

REPORT ON IMPACT ASSESSMENT OF OPORAJITA PROJECT

Prepared For



Submitted By

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Executive Summary

The Oporajita Project was implemented between 2022 and 2024 to improve job opportunities and entrepreneurship for Bangladesh's out-of-work women garment workers (WGWs). Funded by the H&M Foundation and executed by 12 implementing partners, including Intellectap, the project focused on skill development and business creation in high-potential sectors beyond the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. With an emphasis on the circular economy, the initiative aimed to provide sustainable employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for women who lost their jobs in the garment sector. This report assesses the overall impact of the project, highlighting key achievements, challenges, and recommendations for its sustainability.

The study employed a mixed-methods approach for data collection. A random sample technique identified a total of 344 respondents in the quantitative surveys, which included 275 skill trainees (147 from the job placement group and 128 from the no job placement group) and 69 micro-entrepreneurs. The skill trainees were selected from 10 different training trades. The qualitative data collection involved 4 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), with 2 FGDs each for the job placement and no job placement groups, and 21 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), including seven interviews with SMEs, 10 with micro-entrepreneurs, and 4 with program/learning partners.

Most Skill Trainees were aged 18-34 years old, while Micro-Entrepreneurs mainly were 35-44 years old. Education levels were low, with most completing 6th-10th grade. The average household size is 4.12, with the majority relying on one or two earning members. Employment generation through the project significantly improved income levels, as 78.9% of employed trainees earned above 20,000 BDT per month, compared to 38.3% among non-job-placed trainees. Among Micro-Entrepreneurs, 65.2% earned over 20,000 BDT from their businesses. The training completion rate was high, with 97.8% receiving certificates and 91.2% of employed trainees securing jobs through project placement initiatives. The most effective training trades were PET waste recycling, textile upcycling, and quality control, as these trades ensured the highest employment rate, higher income, and job retention.

Employment outcomes showed that 823 out of 1,340 trainees secured jobs, achieving a 62% placement rate. Incomes increased significantly, with job-placed trainees seeing an 85.3% rise in household earnings, while micro-entrepreneurs reported a 54.9% increase. Savings also improved, with 71.4% of employed trainees regularly saving compared to 37.4% before training. Beyond the financial impact, the training enhanced women's social and gender status. 97.3% of employed trainees contributed to their family income, strengthening their decision-making power and social recognition. Many participants reported getting more respect from family members and improved mobility outside the home.

Despite these successes, challenges remained, including short training duration (6-8 days), job retention issues, and limited access to financial support. Participants requested further training in garment machine operation, digital marketing, business management, and advanced tailoring. Extending training duration and offering financial support for small businesses were recommended to ensure long-term stability.

For entrepreneurial development, the project provided training to micro-entrepreneurs in areas like poultry farming, livestock rearing, and mushroom cultivation, with a focus on circular economy principles. The training aimed to help participants transition into sustainable businesses by incorporating waste reuse, organic farming, and digital marketing. The effectiveness of the learning was evaluated, revealing that 88.4% of trained entrepreneurs now run active businesses, and most of them experienced a 54.9% increase in their monthly income. However, many entrepreneurs still faced challenges in accessing financial support, with 77.8% reporting no external funding.

In terms of utilization, 76.2% of micro-entrepreneurs fully applied the training to their businesses, particularly in areas like poultry management and circular economy practices such as reusing poultry litter as fertilizer and creating compost from animal manure. These practices not only improved business efficiency but also enhanced environmental sustainability. Many women also benefited from digital marketing training, which helped them promote their products online.

A significant number of new jobs were created through micro-enterprise activities, particularly in poultry farming and livestock rearing. However, despite the positive outcomes, there were challenges related to funding and business sustainability, which could hinder long-term growth.

Finally, the prospects and business plans showed that 63.5% of entrepreneurs plan to continue their businesses long-term, while others indicated potential shifts or challenges to overcome. The majority of entrepreneurs expressed a desire for additional training in areas like tailoring, livestock management, and veterinary medicine to further expand and improve their businesses.

Social integrity was improved through enhanced women's decision-making power, social recognition, and mobility. 97.3% of employed trainees are contributing to household income, leading to increased respect and involvement in family decisions. Improved mobility outside the home was also noted, with 81.6% of job-placed trainees reporting greater freedom. These advancements reflect a shift in societal perceptions of women, empowering them not only economically but also socially, as they gained more autonomy and recognition both at home and in the community.

Several challenges were encountered throughout the project. One of the primary difficulties was finding garment workers who had dropped out or were unemployed, as many had moved away or changed contact information. It was also challenging to gather women for training and convince them to participate, especially without providing travel allowances or lunch, which led to some participants dropping out. Another key challenge was the short duration of training. The six to eight-day training period was found to be insufficient for preparing participants adequately for the job market, particularly in industries that require more hands-on experience. External factors, such as factory closures during political unrest, affected the placement and employment of some trainees. The re-engagement of participants was also difficult, as many had engaged in family responsibilities (e.g., having children or getting married), which hindered their ability to return to work. Moreover, some women faced harassment and job insecurities after securing employment, leading to a loss of motivation. For micro-entrepreneurs, adopting circular economy practices was challenging due to a lack of support from business stakeholders, insufficient financial resources, and difficulty scaling up their businesses. Additionally, environmental issues such as complaints from neighbours about poultry farm odours and health concerns about farm air quality were prevalent.

These challenges led to several valuable lessons learned. Including factory supervisors in the training proved highly effective, as they played a crucial role in transferring practical knowledge to the trainees. It was also found that monitoring and evaluation during training sessions were essential to ensure effectiveness and knowledge retention. The training duration was identified as a major limitation, and it became clear that longer training sessions would be necessary to equip women with the skills required for sustainable long-term employment or entrepreneurship. Additionally, post-training job retention support was emphasized, especially in helping women maintain jobs and overcome workplace challenges. The project also highlighted the need for better access to financial support for micro-entrepreneurs to ensure their businesses could grow sustainably. Finally, community engagement and advocacy proved effective in addressing societal barriers, including gender discrimination and harassment in workplaces.

Given the success of the training, it is recommended to extend the training period to 2-4 weeks, maintaining the same total training hours (reduce the hours of daily engagement and engaging them 2-3 days a week instead of 5-6 days) to allow participants to gain deep and more practical knowledge that can be applied more effectively in the job market or for business growth. There is a clear need for better access to funding, including low-interest loans or microfinance support, to help women entrepreneurs scale up their businesses. Future projects should include partnerships with local banks and microfinance institutions to provide these resources. To improve job retention, it is essential to implement follow-up programs that provide ongoing support, mentorship, and job placement assistance. Additionally, providing soft skills training on workplace adaptation, time management, and conflict resolution will help women maintain stable employment. Community and family support should be strengthened, primarily to address gender biases, workplace harassment, and societal resistance to women working outside the home. Advocacy efforts involving local communities and policy-makers are needed to promote gender equality and safe work environments for women.

Training programs should expand their scope to include leadership skills, business management, digital literacy, and advanced technical skills to address future market needs better. Additionally, offering training in non-traditional sectors such as green technologies and renewable energy will help broaden employment opportunities for women. Future programs should build stronger partnerships with local businesses, training institutions, and government agencies to create more job opportunities and entrepreneurial support for women in high-potential sectors.

Acronyms and Notes

WGWs – Women Garment Workers
RMG – Ready-Made Garments
CBT – Centre-Based Training
WBT – Workplace-Based Training
TOT – Training of Trainers
MCP – Master Crafts Persons
HDRC – Human Development Research Centre
CAIF – Circular Apparel Innovation Factory
ESDO – Eco-Social Development Organization
SMEs – Small and Medium Enterprises
RTISC – Ready-Made Textile Industry Skills Council
DBL Group – A leading Bangladeshi textile company
FGD – Focus Group Discussion
KII – Key Informant Interview
PET – Polyethylene Terephthalate (Plastic recycling material)
TVET – Technical and Vocational Education and Training
ILO – International Labour Organization
GDP – Gross Domestic Product
IGA – Income Generating Activities
CE – Circular Economy
M&D – Name of a garment company (M&D Sweaters)
RTISC – Ready-Made Textile Industry Skills Council
PWG – Project Working Group
N/A – Not Applicable
Tk/BDT – Bangladeshi Taka (Currency)
NGO – Non-Governmental Organization
UN – United Nations
COVID-19 – Coronavirus Disease 2019
SAMITEE – Local savings groups (context-specific term)
KII – Key Informant Interview
RRR – Reduce, Reuse, Recycle (Circular Economy Model)

Key Operational Terms and Definitions

Circular Economy: *The circular economy is a system where materials never become waste and nature is regenerated. In a circular economy, products and materials are kept in circulation through processes like maintenance, reuse, refurbishment, remanufacture, recycling, and composting.*¹

CAIF: *In 2018, Intellect seeded Circular Apparel Innovation Factory (CAIF) in collaboration with Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd. and Stitching DOEN as its Anchor Partners. CAIF is an industry-led initiative and a common action platform, born with the purpose of accelerating the transition of the fashion industry across the global south to become resource-efficient (by de-carbonization) and responsible (by creating sustained green livelihoods).*

RRR Model: *The “RRR” model in a circular economy stands for “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle,” representing the core principles of minimizing waste generation by first reducing consumption, then reusing items whenever possible, and finally recycling materials to create new products when they can no longer be used in their original form.*

Oporajita Project: *The initiative aimed at improving employability and entrepreneurship for out-of-work women garment workers in Bangladesh, focusing on skill development in circular economy sectors.*

Workplace-Based Training (WBT): *A form of training that takes place at an SME or workplace, where trainees learn by doing the work under the guidance of experienced professionals.*

Centre-Based Training (CBT) – *A type of training provided at dedicated training centres, focusing on both theoretical knowledge and practical skills.*

Micro-Entrepreneurs: *Individuals who run small-scale businesses, often in rural or low-income settings, and focus on creating jobs or income through personal or family-owned businesses.*

Training of Trainers (TOT): *A training approach designed to equip trainers and subject matter experts with the skills to teach others effectively.*

PET (Polyethylene Terephthalate) – *A type of plastic commonly used in packaging and bottles that can be recycled into new products in the circular economy.*

SMEs (Small and Medium Enterprises) – *Businesses that are typically small in size and operate within specific sectors, playing a crucial role in job creation and local economies.*

Microcredit – *Small loans offered to individuals, especially in developing regions, to help them start or expand their small businesses.*

Entrepreneurship Development – *The process of training and guiding individuals to start their businesses, including learning skills related to business management, marketing, and financial planning.*

Livelihoods and Income Generation – *The means through which individuals earn a living, typically through employment or self-employment activities that generate income for themselves and their families.*

Gender and Social Inclusion – *Approaches that focus on ensuring equal opportunities and rights for women and marginalized groups, addressing social barriers to their full participation in economic activities.*

Upcycling – *The process of transforming waste materials or products into new, higher-quality items, often used in fashion and manufacturing as part of circular economy initiatives.*

Business Model – *The framework by which a company creates value for its customers and generates revenue, which could include new models based on circular economy principles.*

Job Placement Group – *This group consists of respondents who successfully secured employment after completing the Oporajita training program. These individuals were placed in a job (either within the same SME/company where they received training or a different one) as a direct result of their participation in the training.*

No Job Placement Group – *This group includes respondents who have completed the Oporajita training program but did not secure employment as a direct result of the training. These individuals may have faced barriers such*

¹ <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/circular-economy-introduction/overview>

as job availability, mismatch of skills with job market needs, or personal or external factors hindering their job acquisition.

Micro-Entrepreneurs – *This group includes respondents who have started or were previously running small-scale businesses and have received the Oporajita training program. Their businesses may involve activities such as poultry farming, livestock rearing, or mushroom cultivation.*

Contents

1. Introduction	1
2. Research Framework	5
1.1 Objectives of the Study	5
1.2 Assessment Framework	5
1.3 Gender and Social Inclusion Framework	5
3. Methodology and Approach	6
3.1 Study Location and Target Group:	6
3.2 Data Collection Methods	6
3.3 Scope and limitation:	8
4. Demographic and Socio-economic Status of Respondents	9
5. Findings on Skill Training Outcomes	12
5.1 Participation and Learning from Capacity Building Training	12
5.2 Skill Training Outcomes	13
5.3 Employment Outcomes	15
5.4 Economic Outcome of the Training	18
5.5 Social and Gender Outcome	21
5.6 Feedback and Future Training Needs	24
6. Findings on Entrepreneurship Development Outcome	26
6.1 Training and learning from the Oporajita	26
6.2 Effectiveness of the learning	27
6.3 Utilization of Training	29
Entrepreneurship Outcome and Job Creation	31
6.4	31
6.5 Pathway Successful Business Pathway of the Micro-entrepreneurs	33
6.6 Future Prospect and Business Plan	33
7. Case Stories	35
8. Assessment of Training Modalities	37
8.1 Job Retention and Continuation	37
8.2 Training Usefulness	37
8.3 Income from Training Modality	38
8.4 Insights for Future Program Design	38
A	40
9. Critical Review on Project Design and Implementation	40
10. Challenges and Lessons Learned	41
10.1 Challenges	41

10.2	Lesson Learned	42
11.	Conclusion and Recommendation	44
11.1	Recommendations for Improvement and Future Sustainability	44
Annexure	48
Annex-1: Tabulation	48
Annex-2 (Data Collection Tools)	54

List of Box, Diagram, Tables and Figures

Box 1: Results of binary logistic regression	11
Diagram 1: Successful Entrepreneurial Pathway of Micro-entrepreneurs	33
Figure 4.1: Education level of the respondents.....	9
Figure 4.2: Household composition.....	10
Figure 4. 3: External financial support to the households	11
Figure 5.1: Training Usefulness	13
Figure 5.2: Training(s) met expectations.....	14
Figure 5.3: Job Status by Trade since the training from Oporajita	15
Figure 5.4: Way of getting a new job after training	15
Figure 5.5: Beneficiary perception on training effectiveness to get a job	16
Figure 5.6: Benefits and growth opportunities in the new job place (multiple responses)	17
Figure 5.7: Participants' income changes before and after training.....	19
Figure 5.8: Income status (Present/Last) of the job placed respondents by trades	20
Figure 5.9: Savings Status	20
Figure 5.10: Savings Methods (Where) %, multiple responses.....	21
Figure 5.11: Monthly Savings Amount (%).....	21
Figure 5.12: Improved Social Status and Respect.....	23
Figure 5.13: Participants' feelings if any other training can help them perform better in a job role ...	24
Figure 6.1: Type of IGA Training Participated	26
Figure 6.2: Learning from the entrepreneurship training.....	27
Figure 6.3: Usefulness of the entrepreneurship training.....	27
Figure 6.4: Training helped entrepreneurs start up new business	28
Figure 6.5: Benefits of entrepreneurship training	28
Figure 6.6: Improvement in social status and empowerment	29
Figure 6.7: Level of learning utilization.....	29
Figure 6.8: Adoption of Circular Economy Practices.....	30
Figure 6. 9: Current Business Status of the Entrepreneurs	31
Figure 6.10: Monthly business net income before and after training	32
Figure 6.11: Additional Training Needs.....	34
Table 1.1: Project Pathway and Activity	2
Table 1.2: Training Trades for Skill Development	3
Table 1.3: Oporajita Project Beneficiarie	3
Table 2.1 Oporajita Project Beneficiaries	5
Table 3.1: Samples Distribution.....	6
Table 3.2: Skill Trainees Sample (Respondents) Distribution by Trades.....	6
Table 3.3: Micro-entrepreneurs Sample (Respondents) Distribution.....	7
Table 3.4: FGD details	7
Table 3.5: KII details.....	7
Table 4.1: Age distribution of the respondents.....	9
Table 4.2: Earning members distribution in the households (%)	10
Table 4.3: Monthly household income (%)	10
Table 5.1: Number of training courses attended by the trainees.....	12

Table 5.2: Major learnings from training (%) (Multiple responses).....	12
Table 5.4: Certification received.....	16
Table 5.4: Household income before and after training.....	19
Table 5.5: Monthly Average Income Contribution to Household (Endline)	22
Table 5.6: Family well-being improvements	22
Table 6.1: Business types of entrepreneurs	31
Table 6.2: Receiving financial support from anywhere.....	32
Table 6.3: Employment generation for outside of family members.....	32
Table 6.4: Business continuation plan in the long run	33
Table 8.1: Job Status by Trade since the training from Oporajita.....	37
Table 8.2: Training Usefulness by Training Modality	37
Table 8.3: Individual and Family Income (end assessment)	38
Table 8.4: Average Income status (Present/Last) of the job-placed respondents by trades and Training Modality.....	38