

SHUNIPUN

STORIES FROM B-SkillFUL

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About The Project

B-SkillFUL Phase I (November 2015 – January 2020) is jointly funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and European Union (EU) and implemented by Swisscontact. The project aims to reduce poverty and improve the wellbeing of 40,000 poor and disadvantaged men and women by increasing their access to the labour market and enhancing their incomes, while safeguarding their fundamental rights at work. The project facilitates implementation of training programmes through local Training Service Providers (TSPs) on demand driven skills. It also supports the linkage of skilled graduates with financial institutions. Additionally, B-SkillFUL raises awareness amongst the graduates and informal sector enterprises on issues of Labour Rights and Decent Work (LRDW).

In the current phase, B-SkillFUL has been successful in enhancing the capacity of the training system, as well as related institutions in proficiently training thousands of women and

men. In that process it has produced flexible and effective skills training modules, created gainful employment and business startup services for graduates and developed gender specific targets and performance indicators that track results and impact. The project hinges on the impact hypothesis that if demand driven skills trainings and employment support are provided to poor and disadvantaged groups, the beneficiaries will be absorbed by the private sector (through wage or self-employment), which will result in improved wellbeing.

“Shunipun: Stories from B-SkillFUL Project” includes stories of training graduates and other implementing partners of the project. It demonstrates the changes and growth through training and employment of primarily the graduates. These are the testimonies of success and positive impact of the project’s contribution. This booklet is meant to inspire skills and development practitioners who can apply the knowledge gathered from these stories for the benefit of others.

Message from National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)



Md. Faruque Hossain
Executive Chairman (Secretary)
National Skills Development Authority (NSDA)
Prime Minister's Office
Government of Bangladesh

The National Skills Development Authority (NSDA) is responsible for setting the national skills development agenda of the country with the demand of the national and International market. It is mandated to carry out skills development as well as up-skilling and re-skilling in the country in order to achieve the target of developing 15 million skilled workers by 2023.

It provides a platform where the Government representatives, employers, workers and civil society can work towards a common goal which is to improve skills development scenario in Bangladesh.

It has assisted in implementation of National Skills Development Policy and coordination with Government, Private Training Institutes, Industry Skills Councils (ISCs) and various recruitment authorities. NSDA focuses on providing efficient and effective skills training and evaluation, recognition, monitoring and support

in the implementation of various skills training programmes.

Skills and knowledge are the driving forces of economic growth and development for Bangladesh. B-SkillFUL project has designed interventions targeting poor men and women in need of skills training and employment in the informal labour market. With a common goal, NSDA aims to empower individuals through improved skills, knowledge, and qualifications that are relevant and recognised in the informal labour market. The system must be responsive

to the present and future industry needs. By providing relevant skills to enhance employability and secure a decent work environment, NSDA, together with other development partners, can create an enabling environment for the underserved and ensure their wellbeing.

This compilation of success stories is a result of a fruitful and comprehensive journey of B-SkillFUL. It further provides a lot of important lessons for the various skills development initiatives currently collaborating to achieve the common national target.

I wish B-SkillFUL a success, implementation with expected achievement.

Message from The NGO Affairs Bureau



K.M. Abdus Salam
Director General
The NGO Affairs Bureau
Prime Minister's Office

I am very happy to know that Swisscontact, an international NGO, is going to publish a booklet on the success stories of its project beneficiaries. This booklet aims to highlight stories from the ground and present the positive impacts and achievements of Swisscontact's skills development project called B-SkillFUL.

This NGO is providing quality training to build a strong workforce for the economy and thus, strongly contributes to SDG 8, specifically in 8.5: promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth, and 8.8: full and productive employment and decent work for all. It additionally addresses SDG 5: achieve gender equality and empower all women – through building mass awareness on labour rights and decent work. Accordingly, Swisscontact is certainly adding up to the national requirements of high-quality human resources to sustain the ongoing national growth.

NGO Affairs Bureau under Prime Minister's Office has been closely collaborating with about 2,500 national and international NGOs in Bangladesh to ensure the consorted national efforts of the NGOs in attaining the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 and thus achieve the goals of becoming a developed country within 2041.

The stories of this booklet will have perspectives of both the trainees and the trainers which, I believe, are invaluable learning for the NGOs and development practitioners

who are working in the country's Skills Development sector. I appreciate such publication and capitalisation effort from Swisscontact and wish them all the best in keeping up the good work.

Message from the European Union (EU)



European Union



Rensje Teerink
Ambassador and the Head of Delegation of
the European Union to Bangladesh
European Union (EU)

The European Union (EU) continues to be a strong partner of Bangladesh for over 40 years. During this period, the EU has played a major role in Bangladesh's journey to progressively elevate itself from a war-torn country to a country of lower middle-income status.

According to EU's Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) 2014-2020 for Bangladesh, education and skills development are recognised as key priority areas and driving forces for the country's continued economic growth and social development. Nonetheless, there is a large portion of young Bangladeshi men and women that still remains out of the country's education and training system, while a large portion of the country's thriving Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) are struggling to improve their productivity for the lack of skilled human resources.

To address this demand and supply gap in the national skills development system, the EU has funded the B-SkillFUL project. Over the period of 2017 to 2019, the project has strongly contributed to attain sustainable employment of nearly 25,000 aspiring youths in over 2,000 growing informal MSMEs of the country. In that process, it has ensured classroom, as well as Workplace Based Training (WBT) on various occupations of at least 35,000 trainees. The project has also contributed to raise awareness on Labour Rights and Decent Work (LRDW) among the MSME employers with the aim to safeguard employees' fundamental rights at work.

All these are great achievements, thanks to the B-SkillFUL team. The EU Delegation also thanks its other collaborating partners in B-SkillFUL, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), the National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), the Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), the National Association for Small and Cottage Industries Bangladesh (NASCIB), the Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries (BWCCI) et al. for their positive support and contribution.

This compilation of case studies is the evidence of success stories from the field. It highlights positive transformations of lives through quality skills training and stimulation of MSME employers' demands on skilled human resources. The EU appreciates this strong effort of harnessing valuable knowledge for the future practitioners on skills development in Bangladesh and abroad.

Message from Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération Suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun Svizra

Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC



Derek George
Deputy Director of Cooperation
Embassy of Switzerland in Bangladesh
Swiss Agency for Development and
Cooperation (SDC)

Switzerland's priorities in development cooperation in Bangladesh are aligned with Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development Goals and the current 7th Five-Year Plan of the Government of Bangladesh, with a strong focus on promoting inclusive and sustainable growth. In Bangladesh, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) supports programmes in the areas of democratic governance, safer migration and income and economic development, and contributes to the international humanitarian response to the Rohingya refugee crisis through Swiss Humanitarian Aid.

Vocational Skills Development is an important part of the SDC work on economic development in Bangladesh, and one of the hallmarks of Swiss development cooperation worldwide. The reason why Skills Development, or Vocational Education and Training (VET) features so prominently in Swiss cooperation has probably a lot to do with the unique system of dual VET in Switzerland, in which the private sector takes on a leading role in defining the

contents, in funding and in the delivery of training at the workplace. Building on this tradition, SDC consistently advocates for labour-market orientation of trainings, for the involvement of employers and enterprises in all aspects of training, and for inclusive systems that take into account the specific needs of women and disadvantaged groups. Within the skills project portfolio in Bangladesh, B-SkillFUL occupies a challenging space,

requiring the piloting and testing of new and innovative approaches. Four key features define B-SkillFUL and make it a particularly interesting project:

- 1) Its ambitious targeting of the poor and disadvantaged groups, including women. The lowering entry barriers for specific groups by tailoring the training offer to the needs of the poor and disadvantaged groups.
- 2) Its focus on the informal economy.
- 3) Its attempt to address labour rights and decent work issues in the informal economy by engaging with informal enterprises and strengthening the IS-ISC and
- 4) Its result-based financing of trainings which link the revenue of training providers to employment outcomes, and the combination of classroom-based and workplace-based training.

The programme has had a strong focus on women's economic empowerment and has taken on challenges such as engaging women in non-traditional trades. The case studies, developed by B-SkillFUL, capture the achievements and lessons learnt from the programme. We hope that this compilation will be widely disseminated so that ongoing and upcoming development initiatives in the areas of skills development and women's economic empowerment can benefit from B-SkillFUL's experiences.

Message from Swisscontact Bangladesh



Anirban Bhowmik
Country Director
Swisscontact Bangladesh

Swisscontact launched B-SkillFUL in November 2015 with the aim of facilitating training, and employment for 40,000 men and women in 6 districts of Bangladesh.

As Bangladesh strives towards a middle-income country, ensuring the economic growth is inclusive and benefits poor and disadvantaged people, especially the youth is central to the development challenge of the country. Therefore, it is imperative for Bangladesh to establish an inclusive and employment-oriented skills development system for nearly two million Bangladeshis entering the workforce every year. It is equally important that the working conditions for this aspiring workforce are decent.

Since the inception, B-SkillFUL addressed the challenge of availability of skilled workforce in informal industry and supported the young men and women in entering the labour market with

better skills. B-SkillFUL provides demand-driven skills training and employment support to the poor and disadvantaged population in partnerships with local training institutions.

The project team members are working closely with the training centres, trainees and employees. Through innovative and demand driven solutions, the trainees are getting a first-hand opportunity to learn in class rooms and at actual workplaces with both training providers and employers. On the other hand, employers are being made aware of the fundamental rights and regulations for creating a decent and conducive work environment for their workers. By strengthening the capacities

of trainees, training centres and small informal businesses, B-SkillFUL is creating an eco-system for an inclusive training delivery in Bangladesh. B-SkillFUL by creating successful models and disseminating the learnings from implementation, encouraging training institutes, businesses and other public and non-government organisations to replicate and scale the models and initiate a change in the training system.

We are very happy to share some of our achievements of the last four years from B-SkillFUL in this booklet. We have focused immensely on harnessing the learnings and experiences gained in the implementation. We hope our learnings will help in providing further direction towards the future of skills-training needs in the country. I hope this booklet serves to inform and inspire others in this domain towards innovation, inclusion and change.

In this effort, I express my sincere gratitude to NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB), Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC) and the

European Union (EU) for their constant support. Collaboration and engagement of National Skills Development Authority (NSDA), Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industry Corporation (BSCIC), Informal Sector Industry Skills Council (IS-ISC), Bangladesh Technical Education Board (BTEB), Bangladesh Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BWCCI), National Association of Small and Cottage Industries of Bangladesh (NASCIB) had been instrumental to B-SkillFUL's achievement. Finally, B-SkillFUL is successful only because of thousands of indomitable young Bangladeshis and resilient entrepreneurs running their small businesses across the country.



1

CASE STUDY

Safe and Save Training Institute (SSTI) – a successful local training service provider

Abu Mohammed Moqtadir tried his luck at various professions, both in Dhaka and his hometown of Tangail, without much success. In 2008 he started a small, informal home-based training centre, the Safe and Save Training Institute (SSTI).

Moqtadir and five of his colleagues began by providing hands-on training in tailoring, mobile phone servicing, electrical house wiring and computer repairs. However, the training model was not designed properly and, along with a lack of efficient financial management, this meant that the Institute was not making enough even to cover its operational expenses.

“**B-SkillFUL guided and nurtured our organisation in ways that almost no other projects do for their implementing partners**”



With his family's wellbeing in mind, Moqtadir was determined to look for opportunities to grow the business. He moved his workstation from his home to a place nearby, when a newspaper advertisement by the B-SkillFUL project caught his eye and he responded immediately. He applied to be an implementation partner, and because of its promising contribution to the local community, SSTI was selected and assigned 1,500 poor and disadvantaged men and women to train. B-SkillFUL provided the Institute with equipment and training materials; it also trained and financed SSTI's staff and instructors. Moqtadir states

that the Institute's technical capacity was “transformed” by the B-SkillFUL training model.

At first, Moqtadir found it hard to retain staff as he could only afford to employ them part-time – now he has equipped SSTI with permanent employees who manage the Institute. At the same time, SSTI's institutional capacity has expanded, meaning it can accommodate more trainees, and the management team has learned to allocate its finances efficiently along with the other resources that B-SkillFUL has provided. SSTI is now a registered training organisation and will be able to continue its activities even after the project comes to an end. Graduates from this institution are already working as part of the Dhaka Metro Rail Project, a success which Moqtadir attributes to B-SkillFUL's continuous support. The Institute has recently received a contract from another donor-funded project, *Sudokkho*, and has expanded its branch in Madhupur, Tangail.

Moqtadir says, “B-SkillFUL guided and nurtured our organisation in ways that almost no other projects do for their implementing partners.” He is convinced that with the support that B-SkillFUL provides, businesses can beat the odds and thrive.



2

CASE STUDY

Sanjida, successful self-employed beautician

Sanjida Islam Shema, aged 22, is now a successful beautician in Tangail, Bangladesh – although getting here hasn't been easy. When she was 14 her family could no longer afford to send her to school, and instead married her off to a man from their village. Four years later, Sanjida was a mother of two and living with a husband who didn't want to work; some days her children went without food. Living in such poverty forced her to take desperate measures. She ended her marriage, took her children back to her parents', and began to look for work. Her only concern was to provide for her children.

When Sanjida heard about the training offered by

“
Being a woman doesn't mean I'm inferior – in fact, it gives me the strength and vision to overcome all the odds and succeed”



the Save and Safe Training Institute (SSTI) as part of Swisscontact's B-SkillFUL project, she decided to become a beautician and enrolled. After the course, she found a job with a starting salary of BDT 15,000 (USD 180) a month. Gradually, she acquired the confidence to move and find work in the city, driven by the aim of saving enough capital to start her own venture back home. It took her just a year to get together enough to return and open her salon.

Sanjida has been an entrepreneur for over a year now. She earns up to BDT 50,000 (USD

590) a month and has employed two other women – also graduates of the B-SkillFUL project – which she sees as her way of giving back to the project which helped her when she needed it the most. Every day she encourages her employees to dream big. Sanjida says, “Being a woman doesn't mean I'm inferior – in fact, it gives me the strength and vision to overcome all the odds and succeed.”

Shema acknowledges the contributions of SSTI and B-SkillFUL to her success. Her connection with B-SkillFUL has been ongoing, giving her the chance to attend several other workshops organised by the project, including on entrepreneurship development, and Labour Rights and Decent Work. Sanjida says the knowledge she has acquired in skills and business means that she can fulfil all her aspirations.



3

CASE STUDY

Rupon, successful self-employed welder

After getting his Secondary School Certificate, Md. Abdur Razzak Rupon lost the motivation to continue with his studies. At the same time, his father, a driver by profession, was struggling to support the family of four. Working for someone else had never interested Rupon – he had always wanted to be his own boss – and with his father's help he opened a small, independent stationery shop. At first, the business ran smoothly and Ripon was earning BDT 10,000 (USD 120) a month, but then a crisis arose: his only employee ran off, taking a large amount of the shop's money with him.

“
I'm creating opportunities for others to earn and live with dignity – to have the same chance I had to change my life”



With his business shutting down, Rupon looked for an alternative means of survival. He contacted Bangla-German Sampreeti (BGS), a local training service provider and partner of the B-SkillFUL project, to train as a welder. Rupon realised how good work prospects were when a medical college was being built in the neighbourhood, inspiring him to start his own welding workshop. With the help of loans from his father and a microfinance institute Rupon's business began to grow and was soon making twice as much as the stationery shop had done.

As a former trainee himself, Rupon understands the difference that work-based training makes to someone who is new to a particular field, and he is driven to provide the same opportunity to others – he has already taken on a BGS/B-SkillFUL graduate welder in his workshop. He recalls the course content about well-being in the workplace: “An important part of the training is how to develop empathy for one's staff – establishing a healthy working relationship, based on trust and mutual understanding between employer and employees, is essential.”

The skills training that B-SkillFUL provides has transformed Rupon's life, taking him from unemployment to being a successful entrepreneur. He recognises the hugely negative impact that the lack of employment can have, explaining: “I'm creating opportunities for others to earn and live with dignity – to have the same chance I had to change my life.”



4

CASE STUDY

Lablu, successful welder

Md. Lablu left school at the end of class eight, aged just 13. He soon joined the family business, helping out in a small restaurant in return for pocket money. However, he was not happy being dependent on others, and when his father retired and his uncles took over the business, Lablu began to look for something else to do.

A friend who had received training as part of a B-SkillFUL project intervention took Lablu to the Bangla-German Sampreeti (BGS) training centre. Here he learned about the high demand for skilled welders in his town. Three months into the course,

“
Everyone
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Lablu began work-based training, and soon came across a welding workshop run by his neighbour, Abdur Razzak Rupon, also a B-SkillFUL graduate.

Lablu was impressed with his neighbour's professionalism, and the feeling was reciprocated. He now earns around BDT 15,000 (USD 180) per month which, considering his educational and employment background, is a real achievement. Lablu explains how the job enables him to hone his skills and gain experience at the same time. He aspires to establish

his own business when the time is right – and until then, will learn as much as he can from Rupon and his workshop.

Lablu is now financially independent and contributes a large share of his income to his household. He explains how earning an income has strengthened his position in the family. “Everyone takes me seriously now, and involves me in any major decision-making”, he says. Inspired by his employer, he is saving hard, to get enough capital to start his own venture.



5

CASE STUDY

Afroja, successful mobile phone technician

Aged just 21, Afroja Khatun took on the responsibility of main breadwinner for the family. Her father had been diagnosed with liver disease and was unable to work, and the small clothes shop that her mother set up to support the family and to pay for his expensive treatment was the household's only source of income – and not enough to make ends meet.

Realising how desperate Afroja was to find paid work, a friend told her about the skills training offered by Grameen Alo training centre, a B-Skill-FUL project partner. After learning that there were

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no course fees, Afroja contacted the centre. At enrolment she explained her need to support the family, and the Grameen Alo counsellor encouraged her to train as a mobile phone technician (MPT). Afroja soon acquired a reputation as a committed and inquisitive learner and, recognising her passion, Grameen Alo facilitated her employment with the LG Mobile Phone showroom, one of the most prominent outlets in Bogura.

Afroja soon realised that there was a healthy labour market for MPT trainees in sub-urban

districts like Bogura, with plenty of opportunities to choose from. She soon found that her technical knowledge gave her the competitive edge as a salesperson, and she now earns around BDT 15,000 (USD 180) a month and still works at the same showroom. She contributes the lion's share of her salary to her family, and has been empowered to state with confidence, “Women are no less than men in the family.”

Afroja's training as an MPT has enabled her to overcome her family's financial setback, and her monthly saving scheme supports her aspiration of becoming an entrepreneur. “I've no intention of being dependent on others,” she asserts, “I want to learn more and really shine in this sector.” Her current plan is to take higher-level MPT training and become an advanced skilled professional.



6

CASE STUDY

Informal Sector Industry Skills Council (IS-ISC) – partnership with B-SkillFUL

The Informal Sector Industry Skills Council (IS-ISC) has been a crucial partner of B-SkillFUL and Swisscontact in the drive for skills development in Bangladesh’s informal sector. Prior to IS-ISC’s inception, in 2011 the Bangladesh government formulated its National Skills Development Policy, establishing a number of industry skills councils (ISCs) to support the formal sector. However, this did not address the needs of the informal sector – and it was only with the involvement of Swisscontact that an ISC to provide similar support for the informal sector began to take shape. From the beginning of IS-ISC’s journey, B-SkillFUL has

“ B-SkillFUL has contributed to IS-ISC’s improved capacity, enabling us to partner with the government and other NGOs ”



played a pivotal role as facilitator – ensuring its registration as an institution, supporting its administrative structure, and establishing linkages between relevant stakeholders.

This collaboration was further strengthened through a partnership between IS-ISC and Swisscontact’s B-SkillFUL project. Until then, there was still a lack of support provided to the informal sector in regard to policy formulation and awareness-raising concerning issues of labour rights and decent work (LRDW). B-SkillFUL began to support IS-ISC in develop-

ing its capacity to promote the LRDW agenda, skills development, and vocational training, focusing on districts outside the capital. With this support, IS-ISC has grown its capacity to advocate with government bodies (such as the ministries of Commerce, Industry and Finance) regarding policy recommendation for the informal sector and the promotion of LRDW. IS-ISC now also collaborates with NGOs and donor agencies, including ILO, ADB, ActionAid and BRAC, to implement projects and articulate policies.

Mirza Nurul Ghani Shovon, Chairman of IS-ISC says, “B-SkillFUL has contributed to IS-ISC’s improved capacity, enabling us to partner with the government and other NGOs.” He also explains that “through B-SkillFUL, IS-ISC is now working with 30 private training service providers.” Assisted by IS-ISC, the government’s National Skills Development Authority is now actively advocating for skills development policy and human capital development strategy in the informal sector. Under the B-SkillFUL project, NASCIB and BWCCI are working in collaboration with IS-ISC to raise awareness of the LRDW agenda in 3,500 informal enterprises throughout six districts of Bangladesh.



7

CASE STUDY

Shapla, successful machine operator

Shapla Khatun was married right after her Higher Secondary Certificate exams. Her husband worked in a garments factory and was the family's sole wage-earner, and her household responsibilities prevented Shapla from continuing her education. However, when her parents needed financial assistance, she wanted to do something for them.

Shapla began to look for a source of income. She was aware of the demand for skilled machine operators in ready-made garment factories, and with the support of her husband and parents, attended the Ahsania Mission Vocational Training Institute

“
Women with the proper skills set and motivation can grow their careers in the ready-made garment sector”



(AMVTI) training program, part of Swisscontact's B-SkillFUL project. She was soon working as a machine operator in a nearby garments factory, earning BDT 7,400 (USD 87) a month. Her performance was impressive and after nine months her persistent efforts, coupled with her determination to advance her career, presented Shapla with the opportunity to join AMVTI as an instructor.

In her new role, Shapla's salary shot up to BDT 15,000 (USD 180) a month. She believes that “women with the proper skills set and motivation

can grow their careers in the ready-made garment sector.” Her increased income and position as instructor have drastically improved her socio-economic status and, perhaps just as importantly, enhanced her inclusion in household decision-making. She has achieved her goal of financially supporting her husband and parents, and save a significant amount of her salary with the aim of starting a degree at the Open University of Bangladesh.

Shapla encourages other women in poor, disadvantaged communities to take the B-SkillFUL training, which is time-bound and meets a market-specific demand, and is thus appropriate for this demographic. She wants her story to act as an inspiration for the country's unemployed and underemployed youth, and urges everyone to take skills training seriously because of its effectiveness, alongside mainstream education, in securing work.



8

CASE STUDY

Iva, successful self-employed hand embroiderer

Israt Jahan Iva married in 2005 at the age of 15. Her husband earns enough at the local shoe production house to support the family, but when young Iva took on the responsibilities of life with her in-laws she had to stop studying. Soon she had two children and started to think about how to pursue higher education and obtain some extra income for the family. Not only did she want to give the children a better future, it was important for her to have an identity other than that of a wife, mother and daughter-in-law. At the same time she realised it would be hard for a woman to survive in the world of work, and to balance her responsibilities inside and outside the house.

“
It’s easier to achieve these goals when there’s support from family – and from institutions like B-SkillFUL
”



Iva was introduced to local training service provider Dhrubo Society, which promotes skills training as part of the B-SkillFUL project. She realised this was a golden opportunity and began to learn hand embroidery. Encouragement from her husband and mother-in-law inspired her to start a business, and after three months of training and with some extra assistance from Dhrubo, Iva opened her own shop. Not only did being part of B-SkillFUL teach her a trade – it also broadened her outlook in terms of both her personal and professional goals.

Although Iva’s husband could not support her business financially, he provided something just as important – motivation. Iva’s enthusiasm has inspired two other women to join her business, and together they rented a small outlet near the local school, where many women – their target customers – gather. Iva now earns around BDT 6,000 (USD 70) each month.

The training provided by B-SkillFUL has enabled Iva to pursue her dreams, even after having married at such an early age. She recently sat the Higher Secondary Certificate examination through Bangladesh’s Open University; her children are studying in a good school and she helps her husband financially when necessary. Her position in the household is now stronger than ever. Iva’s professional goals are to take advanced training further and expand her business, and concludes, “It’s easier to achieve these goals when there’s support from family – and from projects like B-SkillFUL.”



9

CASE STUDY

Rahim, successful self-employed machine-embroiderer

Abdur Rahim's father died when he was in class eight. His family had to cut back on expenses and he was obliged to quit his studies, leaving his elder brother as the only earning member of the family. Rahim left home in search of employment and worked for two years in a shop, where he never earned more than BDT 2,500 (USD 30) a month. After a few years he married, increasing his responsibilities as well as the need to improve his income.

A neighbour introduced Rahim to Grameen Alo, a local training service provider providing skills training as part of the B-SkillFUL project. He seized the

“
B-SkillFUL's assistance has helped me establish an identity for myself
”



opportunity to learn a new skill, opting for machine embroidery. As part of the training, Grameen Alo encouraged Rahim to start his own business, providing him with the appropriate guidance and exposure to potential clients. Rahim states that the training equipped him with both technical and life skills – which have helped him overcome the challenges that being in business has thrown his way.

Rahim received help from relatives in the form of a loan, and with an initial investment of BDT 15,000 (USD 180) started his business, *New*

Hijabi Fashion. With a growing reputation, Rahim now earns up to BDT 30,000 (USD 360) each month. He has employed someone to assist with the heavy workload, and his aspiration now is to expand the business. He says that B-SkillFUL's assistance has helped him establish an identity for himself – not only as a man of business: providing for his wife and children has given him a sense of self-respect, and his elder brother welcomes his support in making important decisions in the family.

When he was given the chance, nothing could stop Abdur Rahim from working hard to overcome every obstacle to earning a living. He says that B-SkillFUL's training program has transformed his life, and is convinced that proper skills training and hard work can eliminate unemployment from Bangladesh. Abdur Rahim is now a role model for many of the unemployed youth in his community.



10

CASE STUDY

Shila, successful karchupi embroiderer

Shila Khatun's father was a fish farmer, and the family's only breadwinner. Because of his limited income, at the end of class eight 13-year-old Shila decided to give up her studies so that her brother could continue his. At the same time, she started to look for a way to earn money and contribute to the household finances, an unusually mature decision for someone of such a young age to make.

When Shila turned eighteen her neighbour, a B-SkillFUL graduate, encouraged her to train as a *karchupi* (hand embroidery sewn to create elaborate patterns) embroiderer at Grameen Alo, a training centre operating as part of the B-SkillFUL project.

“
It meant I could transform my skills into a source of income. Becoming an entrepreneur was the best decision I've ever made
”



As Shila's family was not comfortable with her working outside the home, she planned to start her own home-based business. With only a small amount of capital, she could quite easily fulfil her dream. Shila is clear about the advantages that Grameen Alo training gave her: “It meant I could transform my skills into a source of income. Becoming an entrepreneur was the best decision I've ever made.”

Shila, now 19, makes a profit of around BDT 7,000 (USD 80) per month, and more at the time of religious festivals. She employs three

B-SkillFUL graduates, putting into action her belief that young women should have the opportunity to grow in independence just as she has. Her family is appreciative of the contribution she makes to the household expenses and supports her business in whatever way they can. Shila is somewhat of a role model in the neighbourhood, motivating other young women to stand up for what they believe in.

Shila is confident in her achievements and is now planning to expand the business. According to her, “Women are in no way less capable than men – they can do anything if they are determined and committed.” She believes that persistence, a passion to learn new skills and the right kind of support have together enabled her to achieve success, which she intends to continue to nurture in the days ahead.



11

CASE STUDY

Titu, successful refrigerator and air conditioner (RAC) technician

When Titu Chandra Sutradhar was 13 years old an accident left his hand permanently scarred. This took its toll on him physically and mentally – he was forced to take a long break from his studies, which he eventually stopped altogether. While his father and elder brother struggled to maintain the family of five, Titu avoided taking on any responsibilities, and instead remained financially dependent on them.

The chairman of the local council treated Titu like a son, encouraging him to be self-reliant, and Titu began to look for a way to be independent. He discovered the Bangla-German Sampreeti (BGS) training centre and, as part of the B-SkillFUL

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It’s better to
live a life of
self-respect
than to be
dependent
on someone
else”



project, trained in refrigerator and air conditioner (RAC) servicing. He was hired as a RAC technician by Walton, one of the largest conglomerates in Bangladesh, and was soon earning BDT 16,000 (USD 190) per month. He came to Dhaka for work, and living away from his hometown of Tangail, earning a salary and becoming independent has transformed Titu into a confident young man.

Titu has found that the people around him now value him more, and with this renewed sense of identity he states: “It’s better to take responsi-

bility of your own well-being than to be dependent on others.” He uses this newly found confidence to encourage other young people in his neighbourhood to engage in skills training – demonstrating that it is within their grasp to improve their chances of employment and achieve a better future.



12 CASE STUDY

Antor, successful electrical house wiring technician

From an early age, Md. Antor experienced firsthand the hardship of belonging to an underprivileged family. His father, a mason by profession, struggled to support the family of four, and at the end of class seven Antor had to stop his studies, leave home and start working with his father in Dhaka. Life as a child labourer was precarious, binding coils for electrical meter motors and water pumps in return for just a small amount of money and something to eat. Overworked and underpaid, Antor returned to his village after two years, having acquired no significant skills.

Antor was happy to be back home but his future

“Who knew that a young boy without education could prosper in life? With the support of B-SkillFUL I have turned challenges into opportunities”



was uncertain. He had missed his chance to rejoin mainstream education, and his lack of skills meant he was unable to find work. One day, he heard about the training opportunities provided by Safe and Save Training Institute (SSTI) as part of the B-SkillFUL project. Antor says his next step was the best he ever took. Training as an electrical housewiring technician taught him not only technical skills but also valuable life skills, enabling him to organise himself as a person and start to plan for the future.

Antor's workplace training was at a local enterprise, where the owner Md. Jahangir recognised his potential, nurturing the skills Antor had acquired at SSTI and providing him with additional, practical skills training in plumbing and pipe-fitting. As well as contributing to the family household expenditure, Antor now saves a significant amount of his monthly income of BDT 8,000 (USD 95). His long-term plan is to buy land and build a house for his family – and in the meantime he is delighted to be no longer financially dependent on his father.

Md. Antor's story is one of transformation – from child labourer to successful electrical housewiring technician. “Who knew that a young boy without education could prosper in life?” he says, explaining how with the support of B-SkillFUL he turned challenges into opportunities. He is now well on the way to achieving his goal – to establish his own business and support his family to an even greater extent.

