
Governing Global Garment Production

Bangladesh's **garment industry** employing about 4.2 million people accounts for over 80% of the country's exports. In 2014, the EU and the US accounted for 60% and 20% of Bangladesh's garments' exports respectively. The well-being of Bangladesh's people, particularly women who comprise the majority of the industry, depends crucially on the garment sector, which in turn relies on lead firms in the EU and other developed countries.

However, only 'soft law' encourages lead firms to hold their suppliers to international labour and environmental standards and the Bangladesh government has been slow to implement fundamental social and infrastructural reforms. The Rana Plaza disaster in 2013 has been a '**focusing event**', hastening action to improve building practices and safety. Transnational and local unions, together with over 190 lead retailers and brands from 20 mainly European countries signed the legally binding Accord for Fire and Building Safety.

Global production networks (GPNs) have become the world's economic backbone. We choose to examine garment GPNs as a critical case for the theory and practice of developing sustainable standards in GPNs. Following Rana Plaza, the garment industry in Bangladesh is a testing ground for the creative construction of new governance systems for the improvement of labour and environmental standards in GPNs more broadly.

For further information please contact the project coordinators

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Changes in the Governance of Garment Global Production Networks:

Lead Firm, Supplier and Institutional Responses to the Rana Plaza Disaster



Introducing our Project

“Changes in the Governance of Garment Global Production Networks: Lead Firm, Supplier and Institutional Responses to the Rana Plaza Disaster” is a novel, exciting, international, interdisciplinary research project that seeks to understand the challenges of improving labour and environmental standards in global production networks. We triangulate the perspectives of lead firms, suppliers and workers in the context of ongoing institutional innovations in the Bangladesh garment industry.

Our core aims are to:

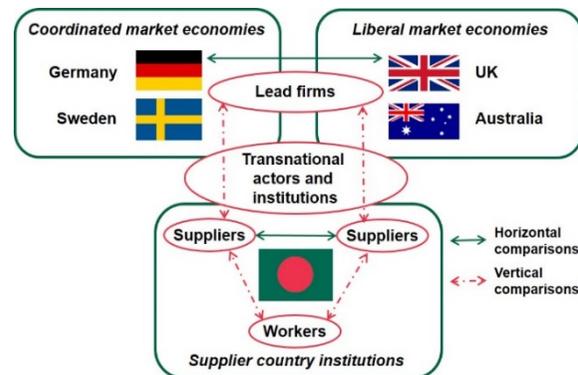
- Compare and evaluate the supply chain governance structures and practices of lead garment firms based in different developed countries (Australia, Germany, Sweden, UK).
- Analyse the labour and environmental policies and practices of factories in Bangladesh supplying these lead firms.
- Explore Bangladeshi garment worker attitudes and behaviour regarding changing factory labour and environmental standards.
- Understand the impact of new initiatives (such as the ‘Accord’) on labour and environmental standards in factories supplying garments to the lead firms in the above-mentioned developed countries.
- Examine the role of the Rana Plaza building collapse as a focusing event that mobilizes support for changes in factory standards intended to have long term and wider implications for the garment industry.
- Contribute to policy-making in developed and developing countries by providing strong evidence-based recommendations for improving labour and environmental standards in global production networks.

Research Approach

This unique, three year (2016-18) project combines a systematic, comparative analysis of developed country lead firm policies and practices with comprehensive, on-the-ground research among managers, workers, government and civil society organizations in Bangladesh. Our experienced, multidisciplinary research team will provide insights into the constraints and enabling factors influencing workplace labour and environmental practices and standards.

Following a change-oriented, multi-actor, multi-level approach, we draw primarily on:

- contextual data designed to facilitate analysis of institutional change and its impact on factory practices in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster,
- interviews and surveys with lead firms, suppliers, and workers enabling a deeper explanation of organizational dynamics, and
- case studies permitting stronger insights into lead firm practices aimed at improving suppliers’ labour and environmental standards.



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