



CSC Evaluation and Monitoring Programme

Impact on development and employment policy

Rizwanul Islam



Before his retirement in 2009, **Dr Rizwanul Islam** was Special Advisor for the International Labour Organisation (ILO), based in Geneva, Switzerland. He completed a PhD in Economics from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) in 1976. Throughout his career, Rizwan had many different roles including Associate Professor at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh, and as Director of various departments of the ILO including the Employment Strategy and Economic and Labour Market Analysis departments. A central theme of Rizwan's work throughout his career was to provide technical advice to governments on how to integrate employment and poverty issues into development policies and plans.

Rizwan's career trajectory

Rizwan began his career as a Lecturer at the University of Dhaka. After his return to Bangladesh, he became an Assistant Professor and then an Associate Professor, all within three years of completing the PhD. Following this, Rizwan joined the International Labour Organisation (ILO) focusing on the areas of employment and poverty, which at the time had a regional programme based in Bangkok but then moved to Delhi. Through this role, Rizwan became involved in policy-making at the governmental level as the main purpose of that particular programme was to provide advisory services to member countries of the ILO.

Rizwan was responsible for conducting research which would inform technical advice provided to countries and would aid in terms of providing support and advice on employment strategies and training people within governments, with the aim of integrating employment and poverty issues into development policies and plans. Rizwan provided training mostly to government officials; however as ILO membership also extends to trade unions and employer organisations, training courses also extended to their representatives.

Rizwan was able to make significant strides in this role and eventually became the director of the team before moving to work at the ILO headquarters based in Geneva, Switzerland. Working in Geneva, throughout his career, Rizwan directed a number of departments at various points

in time. Most notable in relation to the areas of employment and poverty, Rizwan directed two different departments: Employment Strategy and Economic and Labour Market Analysis. In his more senior roles, Rizwan was responsible for developing programmes which included providing overall guidance to the work of the departments, preparing programmes and budgets, allocating responsibilities to staff members, monitoring, supervising, and reporting on the work.

Before his retirement, Rizwan continued to work for the ILO as a Special Advisor. In this role he focused mainly on research and advisory work and collaborated closely with the Executive Director of the employment sector for the ILO.

Although the ILO is comprised of member countries from both high and low income countries, Rizwan's initial focus was on development strategies for low income countries. Once he attained directorial positions, he became involved in building strategies for higher income countries as well, though his technical work largely remained focused on lower income countries due to his expertise and interest in that area.

After retiring from the ILO, Rizwan published a book on development economics (in Bengali). He is currently writing a second book specifically on employment and the labour market, which draws on theories and examples from developing countries.

Employer support and promotion

At the time of applying for a Commonwealth Scholarship, Rizwan's employer, the University of Dhaka, was very supportive of his desire to obtain a PhD. He was granted a leave of absence and was provided basic pay from the University whilst he was in the UK. The University wanted their staff to be trained abroad and encouraged obtaining higher degrees and qualifications in hopes of returning to impart skills onto others.

Upon returning home after completion of his PhD, Rizwan returned to the same post as a lecturer at the University of Dhaka that he had previously held, though with a salary increase. Soon after, he was promoted to Assistant Professor. Rizwan expressed that he would have been able to get a salary increase and promotion without obtaining a PhD as the University had a policy whereby a lecturer could be promoted after three years, which coincidentally is the amount of time it took to gain the PhD qualification. However, Rizwan expressed that his decision to undertake a PhD was not so much for immediate career progression, but rather a valuable opportunity to gain knowledge and skills that, at the time, were not available in Bangladesh, which had a much longer-term impact on his career.

Knowledge and skills

Immediately after returning home from the UK, Rizwan began teaching a course on economic development and planning at the postgraduate level in which he was able to directly use higher level skills gained through his PhD. The concepts, theories and methodologies learnt whilst undertaking the PhD were also very helpful in Rizwan's work for the ILO, which involved undertaking in-depth research and providing technical advice services in cross-country contexts. Alongside academic skills, Rizwan was also able to acquire technical skills during his PhD such as project evaluation, investment planning and econometrics, all of which he employed at different stages of his career.

'At the teaching level, I was able to bring innovative ideas, develop new approaches, and suggest new methodologies.'

Development impact

Throughout his career, Rizwan worked with several different governments across the world in how to integrate employment issues into their development strategies and policies. His first work in this area was with the Nepal's Planning Commission. During the Asian economic crisis, he provided technical advisory services to the Indonesian government and other countries in Asia from 1997-2001. For Indonesia, he led a team that developed policies for recovery from the crisis, focusing on employment as both the economy and labour market were severely affected.

Rizwan also conducted work regarding the impact on small-scale industries in Sri Lanka as a result of economic liberalisation, and how adverse effects could be mitigated. Toward the end of his career, Rizwan helped the Indian

government to develop a strategy for employment promotion and formulate employment policy.

Although a lot of his work was focused on the macro level, Rizwan was also involved in micro-level work. In 2004 for example, he worked in Bangladesh which at the time had been severely affected by flooding. The ILO was called upon to provide advice on how to rehabilitate households whose economic activities and employment were severely affected. Rizwan led a team which identified households engaged in the handloom sector whose equipment had been damaged and did not have the finances or resources to replace it. He implemented a pilot project which provided credit facility to affected households in selected areas in order to enable them to procure the necessary equipment to continue their businesses. This initiative was later adopted by the government as well as various NGOs working in Bangladesh.

Commonwealth Scholarship

At the time that Rizwan intended to pursue post graduate education in the 1970s, he asserted that there were no reputable PhD programmes in Bangladesh. The Commonwealth Scholarship therefore offered him the opportunity to undertake such a programme at a world renowned academic institution in the UK.

Rizwan was teaching at University of Dhaka in Bangladesh when he applied for a Commonwealth Scholarship. He had not sought out other scholarship programmes as he stated that the Commonwealth awards were the most well-known and prestigious means of pursuing higher education at the time. Rizwan chose the UK in particular because he felt it had some of the most reputable universities in the world particularly compared with other high income Commonwealth countries such as Australia and Canada.

Rizwan credits the Commonwealth Scholarship for being instrumental in his professional development as it enabled him to undertake a PhD which allowed him to make significant strides in his career.

More about Rizwan's work

1. Rizwanul Islam (ed.): *Fighting Poverty: The Development-Employment Link*. Lynn Rienner Publishers. Boulder and London, 2006.
2. *Unnayaner Arthaniti* (a book in Bengali, whose title means Economics of Development). University Press Limited, Dhaka, 2010.
3. (co-author with Iyanatul Islam of ILO): *Employment and Inclusive Development*. Forthcoming book, Routledge, London, 2015.

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