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# REALITY CHECK APPROACH

PERSPECTIVES, EXPERIENCES AND MOTIVATIONS OF YOUTH  
ON EMPLOYMENT AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING

IN BANGLADESH

YEAR 2

2017

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## Glossary and Abbreviations

<b>Bhai</b>	Brother
<b>Burqa</b>	Islamic garment to cover women when in public
<b>BSc</b>	Bachelor of Science degree
<b>CCTV</b>	Closed Circuit Television
<b>Chacha</b>	Uncle
<b>CNG</b>	Local taxis that run on compressed natural gas
<b>DFID</b>	UK Department for International Development
<b>Diploma</b>	A four-year educational course run by government polytechnic institutes which can be joined after completing Secondary School Certificate examination
<b>Dupatta</b>	Scarf
<b>EPZ</b>	Export Promotion Zone
<b>Hadith</b>	A collection of traditions containing sayings of the prophet Muhammad that provide daily guidance to muslims
<b>HSC</b>	Higher Secondary School Certificate (examination)
<b>ID</b>	Identification
<b>IRPU</b>	Industry Relations and Placement Unit
<b>Lakh</b>	One hundred thousand
<b>Madrasa</b>	Islamic religious school
<b>Miking</b>	Traditional means to promote news using a loudspeaker mounted on a bicycle
<b>Mistry</b>	Skilled worker such as carpenter, mason
<b>MRM</b>	Monitoring and Research Measurement
<b>Peon</b>	Office assistant
<b>PTP</b>	Private Training Provider
<b>RCA</b>	Reality Check Approach
<b>RCA+</b>	Reality Check Approach + Project funded by DFAT
<b>RMG</b>	Ready Made Garments
<b>Salwar Kameez</b>	Traditional outfit worn by women
<b>SMO</b>	Sewing Machine Operator
<b>SSC</b>	Secondary School Certificate (examination)
<b>Sudokkho</b>	A five-year skills training and employment programme in Bangladesh that tests and scale-up market-driven, quality skills training systems within the readymade garments (RMG) and construction sectors that will stimulate further investment in training by trainees, private training providers and employers
<b>Tk</b>	Taka - Bangladesh currency
<b>Upazilla</b>	Sub district
<b>Ustaad</b>	Boss

Exchange rate (January 2017) Bangladesh Taka to Pounds Sterling

1 GBP = Tk 100.04

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# SUMMARY

This Report presents the main findings of the second year of the Reality Check Approach (RCA) longitudinal study which was carried out between January-February 2017, almost exactly a year after the first study. The second year study builds on the insights gathered in the first year and seeks to support Sudokkho in continuously improving and adapting the design and implementation of the programme through enriching the understanding of the perspectives, motivations and experiences of young people concerning employment and work-related training. The youths included in the study are those enrolled and/or graduated from the Sudokkho private training provider (PTP) programme, as well as youths who are not part of the programme. The study is commissioned by Palladium in collaboration with the British Council and Swiss Contact, and is funded by the Department of International Development (UK Aid).

The Reality Check Approach is an internationally recognised qualitative research approach which seeks to try to understand context, people's aspirations, their behaviours and day to day lives through their lenses. It involves researchers staying in people's own homes for several days and nights and using this opportunity to 'hang out' and interact informally through chatting and two way conversations. This approach ensures that power distances between researchers and study participants are diminished and provides enabling

conditions for rich insights into people's context and reality to emerge. Researchers also work alongside the study participants wherever possible, working on construction sites, garment factories, brick fields and factory workshops to experience and observe the working conditions and environment. The approach provides opportunities to iterate informal conversations and triangulate findings through observations, own experience and multiple conversations with different people living in the communities.

The study locations were purposefully selected to ensure the study participants included recent trainees from Sudokkho courses and youths of similar background who have not undertaken training with Sudokkho. The study was carried out in three rounds: Round 1 comprising of researchers returning to the same locations as in 2016 and living with the same former trainees and their families; Round 2 and 3 were selected based on their proximity to the location of the Sudokkho training centres and included new study participants who had received Sudokkho model 2 and 3<sup>1</sup> support as well as youths of similar backgrounds who were not part of the programme.

The study team lived with 27 households, which included eight families that researchers lived with in 2016, and were in 11 study locations in the greater Dhaka area, Chittagong and Jessore districts. As with the Year 1 study, the composition of the households

<sup>1</sup>The new models (Models 2 and 3) use a payment for results structure which shifts from front-end payment for enrolling trainees to back-end payment for graduates employed; and also works with PTP that have existing industry linkages to elicit demand for trained skilled labour and places trained graduates in pre-explored industries.

varied with some living in their family homes with the whole family, others living in temporary rented compounds, some living in shared dormitories with other workers and a few cases the 'household' was a shelter on the work-site. Unlike Year 1 where Sudokkho trainees were contacted directly by phone by the researchers, the researchers took a different approach this time round and used a more typical RCA way of meeting study participants. Researchers identified the trainees through *in situ* informal conversations at tea shops and the training centres and engaged in opportunistic conversations with trainees and youths. As well as hanging out and chatting with the study participants and their families, the researchers also had extensive conversations with neighbours, other youth in the community, trainers, employers and the wider community resulting in purposive conversations with up to 600 people during the course of the study.

Our researchers observed and Year 1 trainees shared there have been big changes in their lives and communities over the last year. Of the eight Year 1 trainees, only three were working in the same industry for which they had been trained. Two of the trainees had recently had babies and another was expecting a baby soon, and for all three of them this change had impacted their job situation in considerable ways with one losing her job. For another trainee her mother in law passed away recently so her sister in law had moved house and taken with her the sewing machine that she used to use. One former mason trainee has now found a regular job under a contractor and friends said '*he has now become a big man and has money*'. Two of the former sewing machine operator trainees are still studying for their diplomas in textiles and whereas one wanted a job in a textile factory after finishing his diploma, the other is working as a security guard at the airport.

Many young men and women across the study locations shared that they primarily work to earn money to pay for the increasing daily demands for cash, such as to pay rent, utilities, food, mobile credit and recreational costs. Very few actually see their current jobs in terms of careers but instead as a '*means to an end*', with the 'end' being saving enough money to start a small business on their own or to return home to their village and '*buy land and build a house*'. Some young

men and women describe their jobs as a '*time filler*', others as accumulating training certificates with a view to entering higher education whilst others view the work as a series of jobs until they find one job that suits them the best.

Young men and women shared the criteria they look for in their desired jobs; shorter working hours (particularly for garment workers), less harassment, status and respect, better pay, guarantee of regular income and the freedom and flexibility to work when they wish. During the sense making workshop, the researchers ranked the different job opportunities according to what people said were their most and least preferred jobs. In decreasing order of preference the perceived job preference ranking is: (i) government jobs because of the status and financial security it provides; (ii) many young men and women also aspired to have their own business as this provides more freedom and independence to '*do as I want*'; (iii) going overseas often came up in conversations as a way to make a lot of money quickly and particularly young men told us about the better working conditions overseas, although some people shared there are risks entailed. Specifically within the two sectors prioritised by Sudokkho: (i) in the garment sector young men and women shared their preference to work in EPZ factories where the salary and work conditions are comparatively better than the readily available jobs in domestic garment factories; (ii) in the construction sector workers like the idea of being skilled and the flexibility you can have as a result. Some of the least preferred jobs are auto-rickshaw drivers which although providing some flexibility are not considered well-respected jobs because of disputes over fares; and, lastly, van pullers / rickshaw pullers because not only is this regarded as a low status job but also it is physically strenuous.

As 2016, many young men and women told us that it is difficult to get particular jobs without a network and '*good connections*'. In particular this is the case for the most sought after government jobs, overseas jobs and work in Export Promotion Zone (EPZ) factories. Some youths also shared that for more regular factory garment jobs and construction work it also helps considerably to have a good network. People told us maintaining your network and reputation are important for

getting jobs and groups of friends and neighbours formed alliances to share knowledge and opportunities for work. People said mobile phones are increasingly important to connect with friends and colleagues, access information on jobs and search for new opportunities. Compared to Year 1, our researchers observed the increase usage of mobile phones and in some of the living compounds there is now *wi-fi* access for all. As well as having networks, people told us that giving bribes is pervasive not just for getting government jobs but also regular jobs in private companies. Some people explained that more recently bribes are also required to get some jobs in garment factories as more youths are moving to the city creating a higher demand for these jobs.

Some young men and women shared that their age and looks were at times a constraint to getting desired jobs. Many women working in garments told us how factories preferred girls that *'look like they have grown up'* and look good. Some girls shared they drink locally made alcohol which they believed made them look fairer and caused their skin to glow. Construction workers told us about the hard, strenuous working conditions which only the young and healthy could endure and *'older people cannot progress higher'*. Young men and women also explained that not having completed secondary or higher education can limit their job opportunities, whilst others felt they could be overqualified for jobs and this created further frustrations.

As we saw in 2016, many young men and women shared that obligations to their families often impacts their choice of work and the person's position within the family plays a significant part. The eldest, irrespective of gender, often felt pressure to support the family financially and put their siblings through school. Many older sisters, though married, still support their family through paying for siblings' education, sending money to parents and gifts to siblings. Some older siblings shared they had been kept out of school by their parents to look after their younger siblings while their parents worked in garment factories.

As we saw in Year 1, young men and women explained that the conditions are improving in the garment factories with better wages, more regular payments and a better working environment. In particular

this is the case in the foreign-owned factories or factories inside the EPZ. In these factories some women told us about the better benefits, regular pay, better working hours so they could spend more time with their families, and in a few cases 'special diets' and rest time arranged for pregnant women or those with new born babies. However, many other garment workers still complained about the longer hours, intense pressure they faced at work, rude and abusive supervisors. All men we chatted to told us that for them any abuse by supervisors is limited to abusive language and occasional physical violence, while some women told us about experiences of sexual harassment or suggestive remarks and gestures made by supervisors. Many garment workers also complained about health problems they constantly faced such as constant headaches, chronic back pain, fatigue and gastritis.

In most locations young men and women told us that the demand for helpers is always high in the garment industry so it is *'easy'* to get these jobs and they do not require any specific training. People told us the most common way to get a job at a garment factory requires one to stand outside the factory gates with the necessary documents (passport size photograph, national ID card or birth certificate, and a *'clean record'*). In one location close to the EPZ, garments workers shared their concerns that the factories will stop hiring helpers as the factories are introducing auto machines. In this location many of the helpers fear losing their jobs and are enrolling in machine operating training courses from different private training centres. In other locations most helpers said that they didn't need to do training but could learn on the job and be promoted to a machine operator within three to six months.

Most construction workers we met explained to us there are two ways of working in construction, either as a contractor or a daily worker. While both typically pay daily wages, the first means working for a specific contractor and having steady work until the end of the project, and latter people shared provides greater freedom to choose their work and working hours but also less certainty. As seen in Year 1, many construction workers complained about the hard arduous work, long hours and *'having a lot of risks'* of suffering



injuries as there were no safety provisions on the work site. The difficult and risky conditions were also experienced first hand by our researchers working on sites with their family members. Most construction workers shared their preference for learning the trade on the job and said they did not require formal training. Workers shared that contractors and senior *mistries* (skilled workers) preferred to hire those who had on-the-job experience rather than those who had done formal training courses with some saying that certain skills can only be mastered after working for several years. Only those wanting to work overseas told us that training helped them as the training certificate meant they could work as senior *mistry* overseas instead of working as a helper.

Across the locations men and women seemed to have diverse views about women working in the garments and construction industries. Some men thought women should not do any work outside the house as this reflects badly on the husband's ability to provide for the family, whilst most now thought that working in garment factories are good choices for women as these are '*closed jobs*' with '*security*'. The long working hours in many garment factories meant that some believed '*only women without babies or those with grown up children can work here*'. Construction work is mostly for men, but where we saw women construction workers most of them were older (45-50 years old) and explained that they could no longer get jobs in the garment factories so construction work is one of their only options left. Even when women worked in construction sites it is mostly as low paid low status helpers mixing and carrying cement and sand. A recent change is the growing popularity of housemaid jobs which now have gained more respect as they require recommendations, national ID and in richer neighbourhoods there are CCTV cameras which make the women feel safer as '*the men of the house can't harm me*'.

As we saw in Year 1, many youths shared that they had '*fallen into*' the training either as a result of suggestions or pressure from their families to acquire skills for further employment. Of the young men and women who were doing the training because their families wanted them to, only a few told us they wanted to continue to full-time employment. Three girls

undertaking the Sudokkho sewing machine operator training told us they wanted flexible working arrangements where they could '*set up a sewing machine at home and make clothes for themselves and neighbours*'. A group of boys currently taking the Sudokkho plumbing training shared that of the 30 boys doing the training only four actually wanted to be plumbers. The other boys had completed diploma courses from polytechnic institutes and felt that having training from different training courses would help them complete with BSc engineering degree holders for site engineering jobs.

All except two of the Year 2 trainees we lived with were currently still pursuing their Sudokkho courses. Trainees in the EPZ locations told us they appreciated that the training centre provides flexible timings and remains open until midnight on Fridays, lets trainees enrol late and allowed some trainees to continue even after the completion of the six week course. The owner at this training centre told us this was done as a '*special consideration*' so that those working in the garment factories could also attend the training.

Trainees told us they had learned about the training from promotional '*miking*' but unlike last year people also said there were also catchment area door-to-door visits made by the staff of different training centres to recruit potential trainees and in some locations trainers approached youths at tea stalls or '*frustrated looking youths*' at bus stations to encourage them to enrol. At many training centres there was some confusion about whom the training centres were supposed to be targeting for the courses. Some said the training is for school drops outs, others thought it is for '*poor people who lived in the slums*', whilst others said '*it is only for those who want to work in garments*'. A few training centres screened or '*interviewed*' potential trainees to understand their motivation, but often people said this process was reduced to the submission of administrative documents rather than an open discussion on motivations and future interests.

Unlike in 2016, the training fees were more consistent at the centres although people said the payment instalments are still '*open to negotiation*'. Trainees shared that the fees for the Sudokkho sewing machine operator course is relatively lower compared to other training courses. All the trainees we talked to said that

the money for the training fees had been paid by their family members and since they could come to an agreement with the training centres about paying instalments, arranging the money had not been a problem.

In Year 2 the Sudokkho sewing machine operator training centres are also more active in linking with garment factories in their areas. Industry Relations and Placement Units (IRPU) were present at some of the training centres working to link trainees directly to the factories and some made frequent visits to the factories to better understand their requirements and to *'make a deal'* to provide a certain number of sewing machine operators by a certain date. These units were often just one staff who doubled as a trainer and none of the trainees we spoke to were aware of their existence. In one training centre people told us about a man who came to the training centre every Friday and taught the trainees *'tips and tricks'* for getting jobs in garment factories, such as sewing techniques and interview advice. In another location people told us that the owner of the training centre personally knew managers of different EPZ factories and once in a while the managers would come to the training centre and hire workers for their factory. Others felt that even though they had not taken up jobs found by the training centres they had nevertheless gained confidence to start their own ventures in the village or to get into *'the flow of work'*.

The study report concludes with a number of study implications that have emerged from the insights gained. These are structured around some of the underlying assumptions of Sudokkho's current Theory of Change and the conundrums that were flagged up during the analysis and discussion of the 1<sup>st</sup> Year findings. In summary they include:

**Year 1 Conundrum# 1:** *Why there is still a large number of people employed in the RMG and construction sectors and why training centres focus on these sectors, given that people shared they did not generally aspire to work in these sectors?*

Many young men and women told us they do not have career aspirations within these sectors but are working there purely as *'a means to an end'* to make money to move back to their villages or to save for

small scale investment. One key assumption in the Sudokkho Theory of Change concerns the ability of Training Centres to attract trainees and specifically states the assumption that *'PTPs (have the) ability to attract trainees (including disadvantaged groups) for quality training'*. In order to invest in the right people for training, those who do aspire to careers in the two sectors rather than more casual workers who want links to employers or to further education, more careful screening may be required.

The study findings raise a number of key questions around the profile of potential trainees.

The current trainees shared a mixture of motivations for doing the training such as getting a job, *'filling time'* and the course contributing to their further education (a step to undertaking degree course, for example). ***Should Training Centres only be targeting youths aspiring for careers in these industries?***

Many youths and some Year 1 trainees told us that they want flexible working arrangements such as working part-time or working at home. ***Should training courses accommodate these different needs?*** If so, the indicators for measuring success of the Sudokkho programme will need to be adjusted to reflect these different aspirations.

***Who are the disadvantaged groups?*** The study finds there is some confusion about these targets with some suggesting these are poorer families or *'frustrated youths'*. However, the study suggests that, according to youth, that conventional definitions of disadvantage may miss particular aspects of disadvantage which need to be addressed, especially the lack of networks or inability to bribe to enter employment.

**More thorough pre-enrolment discussions / screening:** Some trainers and trainees appreciated the few Training Centres which conducted pre-enrolment interviews and screenings. These practices could be encouraged and enhanced so there is a better understanding of the trainees' background, aspirations, family circumstances and pressures.

**Whole Cycle Pastoral Care:** No trainees were aware of the Industry Relations and Placement Units within the Sudokkho Year 2 Training Centres. To ensure that

investment is being made in the ‘*right trainees*’ and to provide comparatively more support to trainees than other Training Centres, these units could be resourced to provide comprehensive pastoral care for the trainees across the whole cycle of their training course and beyond, including: interviewing the trainees prior to enrolment to understand their aspirations and aligning this with the most suitable course; mapping out career paths; providing guidance on job interviews and what skills are required to pass the factory tests; linking trainees with desired industries; creating alumni networks; and post training support.

**Identifying the ‘right’ industries:** Many young men and women told us that the garment factories or construction sites do not want skilled workers. They told us instead they can learn on the job and this is preferred. This is contrary to a number of the key assumptions in the Sudokkho Theory of Change:

*PTPs can profitably offer quality training that is valued and **demand**ed by industry*

*Employers pay premium wage to **skilled workers***

*Industry recognise that **investing in training** is part of their business model*

People shared there are particular factories and construction sites (often small in number) that do value skilled work and these tend to be the ones which have better working conditions such as the EPZ factories, foreign-owned companies and overseas work. The Training Centres could solely focus on linking up and finding job opportunities for trainees in these workplaces. Indicators of achievement would then be linked to longevity in the job, decent (premium) wages and career progression rather than simply employment.

**Improved Safety and Compliance with Standards:** Many young men and women told us about harassment and the lack of safety provisions in the workplace. The Training Centres could only link trainees with compliant factories and worksites that provide respectful and safe workplaces. This would also become a comparative advantage of the Sudokkho training courses by providing opportunities for youths in highly sought-after factories and sites.

**Year 1 Conundrum #2:** *How the trainees finance the training courses and how they weigh off these costs with other priorities and options?*

**Paying for Quality:** The Theory of Change notes an assumption that ‘*Trainees (have a) willingness to pay for training*’. All the trainees we talked with said that the training fees had been paid for by their family members and the fees are universally lower than those charged by other training courses. The Sudokkho training courses could distinguish themselves from the other training courses by focusing on career-motivated trainees and proactively creating the linkages to highly sought after industries, then it could be envisaged that there would be a competition for places rather than the current situation where Training Centres ‘*run after trainees*’. The Sudokkho courses could be perceived as the highest calibre, with ‘international funding’ and the best for career development. Youths also shared they prefer flexibility in the timing of the course, so that it is still possible to join classes, clinics or practice in the evenings after work.

**Year 1 Conundrum #3:** *What are the major barriers for women leading them to not select male dominated occupations/jobs like construction?*

There is a prevailing view that construction sites are not conducive places for women to work. Having lived on construction sites, researchers would agree that these are difficult places. The factory environment, people feel is more controlled and supervised and women and their families feel it is safer. Families are often not against young women being employed in these industries but more concerned about their safety and well-being. Late and unpredictable shift work meaning women have to come home at night, harassment on construction sites, fear of being forced into prostitution abroad all colour the view of workplace safety and evoke protective attitudes among parents and spouses. Measures to ensure safety and to link trainees only with workplaces which take employees safety seriously would do much to encourage families to support young women in these jobs.

### **Way forward**

**Connecting through Technology:** Virtually all youths we met have mobile phones and a growing number have smart phones. Technology could be used by the training centres to address many of the above study implications such as: to promote the training courses with carefully crafted messages for attracting the right trainee profiles; creating networks for job opportunities; providing more flexible online tutorials; and providing post-training mentoring and support.



# INTRODUCTION



# Introduction

This Report presents the main findings of the Reality Check Approach (RCA) study which was conducted in January-February 2017, almost exactly a year after the first study was conducted in 2016. The study is intended to provide insights to support the Sudokkho Monitoring and Research Measurement (MRM) Framework and better understand the perspectives, motivations and experiences of young people concerning employment and work related training; including youths enrolled and/or graduated from the Sudokkho private training provider (PTP) programme, as well as those youths who are not part of the programme. The RCA is designed as a longitudinal study so that changes can be tracked over a period of time and lessons learnt used on an ongoing basis to improve the design and implementation of the Sudokkho project.

The first year of the RCA study provided insights on the perspectives, motivations, experiences and lifestyle choices of the youth, including trainees from the PTP program. In order to understand the different perspectives of young people in relation to work, skills, aspirations and lifestyle, three different cohorts were chosen, namely:

- i) those enrolled or who had completed the Sudokkho private training providers<sup>2</sup> model 1 courses.
- ii) those with a similar profile but who did not avail similar employment or skills opportunities.
- iii) those already in the ready made garments (RMG) and construction industries but were not part of the Sudokkho programme.

The second year study built on the insights gathered in the first year and involved researchers returning to eight of the fifteen trainees/households from 2016, as well as living with nine additional PTP trainees (who were being trained under Sudokkho PTP models 2 and 3<sup>3</sup>) and a further ten youths who are not part of the programme, and their households<sup>4</sup>. The researchers spent four days and where possible, four nights, living with the youth and those they live with, and through informal interactions with them and the wider community, sought to understand changes since the previous RCA study in 2016 both in terms of the changing context and changes in their personal circumstances.

The study also sought to gather deeper understanding of their motivations, experiences and lifestyle choices.

The study specifically examined some of the underlying assumptions of the Sudokkho's current Theory of Change (see Annex 5). It also purposely sought to shed light on some of the conundrums, which were flagged up by Sudokkho from the analysis and discussions of the first year findings, namely:

- Why there is still a large number of people employed in the RMG and construction sectors and why training centres focus on these sectors, given that people shared they did not generally aspire to work in these sectors?
- What are the major barriers for women leading them to not select male dominated occupations/jobs like construction?
- How the trainees finance the training courses and how they weigh off these costs with other priorities and options?

## Structure of this report

The report begins with an overview of the Reality Check Approach (RCA) methodology as well as study limitations (section 2). The following sections on findings are written from the perspective of the youth themselves and seek to present their views and experience as faithfully as possible by avoiding any researcher interpretation. Section 3 looks at how youths view work and the jobs they would prefer to be engaged in, with a discussion of the constraints in achieving this. The following section 4 describes youths' perspectives of the jobs they're actually engaged in and the real costs and constraints they face when doing these jobs. Section 5 presents their experience of the Sudokkho training.

The final section (section 6) provides some implications, which have emerged from the study from the perspectives of the youths themselves.

<sup>2</sup> The industry based training was not included in both first and second year RCA studies.

<sup>3</sup> While PTP model 1 made high upfront payments to PTPs, the new models use a payment for results structure which shifts from front-end payment for enrolling trainees to back-end payment for graduates employed; and also works with PTP that have existing industry linkages to elicit demand for trained skilled labour and places trained graduates in pre-explored industries.

<sup>4</sup> Household here means not just the families, but is used to describe those with whom youths were living when the RCA researchers met them.



# METHODOLOGY



# Methodology

The Reality Check Approach (RCA) is a qualitative research approach involving trained and experienced researchers staying in people's homes for several days and nights, joining in their everyday lives and chatting informally with all members of the household, their neighbours and others they come into contact with. This relaxed approach ensures that power distances between researcher and study participants are diminished and provides the enabling conditions for rich insights into people's context and reality to emerge. By building on conversations, having multiple conversations with different people and having opportunities for direct experience and observation, confidence in the insights gathered is enhanced compared to many other qualitative research methods. RCA is often used to understand longitudinal change through staying with the same people at approximately the same time each year over a period of several years and this study has been designed to achieve this.

The RCA differs from most other approaches to research. Firstly, it is not theory-based so that there are no preconceived research frameworks or research questions. This is deliberate as the approach seeks to enable emic (insider) perspectives to emerge and to limit etic (outsider) interpretation or validation. The premise for researchers is one of learning directly from people themselves. Secondly, RCA is always carried out in teams in order to minimise researcher bias and to optimise opportunities for triangulation. Thirdly, and importantly, RCA teams are independent and make this explicit with the people who participate in the study. Our objective is to ensure that the views, perspectives and experiences of people are respectfully conveyed to policy and programme stakeholders. The researchers become a conduit rather than an intermediary. This is why RCA studies do not provide recommendations but promote the idea of sharing implications, which are grounded in what people themselves share and show us.

The approach builds on and extends the tradition of listening studies (see Salmen 1998 and Anderson, Brown and Jean 2012<sup>5</sup>) and beneficiary assessments (see SDC 2013<sup>6</sup>) by combining elements of these ap-

proaches with researchers actually living with people and sharing their everyday lives in context.

RCA is sometimes likened to a 'light touch' participant observation. But while it is similar in that it requires participation in everyday life within people's own environments, it differs by being comparatively quick and placing more emphasis on informal, relaxed and insightful conversations rather than on observing behaviour and the complexities of relationships. It also differs by deriving credibility through multiple interactions in multiple locations and collective pooling of unfiltered insights so that emic perspectives are always privileged.

Important characteristics of the Reality Check Approach are:

- **Living with rather than visiting** (thereby meeting the family/people in their own environment, understanding family/home dynamics and how days and nights are spent);



Participating in people's daily lives.

- **Having conversations rather than conducting interviews** (there is no note taking thereby putting people at ease and on an equal footing with the outsider);
- **Learning rather than finding out** (suspending judgement, letting people take the lead in defining the agenda and what is important);
- **Centring on the household** and interacting

<sup>5</sup> Salmen, Lawrence F. 1998. "Toward a Listening Bank: Review of Best Practices and Efficacy of Beneficiary Assessments". Social Development Papers 23. Washington: World Bank.

<sup>6</sup> Anderson, Mary B., Dayna Brown, Isabella Jean. 2012. Time to Listen; Hearing People on the Receiving End of International Aid. Cambridge MA:CDA. Shutt, Cathy and Laurent Ruedin. 2013. SDC How-to-Note Beneficiary Assessment (BA). Berne: Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation

with families/people rather than users, communities or groups;

- **Being experiential** in that researchers themselves take part in daily activities (collecting water, cooking, hanging out) and accompany people (to the workplace, to market, to recreation places);
- **Including all members** of households
- **Using private space rather than public space** for disclosure (an emphasis on normal, ordinary lives);
- **Accepting multiple realities** rather than public consensus (gathering diversity of opinion, including 'smaller voices')
- **Interacting in ordinary daily life** (accompanying people in their work and social interactions in their usual routines)
- **Taking a cross-sectoral view**, the enquiry is situated within the context of everyday life rather than simply (and arguably artificially) looking at one aspect of people's lives;
- **Understanding longitudinal change** and how change happens over time.

## 1. Study locations and participants

### Locations



This study was carried out in three rounds. Round 1 comprised researchers returning to the same locations and living with the same former trainees and

their families with whom they had stayed in 2016 (with the exception of one whose study participant had moved to a different location)

The locations for Round 2 and Round 3 (which included new study participants including those who had received Sudokkho model 2 and model 3 support and those not participating in the programme but in RMG or construction industries) were selected based on their proximity to the location of the Sudokkho training centres.

Except for Round 1 the researchers determined these locations *in situ*. A total of eleven locations were included as indicated below.

### Study participants: Host households

The primary focus of the study were the youths and their households. A total of twenty-seven host households were included in the study of which eight were families that researchers had previously stayed with in 2016<sup>7</sup>. As indicated in Table 1, Year 2 study also included new trainees who were enrolled/had completed the Sudokkho training (under models 2 and 3) as well as other youths who have not undertaken the Sudokkho training course, and are either working in the same industry or different industries.

Below are the cohorts who were included in the study:

- Former PTP trainees with whom the RCA researchers lived in year 1 (2016) PTP trainees from model 2 and 3 support
- Youths with a similar profile but who are either working in different industries or are unemployed
- Youths who work already in the ready made garments (RMG) and construction industries but are not part of the Sudokkho programme

As with the Year 1 study, the composition of the host households varied with some living in their family homes with the whole family, others living in temporary rented compounds with their spouses or families, and some young men and women living in shared dormitories with other workers. In one case the 'household' comprised of a work-site where the construction workers lived and another was a room inside a shoe-factory where the workers worked and in both cases our researchers lived with them. Additionally, two researchers lived in dormitory accommodation with two Year 2 trainees.

<sup>7</sup> In the first year, the study team intentionally stayed/interacted with additional trainees than what was originally planned (fifteen instead of twelve) as it was anticipated that it will be challenging to track down all trainees in future years as there was a likelihood that some of them would have moved to other areas. The team was able to track down eight of the fifteen households from 2016.



**Table 1: Study participants**

Host households	Living arrangements					Neighbours	Others
	Family homes	Compounds	Rented but separate accommodations (not compounds)	Dormitories	Worksites		
	1	3	4	-	-	More than 100 households	More than 200 people
	4	9	1	2	3		

**Year 1 locations****Year 2 locations****Neighbours and others in the community**

In addition to the twenty-seven host households, researchers also interacted closely with their neighbours (on average about four additional households each) and the wider community. These included a mix of different generations of people, including young men and women working in the same industries, different industries, some in full time education and others who were unemployed.

**Trainers and employers**

Researchers also had further opportunistic conversations with owners and trainers of the training centres, factory supervisors, and construction site foremen and contractors. Additionally, researchers who visited different training centres were also shown around the facilities and were able to observe the training classes. When doing the above, researchers were able to maintain their independence from the Sudokkho project, not just by visiting training centres that were supported by Sudokkho, but also those that did not have the Sudokkho training courses. Furthermore, at every step, our interest to understand the perspectives and experiences of the larger Bangladeshi youths and their motivations to be engaged in work was explained carefully to their trainers and employers.

As typical of RCA studies of this size at least 600 people participated in the study (see Annex 3 for

List of people met) although in depth insights came mostly from the trainees/ex-trainees and the households stayed with.

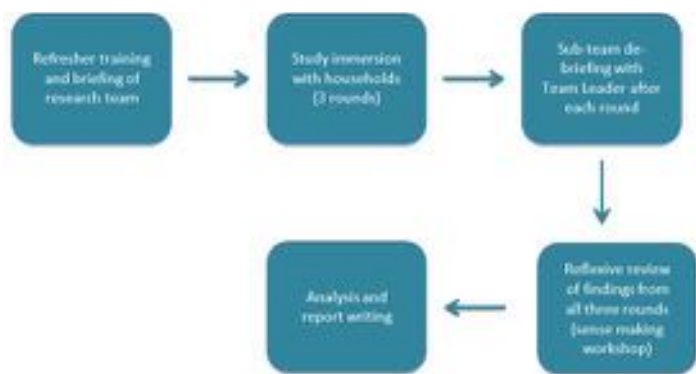
**Study Team**

The study team of twelve researchers included two international researchers and ten Bangladeshi researchers (see Annex 1). Ten Bangladeshi researchers worked independently while the two international researchers were accompanied by a Bangladesh researcher/translator. All researchers and researcher/translators had participated in a full six day Level 1 RCA training in 2016 which emphasised the good practice of reflexivity, understanding and mitigating bias, maintaining informality and ethical considerations in conducting this kind of work. Because these skills are so critical, all of the research team underwent a refresher training lasting two days in January 2017, immediately prior to the Year 2 study. All researchers were young enthusiastic 'people persons' mostly from anthropology and sociology backgrounds. All researchers were required to undergo Child Protection training. The three main sub teams were led by experienced RCA practitioners and overall team leaders for this study were Peter Riddell-Carre and Neha Koirala who led the analysis and report writing, with overall quality assurance undertaken by Dee Jupp, PhD.

**2. Study Process**

As with all RCA studies, a study briefing process was conducted before the start of the main study. This involved briefing researchers on the purpose and scope of the study. As noted above, RCA is not a theory based research method although it often generates people's theories of change and contributes well to grounded theory approaches. It does not have a pre-determined set of research questions relying as it does on iterations from insights gathered *in situ* and building on progressive series of conversations. However, as part of the briefing process for researchers, areas for conversations were developed to act as a guide to ensure conversations were purposive. The

outcome of the deliberations with the research team are provided in Annex 2 Areas for Conversations.



Unlike the first year where the Sudokkho trainees were contacted directly by phone by the researchers, the researchers took a different approach to contact trainees this time around by adopting an informal style more typical of RCA studies<sup>8</sup>. Whilst some trainees were identified through their addresses provided to the research team by Sudokkho, other researchers visited the training centres spending time chatting informally with the training providers as well as trainees. Some others hung around teashops near the training centre and engaged in opportunistic conversations with trainees as well as other youths. As mentioned above, while meeting people for the first time, researchers explained their intent to understand the changing context of the RMG and construction industries and youth's aspirations and motivations about working in these and other sectors.

Some researchers extended their conversations with different youths by using drawings to depict their 'River of life', which focused on events in their lives that youths thought significant. Other researchers used diagrams to understand young men and women's preference for different jobs, also ranking these jobs in order of preference.

Each researcher discreetly left a 'gift' of basic food items, torches, stationery and toys for the family they stayed with on leaving, to the value of around Tk 1,000 to compensate for any costs incurred in hosting the researcher. As researchers insist that no special arrangements are made for them, they help in domestic activities and do not disturb income-earning activities, the actual costs to 'hosts' are negligible. The timing of the gift was important so people did not feel they were expected to provide better food for the researchers or get the impression that they were being paid for their participation.

Whilst researchers never take notes in front of peo-

ple, they do jot down quotes and details as needed. To illustrate context and findings, photos were also taken with the consent of the people concerned and sometimes by them directly.

Each sub-team of 3-4 researchers spent a full day de-briefing with the team leader as soon as they came out of the study locations. These sessions ran through the areas of conversation (Annex 2) and required that researchers share their conversations, observations, experiences and photos related to these as well as expanding the areas of conversation based on people's inputs. The de-briefs were recorded in detail in written notes and combined with other important details on the trainees, their households and the communities where they lived.

Following completion of all the de-briefing sessions, the researchers met together in a one-day sense-making workshop. They were asked to identify emerging narratives from their locations as well as collectively review and analyse the findings by taking the position of study participants. This process ensured that researchers did not overlay their own interpretations on the findings.

The study team leaders then used established *framework analysis* procedures to review the detailed de-briefing notes, the sense making workshop notes and other supporting materials. This involves three of the typical four-stage process i. Familiarisation (immersion in the findings), ii. Identification of themes (from the sense-making workshop and from the data directly) and iii. Charting (finding emerging connections). The conventional fourth step is 'interpretation' which we purposely eschew. The key emerging narratives from these processes were used as a basis for the report writing. Quality assurance was carried out through internal peer review with special concern to ensure the research retained positionality of people themselves.

### 3. Ethical Considerations

Like most ethnographic based research, there is no intervention involved in RCA studies. At best the study can be viewed as a way to empower the study participants in that they are able to express themselves freely in their own space. Researchers are not covert but become 'detached insiders'. People were informed that this was a learning study and were never coerced into participation. All study participants were asked to give their consent for their stories and pho-

<sup>8</sup> Normally in RCA studies none of the households are contacted in advance of the study and all host households are selected by individual team members through informal discussions with people in the community in situ. This is done so that no special arrangements are made and interactions can be a lot more spontaneous and informal. Care is taken to ensure that people understand the nature of the RCA and the importance of researchers not being afforded guest status.

tos to be recorded and shared. As per the American Anthropological Association Code of Ethics, RCA adopts an ethical obligation to people ‘*which (when necessary) supersedes the goal of seeking new knowledge*’. Researchers ‘*do everything in their power to ensure that research does not harm the safety, dignity or privacy of the people with whom they conduct the research*’. All researchers were briefed on ethical considerations and Child Protection Policies before the field work (irrespective of whether they had previously gone through this). All researchers signed Risk and Child Protection Policy declarations as part of their contracts.

All data (written and visual) was coded to protect the identity of individuals, their families and communities. As a result the exact locations and identities of households and others are not revealed in this report. Further, faces of study participants and images which could reveal locations were either not retained in the photo archive or identities were digitally removed. This is partly to respect good research practice with regard to confidentiality but also has the benefit of ensuring that no special measures or consideration are given to these locations or households in the course of the programme.

#### 4. Study limitations

As with other research methods, this study has a number of limitations as follows:

- As experienced in other RCA studies conducted in urban locations, researchers faced a higher degree of suspicion compared to rural areas. As we found in Year 1, this was not with the host households themselves, but from the neighbours and wider community. These required careful negotiation, which was time consuming and, at times stressful. Difficulties were encountered in two locations in particular, one urban slum and another rural location, due to recent rumours and reports of criminal acts (such as kidnapping). The urban location was abandoned and a new one found. The researchers in the rural location were able to negotiate with the community to let them stay in the village.
- Most of the study participants in the urban locations were living in rented quarters and sharing rooms with families. In such cases, landlords sometimes would not give consent to having outsiders stay. It required extra effort to negoti-



Most study participants in the urban locations were living in rented quarters.

ate this, and while some were able to stay with families, others stayed in dormitories and work-sites (construction sites and shoe factory) with youths. Where overnighting was not possible, researchers joined their hosts early in the morning and stayed until late at night, usually taking their meals with the family.

- Opportunities for having relaxed and informal conversations were, at times, limited as people (particularly in the RMG industry) worked very long hours. To mitigate this at least one day of all three rounds was over the weekend. However, researchers noted that those working in other industries apart from RMG (and in some cases RMG as well) would still be going to work on the weekend. Those staying at home too were sometimes preoccupied with chores that they usually left for the weekend.



# CONTEXT



# CONTEXT

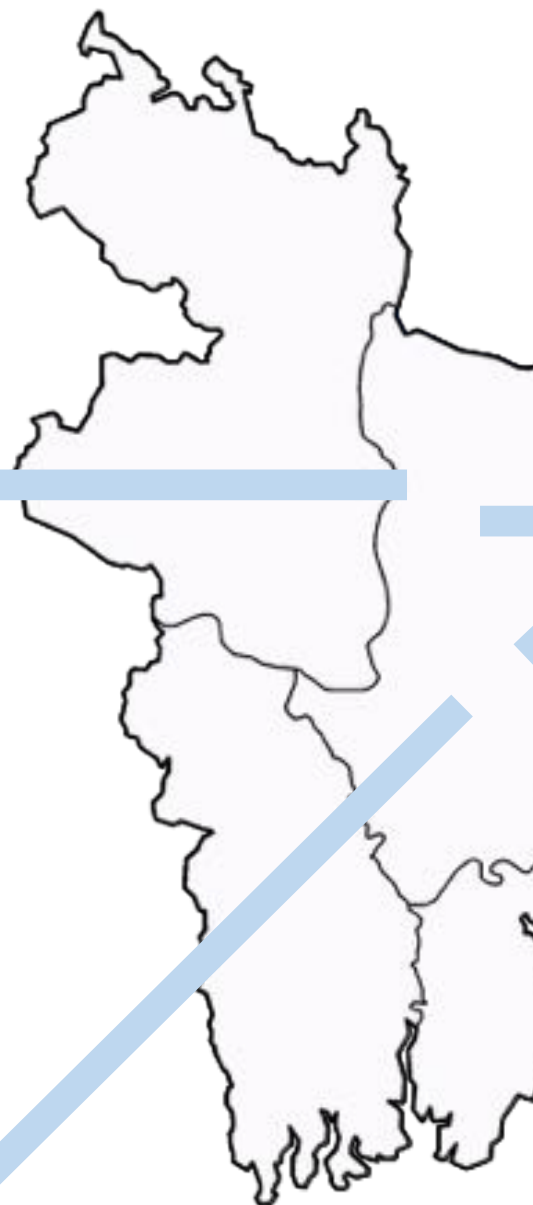
The eleven study locations included in the study are in the greater Dhaka area, and Chittagong and Jessore districts. Whilst the rural locations still retain the feeling of being villages with older people describing themselves as farmers and many families still living in mud walled houses, the employment trend for the younger generation is changing and diversifying. Young men and women in the study locations have migrated or plan to move to Dhaka to look for work, many others are working in factories in nearby towns, and young men are increasingly looking at overseas employment as an option.

The peri-urban study locations are becoming rapidly urbanised as men and women from different districts of the country are moving here to find jobs in the different industries burgeoning in the area. These locations like the urban ones are characterised by many residential compounds which have mushroomed over the years to accommodate domestic migrant workers. The compounds usually have ten to fifteen (sometimes more) one-room living quarters for families with shared cooking and washing areas and are owned by landlords who, in most cases, are locals to the area.



Women sharing a common cooking space in their living compound.

# Year 1 Study Locations



## Y1/1 Peri-urban

**Social:** Used to be more locals living here but since garment factories have multiplied more incomers have come in from different parts of the country. Most people live in rented individual rooms in compounds that have cooking and washing areas that are shared with other families (usually more than 5 others) living in the compounds. Some compounds now have Wi-Fi access.

**Livelihoods:** Many people work in garment factories, as construction workers and day labourers, rickshaw pullers, carpenters and shopkeepers.

**Changes:** The roads have improved since a year ago and are a lot busier with export trucks going in and out of the different factories in the area. Apart from new garment and dyeing factories, the area also has new on-going construction projects. One change observed by researchers that people too are talking about is the short supply of cooking gas because of which, most families have resorted to using clay pot/mud stoves.

**Training centres:** Many, including private ones.

## Y1/3 Rural

**Social:** About 4 hours by road from Dhaka with people living in their own homes on own land.

**Livelihoods:** As most families own farming land, people are engaged in agriculture and also have fish ponds. Almost every family has a male migrant worker working overseas and many others (men and women) are working in the factories nearby.

**Changes:** Since 2016, more shops have opened up and the main road is under construction with support from the local government. There is a new water bottling factory near the village where many youths are currently employed. There are plans for construction of a new garment factory near the village, and while some are enthusiastic about the job opportunities this will create, other farmers worry about factory chemicals degrading soil fertility. Some others are also planning to build new houses on their land so these can be rented out to factory workers in the future.

**Training centres:** In the main town.



#### Y1/2 Urban

**Social:** Residential area which is densely populated. There are many small shops that sell groceries, vegetables and smaller teashops that are always crowded as people gather there to watch TV. As the location has many multi-storied buildings under construction (some buildings under construction last year have now been completed), many are working in these construction sites. People live in rented apartments in buildings that are very close together.

**Livelihoods:** People work in government and private offices, many garment workers, day labourers and rickshaw and auto rickshaw drivers.

**Changes:** Many say the area has become more populated than the previous year as more people have moved in from villages to work in garment factories in the larger area.

**Training centres:** Many private training centres.

#### Y1/4 Peri urban

**Social:** Sprawling location characterised by brick weave streets, quantities of garbage and persistent mosquito problems. Most people live in rented tin sheds while some rent rooms in apartment buildings.

**Livelihoods:** Most men and women from the community work in different factories like RMG, soap, mosquito net/coil. There are also others who have their own shops selling groceries, spices, timber and many men work in construction sites.

**Changes:** The main road that was under construction in 2016 is now completed and people have begun to rent houses/shops near the road. Some of the land used for dumping garbage has been cleared, people speculate, for building construction. There is a new mosquito net factory in the area and some people have now started working there. One new addition to the community is a playground for children which was built by a local political leader. As in Y1/1, the pipeline cooking gas supply is extremely low and women complain of having to wake up at 3am in the morning to cook, some families are also using mud stoves for cooking.

**Training centres:** Closer to town.

## Year 2 Study Locations

### Y2/C2 Peri-urban

**Social:** Quiet residential area with a few high-rise buildings, but most people living in one-storied concrete structures with tin roofs, either rented or owned. There is a small market that has a few tea-shops, shops that sell groceries, medicines, stationery, clothes and also welding and car workshops along the road.

**Livelihoods:** Most of the people are migrants who moved to Dhaka about 20 years ago. There are small business owners (shops), drivers, rickshaw pullers and others work in the six RMG and knitwear factories in the larger area.

**Training centres:** Two training centres within a distance of half kilometre.

### Y2/C3 Urban

**Social:** Industrial area close to the Export Processing Zone (EPZ). The population is made up of Rohingyas who moved to the area about 30 years ago, people from other parts of Bangladesh who migrated later, as well as those who are local to the area, with all of them living in different settlements. The housing is mostly cramped tin sheds (Rohingya) or concrete buildings (one or multi-storied with 9-10 rooms on each floor for locals and migrated Bangladeshis).

**Livelihoods:** Most men and women from the area work in the EPZ factories, but there are also those who own shops in the crowded market place. Others work as day labourers (in various construction-related work), housemaids, auto-rickshaw and rickshaw drivers.

**Training centres:** Many private training centres.

### Y2/C1 Urban

**Social:** Densely populated and crowded market area which is on the main road that offshoots into smaller lanes that lead to residential areas. Most people in the location are not locals but have migrated from other parts of Bangladesh, and either live in apartment buildings or in shared compound areas with families, sharing cooking and washing facilities with other inhabitants.

**Livelihoods:** Income opportunities are varied with many people owning or working in shops, small restaurants and teashops, and construction (tiles, sanitary work, masonry). Many others work in the seven garment factories located in and around the study location.

**Training centres:** Few private training centres.







**Y2/B3 Peri-urban**

**Social:** Locals and incomers say the area has changed over the past 15 years as more garment factories have started operations. Land that was earlier used for agricultural purposes now have living compounds (concrete and tin shed) to accommodate men and women who migrate from all over Bangladesh for work. People estimate that almost every family there has at least one member working in the garment factories nearby. Apart from many smaller factories, the area also has one large, well-recognised garment factory.

**Livelihoods:** Other than working in the RMG industry, the area also has a small but thriving market on the main brick-laid road (said to be built by the large garment factory). Along this road are many that sell groceries, clothes, household items, jewellery, vegetables and small teashops and restaurants. Many men also work in construction, as auto-rickshaw drivers and rickshaw pullers.

**Training centres:** Few small training centres.

**Y2/A3 Rural**

**Social:** About 30 minutes from the town. Most people live in their own homes on own land. The town has an *upazilla* office, bank, NGO offices, police station, post office and a big marketplace.

**Livelihoods:** Most people describe themselves as farmers and in addition to growing staple crops like paddy and wheat, also grow betel, spices like turmeric, vegetables like eggplant, chillies and seasonal fruits like mangoes and dates (for juice). Almost all families keep livestock and trading in livestock is considered an important source of income. There are a few garment factories in the area and people from the village go to work in these factories. Many men also work as masons, carpenters and building painters in the main town.

**Training centres:** In the main town.

**Y2/A2 Urban**

**Social:** People living in multi-storied apartments as well as cramped tin shed quarters, close to two large slum areas.

**Livelihoods:** Most people in the area are migrants to Dhaka and work as day labourers on construction sites, street vendors, rickshaw pullers, drivers, housemaids, and in different industrial factories including RMG.

**Training centres:** Many training centres specialising in RMG and construction.

**Y1/5 Urban (Changed location)**

**Social:** Business area near the airport. The location is densely populated with many buildings. While some of these buildings are rented apartments, there are also many hotels that cater to Bangladeshi pilgrims. People either live in rented apartments or have built tin shed accommodation on government land by the road side.

**Livelihoods:** There are many shops selling clothes, shoes and other household items as well as roadside vendors selling fruits and vegetables and cooked snacks.

**Training centres:** Many private training centres.

# Meet Some of The Youth

Non Sudokkho trainee
Sudokkho trainee



She is 29 years old and has been working in different garment factories ever since she was 14, right after she left school in grade 5. Though she is currently unemployed, she works as a SMO in the EPZ factories for 3-4 months a year *'when the family is short of cash'*. She says she has not returned her EPZ gate card and uses this to enter the area when she wants a job and *'stands in front of the (different) factories till some manager notices me'*. Her dream is to live in her own house one day and she wants to go to Saudi Arabia and earn money so she can return and build a house. She explains that she doesn't know what work she'll do abroad, but hopes it won't be in a garment factory as working in garment factories for years has resulted in a chronic back problem.

She wanted to be a policewoman when she was younger, but had to forego the dream when she dropped out of school in Grade 8 and got married. Now she has a two-year-old daughter who *'can be whatever she wants to be when she grows up'*. She was encouraged by her father to enrol in the Sudokkho training course a month ago and once she completes the training, she hopes the training centre will give her a sewing machine so she can make dresses for herself and the neighbours. Working in a garment factory is not an option as she has to look after her baby and her family.



He is 22 years old, youngest of three siblings and lives with his parents, wife and four month old baby. He used to work as an assistant storekeeper in a garment factory in Dhaka up until three months ago. When he came home on leave to see his son, he contracted chicken pox. This, he says, made him realise he wanted to be near his family and that was when he decided to leave his job and join the Sudokkho training course in the nearby town. He is now doing the sewing machine operator training and wants to get a job in the RMG factory nearby so he can stay with his family. He says there is no pressure for him to work as his father *'takes care of everything'*.

He is 29 years old and has worked in a variety of jobs including, a waiter at a restaurant and as, 'an iron man' (worker in charge of ironing finished garments in a factory) in a garment factory. Three years ago he left his job at the garment factory as he was frustrated by the supervisors' attitude and constant use of 'bad language'. He paid Tk 5,000 as security deposit for an empty shop space and set up a shop ironing clothes. After a year of doing this and making no profit, he says he sat and thought hard about what to do next. He decided to try selling seasonal vegetables and in a month had made a profit of Tk 10,000. The first month that he expanded his shop to include groceries and packaged snacks, he made Tk 20,000 in cash and another Tk 25,000 in credit. Unlike a few other shopkeepers in the area, he keeps his shop open between 1-2pm each day, as this is lunch break for garment workers and 'men come to buy cigarettes and women buy vegetables'.



He used to work as a 'tea boy' at the Sudokkho-supported training centre and joined the construction crew that was working on expansion of the centre as a helper. The training centre later invited him to join the mason training free of cost. When the training finished last year, he was unemployed for a while, before he met a contractor with whom he worked as a junior *mistry* (skilled artisan, mason) on a six-storied building. He got his break when the senior *mistry* left the job a month later and he took over his role. The building took a year to build and 'except for Eid, I didn't stop working'. He now works under the same contractor and wants to continue working till he can earn his reputation as a *mistry*. In his free time he likes to rest and use Facebook on his recently bought smart phone.

He is 28 and has been working in a small privately-owned shoe-factory in Dhaka for 3 years now. He lives in the factory along with the other four workers. As the shoe-factory keeps an unusual working time (from 1pm to 3am) and there is no regular leave, he spends almost all of his time inside the factory, only going out at around 3am after work to get some early breakfast before going to sleep. He likes listening to old Bangla songs on his mobile phone and also watches movies on his phone whenever he gets time. His passion, however, is politics and he lights up every time he talks about the different labour revolutions and some day hopes to be like his role model who is a leader of the Revolutionary Shoeworkers' League in his village.





This 17 year old trainee decided to join the Sudokkho training at the urging of his sister and brother-in-law who provided the initial funds for him to come to Dhaka and also suggested the course (plumbing) for him. For him, taking the training '*made sense*' as he had dropped out of school after failing his Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination, and this, his brother-in-law said, was a way for him to gain some skills and go overseas to earn money. He is also enrolled in a building painting training course at another training centre as he believes this will increase the chances of him getting a job. When he is not attending training classes, he likes to play cricket and watch Hindi and Tamil movies late into the night on his 64 GB smart phone.

**Table 2: Profile of the youths<sup>9</sup>**

Year	Sudokkho/Non-Sudokkho	Gender	
		Male	Female
Year 1	Sudokkho	1	-
		3	1
		2	1
Year 2	Sudokkho	2	1
		2	-
		2	2
	Non-Sudokkho	1	-
		5	-
Total		20	7

Rural
Peri-urban
Urban

<sup>9</sup>A more detailed profile of the youths is provided in Annex 4.

# A LOOK AT OUR YEAR 1 TRAINEES



## A Look at Our Year 1 Trainees

Our Year 1 families were eager to share and update us on the changes that had happened in their lives over the course of one year. These were changes they thought were significant within the context of their daily lives .

Of the eight Year 1 trainees, only three were employed in the same industry for which they had done the training in 2016 (see Table 3). As discussed in the Year 1 report<sup>10</sup> youths had joined different training courses as a ‘filler’ while waiting for a job that was a better fit with what they wanted. In other cases, there was no intention of being employed in the sector, or family obligations demanded they not work after finishing the training. Even for some of those who had wanted to work in the same sector after the training, family pressure was on finding a better job. One electrical trainee was doing odd jobs in an electronics service centre and even though he expressed dissatisfaction as this was not an office job and instead he was ‘making house calls’, he explained that the Sudokkho training had helped him start his career in his chosen field. He shared that he had done the Sudokkho training to gain practical learning which had been lacking in his electrical diploma course. He now planned to join a BSc electronics degree course at the urging of his father in the hopes of finding a better job. Another 17 year-old electrical trainee had dropped out of school in grade 9 and was spending his time doing small electrical jobs around the village, although his parents were planning to send him to Saudi Arabia (box 2).

One former mason trainee had found a regular job under a contractor, whereas previously he had worked as a daily worker. He shared with us that along with doing mason work, he was also working as a rod binder, a skill he had learned by working on the job with a skilled *mistry*. He proudly told us about how he had worked under this contractor to build a six-storied building last year, and this year our researchers<sup>11</sup> went with him to his present work-site, another six-storied building where he is managing helpers. The researchers also met one of the trainers from the training centre where the mason did his training and were told, ‘he (trainee) has now become a big man and has money’.

Two of the trainees (one man, another woman) had recently had babies and another was expecting one soon and for all three of them, this addition to their family had impacted their job situation in considerable ways. While for one woman, having a baby had coincided with losing her job in a garment factory (box 1), the man (same trainee who had tried unsuccessfully to find a job at an electronics store) had not been able to find a job for himself ever since the training centre where he was doing his SMO training abruptly closed down the programme. Contrary to 2016, where he had told us the Tk 10,000 he earned as a caretaker for his aunt’s house was enough to support the family, with a new baby to support and a 5 year-old son who had recently started school, his biggest worry now was about finding a job that would supplement this income. He contin-

**Table 3: Year 1 trainees**

Trainee	Gender	Training	Continuing in sector	Changed sectors	Notes
1	Male	Mason	✓		Also learnt rod binding on-the-job
2	Female	SMO			Hasn’t work since giving birth to baby
3	Female	SMO		✓	Part time teacher at a <i>madrassa</i>
4	Male	SMO			Looking for a job
5	Male	SMO		✓	Works as a security guard
6	Male	SMO			Continuing with his Diploma degree
7	Male	Electrical	✓		
8	Male	Electrical	✓		

<sup>10</sup> Page 26, Training Experiences, Expectations and Perceptions, Year 1 Report.

<sup>11</sup> An international researcher accompanied by a translator.

ually expressed his frustration of not having found a job and shared with us that he had joined another training centre (non- Sudokkho course) to learn how to stitch jeans, but was not able to complete the training as he had to travel a distance to reach there making him constantly late for classes. The trainer too lost interest in teaching and left the training centre to find a job for himself in a garment factory.

Another former woman trainee from Year 1 had lost her mother-in-law recently and was expecting a baby. When we met her in 2016, she worked as a volunteer teacher at a BRAC (national NGO) school, but now, at the insistence of her husband, was working as a part-time teacher at her older daughter's *madrassa* and hoped to be joining as a full-time staff after her baby was born. Although she had been encouraged to join the Sudokkho SMO training by her husband and brother-in-law, they had disapproved of the idea of her working in a garment factory after the training was complete. She shared with us that *'in my family I am not allowed to disobey the orders of my husband'* and *'his decision is final'*, explaining the reason for not taking up work in garments. In 2016, she had been borrowing her sister-in-law's sewing machine to sew clothes for the family and neighbours and earning some money from this. This had changed this year as after her mother-in-law died, her brother-in-law had moved his family to a new house and the sister-in-law had taken her sewing machine along.

Two of the former SMO trainees were still studying to finish their diploma in textiles and whereas one wanted a job in a textiles factory after finishing his diploma, the other is working as a security guard at the airport. Both of the trainees had been enrolled in a four-year textiles diploma course at the training centre and while the first had joined the Sudokkho course after being encouraged by the training cen-

tre owner, the other had thought it might *'help in my future'* if he did the training. Both shared that they had no aspiration to join the RMG industry.

1

### Baby care

My 'sister' (21) told me how she tried to get a job in the EPZ after finishing the training as a sewing machine operator but was unsuccessful because she had no contacts or money, especially as her father died when she was young. So a month after completion of the Sudokkho training she went back to her previous employment, which she had quit to join the training. The work she said was hectic and poorly paid but she felt she had no choice (See Box 20, page 27, Year 1 report).

After a few months, the garment factory she was working in suddenly closed; the owners had removed all the machineries from the building without any notice. She still had three months due salary unpaid. With the help of others like her she managed to get paid but because she was pregnant, she did not look for work in another factory and has not worked since.

She now has a baby girl and her in laws are disappointed it is not a boy. They have not bothered to see the baby although she is now a month old. The baby is ill and she confessed that she felt tired taking care of the baby alone as her husband does little to help. At night he slaps or kicks her and shouts at her to quiet the baby when she cries so that he can sleep. He is moody and has become listless, she thinks because the baby is a girl. He is a rickshaw driver but hardly ever goes to work. The medical costs for the baby are mounting and my 'sister' is unable to work.

Field Notes, Y1/4 peri-urban

### Family responsibilities of a teenager

2

Mahin's father went overseas to work as a mason before he was born and he only met his father for the first time when he was four years old, when he visited for a month laden with gifts, toys and chocolates. At six years old, he went to kindergarten with his friends from the village and then went to a government primary school a short distance from home. His father visited again when he was nine.

He completed primary school and then went to secondary school about 20 minutes from home and recalls that many people left the village for overseas work at this time. All his friends had toys, model cars and trains and battery-operated dolls that their fathers brought from overseas. Mahin found he had an aptitude for mending these toys when they were broken, although he admits that this was not always successful. But this was the beginning of his interest in electronics and mechanics and he looked up to his role model, an electrician who installed the lights and fans in their new home.

Completing grade 8 in 2016, his parents actively encouraged him towards pursuits which would keep him from friends who were smoking, drinking alcohol and consuming locally produced marijuana. One of his friends was enrolled in Sudokkho training, which he had seen advertised in a local newspaper and suggested this to Mahin. He spoke to his parents and with the help of his uncle who is a school teacher, he enrolled and paid the Tk 6,000 costs (for fees, food and accommodation).

Meanwhile, his father's salary was withheld for seven months by the company he worked for in Saudi Arabia, and there was no more remittance. The family racked up Tk 23,000 debt and Mahin was barred from completing his grade 9 exams because of non-payment of exam fees (Tk 1,300) and so his mother pressured him to quit and take a job. He got a job in a fan factory where he assembled the coils, but he told me he found it hot and noisy and he had to walk there every day- so he quit. He is now doing odd electrical jobs around the village and earning Tk 3,000-4,000/month.

Many of the villagers who work in the same company as Mahin's father have been sent back and the family is now worried that Mahin's father too will lose his job. Mahin is planning to sell his mobile phone to raise the money to go back to school but his family is pressurizing him to apply to go to Saudi Arabia as his father might be sent home soon. His sister is mentally challenged and needs care. He feels pulled by the dream to become an electrical engineer and the need to look after his family although he is only 17 years old.

Field Notes, Y1/3 rural



# CHOICES





# Choices

## 1. How do Youths View Work?

Many young men and women in the different study locations explained to us that they are in their current occupations primarily to earn money and refer to the increasing daily demands for cash. People say they work to be able to earn enough cash and one day *'live a peaceful life, a life without tension'* (van driver, Y2/A3 rural). Cash is needed to pay rent and for utilities, buy food, for recreation and mobile credit. For those with the responsibility of supporting older parents who cannot work anymore or who are farmers with no steady source of cash, and contributing to the education costs of their children or siblings (see box 4), being able to earn enough to provide for their families is an additional worry. This worry was constantly echoed not just by men and women who are living and working in the greater Dhaka area, but also by those who are in the rural locations, where people say opportunities for earning cash is limited because of fewer industries and fewer waged jobs.

Many, especially young men see the work they are doing now as a *'means to an end'* rather than a job with career prospects. As shared by some people in 2016, this 'end' for them was saving enough to start a business of their own. For example, one construction worker who earns Tk 600 a day as a senior mason told us that he had been sending as much as Tk 6,000 each month to his father in the village who was saving some of this money to invest in a mango grove.<sup>12</sup> In five years' time the man hoped to be able to save enough to lease a mango grove. Other young men we chatted with thought working overseas was an ideal way to save enough to start a business, like one man who had a diploma in automobile engineering and wanted to go to Italy as he had heard there were no work restrictions for foreigners there. He wanted to return to Dhaka in eight to ten years and be the *'boss'* of an auto-workshop.

3

### Keeping a track of credit

Most people in our study location work in garment factories and receive their wages at the end of the month. Shopkeepers here told us that they keep a ledger of what people buy on credit so they can collect their money when the workers receive their pay. Sometimes workers run up so much debt that they can only pay half the amount in a month.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

4

### Bringing up children in Dhaka

I spent considerable amount of time with a 28 year old woman who has been living in Dhaka for the past ten years. Her husband left her for another woman and now she has the sole responsibility of her two children. She used to work in a garment factory earlier, but left the job to start her own tailoring business so she could *'make a decent amount of money to bring up her children well'*.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban



Many youths shared they work to earn cash.

<sup>12</sup> Leasing a grove of thirty to forty trees for three years would cost Tk 80,000 to 1 lakh.

Consistent with what people told us in 2016, men and women we talked with say they are working to be able to return to their villages and ‘buy land and build a house’ and working in Dhaka and elsewhere (see boxes 5 and 6) is a means to do this. Many see owning land and concrete homes in their villages as a sign of status and as one mason put it, ‘I’m with this contractor like a leech only to get my reputation as a mistry (skilled worker)’ after which he plans to move back home to his village as a skilled labourer and build a house for his family. For another woman working in a garment factory in Dhaka is a way to save money to ‘buy some land back home’.

Whilst some youths say that work is a ‘time filler’ that they can take up as opposed to sitting idle at home, there are others who view the work they do as a series of jobs until they find one job that suits them the best. Some are like a young man we met who is working as a helper in the electrical section of a spinning mill and hopes the job can help him gain experience to get another job more consistent with his education (Diploma in electronics), while another former trainee we met in 2016 is working as a private security guard at the airport and hopes to be able to get a government job through work networks he is making at his current job.

Very few actually think of their current jobs in terms of a ‘career’. Career jobs, people note are government or ‘office’ jobs and other jobs that they have taken the time to establish themselves in, for example, as a senior *mistry* or contractor in the construction business. Others, like the seventeen year-old boy in one our households, think career jobs are those in which they have had an interest for a long time. For him, it means being a senior electrician in his village, a dream of his since primary school. For others still, even having the interest is not enough unless they can set up a business around this interest, like another seventeen year-old electrical trainee who wants to start a computer shop.



Government and defence jobs are preferred by the youths.

### Going overseas to fulfil dreams

5

Though ‘my family’ is local to the area, they don’t have their own home. This bothers my household mum so much that she seldom invites her relatives and friends to the family’s rented room. She has worked in the garments industry on and off for many years, but now wants to go overseas to Saudi Arabia so she can earn enough money to build a house when she returns.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban



Some people are working to be able to return to their village and build a house.

## 2. Job Preferences

During conversations with youths across study locations, the research team tried to understand how they weighed the different job options available to them and their preferences for these. In these different conversations, youths mentioned a broad range of criteria they use to make job choices. These include shorter working hours, particularly compared with garment workers who work 12-hour shifts, less harassment, status, respect, better pay, guarantee of regular income, and the freedom and flexibility to work when and as they pleased. Keeping these in mind, the study team ranked the different job opportunities according to what people said was their most and least preferred jobs. The ranking (Table 4) was done by the team members post field work and draws on multiple conversations with youths and older people across the different study locations.

### UN Peacekeeping a way to earn money

6

I met a 22 year-old young man who works in the Bangladesh army. He told me he wished to join the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Africa where he could earn Tk 1,000,000-1,500,000 in a year. He said when he returned in a year he would use this money to buy land in his village for his family, open a shop and buy a boat for himself.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban

<sup>13</sup> Government jobs requiring Bachelors or Masters level education.

**Business as a realisable dream**

7

I was talking to a group of men who were sitting at a teashop and discussing why they thought doing business was a good option. One man who was a machine operator at a factory shared that two of his friends used to work in a *burqa* factory until a few years ago. Both of them now have their own shops where they sell *burqas* and earn more money than they had earned in the factory. He said looking at them made him realise that business was a good way to earn money and is now planning to invest in his father-in-law's mango supply business.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

**'You cannot do well for your family if you don't go overseas.'****Mother of a migrant worker, Y1/3**

As shared with us in Year 1, the preference for a government job was clear among the youths across all study locations. While many associate government jobs with permanency saying it meant being '*secure for a lifetime*', others are drawn to it because of the financial security it provides. Some young men we chatted with thought government jobs now were better paid compared to the past and even those working in second and third class government jobs<sup>13</sup> earn per month '*Tk 20,000, compared to those working in garments who earn a lot less than that*'. Others saw the promise of pension in their old age as an advantage and as one man put it, '*even sweepers in the City Corporation get pensions*'.

Young men and boys also told us that government and defence jobs like army and police means status and prestige (see Box 6). A group of young boys and girls in the Y1/3 rural location explained their motivation to stay in school was driven by the example of 14 young men and women from the village who are currently in university and are '*sure to get government jobs*' after graduation. One of the boys in this group had been out of school when the researcher had been there last year, but had now re-joined regular classes.

Many other youths across locations shared their experience of meeting young men from their villages who were in the police and army and the sense of power and status they radiate when they return home. People told us it did not matter to the villagers if these were mere constables or soldiers, what mattered was the status associated with the job. Like many others, one young man shared with us his dream to be a policeman as they '*have a lot of power. No one messes around with the police*'.

People likewise related having an 'office' job with regular timings and fixed salary to status. While one man who serviced sewing machines wanted '*an office with many people working for me*' and '*have a separate space for clients to sit*', others thought having had a fixed office job for some time could be a '*reference for getting other jobs*'.

Having their own businesses was also what young men and women told us they aspired to. While for men this means a variety of different things they could do, such as start a small business like a tea or grocery shop, or like the youth

**Living in Dhaka confers status**

8

I had a conversation with a group of people from different professions about status conferred on those living in Dhaka city. Even though the area is geographically Gazipur, people see this as a part of Dhaka City. One man shared, echoing others, that people in his village regard him with respect because he lives and works in Dhaka. He said that parents looking for a husband for their daughters prefer guys who live and work in Dhaka. These 'Dhaka people' are assumed to hold a permanent job and they earn more money than people in the village where they are mostly farmers only able to raise cash at harvest times twice a year. Parents think their daughters will be happy and won't have to worry about money, because their husbands would have salaries paid at the end of every month. He said that parents also like future sons-in-law who work abroad, also earning well and with a regular income.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

above who wanted to start a mango supply business; women, particularly those who could sew, told us they wanted to start a small sewing business from home, making clothes for their relatives and neighbours. People explained to us that this was a more realisable dream than getting a government job as they had seen their own friends and relatives start up small businesses and do well for themselves (see box 7). Some thought having one's own business meant more freedom to work the hours they choose, and though it came with risk of failure, also more money and a chance at savings. Others in a different location seemed to think that investing in a small business initially was a '*smart idea*' as it would be a small investment and even if the business failed, the financial loss would not be a great one.

One shopkeeper in Y2/B3 peri-urban location who previously worked in a garments factory told us that starting his own business gave him the flexibility to '*do as I want*' and he was happy to be able to sit and talk to his customers and '*drink cha (tea) with friends*'. Another teashop owner in the same location also echoed this adding that he felt a bond with the other shopkeepers in the area whom he saw every day and '*shared his joys and sorrows with*'. For both of them this by far outweighed the risk of their businesses failing.

Becoming '*rich*' by going overseas was something people referred to constantly in different conversations with us. As shared in 2016, young men and women saw overseas work as a way to make a lot more money and have savings. In the Y1/3 rural location where the trend of going overseas had been a livelihood strategy even last year, a group of women

## ***‘Work here (in Bangladesh) for one day is the same as fifteen days abroad’.***

### **Returnee migrant worker, Y1/3 rural**

told us they preferred sending their husbands and sons abroad to work as this meant a better salary and a more secure job. In a separate conversation with a woman who had two earning male members in Sri Lanka she explained to us that it was a good option for men to go abroad as *‘over here (Bangladesh) work is only in garments or construction and you get older and tired after a few years’*. Working in these local industries meant *‘eating only when you have the money’*. She saw overseas work as earning more money in a shorter time.

Those who had worked overseas in construction previously and others related to them explained to us that the intensity of work was much less there. Other men said that conditions were much safer overseas as carrying *‘a mix of sand and cement on the head up seven floors was unthinkable’* and the equipment they worked with was of good quality. Some in another Year 1 location told us that overseas companies were careful about the safety of their workers and had also started to include insurance provisions in their contract, while previously they did not. The same group of men who talked about work intensity being lower abroad also explained about the *‘warm up and cool down exercises’* that workers were made to do and that timings too were better as workers were not allowed to stay at the work site after 5pm.

Although people explained to us that there were many risks associated with going overseas (discussed below), most relate overseas work with ‘status’ as it means people have the money (anywhere between Tk 200,000 to 600,000) or the network to go abroad. People constantly reminded us that network was not only about having someone overseas who could arrange a job for them, but also networks in Bangladesh who could provide necessary support (loan, introduction/accompaniment to broker). A few others felt that working overseas meant not just the worker, but also his family getting respect from others. Some young men also thought that working abroad would increase their marriage prospects as parents of the bride felt they were capable of providing financial stability for their daughters, and other young men and women too liked them because *‘they came home wearing new clothes and shoes’*.

Many young men and women we chatted with emphasized that while overseas work was a good option for men, they did not think it a very safe option for women (see box 21). One 18 year-old girl who recently had to return home from Jordan after falling ill, told us about another girl she knew who had returned home pregnant and whom people speculated had been engaged in a prostitution racket. She explained that though she wanted to go back to Jordan again, her family was wary about sending her as they worried

about her safety. Another woman told us that those brokers who were sending women abroad for Tk 20,000 were, she believed in fact running a prostitution ring and if she went *‘people there will make me do bad things I don’t want to do’*.

Even in places where there is no EPZ people talked about their aspirations for working in EPZ factories. This was mostly among those men and women already working in Bangladeshi garment factories. Although most of them had never worked in the EPZ, they were interested to tell us about people who had, and in conversations would tell us why these jobs were better than the ones they were in. Many women shared with us that they had friends who had found jobs in the EPZ which paid much better than their wages from local garments factories. While it took longer (seven to eight months compared to three to four months in a local factory) for a helper to get promoted to a machine operator in EPZ, people told us the salary of a helper in EPZ was almost the same as that of a machine operator in a local factory. The salary of a machine operator too was higher in the EPZ factories (Tk 8,000 -10,000/month compared to Tk 6,000-7,000/month).

People also shared that the EPZ was ‘strict’ about following the government’s regulations on overtime and salary; unlike local garments factories which flouted regulations and made workers work till 7pm without overtime, people said the EPZ factories let the workers leave after 5pm. Likewise, all workers received their salary by the *‘7<sup>th</sup> of every month’*. Some liked that the factories inside the EPZ could not just sack workers if they were late to work or took unplanned leave but had to give three-month notice. Others said supervisors and managers were not very rude or abusive and workers could complain of any harassment to the ‘customs area’ that would be sure to handle their complaints.

While many of the young men and women we spoke with had jobs in garment factories, this, they told us was because these jobs were readily available compared with the jobs they actually preferred (see box 9). People said getting jobs in garment factories was not very difficult as no particular skill was required to work as a helper and all they had to do was stand outside factory gates. Many also thought that prospects of getting promoted from a helper to a machine operator were good in garment factories and only needed them to *‘work hard and learn quick’*. One woman told us her experience of having started as a helper with a salary of Tk 3,000/month (four years ago) and within three months had been promoted to a machine operator and earned Tk 5,000. A few young girls explained that once they learned to operate machines, they could shift to other fac-

tories for better salary or working environment. Other women thought working in factories (particularly garments) was one of the very few work options available to them.

For many construction workers, the idea of being skilled and the availability of construction jobs were what they liked the most about their work. While many senior *mistry* said they had started the trade as helpers and had built up necessary skills by working on the job under their *ustaad* (boss), younger helpers like a 14 year old boy who earned Tk 300 a day told us he '*wanted to be a rod mistry and earn Tk 500 a day*'. Though many emphasized that they needed to '*know the right people*' to find jobs, all agreed that the skills they had learned/were learning would secure them future jobs.

Others like one household brother who worked as a tiles *mistry* explained that as construction work was typically a waged job, it meant freedom and flexibility to work as they pleased. The tiles *mistry* told us that it was his decision to '*work a full day or half day*' and he would be paid according to how much he worked (Tk 800 for a full day's work, Tk 400 for half day). However, those that worked under contractors explained they did not have the freedom to work when they chose and had to be at the work-site each day.

On the other hand, construction work for women was not

thought to be a particularly good option. While many men explained to us that women did not work in construction as the work was physically difficult, some women themselves told us being engaged in 'a man's work (like construction)' meant they would be ridiculed by other women for doing such work and harassed by the men who worked they worked with.

**'I need to feed my family'**

9

As I sat outside the grocery shop that 'my brother' owned, I met a sewing machine operator who had not gone to work that day as he was ill. He told me he'd been having difficulties with his breathing because of the tiny cloth particles that flew around his workspace the whole day. I kept meeting him over the course of the next two days as his breathing problem persisted and he stayed away from work. We'd talk about his wife and children back in the village, and his life and work here in Dhaka. On my last day there I couldn't help but ask him, '*Why are you working in the garments when you hate it so?*' He said, '*You tell me...I've only studied till grade 5, but I have worked in this industry for 12 years- what other job can I find?*' and then pointing to his stomach he added, '*I need to feed my family*'.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

**Table 4: Job preference ranking**

Jobs	Reasons	Ranking
Government jobs including police and army/'Office' jobs	Status, permanency, salary, power, job and financial security, regular timings, timeliness in salary, pension	
Owning a business	Independence, flexibility, family involvement and support, more earnings	
Overseas work (for men)	Status, better marital prospects, better salary, better work conditions	
Working in EPZ factories	Better salary (than normal garment factories), comparatively better working conditions (including leave and over time)	
Owning land	Asset and status	
Garments work	Easily available jobs (even for unskilled people), promotion prospects	
Construction jobs (electrical, masonry, welding, plumbing, sanitary/tiles work and painting)	Available, skilled, minimal investment, reasonable working hours, flexibility/freedom to work as they choose if daily workers	
Auto-rickshaw drivers	OK money (especially if own auto), flexible timings and freedom to work when they want, but job lacks respect	
Van puller/rickshaw puller	Low status jobs that require physical strength	

### 3. Constraints in Exercising Preferences

#### The Need for Networks

Although young men and women shared their preference for specific jobs with us, they also acknowledged that there were certain constraints to finding the jobs they desired. One such constraint, people said, was not having the right networks. As we saw in 2016, these networks were usually made through informal channels like family members, relatives, friends, neighbours but we also heard of other people who had found jobs through ex-employees and colleagues.

Young men told us it was particularly difficult getting government jobs and jobs in the police and army without knowing the right people to approach. While one young man was relatively confident of finding at least a second class officer job at the *upazilla* (sub-district) office as his *'father is a caretaker at a government dak bungalow (guest house) and knows people in the upazilla office'*, others said knowing someone in the police or army was *'certain to get (them) a job as well'*.



Network is seen as important factor to get a job.

*'In Bangladesh, nothing is possible without Mama or Chacha (uncle).'*

A young man who applied to the army, Y1/4

10

#### Networks to find accommodation

Networks are needed not just to hear about work opportunities, but also to find accommodation in Dhaka. Many people we met told us they had decided to come to this particular area as they already knew someone who lived here who would either find accommodation for them before they arrived, or give them a place to stay for a while till they found their own quarters.

In one instance, we saw our household 'brother' negotiating with a landlord and posing as a guarantor on behalf of a young man who had just arrived from his village. 'Our brother' told us he had done this many times before as many who came from his village contacted him first.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

My household sister wanted to return to Dhaka and work in a sweater factory there. She knew from previous experience that she only needed to *'stand in front of the gates of the factory to get a job'* but was worried about finding a place to stay. She was going to call some relatives who lived in the general area and ask them to help her find accommodation.

Field Notes, Y2/A3 rural

#### Chasing jobs

Alamgir told me he came to Dhaka because he was having problems with his father. He said, his father isn't an easy man to deal with and they got into arguments. Before coming he contacted his wife's brother who was already in Dhaka. His brother in law was working in various construction sites as a sanitary mechanic and he worked with him. But the wage was too low and did not cover his expenses. So he quit and started pulling a rickshaw through a local garage owner, but after a while he found he could not do this every day as it was exhausting. A friend then suggested he collect jackfruit from Narsingdhi and took him there in his employer's pick up for a small contribution. Alamgir bought 400 jackfruits for about Tk 30 each and sold them in Dhaka for Tk 300 to 400 each from a hand-cart. While he now works in demolition of buildings, he thinks he should go back to doing business again that was the only time where he made good money.

Field Notes, Y2/ C1 urban

11

Many of those who wanted to work in the EPZ factories told us that one needed *'good connections'* to get jobs there. In one location, people explained that though some of these factories would advertise the vacant positions through banners posted outside the EPZ gates (see box 12), ensuring that they get the job would require knowing someone inside the factory. People also told us that it was possible to arrange a job interview with the manager of a factory, and this was done by family members, relatives or friends working in these factories. They would talk to the manager on the worker's behalf and he/she would ask them to come for an interview on a specific date. One Year 1 trainee who had told us about her dream to work in an EPZ factory last year, rued that she had lost her chance of getting a job at the EPZ as she had not kept a good connection with a fellow trainee who had found a job in the EPZ.

Like in the EPZ, people told us finding jobs in regular factories also required networks. Many told us that before leaving for Dhaka, they had contacted relatives or *'even just someone they vaguely knew from their village'* to enquire about the work situation and had left only after they had been convinced that they would be able to find a job. Others said that applying for a job in a factory was not a problem, they just needed someone to tell them about the vacancy and maybe *'put in a good word for them'*. Another young man who was doing a diploma in textiles told us he was worried that *'I do not have enough senior brothers (his seniors from the course)'* working in textile factories to find him a job, but hoped one senior with enough connections would be able to help him.

Many construction workers shared that their next job would typically be determined by the people they knew, either their previous or current employers or fellow workers. One daily waged labourer we had met in 2016 told us about his network of twelve workers, each of whom knows different contractors, factories and truck drivers and all of them can get work for themselves and the others through these networks. The group coordinate through mobile phones and have a verbal agreement that whoever gets a contract will involve the rest in the project and split the money among them. Another group of five rod binders told us they had been *'moving together from one job to another'* for two years and said the group now felt like a *'home'* for them.

### The local labour market

13

Close to the house I lived in there is a *'labour market'* for daily workers. A mason has a network of different people who require labour and contractors. When anyone in his network needs a daily labourer, they call him one day beforehand and let him know how many workers are needed. Every morning people who want daily labour work gather in front of his house and he finds them jobs. Even if people need a large group of workers for agricultural work they contact him and he can arrange a large number of workers. From time to time he also works as a sub-contractor for different jobs.

Field Notes, Y2/A3 rural

### Getting jobs at garment factories

12

In our location, people knew to stand outside the EPZ gates before 7am every morning if they were looking for a job. The managers from the factories that required workers would come out of the gates and choose some men and women, and either call them for an interview the very same day, or send them away with a piece of paper with the interview date and time written on it. Those who got the piece of paper returned on the said date for an interview and were allowed through the gates after the guards saw the piece of paper. People told us they would be asked at the interview to submit their papers (birth registration certificate or national ID card and educational certificate) and also interviewers would want to know if they knew how to operate sewing machines before hiring them for specific jobs.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban

Most people in our location knew that the largest garment factory in the area hired helpers between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of every month. Men and women told us all one had to do was stand outside the factory gates with their passport size photographs and national ID cards and they would get the job.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

One mason we met thought networks were developed by meeting people, and *'if you work in different places, you will meet different people- these will help you get other jobs'*. He further explained that he had got his current job in a seven-storied building through a contractor who was a friend of his previous *ustaad*. The contractor had liked his work and called him when this job came along.

While some men and women had or were planning to use the services of a broker (see below), most others told us the reason they wanted to go overseas was they had a family member or relative there who could be depended upon for accommodation, and in some cases to find jobs. Often people said relatives abroad would inform them of job vacancies in the companies they worked and ask them to apply in the company's *'local office'* in Bangladesh (often this was a broker/recruitment agency facilitating between the worker and the overseas company), or even talked to their company manager to arrange jobs for them. A group of young ship welders we talked with said they knew the demand for ship welders was high in Singapore from some of their relatives there. One man from their group had left for Singapore as his uncle there had convinced the company manager of his workmanship. The men further explained that the company of course would not hire the worker without a test, and this young man had to give a practical test before he was selected.

People also told us keeping a good reputation and maintaining honest relationships with those in one's network was very important to get jobs. Talking to one member from the aforementioned group of twelve workers, we were told that they had been cheated by one of the workers from the group who told them the contract was for Tk 6,000, when in reality it had been for Tk 8,000. He kept Tk 2,000 for himself. When the rest of the group found out, they decided to

**Maintaining good relationship gets things done**

**14**

Many women in my community told me it was necessary to maintain a good relationship with people, including landlords. One woman said she *'flirts'* (smiles and jokes) with her landlord sometimes so he would allow her relatives from the village to stay with her when they came. She admitted that she also flirted with those men who she thinks might be able to help her later- not just in finding a job, but also to find accommodation and give recommendations for her relatives who come looking for jobs.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban

exclude him from their network. Likewise, whilst living on a construction site with a mason, one researcher observed the building contractor getting calls from another contractor asking about a worker who had worked for him previously. The contractor later told the researcher that this happened frequently in the construction business and he usually made sure to give a good reference for his ex-workers, unless they were particularly bad.

Talking about their first time experience of coming to Dhaka, most young men and women mentioned that relatives and friends would refer them to those industries where they themselves were working as they had information related to these sectors. While many said they knew the wages they could hope to get even before leaving the village, rest of the information was woefully limited. Some told us they learnt about the working condition in factories only after starting work themselves. As one young worker in a shoe factory shared with us, he had only been informed by his uncle about the job and had to call the owner of the factory to get directions to the factory after reaching Dhaka and only found out about his wages after meeting the owner.

All but one youth from our host households had mobile phones (see table 5a and 5b) and they and many others shared the importance of mobile phones in maintaining work networks and getting information about work opportunities (see box 15). While many said they had phoned their contacts in Dhaka to look for work, one household mother in the Y2/C3 urban location told us that she regularly called her relatives back home and told them of the vacancies in the different factories inside the EPZ. Another woman construction worker who had missed a call from a colleague informing her of an opportunity worried about getting a new phone as she did not want to lose out on other work opportunities. Some young men from plumbing training and another man, all of whom had done diploma courses, told us they used their mobile phones to access a job search website to *'look for jobs that matched their diplomas'*.

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**Importance of cell phones to get work**

Nur Alam shared with me that having a mobile phone helped him a lot to get jobs in different places. In his village in Bogra he was unemployed and he used to hang out with some garage guys playing carom until his uncle caught him and beat him. After that incident, he left the village because he felt embarrassed because he didn't have a job whereas all his other friends did. This was in 2002 and the use of mobile phones was uncommon, but he made sure to have the phone number of his uncle in Dhaka who could help him find a job. He had to pay Tk 7 per minute to a man who owned a telephone booth to call his uncle's mobile phone. His uncle and cousin arranged a job for him in Bangla Motor where he worked for 4-5 years. The factory closed down and he and his cousin got work in the Mirpur area where he worked another year. After a year, he contacted one of his ex-employers at Bangla Motor having kept his business card, who invited Nur Alam to join his new factory, where he is currently working.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

**Table 5: Mobile phone ownership for Year 1 and Year 2 youths**

Y1 Locations	Youth 1	Youth 2	Youth 3
1 peri-urban	✓*	X	X
2 urban	✓	✓	✓
3 rural	✓	X	X
4 peri-urban	✓	✓	✓

\* = upgraded to a smartphone in year 2

Y2 Locations	Youth 1	Youth 2	Youth 3	Youth 4
A2 urban	X	✓	✓	X
A3 rural	✓	✓	✓	✓
B3 peri-urban	✓	✓	✓	X
C1 urban	✓	✓	X	X
C2 peri-urban	✓	✓	✓	✓
C3 urban	✓	✓	✓	X

Smartphone  
Regular phone



## ‘Need to know what plants to water for them to flower.’

Old woman talking about giving bribes, Y2/A2 urban

### The need for bribes

Many people told us that while having networks got them closer to the jobs they wanted, bribing someone was a way to ensure they got another step closer. As people had told us in 2016, paying bribes was particularly endemic in the government, not just to get some work done, but also to get a job. One old woman we spent considerable time with told us how even getting a job as a *peon* (office assistant) in the City Corporation is difficult as there are different levels of people who have to be bribed. She explained from experience that money for the bribe depended on the job one wanted, but it was usually ‘a lot of different people who benefitted from the money’. Another man seemed to think that government employees were always on the lookout for those families with young and educated people who wanted government jobs and who could pay a bribe for these jobs.

Another young trainee shared with us that his brother-in-law had been helping him scout for jobs for some time. Recently he applied for a government job in railway section for which the railway official demanded Tk 60,000 bribe. Before this contact fell through, the brother-in-law had already paid Tk 15,000 and now the family was worried about getting this money back. Another trainee told us about his parent’s hopes for him to get a police job, but said that since they did not have the required network, there were less chances of him getting the job unless they were able to bribe someone. He added that the asking rate to get a job as a constable was Tk 500,000.

People shared that bribing was pervasive not just for getting government jobs, but also regular jobs in private companies (see box 17) and garment factories. People explained this recent change saying this was a result of increasingly more youths from villages trying to get jobs in garment factories in the cities, which created more demand for these jobs. In one peri-urban location, one man shared that he had got his job as a helper in a garment factory by paying Tk 3,000 to a broker who had bribed an official inside the factory. This official had then selected the man from the queue outside the gate. Other men and women in the EPZ location also told us that people gave money and gifts like sweets, snacks and shirts to garment supervisors

#### Network to rent out a rickshaw

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I was hanging around a rickshaw garage talking to different rickshaw pullers who came to park their rickshaw there. All of them told me the first time they had wanted to take out a rickshaw, they had to ask someone from the neighbourhood to introduce them to the garage owner as ‘someone who had a good reputation’ and be their guarantor. They said it was the same for someone who wanted to work as a CNG (auto-rickshaws that run on compressed natural gas) driver or van puller.

Field Notes, Y2/C1 urban

to get interview dates for jobs and, also to get recommendation or references for better jobs in the factory.

### Being or looking the ‘right age’ and ‘modern’

Young men and women also shared that their age and looks were at times a constraint to getting desired jobs. A 17 year-old from one of ‘our families’ wants to join the army but was not sure if he would be able to as he did not meet the height requirement. Another young man shared similar worries, ‘I’m growing older (20) but not taller’. It is common knowledge that the upper age limit to apply for government jobs is 30 years old, but others shared that age limits were also prevalent in private companies.

Many women working in garments told us how factories preferred ‘girls that look like they have grown up’ and wanted women who looked the right age and were tall so as to ‘impress the buyers’. Others said that it was easy for girls as young as 13 years old to find a job in the garment industry if they looked bigger, older and had a birth registration certificate<sup>14</sup> that showed they were of age. One of our households had a 14 year-old working in a factory at the EPZ, and another of the same age, hoped to be able to join in six month’s time; both were ‘bigger’ girls. Many explained that foreign garment factories did not

#### The bribe that didn’t work

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‘My brother’ who had done the Sudokkho SMO training last year told me of his experience of trying to get a job as a product checker at a store in Dhaka. He had been informed about the job by a friend, who also put him in touch with a person at the store. After borrowing Tk 10,000 from his aunt to pay as a bribe, he went for the interview. Three days later, the contact left his job at the company having taken the bribe. ‘My brother’ was then told he could not fill the post as he was seven years over the age requirement (32 years).

Field Notes, Y1/4 peri-urban

<sup>14</sup> Birth registration certificates can be easily obtained from the *upazilla* office by verbally stating one’s age to the officer in charge of making the certificate. No documents are required to verify people’s actual age.

In one urban location, women told us the pressure to look good was so much that some of them were drinking a locally-made alcohol which, they believed, made them look fairer and caused their skin to glow. Others expressed that it was necessary to look 'smart' and 'healthy' to get a job in a garments factory and those who were neither, like the woman we met who had once suffered from tuberculosis and had applied to 25 different factories, would find it difficult to get a job. Another woman told us she was trying to eat more protein and taking iron and calcium supplements, as she needed her health to be good when applying for work in another factory.

For construction workers like masons, rod binders and painters, work opportunities are constrained by age. Many people we talked with told us that since construction work is hard, required energy, and physical strength, it was not possible to continue work after reaching a certain age and 'older people cannot progress higher, only younger can pro-

gress'. For example a 50 year-old brother-in-law of one of our neighbours whom we met last year has stopped working as a mason's helper and another mason from one of our Year 1 families' shared his worries about providing for his family 'if his body stopped supporting him' when he grew older.

Others told us that constant physical exertion and working in the sun took a toll on a person's body and it was impossible to do construction work for ten years at a stretch. We also met a few young men working in construction who had begun to think of alternate jobs for when they were older. While one wanted to work as a contractor with others working under him, another 26 year-old said he wanted to go to Saudi Arabia and work there as a driver work there as a driver recognising that by the time he was 35 years old he would not have the energy to work as hard as he was working now and becoming a driver was 'less physical work'.

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### Pressure to be 'modern'

Sakina (28) came to Dhaka 10 years ago with her husband. They were a newly married couple back then, with very little amount of financial support. She decided to get a job in garments sector as a helper. She managed all necessary papers to apply for the job and waited outside the gates of different garment factories. Even after waiting outside different factories for a month, she was not able to find a job. Some of her friends who worked in garments told her she was not getting a job because she was not 'modern' enough.

One day she decided that it would be the last day she would try for a job. She borrowed faded jeans, a 'dandy' blouse and a pair of high heels from her neighbour and took her papers to stand in wait at the gates of one of the factories she had been to a few times previously. She says even before she reached the gates, one man came to her and asked her if she needed a job in the factory. He was a supervisor. When she agreed, he took her to the sewing section of the factory and told her to start working as a helper.

Her younger sister Runa (21) also described how she feels pressurised to look 'smart' to enter the job market. She told me of the time when she went with her sister to Bashundhara City Shopping Mall to be interviewed for a job as a salesgirl at a cosmetics store. The employer took a look at her and declined to hire her. When the sisters asked why he was rejecting Runa, the man showed them a girl coming down an escalator and told them, 'Look at that girl's shoes. Do you know how much they cost? At least TK 1,500-2,000. Look at her dress- it costs at least TK 5,000-6,000. But she is a poor man's daughter. Then how does she manage to maintain a lifestyle like this, do you know?' He went on to add that the girl was a salesgirl at one of the stores in the mall and in her spare time moonlighted as an escort. He explained to the sisters that to get work in the different stores in the mall, salesgirls had to appeal to the customers, particularly the men. 'But your sister wears a burqa, she wishes to remain good'.

After this incident, Runa tried to get jobs in different places, including a bank where her cousin worked, but even with her HSC certificate and her on-going degree at a college, she was constantly rejected by prospective employers. She says she has recently stopped wearing a burqa and though she feels uncomfortable without it, is slowly getting used to it. When telling me of her job search she asks, 'it is written in Hadith that a woman who maintains purdah is like fresh coconut water inside coconut shell. On the other hand, woman who walks on the road without proper clothes is like a peeled-off banana. But yet they ask me to dress smartly. Why? Can't I get a job without being like the rest of the other girls?' When I met her, she was still trying to get a job.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban



Youths shared to us that their educational background would be a barrier in getting their preferred jobs.

## Having the 'right' education

Young men and women who had not been able to complete their Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) had accepted that their job options were limited with many telling us that jobs in the government, army and police were now out of their reach. Some like the 23 year-old plumbing trainee who was *madrassa*-educated, thought their educational background would be a barrier in finding government or defence jobs. He explained that the government did not provide many opportunities to *madrassa*-educated students as they were thought to have potential terrorist links. He wanted to get a job in the police but thought the only opportunity he now had was to bribe someone.

Others who wanted to study further told us about the costs associated with doing so with one trainee telling us that after his HSC he wanted to study computer at Bachelors level, but getting admitted into a public university was tough and private university would '*cost a lot*'. He said his father earned Tk 8,000 a month as a driver and he himself was making only '*a little*' by working at a computer shop and hoped that his uncle who was a dealer in cigarettes would be able to support his education. In a similar case, another Year 1 trainee who also has a diploma in electronics wanted a job as an assistant engineer at the Ministry of Defence but said he needed to get BSc degree for that. The BSc degree is a three-year course and will cost Tk 250,000 . He was hoping his father would be able to pay for this somehow.

A few parents seemed to think that higher education created unattainable expectations for their children and one father explained to us why he did not want his son to study beyond SSC. He thought that if his son studied up to HSC level, he would want to be engaged in jobs that matched his education and think that jobs in factories or construction were below him. This father further went on to say that finding '*an educated person's job*' in Bangladesh was difficult without networks and bribes and there were chances his son would end up working in a factory

and feeling frustrated because of this .

Indeed many young men who had diplomas seemed to think that they were overqualified for jobs in garments and other factories and workshops. One young man who worked as a helper in the electrical section of a spinning mill (which required minimum Grade 8 completion) told us that because he had not been able to find a job as a senior electrician in several garment factories, he had applied for his current job as an electrician's helper. He had, initially, been rejected for the job for being overqualified, and then when he finally got it, he himself was not happy as his other friends with diploma in electronics are earning as much as Tk 20,000 as senior electricians in other garment factories while his salary as an electrician's helper is a mere Tk 5,300.

Another boy with a diploma in automobile engineering said he had left his job in an auto garage after a month as he felt he was better than the rest of the workers (who were school dropouts and learning by working) because he had a diploma. He was now looking for a job at an electrical company where '*educated men work*'. Some other construction trainees we met had diplomas and told us they did not want jobs as workers in local construction sites, but would rather get a BSc degree and get jobs at par with site engineers.

## Family expectations

Many young men and women shared that obligations to their families often had an impact on their choice of work. While this depends much on the family's financial circumstances, the person's position within the family also plays a significant part. As seen in Year 1, the eldest children, irrespective of their gender, often felt pressure to support the family financially and put their siblings through school, like the eldest of four siblings, an 18 year-old SMO trainee told us she had '*forgotten my dream to be in the police*' when she dropped out of school in Grade 8 to save tuition costs so that her three younger siblings could continue

their education.

However, we also met many middle or younger children who said they were working to keep the pressure off their older siblings and parents. One such boy was a quiet 10 year-old brother of one of our families who had dropped out of school two months previously and was now working as a helper in an auto garage. His 16 year-old brother who is in Grade 10, had refused to drop out of school despite his father's insistence as he thought he would be able to do better for the family if he studied further. It had then fallen upon the younger brother to learn a trade so he could start supporting the family's income in a few years (see box 19).

Another 17 year-old plumbing trainee told us that he was doing the training to get a job so he could take the family's responsibilities off his elder brother. He explained that though his elder brother had been a good student, he had not been able to study after HSC as he had started working to support their family. After finishing the training, the trainee wanted to go abroad and earn money so he could send his older brother (now 21 years old) to university. He shared with us his love for dancing and how he used to earn money in the village by dancing at weddings, but said he stopped when he realised dancing would not support his family financially.

We also heard of many elder sisters who, though married, were still supporting the family, either through paying for younger siblings' education, sending money to elderly parents and gifts like phones and laptops to siblings, and in some cases, living with the family and taking care of them. The same SMO trainee who had wanted to be a policewoman had moved, along with her husband and toddler, to her parent's home ever since her mother had left for Saudi Arabia three months ago. She explained that as her youngest sister was only seven and still in school, her parents had asked her to move so she could help with the chores in the mother's absence. She said her daily chores (cooking, washing, cleaning for the family of seven and also looking after her baby) took up most of her time and the only time she had to herself were the three hours she was at the training. The married elder sister of another one of our trainees too was helping her family by paying for his training cost and her husband was looking for jobs for our trainee.

In Y2/C3 urban location, we met a few young boys and girls who had been kept out of school by their parents to look after their younger siblings and/or older sibling's children while the parents went to work in garment factories. One such girl is a 13 year-old SMO trainee who is the second eldest of four siblings. As her mother works long hours in the nearby garment factory, the girl is responsible for cooking for the family and looking after her newborn brother (see box 46). A few mothers here explained to us that there were no other options but to keep the children from school as they worked in garment factories that typically had long hours and overtime and there was no one else to look after the younger children.

While a few young men expressed hesitancy to get married as it meant taking on responsibility for another person, those married with families shared how they had had to keep some of their dreams on hold and put their families first. One man from a Year 1 family told us how he had

### Discouraged but finding inspiration from self-help books

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My 'brother' who is 16 and in grade 10 shared that he always wants to learn something new. As we (my interpreter and I) were talking in English; he wanted to talk to us in English. A few years ago, his teacher had told him that if he wanted to have better English, he should practice talking in English. So he started talking in English at home. His attempts to practice in his house did not go down well with his mother who said she doesn't have time to listen to his English and there wasn't anyone else at home to practice with. He tried to practice in school, but his friends in his class just shut him off and made fun of him so he stopped. That's where the English language practice stopped.

He said he often used to play cricket and other games until he began to think this was a time waster and now focuses more on his study, even though his father is not encouraging him because he cannot afford his education. He tells us because he refused to drop out of school, his father forced his younger brother to drop out. He is determined to complete his SSC exam and study further as he thinks he can get a better job when he is educated. But without encouragement from his family, he seeks out self-help books. He likes to read the books of Del Carnegie and Shiv Kherra's "You Can Win". He told us those books help him to be focused on his objectives and inspire him.



Field Notes, Y2/C1 urban

wanted to buy a motorbike and ride it back to his village. He had managed to save Tk 8,000 to buy the motorbike, but then realised that it was an 'unrealistic dream' as he had other responsibilities towards his wife and children. Another man joked with us that 'one day I want to be seen riding a motorbike with my dark-skinned wife', but said before that he needed to 'fill the three empty bottles of oil (oil for cooking, kerosene for the lamp and hair oil)' that his wife had given him that morning.

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**Decreasing costs to go to the Middle East**

Some men in our location told us the costs for going to the Middle East had decreased (from about Tk 1,000,000-700,000) in recent years because of the different wars, as families were hesitant to send their male members to these countries. People seemed to think that as less men and women wanted to go to the Middle East, the agencies and brokers had lowered their cost demands.

Field Notes, Y1/3 rural

**Costs and risks in working overseas**

In almost all our conversations with people who wanted to work overseas, they shared with us the costs and risks associated with going abroad. As explained above, while many saw working overseas as an option because they had relatives or friends working there, others sought the help of brokers to process papers and find jobs for them. These brokers, in most cases, were those they knew through relatives, friends, neighbours, or someone who had used the service before.

People told us the broker cost for going overseas varied for men and women with men having to pay between Tk 125,000 to 700,000, while it was much lower for women (Tk 150,000 to 200,000). Many seemed to think that if the asking amount was small (Tk 125,000 to 150,000, mainly for countries in the Middle East) (see box 20), the jobs they found abroad would not be the better paying ones (less than Tk 20,000 a month) and said they preferred to go abroad on a 'free visa' (one that cost about Tk 600,000 to 700,000) as that meant they could find better jobs for themselves once there.

Men and women told us they financed the broker, visa and ticket costs in many different ways. The most common and preferred way was managing the money through family members and relatives, as the money could be borrowed for short term (six months) without paying any interest and the borrower could show their appreciation to them by sending gifts like smart phones from abroad. Others said they could borrow money from the 'rich people in the village' at a certain interest rate, which varied (from 12 to 20 percent per annum) depending on whom they were borrowing from. People also told us that the interest was usually higher on shorter-term loans.

Many expressed a feeling of vulnerability when telling us that they had to mortgage or sell their family land to manage money for going overseas. While people said they tried to avoid selling their land as much as they could, there were still some who were doing this as their options were limited. One neighbour from one of our Year 1 locations looked very stressed this year as he told us as he needed Tk 600,000 to go to Saudi Arabia. He had mortgaged his land (Tk 100,000), borrowed Tk 85,000 from one relative and Tk 100,000 from another relative who worked in a bank and had some personal savings. Even then he was short of Tk 200,000 and was worried that he would have to 'destroy my property' by selling some of his land.

In 2016 people in the Y1/3 rural location had told us selling land and borrowing money from moneylenders (with some paying an interest of 20 percent) to finance the cost of going overseas was a common occurrence. This practice had changed from last year with the same people now telling us that villagers were taking loans from a bank in the nearby town. They thought it a 'safer' option as the interest rate was only 16 percent and as both parties had 'official papers' they heard less threats (from the bank) about their property being confiscated.

Others had met or heard of people who had been cheated by brokers while trying to go abroad and two of our team members sat in on a teashop discussion where a group of men were cautioning the same neighbour who was worried about having to sell some of his land to finance the cost. They gave the example of the teashop owner who had been cheated of Tk 120,000 by a broker and had not been able to get this money back. While some rationalised that the neighbour's visa was being arranged by his relative, others advised him 'not to be sure until you get into the airline, or into the country'.

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**Dreaming to go overseas**

'My sister' (29) dreams of going overseas. She has, in fact, tried to go twice. The first time she tried for Qatar, she didn't tell anyone in her family, as she knew they wouldn't approve. She gave Tk 5,000 (that she had saved from her garments earnings) to her paternal uncle who arranged for her passport and ticket. A week before she was to leave, a cousin died and the family got together for mourning. The uncle let it slip to her mother that she was leaving. Knowing this, her mother locked her up in the house and she was given regular beatings.

She is now married and trying to go to Saudi Arabia this time. She has already paid Tk 8,000 to the broker (who is her neighbour) for a new machine readable passport, but the broker, under pressure from her mother and husband, has not given her the passport. The husband does not want her to go to as he's heard about women being forced to work as prostitutes there. 'My sister' does not know what else she can do.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban

Often people also told us that going through a recruitment agency or brokers meant working under uncertain conditions than what was expected and we met a man who had been sent to Saudi Arabia as a construction worker but had ended up working as a gardener for the same company. In the Year 1 rural location many men who had been working in Saudi Arabia last year had recently returned home. While some said they had come back voluntarily, others told us the companies were sending back those workers who had been working there for a long time. Many of those who had come back said their salaries had been withheld for some months before they were sent back home. One of our families was worried that the father who was in Saudi Arabia would be sent back home and that 'one morning we might wake up and father will be at the door' (see box 2).



# THE REALITIES OF WORK



# The Realities of Work

While the previous section described the various constraints faced by young men and women to get their preferred jobs, this section describes the reality they face in terms of the jobs they are actually engaged in, mainly those within construction and garment industries. People were keen to share with us their views and experience of working in these sectors and how they ended up in this work. They chatted about the real costs and constraints they faced while working and the work within these industries that they preferred.

Given the constraints of low education, weak networks and little bribing power, most youth we interacted with have to accept less than their aspirations. But nevertheless they still exercise agency where they can in getting jobs with what they referred to as ‘freedom’ and an acceptable wage. They frequently move jobs in order to achieve these two key objectives and whether in garments or construction there is a strong preference for working with foreign companies.

## 1. How do youths view the garments industry?

In Year 1 young men and women had shared with us their views about working in the garments industry, explaining to us that the industry was creating more employment for youths like them and how conditions in the factories were improving over the years with better wages, regular payments and better working environment. Even with the improving conditions, people had complained about the long hours (typically 12-hour shifts and overtime) and the intense pressure they faced working under often rude and abusive supervisors trying to keep to tight deadlines and strict schedules with hardly any holidays.

Similar to 2016, most youths we chatted with expressed their preference for working in foreign owned factories or in factories inside the EPZ because these factories paid well and had better working conditions, where they were not forced to put in overtime hours daily. In the urban location close to the EPZ, many women we chatted with had, at different points in their lives, worked in factories inside the EPZ and also had experience of working in non-EPZ factories. They told us they liked the jobs inside the EPZ which were much better in terms of regular pay, bonus, overtime, working hours, leaves, and other facilities like

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### Perks of working in a sweater factory

The rickshaw puller I was talking with told me his ‘real’ job is as a machine operator in a sweater factory. As work in sweater factories only happens during summer months, all factories are usually closed for two-three months every year (mid December to February/March). As he wanted to earn some ‘extra money’ this year, he called his brother who is a rickshaw puller and arranged for him to get a rickshaw from a garage. He plans to go back to the factory when it re-opens in March.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

A group of sweater factory workers told me when the factories closed in the winter, some of them go home to their village and work on their land, while others stay back in Dhaka and worked as CNG drivers or rickshaw pullers to earn some extra money. They liked that they got some free time in their work.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

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### How ‘overtime’ works in a factory

People say that while all work beyond 4pm in garment factories should be counted as overtime, it is rarely so. Most factories make workers work from 8am to 8pm without counting the four hours as overtime. It is overtime only when the worker has crossed the 8pm mark.

In the big garment factory in my location, schedules for overtime are usually decided by 10am each morning. If a worker needs to leave early that day, she/he has to inform the supervisor before the schedule is finalised. Workers are informed of their requirement to work overtime by 5pm each evening, but those workers who have a good relationship with supervisors know the overtime schedule before lunch and will inform their friends. In this way, a worker will inform his/her family if they will be working overtime that night when they come home for lunch. Family schedules and cooking duties are decided in this way.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

transport for staff and maternity benefits. Some women explained that they were able to spend more time with their family as they got a regular one-day weekend on Fridays, and working less overtime hours meant they were able to come home earlier than before. Other men and women shared that their factories had set up a Provident Fund for them and while one of our household mother had Tk 50,000 in savings in this fund, another man who had worked for 22 years in one factory said he had a savings of Tk 1,200,000.

Within the EPZ, most men and women told us they hoped to get work in the foreign-owned factories as these had *'better behaved supervisors and good food'* while most Bangladeshi-owned factories did not provide lunch, or when they did, the food was *'not very good'*. One man who had worked in 4-5 different factories (foreign and Bangladeshi owned) shared with us that every time he looked for a new job in a factory, he liked *'to see what kind of lunch and snacks they gave (to workers)'* and said he liked working in those factories where the food was tasty. Whilst all factories inside the EPZ provided one time snack<sup>15</sup> for the workers, a few women told us the foreign factories in the EPZ also had provisions for women who were pregnant with their first child and in addition to arranging a *'special diet'* for them (given more food during snack time as compared to other workers), the women were also given an hour's rest time during working hours. Some others told us they were also given a three-month paid leave and the factories also covered delivery costs for the family (ranging between Tk 15,000 to Tk 30,000).

Many also explained that when they were in the position to choose, they usually went for those jobs within the industry that were the *'better ones'*. A few men working in a sweater factory told us they were happy with their job because the money was better than wages paid by ready made garments factory as the buyers for sweaters were mostly international and the products were more profitable. Another woman in Y2/A3 rural location wanted to work in a sweater factory as she had heard the pay was more than in ready made garments. While she did not have any training in sweater making, she knew of a factory in Dhaka which had a short training for new recruits and was planning to apply as a helper in that factory. In another location, women told us they liked working in undergarment factories because while the work was *'trickier, it also paid well'*. Other girls shared that they liked here as this meant they could steal

### Overtime at the garment factory

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The garment factory workers mostly live near the factory but they shared with me that it is hard to manage their food and accommodation costs and can only do so if they do overtime. It is anyway a requirement of their employment. They have to wake up every day early and put in a regular 8-hour shift from 8am to 4pm but followed by 4 hours compulsory overtime until 8pm. Often they work beyond this until midnight when there are deadlines for orders.

When I was in the community, some of them had been doing continuous overtime for a week and had demanded leave. The factory manager promised them one-day leave if they fulfilled the target before Friday lunchtime. They started work at 8am on Thursday morning and worked through the night without sleep. They reached the target but the manager reneged his promise of leave. Workers were frustrated and demonstrated with a protest march but the manager hired a local gang to threaten them. The workers stood up to the gang but were beaten up in the process. Over 20 people were hospitalised, some with wounds from the beatings and some from exhaustion of having worked continuously for almost 30 hours. When I was leaving on my fourth day, I saw that they had continued their strike and some of them hoped that the law would punish the factory owners.

Field Notes, Y1/5 peri-urban

the undergarments (which are small and can be worn under their clothes) for their own use.

As found in Year 1, very few young men preferred *'sitting jobs'*, like cutting and sewing, inside a garment factory. Most liked jobs like cutting threads and packaging, where they could move around their workspace a little more instead of *'sitting in one place all the time'*.

Others repeatedly told us about the long hours they had to put in each day in a garment factory (as many worked 12-hour shifts) and said they wanted jobs in those factories which were less demanding time-wise. One spinning mills worker explained that he left his job in garments even though he was earning Tk 7,000/month because *'even though I was earning money, I did not have time to spend it (because of excessive overtime)'*. He says he is happy in his present job even though he earns less (Tk 5,300). Another garment worker shared his plan to shift to a spinning mill as groups of workers worked in shifts for the whole month

***'We know when we will get in, but we don't know when we will get out (of garment factories)'***

**Young woman, Y1/1 peri-urban**

<sup>15</sup> Usual snack-time food consists of bananas, eggs, milk, patties and cake



where 'from 1<sup>st</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> you work from 6am to 2pm, on 9<sup>th</sup> to 16<sup>th</sup> from 2pm to 10pm and 17<sup>th</sup> to 24<sup>th</sup> from 10pm to 6am'. He thought the work would give him more time for himself and his family.

A few older people we spoke with told us that since the time they had worked in garment factories, conditions had improved, while younger men seemed to think this improvement was only 'on paper'. In one peri-urban location, one man who supplied bananas (as snacks for overtime workers) to two garment factories in the area told us that his business had been declining for three years, ever since there had been a big protest demanding better salary and less overtime. While initially he said this was because the factories did not ask workers to do as much overtime as before, others around him explained the process to us saying this was just a clever way adopted by the factories to pay less for overtime (see box 25).

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#### Less overtime, but only 'on paper'

The basic salary for factory helpers was increased from Tk 3,000 per month to Tk 5,000 (and Tk 8,000 for machine operators) after a big protest happened in the factories 3 years ago. After the increase in salary, the factories began forcing workers to do more work in less time. For example, earlier if a worker had to sew 300 shirts in the usual time (8am-8pm) and 100 shirts in overtime (8pm-11pm), now factories forced people to sew 400 shirts in the usual time to avoid paying overtime to workers as their basic salary was already high. While in theory this looks like factories are making workers do less overtime, in reality there is more pressure on the workers.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

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#### Eating dinner with the wife

'My brother' who is a shopkeeper told me that while he usually missed eating lunch with his wife (who works in a garment factory) because he kept his shop open during the factories' lunch break, he made sure to eat dinner with her every day.

While 'lunch' is usually cooked by her every morning before she leaves for work at 7:50am; on the days she worked overtime, he went home at 8pm every day to cook dinner and then came back to sit in the shop until she returned home. He then closed his shop at 11pm every night and went home to eat dinner. On those days where there is no overtime, she makes dinner for them. He says he likes her cooking better!

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

## 2. How do youths view the construction industry?

Similar to Year 1, construction work was described as being tiring with workers required to work not just long hours but also suffering injuries as there were rarely safety provisions on the work site. Others told us about their preference for learning the trade on-the-job, as this helped them to specialise in a particular area by working, and also explained that employers too preferred those who had learnt the work on-the-job as this means workers have real experience as opposed to what they learn in a formal training course.



Construction work was described as being tiring with workers required to work not just long hours but also suffering injuries.

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#### Construction work is for gawaars

A group of 17-18 year-old boys we met in a slum told us that construction work was for 'men who had recently come from the villages. It was for gawaars (villagers)', and not for boys like them who had been born in Dhaka of second-generation migrants. Young boys like them liked working as bus drivers and in mobile and TV repair shops. They could learn on the job and it was 'more respectable than working in construction'.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban

Most construction workers we met explained to us that there were two ways of working in construction; one was under a contractor, the other was as a daily worker. While both typically pay daily wages, the first means working with the same contractor and workers for a specific duration, usually until the work is completed). Those workers who worked independently of contractors were divergent in their views with some preferring the freedom to choose their work and working hours whilst others worried about finding their next job

Some like one sanitary *mistry* and another daily worker who did odd jobs in construction sites, both of whom worked independently, told us that they liked the freedom of not being bound to a particular job or contractor as they could choose the kind of work they wanted and keep their own hours. They explained that they could take up more than one work in a day when working like this and the daily worker further elaborated saying if he worked to unload a truck in a construction site, it would take him 2-3 hours (and earned Tk 300), after which he was free to do as he pleased. He said he was *'working less and earning more'* as compared to his friend who worked as a junior *mistry* under a contractor. Others explained that working under a contractor meant being secure that they had a job, as it was possible to move to other jobs along with the contractor. However, workers say there is no guarantee of finding work even when working under a contractor, like one mason who did not have work for almost four months before he changed contractors and joined the current one.

While for some construction workers the next step up was to go overseas, others we talked to were mostly content with their work and even though it required arduous physical labour and there were concerns of safety (discussed below) said they liked what they were doing. A group of masons we chatted with explained it was easy to get work once they had built a good name for themselves, and the work did not require any formal training but could be *'learned while earning'*. While a young electrician told us his was easy work as he could earn Tk 200 *'just by fixing a fan'* and do several such jobs in a day; another mason's helper liked that he could move around the work-site and *'all I have to do is carry a pan of cement'* and he could earn Tk 300 a day. The same daily worker who did odd jobs in construction sites compared his present work to his previous in the garments by saying *'it (garments work) was like a prison'*.

An exception to this was the aforementioned construction trainees who had various diplomas and were doing the Sudokkho training. All of them told us they did not want to work in *'ordinary construction sites'* and as one put it, *'I don't mind physical labour, but not here (in Bangladeshi construction companies). Here, I only want to work as a boss'*. However, most agreed that if they got a chance to work as masons, plumbers and rod binders in foreign companies' construction projects in Bangladesh, they would not mind doing it as these companies paid around Tk 15,000 to 18,000/month and if they performed well they might get better positions in the future.

Workers in different locations told us although they were supposed to be paid on a daily basis, this was not always

the case. While one tiles *mistry* told us he collected his wages every two or three days as this meant he had more money to spend at once, some mason helpers told us that while their daily wage was Tk 300, the contractor would make partial payment by giving them Tk 200 each day and give them the rest at the end of the month. Most liked this arrangement as they were able to save some money each month to send back to their families, but it also created problems like it did for one of our households who had only been given Tk 300 for two days' work (compared to Tk 900 that he should have received) and was unable to buy beef to treat his mother-in-law who had come from the village.

### 3. Views on women working

Across study locations, men and women seemed to have diverse views about women working in the garments and construction industries. While most of the women we chatted with were either working in or planned to start working in the garments sector, very few in rural locations told us they would rather only work from home as others in the village did not think it was respectable working in garment factories. There were also a few men in different locations who thought that women should not do any work outside the house as this reflected badly on the husband's ability to provide for the family, and *'women needed someone to keep an eye on them'*, these, however, were exceptions rather than the rule. Most thought that working in garment factories and housemaid jobs were good choices for women as these were *'closed jobs'*, where women were within the *'security'* of four walls of a garment factory or the employer's home.

Some women also told us that while earlier a job as a housemaid was not considered a good option, recent changes in practice that required recommendation (usually from someone known), and national ID meant that the job was gaining respect. Another woman liked that the richer neighbourhood homes usually had CCTV cameras inside which meant *'the men of the house can't harm me'*. Those who were working as housemaids said they liked the jobs as these were more flexible in terms of timing (3-4 hours a day, giving them time to manage their own household



People had diverse opinion about women working.

chores), easily available if you had contacts who could find work for you, and paid Tk 2,000 per household. Two other women in another location were earning Tk 15,000/ month working as housemaids as they worked in five different households for Tk 3,000 per household.

The long working hours that was a requirement of the garment factories was a problem for most women we chatted with, with many women who were pregnant or had babies and toddlers saying that working 12-hour shifts and overtime, would only be possible if they had someone to look after their children, or after the children had grown up. Agreeing with this, a group of young male garment workers in the Y1/3 rural location joked that *'only women without babies or those with grown up children can work here'*, as the working hours were long and there were no child care facilities. In the same location, we were told that a fan-making factory discouraged women from applying for jobs, as they would want to take personal leave often giving their

children or family responsibilities as reasons.

A few women we met also expressed concern that they usually had to work till late at night doing overtime in garment factories and told us that as they had experienced 'catcalling' while walking home at night, they made sure to walk home in groups. One father whose daughter had recently started working in a garment factory an hour's walk away, went half way to pick her up every day after dark.

Where we saw women working on construction sites, most of them were older (45-50 years old). These women explained to us that as garments did not hire older women, construction work was the only option left for them. Even when women worked in construction sites, it was mostly as helpers mixing and carrying cement and sand and while this was the same work as that done by male helpers, they were receiving less wages than the men (see box 28).



Women working in construction site.

**Being an older woman working in construction**

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Safia(43) chatted to me about her work and told me she has worked in construction for four years now. She chose this because she feels she has no other option as her husband is sick and unable to do heavy work and her sons and daughter do not take care of them. Her neighbour, who also works in construction, helped her get the work which is for five hours per day and for which she earns TK 150. She shared her disappointment with this wage as male workers doing the same job earn TK 350, although she concedes they work a further three hours. *'Men do just 3 hours extra work but earn TK 200 more than me. It's not fair'*.

She missed out on some better paid work last month because she does not have a mobile phone and her friend could not reach her. This would have earned her TK 200/day.

Field Notes, Y1/4 peri-urban

**Table 6: Comparative wages**

Workers	Gender	Wages in Tk (per month approx.)	
		Garments (non EPZ)	Construction
Helper	Male	5,000	9,000
	Female	5,000	4,500 (for less working hours compared to male workers)
Skilled	Male	7,000-8,000	15,000-24,000
	Female	7,000-8,000	No information

## Learning sewing to get a better job

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I met a few men at the Sudokkho training who worked in packaging and knitting sections of garment factories in the EPZ. They told me they were doing the training as they wanted to move to the sewing section because the pay there was more than what they got in their present jobs. They had heard that factories in the EPZ wanted people *'who could use a sewing machine'* and thought doing the training would help them change their job.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban

Another older woman worker we met was working on road construction and told us that most women who worked construction preferred to work on the same work site as their male relatives as a precaution against teasing that happened on these sites. A second woman construction worker (40-45 years old) also agreed with this telling us that often younger women (below 35 years old) were teased by male workers on work sites and told us about a young woman in her previous work site who was constantly propositioned by male workers who would shout *'today I am alone in my house'* at her. The woman eventually left the job because of this and is now earning Tk 2,200 a month as a housemaid.

## 4 What youth think the industries are looking for?

In different conversations with youths they shared with us their perception of the garment and construction industries' requirement and what they thought was necessary to get work in these industries.

In all but one location, young men and women told us that the demand for helpers was always high in the **garment industry**, as those working as helpers in factories either got promoted to machine operators, or left the job because

of long hours and difficult supervisors. People shared that many young men and women like them took up jobs in the garment industry because getting jobs as helpers in factories was *'easy'*, and did not require any specific training and all one had to do was queue up outside the gates of different factories.

However, in the Y2/C3 urban location, those who worked as helpers in the EPZ factories had heard that the factories would eventually stop hiring helpers. As some of these factories had introduced auto machines which *'could cut threads from finished garments'*, helpers were worried about losing their jobs if they were not promoted to sewing machine operators. As a result, many of those who were working as helpers were doing machine operator training from different private training centres in the area. One such machine operator was a woman who had joined a factory in the EPZ two years ago as a helper. She explained to us that within a month she had joined a training centre to learn sewing as she had been suggested by a co-worker to do the course if she wanted to keep her job in the future. We also met many other EPZ factory helpers who came to the different training centres (including the one who had taken the Sudokkho course) in the evenings after work and stayed on until midnight as they were worried about *'losing (their) jobs if we can't operate the sewing machine'*.

Although learning to operate a sewing machine is necessary to be promoted to a machine operator, most helpers in locations other than the EPZ explained that it was a skill that could be learned on the job, as had many before them. Some told us they had been promoted to machine operators within three months of joining as a helper as their work *'had been good'*. This is almost equivalent to the time it takes to do a SMO training. Others said it had taken them about six months to be promoted. A few men explained that if one showed they were willing to work, they could get promoted to a supervisor in two years' time, and being promoted to a supervisor did not *'require any training certificate but depended on how fast one could learn'* with one man adding, *'you only need to know how to shout abuses at*

Table 7: Sudokkho and On-the-Job training comparison

	Sudokkho Training		On-the-job	
	Garments (non EPZ)	Construction	Garments (non EPZ)	Construction
Earning while learning (monthly in Tk approx.)	None	None	5,000 as a helper	6,000-9,000 as a helper
Duration (months)	1.5	1.5	2-3 (for helpers to learn sewing machine operation)	2-12 (to move from helper to skilled mistry)
Cost of course (in Tk)	1,000- 3,000	1,000-3,000	None	None
Entry salary (monthly in Tk approx.)	7,000-8,000 (trained SMO)	4,000-12,500	7,000-8,000 (for a SMO)	15,000-24,000 for those have moved up from helpers to mistry

However, people working in the EPZ factories told us that while promotion from helper to machine operator worked in the same way as in a local factory, EPZ required a person to have worked at least two years as a machine operator and have a grade 8 pass certificate to be promoted to a supervisor. A few others said that having a ‘*good relationship*’ with different supervisors and managers also helped as this meant that a machine operator with a good rapport would more likely be promoted as soon as they had worked the mandatory two years, while others might have to wait a bit longer. One woman who was a supervisor of the sewing section told us she had been a machine operator for four years and was promoted because she knew how to operate all of the machines in the sewing section.

As mentioned above, finding jobs in garment factories requires people to stand outside factory gates with the necessary documents. This was common knowledge across all locations and those who had recently joined garment factories told us they had needed passport size photographs, national ID card or birth registration certificate, and a ‘clean record’ certificate from the police or Ward Commissioner (for City Corporation areas) and Union Parishad Chairman (for villages). Others explained that the ‘clean record’ certificate was a more recent requirement as in the past they could get jobs by showing their birth registration certificate or national ID and photographs. Although a few people told us it was a bother to get the ‘clean record’ certificate from the Union Parishad Chairman in their villages, others said they had brought it with them when they had first come to Dhaka as their relatives who worked in garment factories had informed them beforehand. We also heard from a few people in some locations that the factories they had applied to had asked them for a grade 8 certificate along with the other papers .

In all locations, people said and we observed more women working in garment factories compared to men. Men, particularly in the Y2/C3 urban location, told us this was because factories preferred women workers as they were ‘*good looking and can flirt with supervisors and managers*’, over men who often quarrelled with each other and supervisors, were thought to be drug addicts, and stole merchandise from the factories. They added that while men had to provide national ID, photographs, and a ‘clean record’ certificate even before starting work, factories were generally lax about the women who could provide the above even after few weeks of starting work.

In the **construction industry** workers shared that contractors and senior *mistry* preferred to hire those who had on-the-job experience rather than those who had done formal training courses, and although it was ‘*okay to have a certificate* (showing you were trained)’ one actually ‘*learned from the experience*’. Learning on-the-job meant a chance to mentor workers who were just stepping into the industry and bosses told us it gave them the freedom to train their workers the way they liked. Others seemed to think that there were certain skills that could only be mastered after working for several years and short term training courses did not compensate for this. One man who worked as a building demolisher told us he had become a *mistry* in his

present job by learning on the job. He explained that one needed to learn how to correctly demolish different parts of a building from an experienced worker and take every safety precaution so they are not injured. This, he added, ‘*was not taught in any training*’.

With the preference for on-the-job learning being high among workers and bosses alike, many young men explained to us they either looked to their relatives to train them, or used networks to be introduced to other *mistry*. One mason trainee from Year 1 shared with us that he had asked his nephew not to join a short term mason course but work with him on his construction site so he could teach him what he needed to about building. Another electrician who had trained at a private training centre laughed when we asked him if he had started working as a *mistry* right after his training. He shared his experience saying ‘*even if you have formal training, you have to have job experience*’ and that he had worked for a year as a helper to his brother’s electrician friend before he started working on his own.

While those working in Bangladesh thought that on-the-job training benefitted them more to get a job, those hoping to go overseas seemed to feel that training was necessary for different reasons. A few men we spoke to in Y1/3 rural location seemed to think that it was possible to get jobs directly after doing a training and the training certificate meant they could work as senior *mistry* overseas instead of working as a helper like they had to in Bangladesh. Another young man in the Y2/A2 urban location who was working as an electrician said he wanted to do a training before going to Qatar as his ‘*application for work would benefit from this and I will get a job easily*’ without having to do a training there. Others told us that even though they might not gain practical skills, they would still ‘*benefit from learning international construction measurements and mixing ratios*’ and some others thought they would need to know the ‘*English names of the tools*’ if they wanted to work abroad which, they said, training centres which specialised in sending workers abroad taught.

## 5. The ‘other’ compromises

Not only do the youths settle for jobs that are less than what they aspired for, they tell us doing these jobs means making a lot of other compromises. Those who have moved to Dhaka or other bigger towns for work have to live there for extended periods of time, in some cases without their families. More often than not, as they are usually in the most vulnerable rung of the work hierarchy, those working in garment factories and construction sites face bullying and harassment by their supervisors and contractors. In addition to this, the poor accommodation facilities and high costs makes city living unattractive not just to the youths who are make less wages, but also to the those who have established small businesses of their own.

## Living conditions

Those people who had moved away from their family homes to work in the urban locations often complained about living in cramped conditions compared to what they were used to back in the village. The quarters they are living in were often just tin sheds with tin walls and roofs and, in some cases, concrete structures with little ventilation. These are typically inside compounds where people shared cooking, toilet and washing with at least five (in many cases even more) different families. These quarters were usually just one room, which was shared by the family<sup>16</sup> and were equipped with a light and a fan. Even with the fans people said, the tin sheds were unbearably hot in the summer months (April to September).



People shared a compound with at least five different families.

Depending on the size of the living quarters, the families we lived with were paying Tk 1,500 (for a 10x10 feet tin shed) to Tk 4,400 (for a two room unit shared by seven people). This often included utilities like electricity, water and pipeline gas for cooking, but in some cases families had their own meters for electricity and paid for it separately. While each compound had an open 'kitchen' where there were gas stoves for cooking, many grumbled about the irregular and low gas supply and had resorted to using traditional mud stoves to cook. In a few families where they were using these mud stoves, people shared that since firewood was expensive, they were using waste fabric<sup>17</sup> as a fuel to cook with. Some other families, particularly those with garment workers, were waking up as early as 3am to cook breakfast because the gas supply was sufficient at this time



Pipeline gas supply is usually sufficient in the early mornings.

***'If you want to drink a glass of water, you have to pay Tk 1. Nothing is free in Dhaka.'***

**Man, Y2/A3 rural**

While many living in the urban locations, particularly in and around Dhaka, were worried about the living costs being very high, others had returned home to their villages after having lived in Dhaka for some time. One young man in the Y2/A3 rural location told us he had left his job of two years in Dhaka to stay with his family and newborn baby in the village. He shared that he wanted to join the garment factory nearby and even though it would pay him much less than what he had earned in Dhaka, he thought '*earning Tk 10,000 in the village was like earning Tk 30,000 in Dhaka*' as everything was doubly expensive in the city. In the same location, a group of women who had worked in garment factories in Dhaka explained that they hoped to get jobs in the garment factory near the village rather than staying in Dhaka. They said that it was difficult to get by earning Tk 10,000 in Dhaka as most of it went in paying rent and buying food, but were happy to earn Tk 6,000 working in the village as living costs were much lower and their basic food came from their own land. Another divorced mother of two boys told us she had returned from Dhaka after 5 months of working in a garment factory. Although her current pay (working as a *peon* in a NGO office) was much lower than what she earned in Dhaka (Tk 3,000/month compared to Tk 5,300/month in Dhaka) she said the difference in pay did not matter as it would have been spent on food and rent anyway. She was much happier here living at home with her two boys.

In addition to the expensive living conditions that they put up with in urban areas, many also complained about the rude landlords who often did not like friends and relatives coming to meet and stay with tenants for a few days. People shared, and it was also experienced by two of the team members, that landlords frequently visited these compounds, sometimes spending hours there and threatened to evict families if they had friends or relatives over, for '*using up too much of the water*' and '*making a lot of noise*'.

An alternative to renting is to live on the work site. Three of our youths were living in their workplaces. Two construction workers lived with 11 others at the ground floor of a seven-storied building that was under construction. They were using makeshift cots made up of wooden boards to sleep and shared one small toilet and washing facility. Another youth who worked at a shoe factory shared a 6x10

<sup>16</sup> One researcher stayed in a one-room accommodation that was shared by nine members of the family.

<sup>17</sup> Offcuts from garments factories sold in bundles of rags. As well as being used for fuel they are also used to make yarn and rope.

feet workroom that also doubled as their sleeping space with three other men. All of the three youths told us it was an arrangement they preferred as they saved on the rent they would have to pay if they rented a room outside, and *'there is always someone to talk to'*. The young man working at the shoe factory, however, felt that the *'owner should be paying us more as we are also acting as security guards'*. He added there was no privacy when living like this and that they were *'stuck inside the factory all the time, breathing glue fumes even when we sleep'* (see box 30).

***'Here (in the village), if you grow rice, you can pluck leaves from the field and feed your family. But if you don't have money in Dhaka, you go hungry.'***

Woman, Y2/A3 rural

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#### Hazard in the working Place

'My brother' is 28 years old and lives and works at a shoe factory. He told me about hazards of working in the shoe factory and all the chemicals that he is exposed to. In every step of the production process different kinds of chemicals are used such as latex, glue and other adhesive substances. All the workers use their bare hands and don't wear masks. Most of the time they are stuck inside the factory and don't get any fresh air so he says it makes it impossible to breathe if he wears a mask. He complained to me that he now has breathing problems and a reduced appetite.

Another hazard he shared is the risks of fires as they use lots of flammable substances. The owner of the factory's oldest son recalled an incident a few years ago when a fire broke out at night in one of the other shoe factories in the area. The workers used to sleep in the factory and were locked inside. While others escaped unscathed, one worker burnt his leg from knee to toe. He had to stay in the hospital for 2 months. The owner of the factory paid for some of the costs but most was borne by the worker himself. 'My brother', who also sleeps in the factory every night, says he fears one day there will be a fire at the factory while he is asleep.

'My brother' told me about his future goals and said he didn't want to work anymore in the shoe factory. He plans to work for another five years and after that he wants to quit. He told me he met some older guys who worked in a shoe factory for 25-30 years and said *'now they are reduced to skeletons'*. He doesn't want this to happen to himself.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban

## Harassment

Men and women working in the garments industry spoke constantly of the harassment they or their friends had experienced at work. All the men we chatted with told us that for them this was mostly limited to supervisors using abusive language and occasional use of physical violence, women had also experienced harassment of a sexual nature. Many women garment workers expressed frustration that male supervisors often stood very close and even tried to touch them inappropriately. When this

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#### Coping with harassment

'My sister' managed to get a job as a helper in garments after a lot of struggle. After one month of joining the factory a new young supervisor started work. Flirtatious by nature, he began to tease and harass young girls in factory, including 'my sister'. One day he asked 'my sister' in a very obscene way that as she is so thin, how does she make love to her husband. This was a step too far and 'my sister' said she slapped the supervisor in front of everybody. The supervisor complained about her to the floor manager of the factory. When the floor manager called her, she says she asked him if it had been his wife or daughter in the same situation would they have tolerated this kind of behaviour? The floor manager was sympathetic and warned the young supervisor not to harass young women in the future.

The case should have ended then, but the supervisor was furious. He secretly threatened 'my sister' that he was going to teach her a lesson for complaining to the boss. 'My sister' says she was very frightened at this and left the factory at the end of the month and found a job at another factory.

Field Notes, Y2/A2

happened, they tried not to physically react to these overtures as they had to maintain a good relationship with supervisors. One woman told us how she usually talked to the supervisors with a smile and pretended she was happy with the attention she was getting so that she could ask them for favours like less overtime or personal leave later. Other girls shared about married supervisors who would propose them for affairs by pretending they were unmarried. In such cases, girls said they had no option but to move to a different section and even then the harassment might continue.

Many other women shared with us that although they had not faced significant sexual abuse, they had often had to deal with suggestive remarks and gestures from their supervisors (see box 31). Women working in the EPZ factories told us since it was mandatory that they wore uniforms (shirt and pants) to work, they felt vulnerable because they were not allowed to use a *dupatta* (a length of material worn as a scarf or head covering) with this. While some women complained they had caught supervisors glancing at their breasts at times because they did not have a *dupatta*, we saw others tightly pin the *dupatta* to their chest underneath the uniform shirts so their breasts looked flat.



A little girl wearing her mother's garment factory uniform.

**Not enough time to pray****32**

He works as a sewing machine operator in the biggest Bangladeshi garment factory in the area. For some time now, he has been sewing shirt collars. Every hour he is supposed to sew 250 collars for polo t-shirts. If within the first hour he is unable to sew the required 250 collars, the supervisor will only tell him to hurry up, if he still hasn't caught up within the second hour, the supervisor will start to get angry, but if he still isn't able to complete 250 collars in the third hour, the supervisor will begin shouting abuses.

He tells me he is a devout Muslim who prays 5 times a day, but ever since he started work at the garment factory, he doesn't get time to pray. He explains this saying he will have to pray three times during his work hours. This means spending a total of about 1 hour a day in prayer. Taking out 1 hour to pray means missing out on sewing 250 shirt collars. To his supervisor, that is unacceptable.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

Other men and women talked of the verbal and physical abuse that the supervisors were capable of, with some telling us that supervisors would shout abuse even when simple mistakes were made. They told us that they had seen supervisors hit workers with chairs and tools for making crooked stitches and forgetting to cut and clean threads from the cloths. Women supervisors were said to be worse and '*pulled your hair, pushed you against a wall and sometimes banged your head on to the sewing machines*'. There was also a concern about there being a backlash from the supervisors if a complaint was made, and in most cases, people explained that as the supervisors were typically let off with a slight reprimand, complaining to managers was '*of no use*'.

While harassment in construction sites was said to be less compared to garments, we met a few (like the woman construction worker discussed above) who told us about their experiences of being bullied and harassed by contractors. This was typified by one contractor who had hired one Year 1 mason trainee and was said to have a bad reputation for bullying because of which other workers had stopped working with him. Our trainee too told us that he would sometimes get sworn and shouted at. The contractor agreed and said he does that because '*he (the mason) forgets-he has a bad memory*'.

## Health and safety

As we had found in Year 1, construction sites were full of safety hazards and workers we chatted with described their working environment as '*having a lot of risks*' and told us there were no safety measures taken on work sites. While working on a building site with one of our family members, researchers experienced for themselves the difficult working conditions on the site that workers faced everyday (see box33, 34, 36 and 38).

Workers told us that accidents were very common and when they occurred, the worker would either get a partial compensation or not get paid at all. This, people said, depended on how '*the contractor was feeling that day*'. One

**Construction work hazards****33**

While living with the construction workers at their work site, I observed that every evening after work, the workers would freshen up and apply mustard oil on their arms and legs. They told me that as they worked without gloves to mix cement all day, their hands would crack if they did not moisturise every night, making it difficult to work the next day.

Researcher Observation, Y2/C2 peri-urban

**Researcher's experience at the construction site****34**

We worked for four days on the construction site with our 'Bhai' who is a mason. Last year the work was a lot more strenuous and physically demanding as we were mixing the cement and layering floors. This year our Bhai is a *mistry* on the site and his work is more technical in overseeing the construction but also more dangerous. On the first and second day we helped with removing the wooden plank boards around the construction columns. These wooden planks are covered in rusty nails which protruded out. The planks were kept on site all the time so they could be used later and constantly we had to brush past or step over them.



Last year the workers had worn heavy duty safety gloves which were provided by the training centre as the work was contracted by the training centre. This year the sub-contractor told us he never provides any safety equipment for this workers, '*there is no need*' he said. We got multiple small cuts and scrapes from wire binding and on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day, also had a go at iron rod binding. This entailed using an electrical machine to cut the rods. Our Bhai encouraged us to make sure we kept low to keep the pressure on the iron rod while cutting. Although this is a more efficient way of cutting iron rods, it also increased the risk of the sparks that flew off the machine hitting our body or eyes. While cutting one of the iron rods a spark narrowly missed my left eye.

On the last day we were binding some foundation columns. The columns were supported by two poles at both ends so that we could work on the binding. Half way through the poles fell and the steel columns crashed to the ground. Luckily no one had their feet or hands under the columns when they fell. It took the whole team of eight workers to lift the steel columns back up onto the poles.

Researcher Experience, Y1/1 peri-urban

rod binder working on the seventh floor of a building told us he was '*always afraid that he would fall down*' and shared his experience of having fallen down from the first floor on another work site. He hurt his back and had to be hospitalised for seven days. He was not compensated for the treatment. Another mason shared his experience of working on a government building construction and told us that a worker had fallen from the building and died. Though the government had filed a court case against the contrac-



**Working under harsh lights****35**

Even though there were three light bulbs in my family's one room quarter, I noticed they only switched on one of the lights. 'My mother' told me that because she worked under the harsh tube lights the whole day in the garment factory, she did not like to turn on too many lights when she came home.

I also noticed this in the other houses I went to and everyone else also told me the same thing.

Researcher Experience, Y2/C3 urban

**From the construction site****36**

On the first day on a nearby construction site we met a helper who they called 'the mixing machine'. He got the nickname as he can mix cement as fast as a machine. On the second day he worked with us at our site as he told us he had injured his foot with the mixing shovel the day before in the haste to mix cement. Although less strenuous than his previous day's work, while moving the wooden planks his foot got caught on a rusty nail. To stop the bleeding he found a plastic bag on the floor and wrapped some of the plastic around the cut.

On the third day the helper asked the supervisor for some boots for protection but the supervisor refused to provide any. Throughout the day he was struggling with his injuries. He joked with his fellow workers that there is no safety and told us in a jokey manner that *'if we ask for anything after getting injured the contractor will give two kicks instead of providing anything'*. Everyday he said *'I lose 3 drops of blood, but what can I do?'* he exclaimed, *'I have a wife and kids so cant take any time off even if I get hurt'*.

Field Notes, Y1/1 peri-urban

**Safety concerns differ between training and the real workplace****37**

On the second day I was in the community, a young trainer from the training centre asked me to go with him to meet the head of another training centre. He showed me round that training centre and then took me to a construction site within the training centre grounds which was to be an extension. Construction was going on. The workers were not using safety equipment yet there were some trainee masons working alongside them for experience who had all the necessary safety equipment. The young trainer explained that the workers work under a contractor who is responsible for providing the safety equipment. He pointed out that trainees' experience of training is very different from their experience in work. He said during training they try to provide enough information about safety to the trainees but whether they can follow it depends on the contractor.

Field Notes, Y2/ C2 peri-urban

tor for not providing adequate safety provisions on site, it had not provided any compensation to the dead man's family.

Others like the two young electrical trainees we had met in Year 1 told us while they had been given helmets, boots, gloves and aprons during the training, these had been taken away afterwards. Both were working as electricians and said they did not use any safety equipment as they had no money to buy them. One of them told us that he *'made sure to wear plastic sandals while working so I don't get electrocuted'*.

Like the man who had told us he had breathing problems from having worked in the sewing section for too long, others also shared with us the health problems they were constantly facing since working in garment factories. While some of them complained of constant headaches from working under harsh lights all day and night, others said it was because they were not getting enough time to sleep. As most garment workers did overtime, they usually came back home at 11pm and slept at around 1am each night, before waking up at about 5:30-6am for the morning prayer, and for many women, to cook lunch for the family.

One health worker we met in the Y2/C3 urban location told us that 90 percent of the patients he treated were garment workers who complained of gastritis and weakness. Others told us this was because *'of sitting in one place all day'* and not drinking enough water as going to the water cooler too many times was seen as *'wasting time'* by the supervisors. One household mother told us she had stopped working in the garment factories because of chronic back pain from sitting for long hours at the sewing machine.

**Safety issues at the construction site****38**

There were no safety measures taken by the construction site owner. In the course of conversation I mentioned to them that somewhere I have seen that there were some nets around the building and wondered what they thought of this. The two masons said it wasn't necessary as there was no other house nearby. They also did not use gloves when mixing cement and both had damaged their hands and complained that it hurt when they took food. They shared with me that they use cigarette ash to soothe this severe pain as if they did not use ash in this way it will be very difficult for them to work the next day.

Another works as a rod binder but also is in charge of the cement mixer. He is very careful about wearing his plastic boots while mixing cement as he says *'if I don't use shoes my leg will be destroyed by the cement and I will suffer skin disorders so I always use shoes when I am working'*.



Field Notes, Y2/C2 peri-urban

## Psychological issues

Although some like the young father (discussed above), had returned to their villages to be with their families, other parents living in the urban areas frequently talked about missing their children and for some men who lived alone, their wives. We met many parents who had left their young children in the village with their grandparents. Whilst some said they tried to go home every few months, with a few who lived nearby even trying to go home every Friday, others said this was difficult as it meant spending less than six hours with their children before heading back to be at their job in the garment factory the next day.

People shared that even though they were in constant contact with their children and parents back home, it was not like meeting them every day and they worried about their elderly parents, who often than not, were living alone in the village. While one man told us he was sending Tk 2,500 each month to his parents who lived with his 4 year-old son in the village, he felt guilty about not being able to take

care of them himself and felt he had added to their burden by asking them to care for his son (see box 39). Another man who had come to Dhaka after fighting with his father told us he missed his mother and if he could do something worthy to prove himself to his father, he would go back home to meet his mother.

Others who had plans to go overseas told us they often thought about how it would be lonely there without their families. One of our neighbours who was planning to go to Saudi Arabia shared that every morning when he woke up he saw his family around him and worried that he would not be able to see their faces for a long time. He was planning to go to Saudi Arabia for 10 years and would only come back for a visit in 5 years' time. His youngest daughter (who is 13 years old) would be a grown woman then and he would have missed watching her grow up. Another father who was in Saudi Arabia was constantly calling up his wife to talk about their son who had dropped out of school, and the parents would spend a long time on the phone discussing about sending the son overseas to work.

### Listening to 'recordings' of his son

39

My 'brother' is a shopkeeper who has been living with his wife in Dhaka for many years. Ever since his 4 year-old son was a year old, they sent him to the village to live with his grandparents. My brother keeps recordings of his son's voice on his mobile phone and listens to those on the days he misses him.

He has many such recordings, of which the one of his mother and son talking is his favourite.

Field Notes, Y2/B3 peri-urban

### Bad influence

40

'My sister' had been in Dhaka for 20 days before she came back home to the village. There she had lived with two other women, one of whom used to talk to a lot of people, particularly men, over the phone. As 'my sister' did not have a phone, her husband used to call her on this woman's number. Every day he had to try for a long time to get through the number as it was mostly busy.

Seeing this, both 'my sister' and her husband decided that it would be better for her to return home as the other woman's influence might turn 'my sister' into a '*person with a loose character*'.

'My sister' wants to go back to Dhaka again, this time with a mobile phone of her own.

Field Notes, Y2/A3 rural



# YOUTHS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES OF THE SUDOKKHO TRAINING



# Youths' perspectives and experiences of the Sudokkho training

## 1. Motivation to join the training

Consistent with the findings from the RCA study conducted in 2016, all except two of the nine new Sudokkho trainees we met in this study had left school some time ago. Of the two still in full time education, one was enrolled in Islamic school and the other was in Grade 11). Some had worked (part time work in stores, own business, garments work or farming) but more had no previous work experience. These youths shared that they, like so many of the Year 1 trainees, had *'fallen into'* doing the training either as a result of suggestions or pressure from their families to acquire skills for future employment.

Those who had made the decision to enrol in the Sudokkho training course on their own had done so for varied reasons. While a few men and women the Y2/A3 ru-

### Interest in computers

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'My brother' has had a keen interest in computers ever since he was 14 and his cousin brought a laptop home but wouldn't let 'my brother' touch it. He is now in grade 11 and works part time in a computer shop. He started visiting a computer shop near his school two years ago after seeing others there use Photoshop and creating graphics on computers. He became fascinated with computer graphics and wanted to learn how to do it himself. When he asked the shop workers to teach him they refused saying he was very young. He then decided to learn by himself and started to go to the computer shop every evening. He learnt about creating computer graphics by watching Youtube videos and after a year was able to find a job in a computer shop.

He shared with me that he had wanted to join a formal computer graphics training. The Director of the training centre that he went to (the centre also runs Sudokkho SMO and electrical house-wiring courses) told him he could only join the graphics course after enrolling and completing the Sudokkho electrical wiring training. When he told his mother, she thought it might be a good idea for him to join the electrical wiring training as he would learn a new skill as *'anyone who has a skill will not have to sit idle in the future'* and this might benefit his future work options.

Field Notes, Y2/C1 urban

ral location had joined as they thought the training would help them find a job in the two garment factories nearby (see below), one woman who had her own tailoring shop where she made *salwar kameez* (traditional outfit worn by women) thought she would be able to expand her client base to men if she learnt how to make pants and shirts in the training. Also as mentioned above, there were others, like a group of helpers in the Y2/C3 urban location, who had joined the Sudokkho training to learn new skills that would help them advance in their jobs. Others here had joined as they had heard the EPZ would not be hiring low skilled helpers any more.

Of those young men and women who were doing the training because their families wanted them to, only a few told us they wanted to continue to full time employment. Three girls doing the Sudokkho SMO training in Y2/C1 urban location told us they wanted more flexible arrangements where they could *'set up a sewing machine at home and make clothes for themselves and neighbours'* (one had already invested Tk 7,000 in buying a sewing machine). Two of these girls had toddlers who needed looking after, making a job in garment factories almost impossible because of the long hours. Another girl from one of our focal households and who was still in school (grade 9) told us her parents did not want her working in a garment factory as it meant long hours. She had only joined the training as they wanted her to learn a new skill that could be used after she left school in a few years' time.

A group of boys currently taking a Sudokkho plumbing training from another training centre in Y2/C2 peri-urban location shared with us that of the 30 boys who were doing the training only four actually wanted to get jobs as plumbers and had purposely moved to Dhaka to be able to attend the course. The other 26 boys had completed diploma courses from polytechnic institutes and had been resident in Dhaka for a longer time (1-2 years) where they had been enrolling in different training courses at various training centres. They felt that having the diploma and doing different training courses would help them compete with BSc engineering degree holders for the job of a site engineer. Typical of others, one current plumbing trainee told us that in the last year spent in Dhaka, he had completed a range of different trainings related to civil engineering, including masonry, sanitary and rod binding courses with the inten-

tion of working as a site engineer. Although having an ambition to complete a BSc engineering degree, he hopes that these courses taken together might be enough to secure a site engineer job for which usually engineering graduates are preferred. Most of the boys we chatted with explained that even if they managed to secure site engineer jobs, they would be paid less than engineering graduates, but did not seem to mind this as they could be promoted on the job if they worked well.

## 2. Training promotion

As found in the 2016 RCA study, trainees told us they had heard about the training from the promotional 'miking'<sup>18</sup> and posters in their communities. What the RCA team had not seen in Year 1, however, was the catchment area door to door visits made by the staff of the different training centres to recruit potential trainees. A woman trainee in Y2/C1 shared that she had been approached by a trainer while she was working in her tailoring shop; another explained that she had heard about the training and been given related information from a trainer who had visited her home. In the Y2/A3 rural location, people said the training centre staff also visited places like tea stalls where they were sure to find young men hanging around.

Staff at two of the training centres also told us about these door-to-door visits they had conducted to recruit potential trainees for the Sudokkho training courses. The training centres had printed promotional leaflets to hand out to people (see box 42). One training centre in the Y2/A2 urban location that had been operating different training courses for the past 10 years told us they got more than double applicants for the required 40 seats for the Sudokkho SMO training. The owner explained that since attracting applicants was not a problem he had decided not to distribute leaflets in the future. However, one young trainer here later confided that at the start of a new training course, he was sometimes sent by the owner to bus stations with leaflets to look for 'people who looked as if they had just come from villages' and 'frustrated looking youths'. At another training centre in Y2/C2 peri-urban location, two trainers explained that they had undertaken recruitment drives in their own home districts outside of Dhaka and encouraged boys to enrol in the construction training. As a result, all of the trainees here were from these two districts.



Promotion through 'miking'.

### Sudokkho training promotion leaflet

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The Sudokkho training promotion leaflet for SMO training in this study location clearly links itself to UK and Swiss funding with a logo of the Union Jack at the bottom of the leaflet. It also has information relating to application requirements; the applicant must be 18, submit educational qualification certificate, national ID card or birth registration certificate and 3 passport size photographs.

The leaflet also says it provides the following benefits for trainees:

1. Good and charming environment
2. Guaranteed 80% practical classes and standard training
3. Guaranteed certificate after training completion
4. 100% guarantee of jobs after successful completion of the training.

The leaflet also states that poor people will get a discount on the fees if they join the course.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban

The same Trainers from the abovementioned training centre indicated that many centres run government or donor funded training programmes where the main requirement was to demonstrate numbers participating in the course. They explained that the best way to fill up seats was to collaborate with another centre to share students. Trainees described this practice from their perspective too. So, for example, having enrolled in one training, they had been encouraged to take up a different training at another centre as 'it would help their job prospects if they knew more skills'. As a result almost all of the trainees here were doing two trainings at the same time. Furthermore, they preferred benefits which enabled them to cover living costs (which many of the training centres that had Sudokkho courses did not provide). So, for example, many of the trainees were enrolled at another training centre that had a government funded course and provided a stipend of Tk 3,100 per month that they were using to cover their living costs.



Promotion through poster (left) and leaflet (right).

<sup>18</sup> Promotion carried out through loudspeakers usually mounted on bikes or rickshaws which pass through communities.

### Filling up seats at the training centre

There are two new, medium-sized garment factories in this rural location and many people from nearby villages are employed there. Others who are interested to work in the factories either join as unskilled helpers or do SMO training from the few training centres in the nearby town.

'My brother' is currently doing the Suddokho SMO training at the training centre which also has a Suddokho sweater knitting machine operator course. As both factories in the area produce ready-made garments, most people want to enrol in the SMO course, and the demand for the knitting course is low. Because the training centre has to fill up all the course (20 seats each in 2 shifts) in both courses, it enrolls people in the knitting course, while letting them actually do the SMO course. So 'my brother' is enrolled in the knitting course, even though in reality he is learning how to operate a sewing machine. This, he says is a 'win-win situation' for both him and the training centre.

Field Notes, Y2/A3 rural

## 3. Training timings and requirements

All of the non EPZ training centres providing Sudokkho courses offered these in two shifts; morning (9am-1pm) and afternoon (2pm-5pm). Trainees in the Y2/C3 urban location told us the training centre which had the Sudokkho SMO course opened before 9am each morning and would remain open late until midnight and on Fridays. The staff here explained the flexible timings saying that as the trainees were mostly EPZ workers who did not have time to attend the training during the day, the training centre made special arrangements to let them come in after work and stay until late and also were open on Fridays. The SMO training here was not instruction based; rather trainees could come in at any time and practice operating the sewing machine (see box 44). Likewise, in the Y2/A3 rural location, a few trainees who had already completed the Sudokkho SMO course shared that as the training centre had not been able to fill up the required 40 seats in their batch, they had been allowed to do extra classes by joining the evening shift of the training as a way to practice.

Although all the training centres and trainees told us that Sudokkho courses are a standard 6 weeks, the training centre in the Y2/C3 urban location let trainees enrol late and had also allowed a few trainees to continue even after the required 6 weeks. The training centre owner told us this was done as a '*special consideration*' to them because they were garment workers who worked all week and could not attend the training. Although trainees here told us they were not given classroom based training, they were still required to take a test at the end of the 6 weeks. Two trainees in the same location had enrolled 3 weeks late and the training centre was now pressurising them to learn to operate the sewing machine quickly as '*some people from Dhaka were coming to take a test this month*'. Another 13 year-old trainee who had been enrolled in the training for 6 months was also being asked to come regularly to the training centre to practice so she could pass the test (see box 46). Some told us that as they were tested on their proficiency in operating a sewing machine, the test was easy to pass. Others explained that they were not worried about failing the test, as their motivation behind doing the training was to retain their jobs in the factories by learning to operate sewing machines; the factories were not looking for training certificates.

### The EPZ training centre

On our first day in the study location, we went to the training centre which had the Sudokkho SMO course. Even though it was around 6:30pm, the training centre was bustling with activity. There were many trainees, some wearing aprons and others without, who were sitting at the different sewing machines and working on jeans. We started chatting with the training centre owner who explained to us that the trainees wearing aprons were the ones in the Sudokkho programme and the others were regular trainees. Majority of them worked as helpers in the different factories in the EPZ area and were learning to operate sewing machines to get promoted to machine operator position. As the trainees were mostly garment factory workers, he added that he kept the training centre open every day, including Fridays, from morning 9am until midnight. This was so the garment workers could come at the time that suited them best, with many preferring to come after their shift at the factory was complete. When we left the training centre at 8pm, the training centre was still crowded with people still coming in.

Over the next few days each of us spoke to different people who trained at the training centre. Some were Sudokkho trainees while others were not. They shared that although officially there were supposed to be two different shifts, in reality they could go in at any time, find an empty sewing machine and start practicing. There was no formal class and the two instructors and one helper usually sat idle until called upon by one of them. Many trainees told us they were happy that the training centre ran in this flexible way as otherwise they would not be able to practice on the sewing machine. Others explained that although they were tired after working long hours at the garment factories, they still came in to do the training as learning to work on the sewing machine was the only way to get a promotion.

On our last day, one of us visited the training centre again with our household sister who was a trainee. It was a Friday and the training centre was extremely crowded. Trainees, in aprons and without, were chatting around waiting for sewing machines to be free so they could start working. There did not appear to be any instructor and those who were at the sewing machines seem to be working on different types of clothes- some on jeans, others on shirt pockets. The environment was chaotic and loud as people were talking with each other while they worked. I observed one male trainee trying to get the attention of the young helper for 30 minutes before he went over to solve the trainee's problem.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban

At other training centres, staff told us about the Sudokkho trainee selection criteria. While all staff we chatted with noted that trainees must be between 18-30 years old, beyond this there was some confusion about whom the training centres were supposed to be targeting. One told us that the potential trainees should be school dropouts, while another thought the training was for *'poor people who lived in the slums'*, and a third said *'it is only for those who want to work in garments'*. One girl here explained that even though she told the training centre staff she did not want to work in a garment factory after she completed the course, the staff had told her it *'didn't matter'* and *'if anyone came from outside, say you are doing the training to join a garment factory'*. Additionally, the criteria that different training centres' staff mentioned were not being consistently followed in practice. As mentioned above, we met a number of trainees, from our host families and otherwise, who

were still enrolled in school. Many of those who we met were below 18 years, some quite visibly so, and a few were from relatively well-off families and were doing the training to pass time.

In one training centre a trainer told us they screened potential trainees to understand their motivations to join the course, and discouraged those who did not want to get jobs in the same industry. However, this was the same training centre which had asked a boy from one of our families to join and complete the Sudokkho training before he was allowed to join the training of his choice (see box 41). A few trainees from another training centre also told us they had been *'interviewed'* when enrolling in the training courses, but when researchers probed them more about the *'interview'* process, they explained it was reduced to submission of their national ID card or birth registration certificate, school certificate and passport-sized photographs. They had not been asked about their interest or motivation to join the courses and had been told that if they completed the full course, the training centre would find them a job.

#### Struggles of a 13 year-old trainee

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Purnima is the second child of four and was born in her grandma's home in a slum in one of the industrial districts in Bangladesh. Her parents had migrated here in search of work and her father started working as a rickshaw driver while her mother joined in a garment factory in the EPZ earning Tk 3,500/ month. Her father's health soon deteriorated as he suffered from chronic asthma and arthritis. He started using *ganja* and spent time gambling so they became completely dependent on her mother's income. He gave Purnima away to their landlord when she was four years old in return for some money. He said he did it *'for her better future'* and insisted her elder sister stop going to school and help with household chores.

Purnima started her new life with a completely new family who treated her well. She *'got admitted in a school, had nicer dresses, good food'*. But she *'was feeling empty inside'* as she missed her family so she ran away back to her parent's home. Strangers helped her with the bus fare and finding her old village. Although her mother and sister were pleased to see her, her father was furious because he thought he would have to return the money he took from the family. For a year afterwards, her parents arranged for her to work as a housemaid in another *upazilla*. Then her mother gave birth to her fourth baby and the parents decided to bring Purnima back home as her elder sister was now married and with mother working at the EPZ there was no one else to take care of home and her baby brother.

Purnima is now 13 and her parents want her to get a job in a garment factory. She went to the EPZ several times and visited at least 20-22 garment factories but was rejected by all of them for being underage. One of her neighbours suggested to her mother that she should could join the Sudokkho training as she had heard some graduates had got work at the EPZ. She has been attending the training for the last 6 months but cannot finish, in part because she has to find someone to look after her baby brother. The training centre is putting pressure on her to complete the course because they will have people come from the Dhaka office to organise the exam. But she rarely gets time to go to class. When she does go she tries to stay longer so she can learn to operate the sewing machine. They have promised to help her get a job when she finishes the course and is old enough and she is hopeful of this.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban

## 4. Training costs

Unlike in the 2016 study, where trainees had shared with us that the training fees varied even for people on the same course, this year we saw that though the training fees var-

#### What training centres say about fees

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The owner of the training centre I visited explained that since the Sudokkho SMO course was a donor-funded one, there was no pressure on the trainees to pay for the course. He shared that the training centre was given a sum of about Tk 3,500 for each trainee by the programme. 30% of this amount was paid on enrolment, 15% on graduation and 55% when the trainee was placed with a garment factory. While there was a fee of Tk 1,000 to enrol in the course, the training centre owner said this was hardly ever paid in full by the trainees. He gave the example of a mother and son duo who had joined the Sudokkho SMO course by paying Tk 200 each promising they would pay the rest when they found jobs. After completing their training and being placed in SMO jobs at a garment factory, they had *'conveniently forgotten'* to pay the Tk 1,600 they owed the training centre. The owner told me there were other cases like this but the money Sudokkho paid them for training the trainees made up for the costs.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban

The training centre owner said he did not want to charge any fee for the Sudokkho training as it was a donor-funded project but was encouraged by the project to charge a minimal fee of Tk 1,000 as it would mean that the training was *'not free'* and trainees would feel obliged to complete the training as they had paid for it. Although he told me he was still not charging a fee to enrol in the Sudokkho course as it's *'not nice to take money from poor people'*, the trainees I talked with told me he had taken a fees of Tk 1,000 when they enrolled.

Field Notes, Y2/A3 rural



A Sudokkho SMO training in progress.

ied across locations, they were consistent for trainees within a centre. However, like last year, they were still *'open to negotiation'* with many trainees telling us that they had negotiated with the training centre to pay a certain amount upfront and would be paying the rest as and when they completed their training. All of the trainees we talked with said that the money for the training fees had been paid by their family members and since they could come to an understanding with the training centre about paying in instalments, arranging the money had only been a problem for one boy who had not been able to pay for his electrical course.

Trainees shared that the fees for the Sudokkho SMO course are lower than those charged by other training centres. This, a few said, was also a reason for them enrolling in the Sudokkho course. People told us that a two-month training for a sewing machine operator typically cost in the range of Tk 3,000-5,000 in other training centres, with them having to pay even more for joining courses that specialised in specific clothing items, for example, a two-month training for sewing jeans cost between Tk 7,000-8,000. In contrast, the Sudokkho training course fees, in all but the Y2/C3 urban location, were less than Tk 1,100. In the EPZ location, however, people told us the Sudokkho training fees were higher

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#### Age criteria to enrol in the training

The owner of the training centre we visited told us they only encouraged trainees who were 18-30 years of age for the SMO course. He particularly focused on the upper age limit saying this was important because they were linking their trainees up with different garment factories in the area and these factories did not want workers who were above 30. The owner explained that most people who worked in the garments industry were poor and *'poor people get old earlier because they don't eat well- if you don't eat well you have poor eyesight'* and good eyesight is essential for garments work.

Field Notes, Y2/A2 urban

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I met two girls who were under 15 and enrolled in the Sudokkho training. One of them was my neighbour who is 14 years old and works as a helper in a factory in the EPZ. She is also doing the Sudokkho SMO training. She said that although the age requirement for training was 18, she was able to join as her mother is good friends with the owner of the training centre. She explained that her *'official age'* on her birth registration certificate is 17. She made the certificate six months ago so she could get a job at the EPZ. The other girl I met is 13 and has been doing the training for six months already.

Field Notes, Y2/C3 urban



than regular training centres (Tk 3,000 compared to Tk 2,000 for a six-week course) as this, they had been told by the training centre, was a *bideshi* (foreign) training. Table 7 shows the amount paid by both the Year 1 and 2 trainees for the training courses they enrolled in.

**Table 8: Sudokkho training fees**

	Fees paid (Tk)	Fees payment				Notes
		Paid upfront	Free	Instal-ments	Not paid	
Year 1 trainees	-		✓			Used to work as tea boy at training centre and asked to enrol
	150	✓				For filling up enrolment form
	6,000	✓				
	3,000	✓				
	500	✓				
	-		✓			Was enrolled in textiles course at the same centre
	-		✓			Was enrolled in textiles course at the same centre
	1,000	✓				Training centre said would give back Tk 500 with certificate
Year 2 trainees	1,100			✓		Tk 500 when enrolled, yet to pay Tk 600
	1,100			✓		Completed the course but yet to pay Tk 800
	3,000	✓				
	1,500	✓				Supposed to be Tk 3,000 but got a discount because mother is a good friend of the owner
	150	✓				For filling up enrolment form
	150	✓				For filling up enrolment form
	1,000			✓		Paid Tk 200 upfront, rest after course completion
	1,000				✓	
	1,000			✓		Paid Tk 700 upfront
	1,000	✓				
1,000				✓	Did not finish the course	

## 5. Training experience

All except two of the Year 2 trainees we lived with were currently still pursuing their Sudokkho courses; one had completed his electrical course, whereas another had left the SMO course halfway to find a job in a garment factory. One man who was still doing the SMO training but had been guaranteed a job at a nearby garment factory from the following month appreciated the opportunity the training had provided. A few others shared that they were hopeful of finding jobs once the training completed as the training centre had told them of possible job link ups.

Others felt benefitted even though they had not taken up jobs found by the training centres. For example, two young electrical trainees from Year 1 whom we re-met told us that though they had not taken up the work opportunities that their training centre had linked them up with, nevertheless had gained confidence to start their own ventures in the village after doing the training. While one had started a small business of his own, the other was doing odd electrical jobs in the village and earning Tk 3,000-4,000 a month. They had not taken up the job offers as they were based Dhaka and low paid (Tk 4,000/month), and this would not be enough to live in Dhaka. One was pleased that the training centre was still in contact with him (last phone call was two months ago) and offering him jobs but each time the wages were not enough to live in Dhaka. Another mason trainee from Year 1 felt the training had given him a good start and had helped him get into *'the flow of work'* but thought that on-the-job training was more suitable for young learners.

## 6. Linkages with jobs

By contrast with 2016, we found that the training centres that had the Sudokkho SMO courses were more active in linking with garment factories in their area. All of these training centres had been contracted by Sudokkho after the Year 1 RCA study, and as a requirement of the collaboration, had to institute an Industry Relations and Placement Unit (IRPU) within the training centres. These units often comprised just one member of staff (who also doubled as a trainer), and who were responsible for placing trainees in jobs at the different factories in the area. Whilst some IRPUs worked to link trainees directly with garment factories, like one training centre staff who had *'phone numbers of all the garment factories in the area'* and can call and ask them if they required sewing machine operators; others told us they made frequent visits to the factories in the area to better understand their requirements and also *'made a deal'* with factories to provide a certain number of sewing machine operators by a certain date. Even with a functioning IRPU, and guaranteeing 100% job placement in their advertisement, owners and staff at all but one training centre told us they had, until now, only been able to place 5-6 trainees from each batch in jobs at garment factories. Additionally, none of the trainees we spoke to were aware of the existence of this unit, but as mentioned above, most had been told at the time of enrolment that they would be placed in jobs for which they were trained.

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### Practising on paper instead of cloth

'My sister' shared that at her training centre all the SMO trainees practice using newspaper instead of cloth. She told me she had only used cloth once during practical classes. Usually they had to measure, cut and sew newspaper according to instructions provided by the trainers. She said this was a cost-saving measure. She proudly showed me a *salwaar* she had made out of a newspaper.

During discussions with the rest of the RCA team after my return, I found that this was the only example of a training centre which did this and all the other training centres were providing cloth to their trainees to practice with.

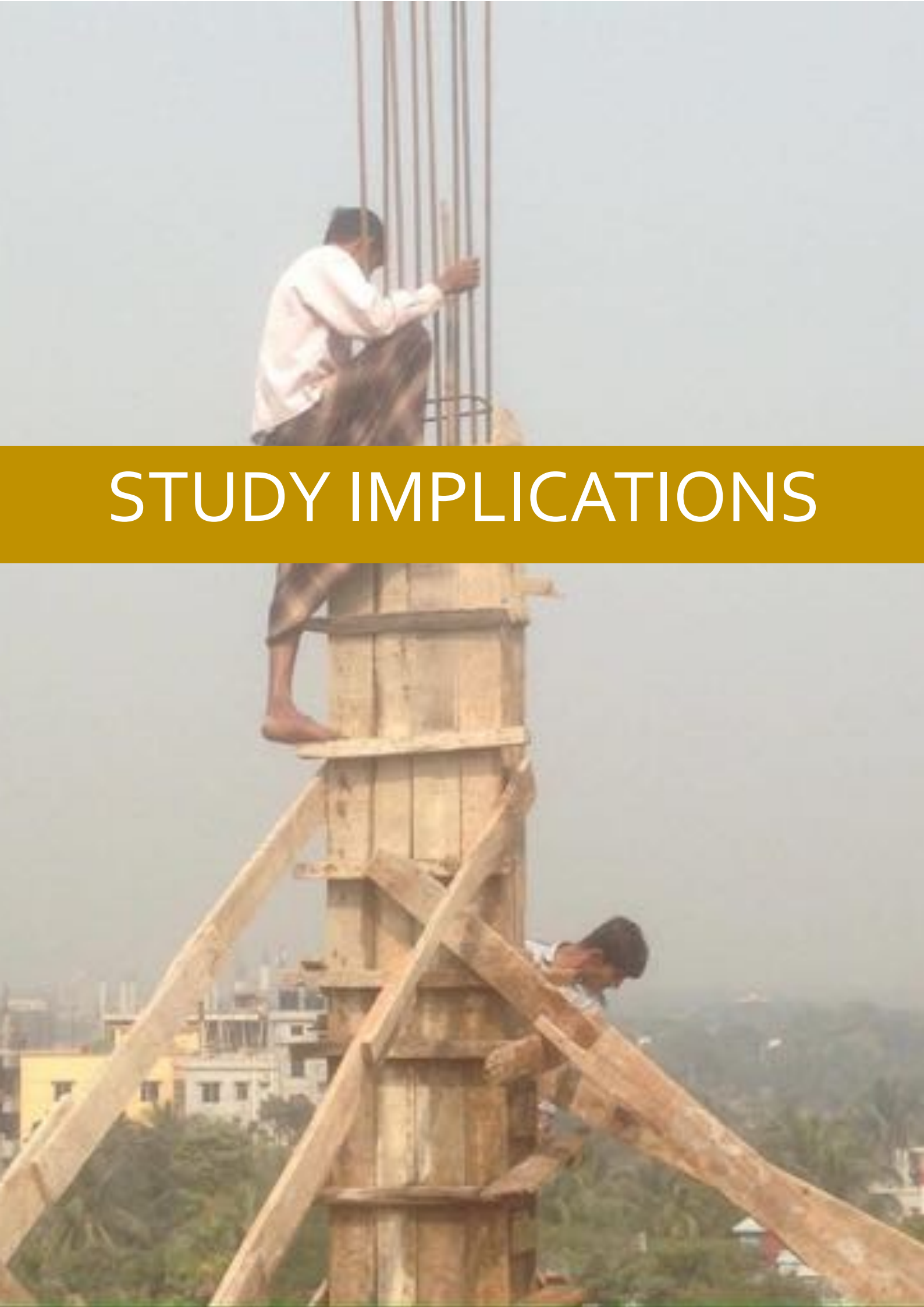
Y2/C3 urban

In the Y2/A3 rural location, the training centre owner explained to us that although they had an IRPU staff who made contact with the different garment factories in the *upazilla*, he relied heavily on his personal network to find jobs for the Sudokkho trainees who were enrolled at his centre. He shared that he knew the owner of several garment factories in the area and was using this network to his benefit by providing skilled workers to these factories. Others here also told us that the training centre owner had made clear to the trainees that the training centre would arrange a job for them on the condition that they (the trainees) bring 4-5 potential trainees to be enrolled in the following batch of training courses. The owner explained the reason for this saying that as this was a rural location, many did not understand the added value of training, focusing instead on directly joining the garment factories as helpers, or going to Dhaka to work in garment factories. Asking trainees to recommend the course to other people and also bringing in potential trainees was a way to fill up the required seats in a batch.

People in the same location also told us about one man who came to the training centre every Friday, and taught them *'tips and tricks'* for getting a job at the two garment factories nearby. People said he worked at one of the garment factories there and referred to him as the *'trainer from the factory'*. While one woman shared that he told them it was *'important to sew in a straight line'*, another mentioned that he asked them to *'smile when answering questions at the job interview (at the factory)'*. Trainees told us he would *'point at a few people'* and tell them they will *'get a job at the factory next month (when they completed the training)'*. While no one knew the basis on what he made his selection, everyone agreed that the people he pointed at ended up getting the jobs. One of the trainees we lived with had been selected by him in this way and was eager to start a job at the factory in the next month.

In the Y2/C3 urban location, people told us that the owner of the training centre personally and professionally knew managers of different EPZ factories and once in a while a car would come to the training centre from the EPZ area.

This car would have managers from some EPZ factories who chose trainees from the training centre and hired them to work in their factories. Although no one was sure of the criteria for the selection of these trainees, many women we chatted with thought it was a better choice to enrol in this particular training centre as they had seen trainees from this centre *'getting into the cars with the managers from EPZ'*. Another woman trainee shared with us that though she had finished her training two months ago, she had purposely not taken her certificate so that she was still officially enrolled in the course and still goes into the training centre so she has *'a chance to get picked up by the EPZ car'*. A few others told us that the training centre owner acted as a broker for the EPZ factories and both trainees and EPZ factory managers paid him a commission of Tk 2,000- 3,000 for per worker hired by the factories.



# STUDY IMPLICATIONS

# Study Implications

The following study implications emerge from the in-depth conversations and interactions with the youths in the study locations and are presented from their perspective rather than with the interpretation of the research team. They are structured around some of the underlying assumptions of the Sudokkho's current Theory of Change (TOC) and also purposefully seek to shed some light on the conundrums that were identified by Sudokkho staff during the analysis and discussions of the 1<sup>st</sup> year Findings.

**Year 1 Conundrum# 1:** *Why there is still a large number of people employed in the RMG and construction sectors and why training centres focus on these sectors, given that people shared they did not generally aspire to work in these sectors?*

The RMG and construction sectors are large employers and youth tell us that it is relatively easy to get employed with or without skills in these sectors. Turnover is always a high and there *'are always vacancies'*. Many young men and women told us they do not have career aspirations within these sectors but are working there purely as *'a means to an end'* to make money to move back to their villages or to save for small scale investment. Training centres are often viewed as a means to get a job rather than to acquire skills *per se*. In these industries where competition for short term work is high (always many seeking work because of the high turnover), any opportunity to network with future employers is highly valued and training centres offer this link.

One key assumption in the Sudokkho Theory of Change concerns the ability of training centres to attract trainees and specifically states the assumption that *'PTPs (have the ability to attract trainees (including disadvantaged groups) for quality training'*. In order to invest in the right people for training, those who **do aspire** to careers in the two sectors rather than more casual workers who want links to employers or to further education, more careful screening may be required.

The study findings raise a number of key questions around the profile of potential trainees.

The current trainees shared a mixture of motivations for doing the training such as getting a job, *'filling time'* and the course contributing to their

further education (a step to undertaking degree course, for example). ***Should training centres only be targeting youths aspiring for careers in these industries?***

Many youths and some Year 1 trainees told us that they want flexible working arrangements such as working part-time or working at home. ***Should training courses accommodate these different needs?*** If so, the indicators for measuring success of the Sudokkho programme will need to be adjusted to reflect these different aspirations.

***Who are the disadvantaged groups?*** The study finds there is some confusion about these targets with some suggesting these are poorer families or *'frustrated youths'*. However, the study suggests that, according to youth, that conventional definitions of disadvantage may miss particular aspects of disadvantage which need to be addressed, especially the lack of networks or inability to bribe to enter employment.

**More thorough pre-enrolment discussions /screening:** Some trainers and trainees appreciated the few training centres which conducted pre-enrolment interviews and screenings. These practices could be encouraged and enhanced so there is a better understanding of the trainees' background, aspirations, family circumstances and pressures. People said many training centres seemed more concerned with *'filling the seats'* to ensure they get the money rather than investing time in identifying the most suitable trainees for their courses.

**Whole Cycle Pastoral Care:** No trainees were aware of the Industry Relations and Placement Units within the Sudokkho Year 2 training centres. Often these units are staffed part time by staff who are also trainers. To ensure that investment is being made in the *'right trainees'* and to provide comparatively more support to trainees than other training centres, these units could be resourced to provide comprehensive pastoral care for the trainees across the whole cycle of their training course and beyond, including: interviewing the trainees prior to enrolment to understand their aspirations and aligning this with the most suitable course; mapping out career paths; providing guidance on job interviews and what skills are required to pass the factory tests; linking trainees with desired industries; creating

alumni networks (see below); and post training support (see below).

**Networking the un-networked:** Many young men and women told us that networks are key to getting jobs. People shared that one of the benefits of the training course is that they can develop wider networks with other trainees and trainers. This could be capitalised on and made more systematic through developing alumni networks with ex-trainees to share job opportunities. An alumni, managed through the IRPU, could assist in widening and fostering stronger networks for trainees and become a comparative advantage of joining the Sudokkho training courses.

**Post Training Support:** Some trainees shared that although the training had helped them understand the '*flow of work*' they learned the most when this was put into practice on the job. The training centres could provide ongoing mentoring services to support former trainees who have since acquired practical experience to further enhance their skills to enable career progression. Different media could be used for the on-going mentoring such as in-person evening clinics or the use of online applications (see study implication below).

**Identifying the 'right' industries:** Many young men and women told us that the garment factories or construction sites do not want skilled workers. They told us instead they can learn on the job and this is preferred. This is contrary to a number of the key assumptions in the Sudokkho Theory of Change:

*PTPs can profitably offer quality training that is valued and **demand**ed by industry*

*Employers pay premium wage to **skilled workers***

*Industry recognise that **investing in training** is part of their business model*

People shared there are particular factories and construction sites (often small in number) that do value skilled work and these tend to be the ones which have better working conditions such as the EPZ factories, foreign-owned companies and overseas work. These factories and sites are the ones that also provide better longer term career prospects and are the more sought after jobs. In order to confirm the intention of linking skilled workers to industry demand, training centres could solely focus on linking up and finding job opportunities for trainees in these workplaces. Indicators of achievement would then be linked to longevity in the job, decent (premium) wages and career progression rather than simply employment.

**Improved Safety and Compliance with Standards:** Many young men and women told us about harassment and the lack of safety provisions in the workplace. Even though they

are taught about the importance of safety in the training courses this is rarely practiced in their jobs. Rather than turning a blind eye to this and recognising that these issues are often at the heart of why youth choose to leave these industries, training centres could only link trainees with compliant factories and worksites that provide respectful and safe workplaces. This would also become a comparative advantage of the Sudokkho training courses by providing opportunities for youths in highly sought-after factories and sites.

**What are employers looking for?** Young men and women told us there are many factors that influence their ability to get jobs such as being or looking the '*right age*' and '*modern*', '*looking fit*' and having the '*right education*'. Building on the analysis presented in the Labour Market Assessment, a study could be commissioned to develop a more nuanced understanding of the factors and characteristics that factories and construction contractors are looking for in their employees. This would assist the training centres in developing their curriculum, preparing their trainees for interviews and identifying the factories/workplaces with the values that they wish to create linkages with.

**Year 1 Conundrum #2:** *How the trainees finance the training courses and how they weigh off these costs with other priorities and options?*

**Paying for Quality:** The Theory of Change notes an assumption that '*Trainees (have a) willingness to pay for training*'. All the trainees we talked with said that the training fees had been paid for by their family members and the fees are universally lower than those charged by other training courses. The costs were not seen as unmanageable and this is one of the reasons that attracted them to the training course. However, in some ways the lower cost seems to be linked with lower expectations by some and, confusingly, as inappropriate by others as it is a donor-funded programme. Contrary to the presumed intention, payment is not viewed as concomitant with valuing the course and quality.

However, if Sudokkho training courses could distinguish themselves from other training courses by focusing on career-motivated trainees and proactively creating the linkages to highly sought after industries, then it could be envisaged that there would be competition for places rather than the current situation where training centres '*run after trainees*'. The Sudokkho courses could be perceived as the highest calibre, with '*international funding*' and the best for career development.

**Flexible training to accommodate earning while learning:** Many young men and women had moved to Dhaka for training and work and often complained about the high costs of living. Money is needed to pay rent, utilities, food and mobile phone credit. City rents, in particular are consid-

erable and it is these costs rather than training costs which are difficult to manage.

Some trainees in the EPZ training centre told us that they really benefitted from the evening classes and opportunities or practice skills in the evening after work. Sudokkho training courses could also offer more flexible arrangements with the timing of the training courses which would enable trainees to earn and learn.

**Year 1 Conundrum #3:** *What are the major barriers for women leading them to not select male dominated occupations/jobs like construction?*

There is a prevailing view that construction sites are not conducive places for women to work. As old women are often seen doing menial low-status work on these sites, there is currently little attraction to this line of work. Women shared that they left some jobs due to harassment and 'catcalling' a particular problem when women are alone or in a minority on work sites. Having lived on construction sites, researchers would agree that these are difficult places. The factory environment, people feel is more controlled and supervised and women and their families feel it is safer. However, work offered to girls in construction need not entail long periods on construction sites. As plumbers, electricians and decorators, work teams of women could work together and gradually change perceptions. We met girls who were interested in traditionally male-dominated occupations but would need extra support to do this. There are jobs where women may have a comparative advantage because of their dexterity and precision (e.g. electrical wiring, tiling etc) and contractors which recognise this and support this could be actively sought for linkages.

Families are often not against young women being employed in these industries but more concerned about their safety and well-being. Late and unpredictable shift work meaning women have to come home at night, harassment on construction sites, fear of being forced into prostitution abroad all colour the view of workplace safety and evoke protective attitudes among parents and spouses. Measures to ensure safety and to link trainees only with workplaces which take employees safety seriously would do much to encourage families to support young women in these jobs.

## Way forward

**Connecting through Technology:** Virtually all youths we met have mobile phones and a growing number have smart phones. In some living compounds Wi-Fi access is also now available for all to use at a minimal cost. Many youths shared that they regularly use their mobile phones to connect to friends and expand their networks for finding jobs; to search for jobs online; and in one case to learn new skills through online learning. Technology could be used by the training centres to address many of the above study implications such as: to promote the training courses with carefully crafted messages for attracting the right trainee profiles; creating networks for job opportunities; providing more flexible online tutorials; and providing post-training mentoring and support.



# ANNEXES





# Annex 1

## Research Team

### STUDY TEAM LEADERS

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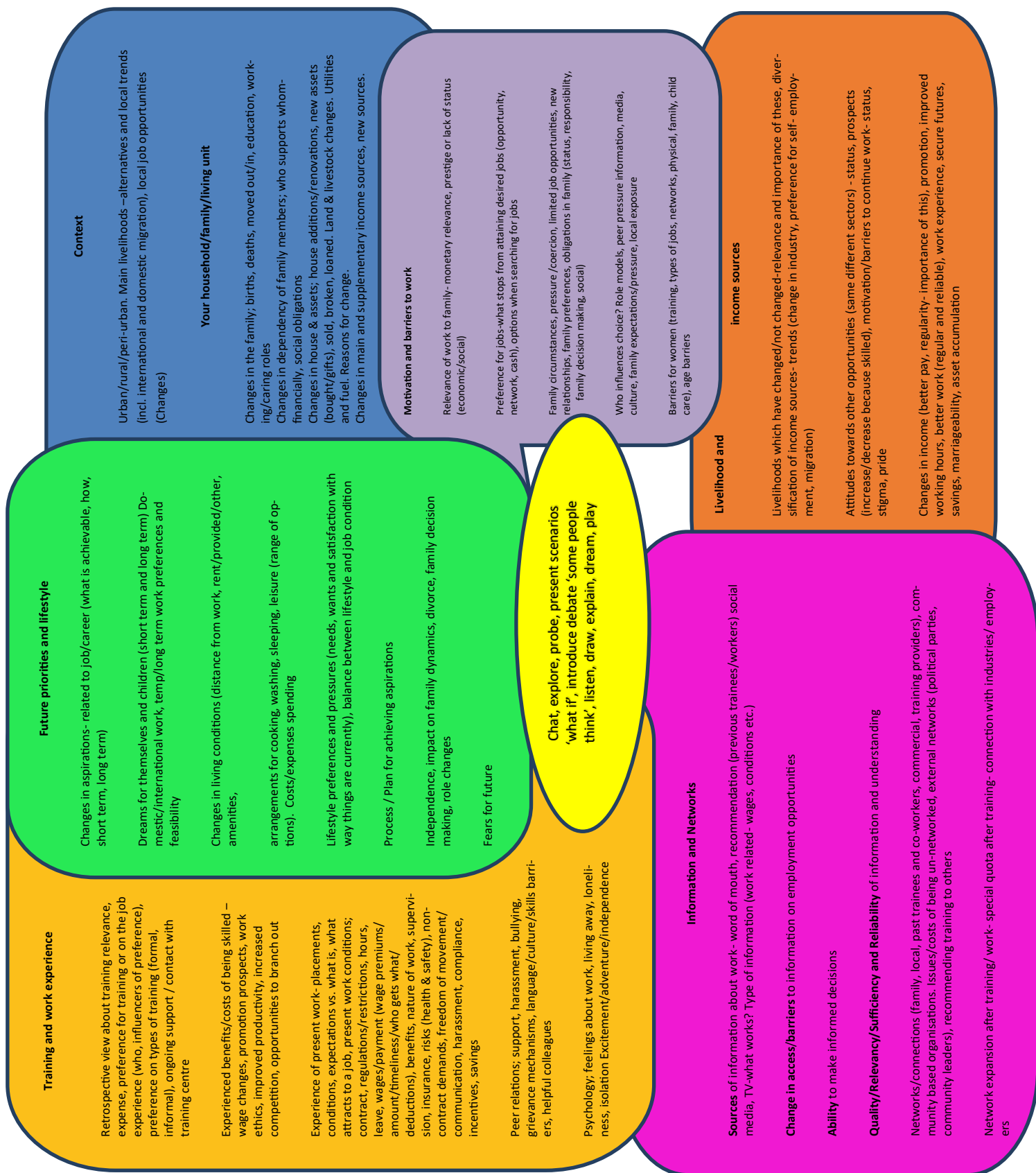
Suchita Rahman

# Annex 2

## Areas of Conversation

### Round 1

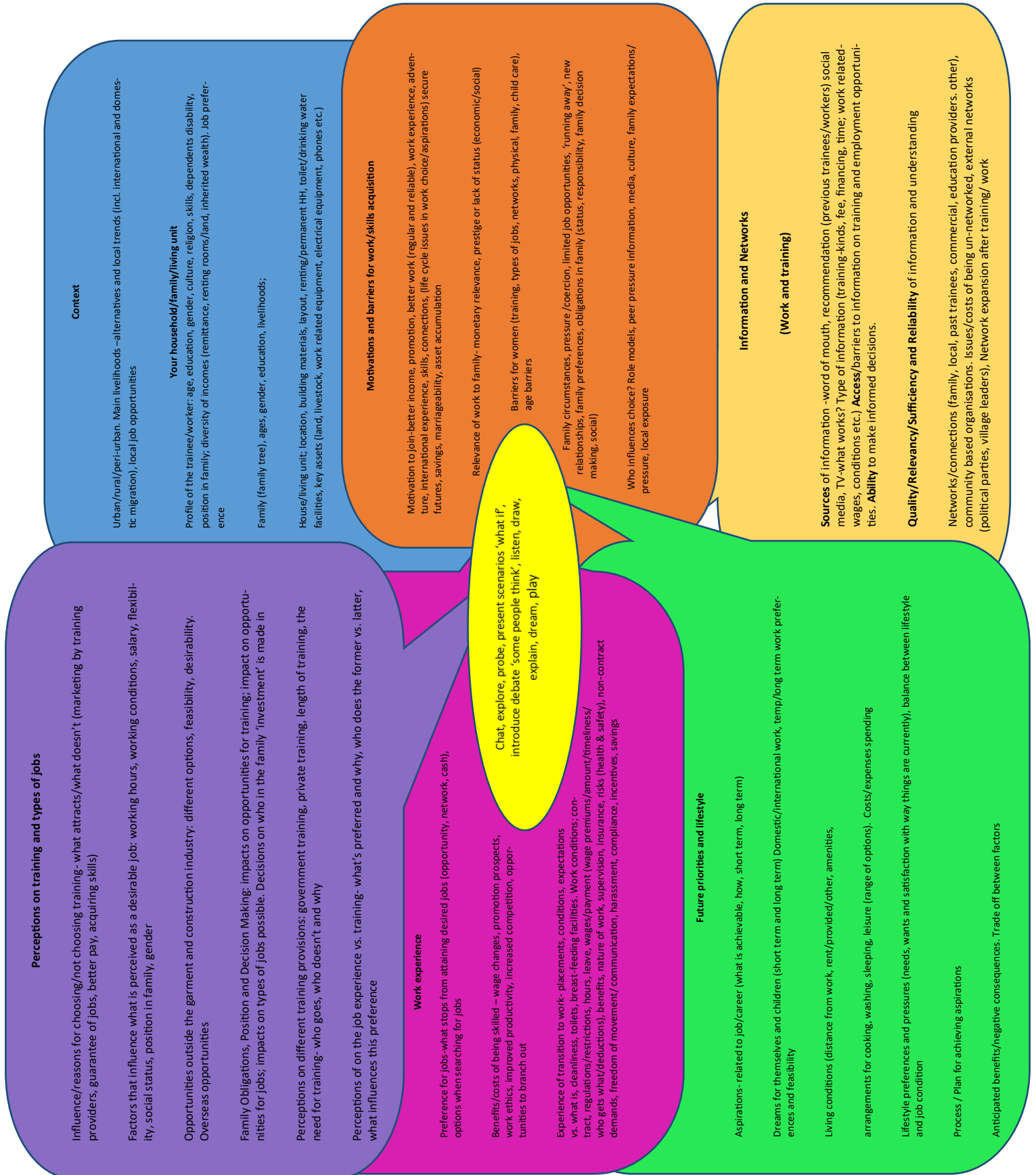
#### Youth Aspirations and Lifestyle Study Year 2 (Changes)



# Areas of Conversation

## Round 2 & 3

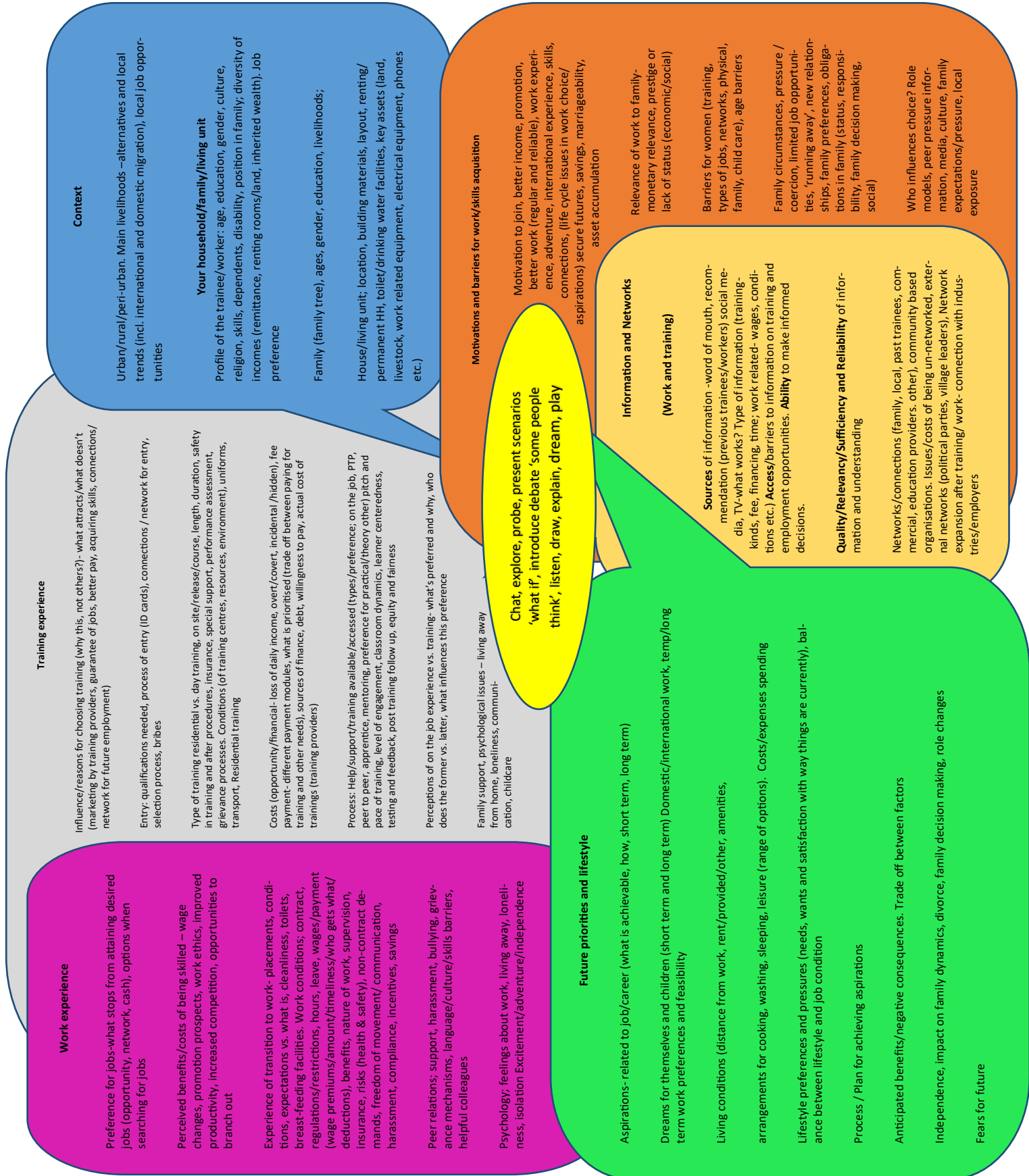
### Youth Aspirations and Lifestyle Study Year 2 (Non Sudokkho)



# Areas of Conversation

## Round 2 & 3

### Youth Aspirations and Lifestyle Study Year 2 (Sudokkho Models 2 and 3)



## Annex 3

## List of People We Conversd with

Category	TOTAL	
	M	F
<b>Sudokkho Trainees</b>		
Above 30 years old		
Not working	0	2
Working in construction	1	0
Working in garment	0	0
Working in other industry (trainer at training centre)	5	0
	0	0
Below 30 years old	23	9
Not working (current trainees)		
Working in construction	0	0
Working in garment	2	2
Working in other industry	8	1
<b>Non- Sudokkho</b>		
Above 30 years old		
Not working	14	10
Working in construction	17	5
Working in garment	11	7
Working in other industry (shopkeeper-1, Hotel business-1,	84	17
	0	0
Below 30 years old	40	7
Not working (student)		
Working in construction	19	5
Working in garment	22	23
Working in other industry	69	16
Current Trainee	5	0
Ordinary people	131	46
Total	450	150

## Annex 4

# Profile of the Youths

Year 1/Year 2	Male/ Female	Age	Training	Job		Date of training completion	Employed in same industry as training
				Before training/ Previous job	After training/ Current job		
*	M	32	Mason	Tea boy	Mason (works under a contractor)	Dec 2015	✓
*	M	22	Electrician	Unemployed	Camera service centre + other home servicing	Dec 2015	✓
*	F	25	SMO	Volunteer teacher at BRAC school	Volunteer teacher at Islamic religious school	Dec 2015	✓
*	M	17	Electrician	Student/odd electrical jobs	Worked in fan making factory for one week/odd electric jobs	Dec 2015	✓
*	F	21	SMO	Sewing machine operator in garment factory	Same but currently unemployed as factory closed	Jan 2016	✓
*	M	21	SMO	Student	Private tutor	Jan 2016	✓
*	M	39	SMO	Caretaker	Caretaker but looking for other jobs	In complete (training centre discontinued course)	✓
*	M	25	SMO	Computer shop sales-person	Security checker at airport	Jan 2016	✓
**	F	14 (listed as 17)	SMO	Unemployed	-	Training on-going	-
**	F	37	SMO	Unemployed	Worked 5 days in garment factory, currently unemployed	Incomplete training (left on her own)	✓
**	M	21	SMO	Farmer	-	Training on-going	-
**	M	22	SMO	Assistant store keeper at garment factory	-	Training on-going	-
**	F	18	SMO	Unemployed	-	Training on-going	-
**	M	17	Electrician	Student	Student/part time at computer shop doing printing etc.	August 2016	✓

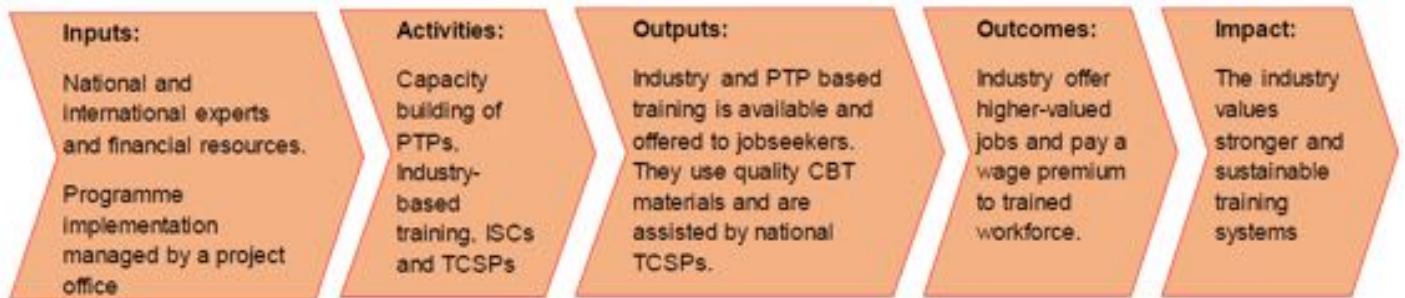
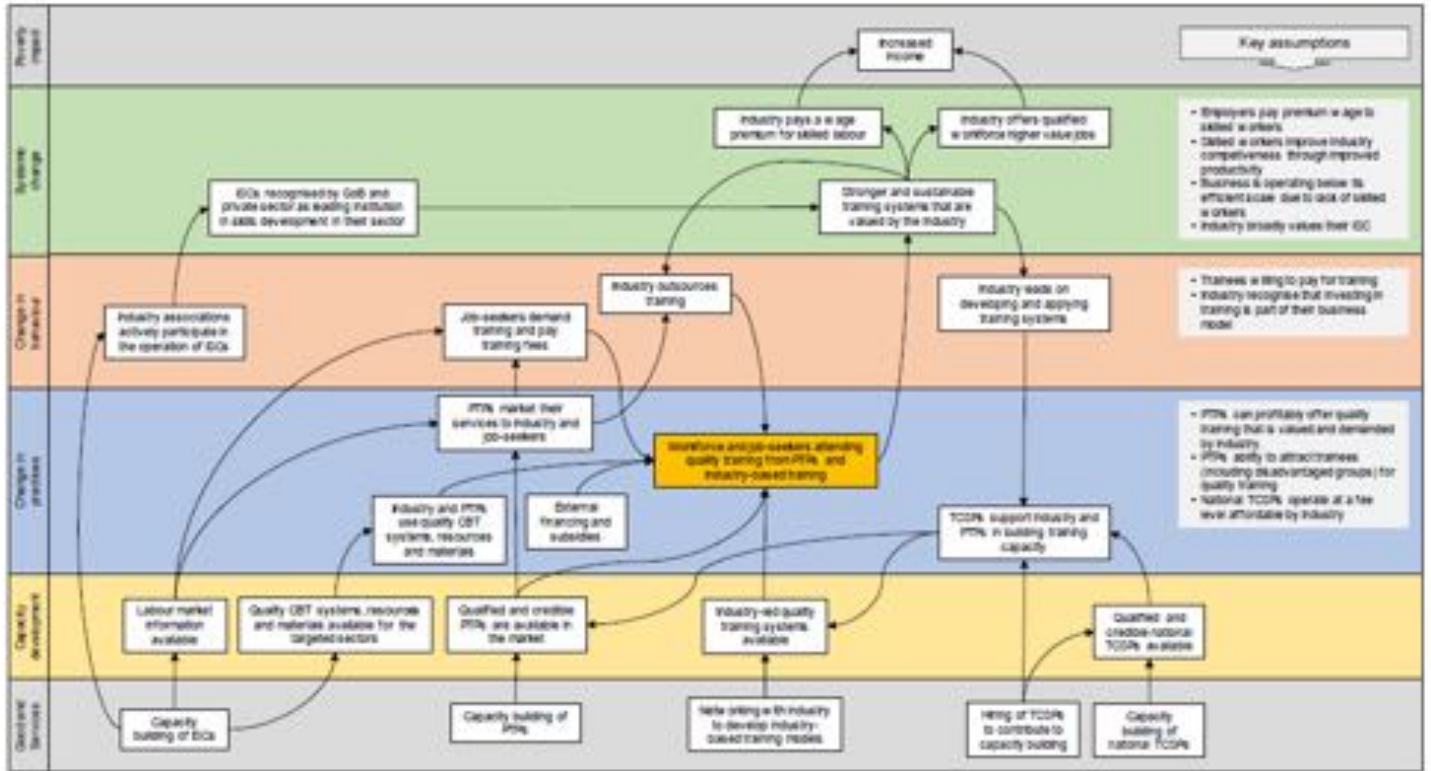
**	M	17 (listed as 20)	Plumbing	Unemployed	-	Training on-going	-
**	M	23	Plumbing	Student	-	Training on-going	-
**	F	13	SMO	Housemaid	-	Training on-going	-
**	M	28	On the job	Shoe factory	Small shoe factory	-	-
**	M	19	Non-Sudokkho training/on the job (repairing / servicing sewing machines)	Unemployed	Own business of repairing/ servicing sewing machines	-	-
**	M	26	On the job	Helper in construction (rod binding)	Rod binder (mistry)	-	-
**	M	22	On the job	Helper in construction	Full mason/ subcontractor for	-	-
**	F	21	On the job	Sewing machine operation (local garment factory)	Sewing machine operator (foreign garment factory)	-	-
**	F	29	On the job	Helper in garment factory	Unemployed (own choice)	-	-
**	M	27	-	Manual van puller	Electric van puller	-	-
**	M	29	-	Work in ironing section at garment/ restaurant work	Own business (groceries and vegetables)	-	-
**	M	27	-	Helper in garments	Own business (teashop and small grocery)	-	-
**	M	23	-	Helper in garments	Junior electrician at spinning mill	-	-

Sudokkho trainees
On the job training
No training

\* Year 1 youths  
\*\* Year 2 youths

# Annex 5

## Sudokkho Theory of Change









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