwork with learners with deafblindness and other marginalised impairments. TO12: Disability Inclusive Vocational Training and Youth Employment programme in Bangladesh. Institute of Development Studies. 2022
- Current situation of disability-related stigma and discrimination against persons living with disabilities in Bangladesh. BRAC James P Grant School of Public Health, BRAC University. 2022
- Learning Document: How can the STAR programme be adapted to include youth with deafblindness? BRAC SDP. 2023
- Learning Document: Towards Inclusion of Persons with disabilities within BRAC's Skills Development Programme. BRAC SDP. 2023