

Chapter 8

Working for the International Labor Office and Asian Development Bank 1991-1998

(7-19, 2010)

Part 2: Assessing the Bangladesh vocational training system for the Asian Development Bank

Fielding a team and working with Yun Kim

In the spring of 1995, Professor Yun Kim, a USU sociologist, wrote a proposal responding to an RFP from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to conduct an assessment of the vocational training system in Bangladesh for the Government of Bangladesh and the ADB. The final proposal was bid on by several international bidders. As I recall, Yun Kim had a good Korean friend who worked at the ADB, and that probably helped USU win the bid to carry out the design mission.

Yun Kim approached a number of USU faculty members to help write the proposal and then, if USU won the bid, serve on the design mission to Dhaka in June 1995. USU wanted the money that project could bring to the university. I had known Yun Kim for many years as a fellow faculty member at USU and had doubts about working with him as the project director. But I agreed to help as much as I could with that proposal. In addition to teaching classes, I was also doing consulting work for the ILO in Geneva. So I asked Chris Fawson, a USU Economics Department colleague, to pick up the other piece of the proposal that needed working on and see it through to the end.

Two eventful weeks in Dhaka, May 28 – June 15, 1995

On May 28, 1995, I flew to Los Angeles and from there to Singapore and on to Dhaka, Bangladesh, to spend two weeks working with the USU team helping the Government of Bangladesh prepare a report on the design of a national Technical and Vocational Training System for their country. Because of a mix-up with travel arrangements and time differentials on both sides of the International Date Line, by the time I arrived at LAX, I found that the time of my arrival in Dhaka would be different than originally communicated to Yun Kim. So I had to find a fax machine at LAX to send him a fax with the correct date and time of my arrival. That situation did not help to start my tour of duty, May 28 – June 15, 1995, on the right foot.

While in Dhaka, I stayed with the other team members at the Project's headquarters hotel [name of hotel?] where Yun Kim held court. That was one of the two or three Hotels that were considered decent by international standards. As I recall, first lady Hilary Clinton stayed there when she visited Bangladesh. The hotel was like a little first-world enclave or island surrounded by third-world slums. Looking out of my 7th or 8th floor window I could see hundreds of people

living in tarpaper shacks and washing their clothes in a little stream that meandered through that area behind the hotel compound. Every day we went in and out of our heavily guarded hotel. Drivers took us to the Ministry building where we had an office, and on visits to see existing vocational training facilities and to talk with local government officials.

Every site visit was an eye opener. Bangladesh reminded me a great deal of Nepal. The training facilities we visited were poorly equipped, outdated, and lacked any modern equipment or other attributes of decent training facilities. The only place that intrigued me was a training center run by a Swiss charity that provided housing and school facilities for young people plus some commercial production activities the students worked at to help pay the costs of their schooling and board. It looked like the kind of facility that was needed to help young people gain an education and skill training in a very poor country like Bangladesh. Consequently, I wrote a section for the project report that included a proposal for the creation of a unique Technical Training Center that would replicate in innovative ways some of the things I saw at the Swiss-run project.

June 11, I made a presentation on “Micro-OIS: An introduction to computerized occupational information systems for vocational educators” at the National Vocational Educators Workshop, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The following day, June 12, I prepared a proposal for the inclusion of an enterprise development technical training center (EDTTC) as part of the Bangladesh project design. Unfortunately, the innovative EDTTC concepts that I had proposed were never picked up by the Bangladeshis or any of the other ILO projects that I worked on.

My other recollections of Dhaka were that it was a very poor, backward and teeming city of millions. Just driving around the city was a major ordeal. Although we never experienced any problems, there was always a hint of danger in the air as the country was prone to civil unrest.

Dhaka was not a great place to find good, safe food. The hotel restaurant menu had lots of rice and not much else, so we looked for other places to eat. Yun Kim, as expected, had found a good Korean restaurant, and we went there regularly. He also found a good Thai restaurant. We also went to the Sheraton Hotel for some of our meals. I remember having dinner at the Sheraton with Ejvind Mogensen, a good friend and colleague who worked for the ILO in New Delhi, but in Dhaka for some purpose.

While in Dhaka, I got acquainted with Kurt Becker, a USU faculty member in the Industrial Technology Department, who prepared a list of equipment the training centers needed. Working together in Dhaka resulted in my subsequent recruitment of him to work on some USDOL-funded Quick Start projects in Central and Eastern Europe several years later.

Upon returning home from Dhaka, I completed my section of the project design document. I coordinated with Chris Fawson, whom I had recruited to complete another part of the project that I could not complete because of time constraints, and Herb Fullerton, another Econ faculty member recruited by Yun Kim to help write the final project document. I completed my part of the project in mid-June 1995 and sent a memo to Yun Kim informing him of my actions.

I have given the file containing the section on labor market information I prepared while in Dhaka to Chris Fawson. It covers most of the topics that will be needed as part of Chapter 5 (in the June 14 version of the outline), or wherever it fits in the latest outline. I identified those items or sections which needed his input or further clarification and suggested that he add his material and make any changes or additions to my draft that he deems appropriate. He will be doing this during the next two or three days. We will then go over it and see if it covers the subject properly. This LMI section and Chris's other material can then be merged in the draft final report in the appropriate places by Herb when you get back.

Chris has invited Bruce Heath from the Utah Department of Employment Security (DES) to come to Logan on Friday morning to meet with us to see what part he and the Utah DES LMI unit may be willing to play in the subsequent implementation phase of the project, and also to get his ideas and input on: (a) what kind of TA and other inputs would be required to set up a good LMI system in Bangladesh, and (b) what TA or other inputs would be needed to design and implement the Micro-OIS capability. Once we have met with him on Friday we should be in a better position to flesh out this part of the proposal.

If I can be of any further assistance in getting the draft final report out, let me know when you return to Logan. (June 20, 1995 memo from GBH to Yun Kim)

After completing my part of the Bangladesh project, I had no desire to work on any more projects with Yun Kim. However, I did continue to work with Katherine McConkie, the International Programs Assistant to the Director, in writing and editing some of the other sections of the final ADB report. We commiserated about what it was like working for and with Yun Kim.

October 23, 1995, Yun Kim sent those of us who had served on the Bangladesh Vocational Training Project Consulting Team a copy of the ADB fax he received after submitting our final report.

Attached please find a copy of a Fax letter that I recently received from the Asian Development Bank shortly after submitting the Final Report of the Bangladesh Project. The letter is self explanatory. I would like to add my personal appreciation and thanks to you all for assisting me in the implementation of the Project and the preparation of the reports. In spite of all the difficulties that we experienced in scheduling and logistic problems, I think, we managed and worked well as a team for completing all the Project activities in a timely manner.

I have already submitted all the monthly reports required by the Bank, and the Project's financial reports including receipts will be submitted by early November.

It is my understanding that the Bank will be sending a Fact Finding Mission in November to Dhaka and the Government of Bangladesh will be submitting the Project request to the Bank early next year. The Bank will go through their internal review and approval processes sometime next spring and early summer. It is anticipated that the Project will be ready for implementation starting September, 1996. I will keep you informed about the progress of the Bangladesh project. Regards, Yun Kim

The appropriate sentences from the ADB fax that was attached to Yun Kim's memo follow:

11 October 1995

Re: TZ No. 2150 SAN Vocational Training Project

I refer to your fax message of 27 September 1995 regarding the submission of the final report of the above captioned report. We acknowledge the receipt of 50 sets of the final report.

We reviewed it thoroughly and found it well prepared. We are satisfied with the contents of the final report and the suggested loan project.

Please accept our appreciation for you and your team's good job. We will keep you posted on the development of the project.

As I recall, the Australians or Canadians were the successful bidders on the Bangladesh Vocational Training project when it was put out for bid. However, USU's successful work on the Bangladesh design project paid off handsomely when the ADB sent out an RFP for the implementation of a technical and vocational training project for the Government of Thailand.

With the experience gained in designing the Bangladesh Project, and with Yun Kim's leadership and connections, USU successfully bid to implement a \$10 million five-year vocational training project for Thailand that had been designed by one of the other international groups we had competed with for the Bangladesh project design contract. After USU was awarded the Thai contract, Yun Kim went to Bangkok and directed that project over the five plus years of its life. A number of other USU faculty members participated with him on that project, including Kurt Becker and Gary Stewardson, with whom I had worked on the Bangladesh design project. I subsequently recruited Becker and Stewardson to work on some USDOL projects in Central and Eastern Europe.

Although I provided some modest assistance in helping to write the Thailand proposal and to host their delegation when it came to Logan to decide whether USU would be a suitable contractor to carry out the project, I had no desire to work for Yun Kim on the Thai project.

Several years later, on March 5, 1998, while I was in Bangkok working for the ILO on the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis, I stopped by the USU Thai Project office. While my visit with Yun Kim was cordial, later some of the USU Thai project team members told me that working with Yun Kim was very difficult and that I had made the right decision to not work with him again.