



Canada



Kingdom of the Netherlands



International
Labour
Organization

Towards safer working conditions in the Bangladesh ready-made garment sector



The activities and results of the first phase of ILO's
Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector Programme (2013-2017)
funded by Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom

**Partners
in the Improving
Working Conditions
in the Bangladesh
RMG sector
programme**

The programme has worked with a wide range of stakeholders. These include, **the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE), the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE), the Bangladesh Employers Federation (BEF), the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), the National Coordination Committee for Worker's Education (NCCWE) and the IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC).**

In addition, close support and collaboration has taken place with the Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD), Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety as well as other development partners including GIZ and Denmark.

This publication features QR codes linked to videos. These allow readers of hard copies of this brochure to watch the videos on their smart phones. To install a QR reader go to App Store or Google Play.



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November 2017

Foreword

The collapse of Rana Plaza in April 2013 highlighted the need for an immediate effort to enhance safety in the Bangladesh ready-made garment sector. The International Labour Organization responded rapidly by working with the Government, employers' and workers' organizations to develop a national plan of action to improve fire and building safety.

To help implement this plan ILO, through the support of Canada, the Netherlands and United Kingdom launched the Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector Programme in September 2013.

By June 2017 the first phase of the programme had been concluded. During its lifetime the initiative has made a number of major achievements which are detailed in this publication. While the focus has been on the RMG sector much of the work carried out by the programme, such as the strengthening of the labour inspectorate, fostering regulatory collaboration and the enhancement of OSH awareness will eventually benefit workers in all industries.

Progress under the programme also contributes to commitments to improve workplace safety agreed under the Sustainability Compact adopted by the Government of Bangladesh, European Union, USA, Canada and ILO. The initiative has taken place in tandem with another ILO project to improve social dialogue and industrial relations in the sector supported by Sweden and Denmark. This recognizes that unless labour rights are respected, real workplace safety will be difficult to achieve. The governments of Norway, Germany, Italy and France have also supported various aspects of this work.

I must also mention the valuable support of the '3+5+1' group which brings together the Ambassadors of five countries, the secretaries of commerce, labour and foreign affairs as well as ILO. The group has proven a valuable forum helping facilitate progress in many areas.

While the programme delivered many key results, the process of enhancing workplace safety in the Bangladesh garment sector must continue. A second phase supported by the same donors will build on what has been done so far. Our common goal is for all garment factories to be safe and to develop the capacity of the Government, employers and workers alike so that international partner support is no longer needed.

Finally, I must make special mention to all those who have supported the first phase of this project: the governments of Bangladesh, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom; the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments; the Bangladesh Employers Federation; the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association; the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association; the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education; the IndustriALL Bangladesh Council and several others.

Through your dedication much has been achieved, and I look forward to continuing our joint efforts to ensuring all workplaces are safe and achieving Decent Work for all.

Srinivas Reddy

Country Director
ILO Bangladesh



Responding to industrial tragedy

After Rana Plaza, over 1,500 factories were assessed and remediation work is continuing to improve workplace safety

The Rana Plaza tragedy led to a concerted effort involving local and international stakeholders to overhaul building and workplace safety in the Bangladesh garment industry.

The collapse of the Rana Plaza building in the outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh on the morning of 24 April 2013 was one of the world's worst industrial disasters in recent history. Months later, when the final death toll was tallied 1,136 people had lost their lives and many more were injured or faced a very uncertain future.

Rana Plaza was no localised disaster. Consumers worldwide identified with the deaths of so many garment workers who produced the clothes they wear. It was clear that business could not continue as usual for the Bangladesh Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector and that fundamental changes relating to safety, inspection and compliance had to be made.

Just days after the collapse of Rana Plaza, a high-level ILO mission to Bangladesh took place to facilitate dialogue between the government, employers, workers, development partners and other stakeholders. Key areas for action were identified that led to the development of a Joint Statement on Building and Fire Safety on 4 May 2013.

As part of the Joint Statement, agreement was reached on the need for the inspection of all RMG factories for structural, electrical and fire safety. Also highlighted were the need for longer-term processes to enhance the capacity and accountability of the regulatory bodies responsible for inspection and compliance.

Importantly, ILO strongly advocated for buyers worldwide to 'stay with Bangladesh' and that any rush for the exit by international brands would have far reaching consequences for the estimated four million garment workers, many of whom are women.

The process of developing the Joint Statement, as well as an earlier agreement on fire safety made following the Tazreen fire disaster in November 2012, signified a change in the dynamics of the Bangladesh garment industry.

The Government of Bangladesh revealed a clear commitment to work with the employers and workers to improve safety of the RMG sector. These steps were later detailed in the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA). It also saw considerable engagement with, and input from, the international brands and retailers as well as development partners. Engagement which has continued to this day.

Improving Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme: Actions and achievements

The ILO's RMG programme launched in response to Rana Plaza and funded by the governments of Canada, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom has made a major contribution to enhancing workplace safety in the garment sector.

In response to the Rana Plaza disaster the ILO launched its Improving Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme on 22 October 2013. This initiative has worked with the Government of Bangladesh as well as employers and workers organisations to enhance workplace safety through actions in five priority areas. The first phase of the programme came to an end on 30 June 2017 with a second phase set to run until 2023.

The following section highlights activities undertaken and key achievements under each area in which the programme worked.

Enhancing building and fire safety

The programme supported the Government of Bangladesh to inspect RMG factories for structural, fire and electrical safety which were not covered by the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety or Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. Underpinning this work were actions to harmonise safety standards, enhance collaboration between stakeholders and support the follow up of remediation.

Major programme achievements

- 1,549 factories inspected for structural, fire and electrical safety
- 39 factories closed for posing immediate danger to workers
- Harmonisation of inspection and reporting standards
- Enhanced collaboration between regulators
- Strengthened regulatory capacity to follow up safety inspections
- Launch of Remediation Coordination Cell to drive forward remediation for National Initiative factories



ILO Director General Guy Ryder visits a RMG Factory

Strengthening the labour inspection system

In the aftermath of Rana Plaza it was clear that the labour inspectorate required a complete overhaul if it was to effectively carry out its regulatory mandate. The initiative has provided comprehensive support to the Government for its reform of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE).

Major programme achievements

- Contributed to development of a more efficient, accountable and credible labour inspectorate
- Labour inspection reform roadmap devised and under implementation
- Labour inspection strategy developed identifying strategic priority areas and industries
- Inspection checklist created to ensure more systematic, comprehensive and gender responsive inspection process
- Information and knowledge management systems in place to enhance data handling and transparency
- Gender considerations incorporated into inspection checklist, foundational training, equipment and data systems
- 239 inspectors (53 women) completed comprehensive 40-day foundational training programme
- Code of Ethics adopted

Building a culture of Safety and Health in the workplace

While the RMG industry had grown rapidly, a major challenge highlighted by the Tazreen and Rana Plaza disasters was the lack of a culture of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH). The ILO RMG programme therefore worked to enhance the institutional capacity of stakeholders in this regard as well as that of workers, supervisors and managers to improve the safety of their workplaces.

Major programme achievements

- Improved legislative and policy environment
- Improved capacity of government, employers and workers organisations to manage OSH issues
- Support to formation of 210 OSH committees
- Greater institutionalisation of OSH with OSH units formed within labour inspectorate and employers organisations
- OSH Kit produced and distributed to 4,000 RMG factories
- 811,100 workers (55% women) trained on essential OSH
- 2,700 trade union members trained
- National Occupational Safety and Health Day celebrated
- General awareness of OSH improved through public information campaign and development of general materials



A Labour Inspector visiting a garment factory

Rehabilitating injured RMG workers

In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, many victims were left injured or too traumatised to return to work in the garment sector. The programme helped assess the needs of victims and develop a reintegration and rehabilitation programme that met their needs. It also identified partners able to provide necessary services.

Major programme achievements

- 299 survivors trained in livelihoods skills (68 men, 231 women)
- As of April 2017: 176 running small businesses, 62 in paid employment*
- 3,137 received career, financial and family counselling
- 50 received business development training
- 142 received medical support
- 66 received psychosocial counselling

*Only 238 survivors could be contacted

Improved working conditions and competitiveness through Better Work Bangladesh

A collaboration between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation (IFC), Better Work Bangladesh seeks to improve working conditions and promote competitiveness in the garment industry. It does so by promoting compliance with international labour standards as a basis for building socially responsible export strategies and by enhancing enterprise-level economic and social performance.

Major programme achievements*

- 134 active factories working with Better Work Bangladesh, employing 280,254 workers of whom 56% are women
- 15 international buyer partners
- 136 assessment reports purchased by buyers
- 1,090 advisory visits carried out
- 16 elected Participation Committees formed
- 3,708 management and staff trained: supervisory skills; sexual harassment prevention; work place cooperation; roles and responsibilities of participation committees.

*Figures as of June 2017, end of first phase of the RMG programme



This programme has made a major contribution to the safety of the Bangladesh readymade garment sector. By closely supporting the Government, employers as well as workers organizations a strong foundation for workplace safety in the RMG sector has been established. I thank the ILO as well as the governments of Canada, the Netherlands and United Kingdom for their backing which will ultimately benefit workers in every sector.

Md. Mujibul Haque

Honourable State Minister, Ministry of Labour and Employment

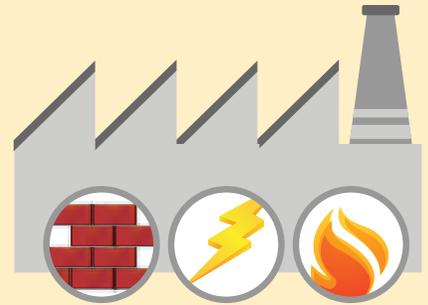


MAJOR PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

Enhancing building and fire safety



Harmonisation of inspection and reporting standards

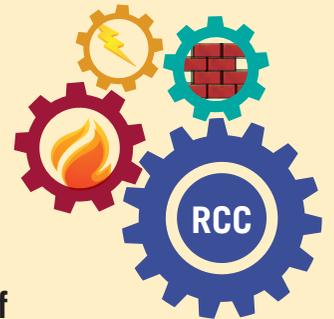


1,549 factories inspected for structural, fire and electrical safety

Enhanced **collaboration** between regulators



Strengthened regulatory capacity to follow up **safety inspections**



Launch of **Remediation Coordination Cell**



Over the past four years this initiative has helped inspect over 1,500 RMG factories, strengthened the institutional capacity of the labour inspectorate, built a culture of occupational safety and health, assisted Rana Plaza survivors as well as launched the Better Work Bangladesh programme. Its contribution has been considerable and these achievements will be built upon as we strive to ensure safe workplaces for all workers.

Afroza Khan

Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment

Enhancing building and fire safety in the Bangladesh garment industry



Inspecting an RMG factory for structural safety

The ILO's RMG programme has helped boost workplace safety in the Bangladesh garment industry through the assessment of 1,549 garment factories. It has also helped establish the institutional foundation and regulatory capacity upon which long-term workplace safety efforts will be built.

Following the Rana Plaza collapse immediate action was needed to ensure that no other garment factory was at risk of a similar collapse. Work therefore commenced in late 2013 to inspect the structural, electrical and fire safety of 3,508 export-oriented garment factories which were identified by industry associations as being active at that time.

Three initiatives carried out this task. The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety inspected factories that their members source from. The remaining factories were assessed by a National Initiative supported by the ILO's Improving Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme funded by Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

By the end of December 2015 the inspection process was complete with 3,632 factories inspected by the three initiatives. Of these, 39 had been closed for presenting immediate danger to workers and a further 38 partially closed: actions which have potentially saved the lives of many thousands of workers.

The inspection process presented considerable challenges. Factory lists had not been kept up to date and simply establishing what factories were in operation and where they were was a major task. With three different inspection efforts underway it also became clear that there was an urgent need to agree on processes and standards.

An intense period of coordination and collaboration saw harmonised inspection standards developed based on the Bangladesh National Building Code and international good practices.

A common reporting template was created to ensure consistency between inspection reports produced by different groups. It was also agreed that any decision to close an RMG plant deemed dangerously unsafe would be made by the Government of Bangladesh alone.

ILO played a central role in facilitating stakeholder cooperation through its Improving Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme as well as its Fire and Building Safety project funded by USDOL. The harmonisation is a significant achievement that has helped create a solid foundation on which future inspections for all sectors can be based.

Remediation of RMG factories

Whilst the completion of inspections marked a major milestone, no factory can be considered fully safe until it has carried out all actions highlighted in the inspection reports.

Since December 2015, emphasis has been placed on the development of Corrective Action Plans (CAPs) and follow up remediation work. A number of factories also need to complete Detailed Engineering Assessments as part of their CAPs where further information to assess their safety is required.

The ILO programmes with support from the Accord and Alliance have helped enhance the capacity of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) to effectively follow up on the findings of fire and structural inspections in a systematic, comprehensive and transparent manner. The Fire Service and Civil Defence as well as the Capital Development Authority (RAJUK) have also been involved in this process in view of their important role relating to fire and building safety. An important outcome has been the commitment between the fire and labour inspection services to carry out joint inspections of factories.



Employers' organisations have been actively involved in the delivery of this important programme from day one. Both employers and workers are now more aware of the need for safe and healthy workplaces and better equipped to put such improvements into practice. Money spent on safety is increasingly being seen as an investment that will pay dividends rather than a burden. While the focus of this initiative has been on the RMG sector, as the apex employers' body we will ensure that the lessons learned are shared with all industrial sectors.

Kamran T Rahman

President, Bangladesh Employers Federation

Remediation Coordination Cell

Supporting RMG factories to carry out remediation requires considerable resources and expertise. For this reason, ILO has worked with the government and other stakeholders to establish a Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC). Staffed by members of the key regulators as well as by specialist engineers, the RCC will oversee the process of remediation for 1,293 non Accord and Alliance factories.

The operation of the RCC marks a major step towards improving workplace safety in the RMG sector.

It is a concrete manifestation of efforts to institutionalize safety reforms which will ultimately benefit all sectors. It will also contribute to building the national capacity of regulators as well as collaboration between them.

It is planned that most remediation will have been completed by 2018. By the end of 2018, agreement should also be reached on the transformation of the RCC into an industrial safety agency. This will ensure a long-term, coordinated approach to safety inspections as well as provide a one-stop service for all factory licenses and permits.



State Minister for Labour and Employment Md. Mujibul Haque formally marks the launch of the Remediation Coordination Cell

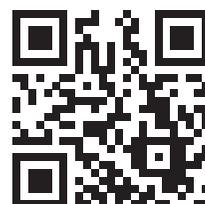
VIDEO STORY

About the RCC

Follow the QR code or the link below to watch a simple video explaining the work of the Remediation Coordination Cell



[Watch the video here](#)



Remediation Financing

A major barrier cited by many RMG factories to carrying out remediation is financing. While many remediation actions can and have been carried out fairly easily others require major investment by factory owners.

The ILO RMG programme collaborated with the IFC to develop a report that assesses the barriers to remediation financing and provides recommendations as to how such barriers can be overcome. High interest rates and a lack of financial literacy were highlighted as major obstacles that need to be addressed. As the programme moves into its second phase it will also provide dedicated support to RMG factories to help them obtain funding for remediation.

VIDEO STORY

Remediation in action



[Watch the video here](#)

Follow the QR code or the link below to see how one national initiative factory owner has worked to enhance safety in his factory

Publications

supported by
the ILO RMG Programme

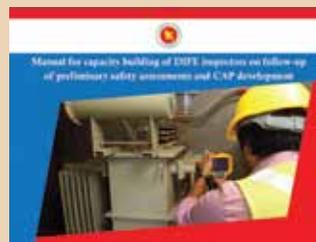
Remediation financing in Bangladesh's ready made garment sector: An overview



This report launched by the International Finance Corporation (IFC) and ILO in 2016 analyses the costs of remediation work in the garment sector and some of the obstacles factories face in accessing funding.

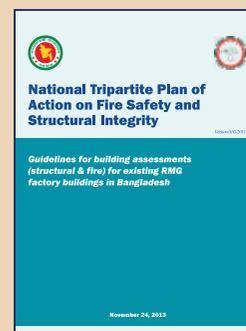
Building assessment guidelines for existing RMG factory buildings in Bangladesh

The publication is a compendium of national guidelines for structural, fire and electrical assessments of RMG factories.



Manual for capacity building of DIFE inspectors on follow-up of preliminary safety assessments and CAP development

This manual provides detailed information on the CAP process, actions to remediate faults as well as checklists for inspectors covering structural, fire and electrical areas.



These publications can be downloaded from

www.ilo.org/dhaka/Whatwedo/Publications/lang-en/index.htm

Refusing to throw in the towel on factory safety in Bangladesh



Four years on since the disastrous collapse of the Rana Plaza building, RMG factories under the national inspection initiative are working to improve workplace safety

Like all export-oriented garment factories in Bangladesh, Towel Tex underwent an inspection after Rana Plaza to assess its structural, fire and electrical safety. Producing some 1.4 million terry towels per month for export to countries like Canada and the Czech Republic, Towel Tex was inspected by the National Initiative supported by the ILO in March 2015.

Following the inspection recommendations, the factory made a number of changes as General Manager Anwar Hossain explains.

“Previously, the dyeing shed and the boiler room were housed under the same roof, so we built a wall to separate them. The walk ways on factory floor were also 0.77 metres wide and we have widened them to 0.9 metres to meet the rules,” says Anwar pointing to the aisle markers on the second storey production floor.

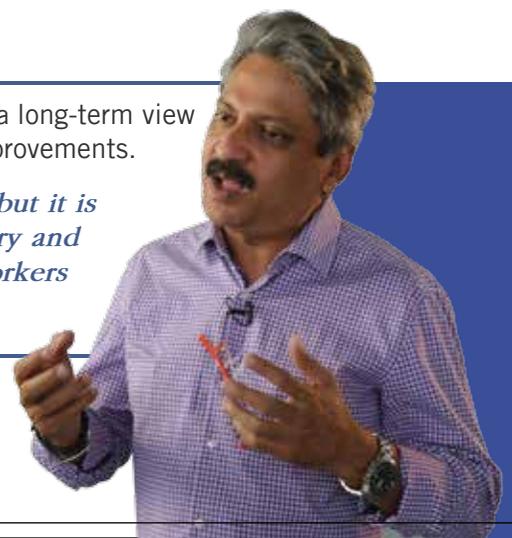
Towel Tex now also receives regular visits from officers of the labour inspectorate. *“I had never even heard of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments. But now we have regular surprise inspections, almost one a quarter.”* Increasingly, says Anwar, the inspectors are becoming more cooperative and helpful with their recommendations.

While previously management would do what it thought would work, now with the regular inspections they know exactly what to do to optimise safety.

“We want to be compliant, but without inspections we could never be sure,” he adds, *while pointing out exit lights that installed in line with the factory’s corrective action plan* “We have also put doors on our electrical switch boards and developed an evacuation plan,” Anwar says.

Factory owner, Md Shahadat Hossain Sohel holds a long-term view to meeting the costs of carrying out the safety improvements.

“*The cost of remediation work can be high, but it is worth it. At the end of the day, it is my factory and I have to be the one to make sure that the workers are safe and cared for.***”**



MAJOR PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

Strengthening the labour inspection system



A more efficient, accountable and gender sensitive **labour inspectorate**

Labour inspection reform **roadmap**



Labour inspection strategy identifying **strategic priority areas** and industries



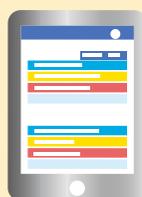
Inspection **checklist** for more systematic, comprehensive and gender responsive inspection process



Inspection Standard Operating Procedures (**SOPs**)

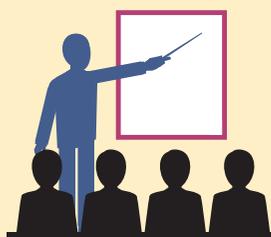


Information and **knowledge management systems** enhance data handling and transparency



Labour Inspection Management App (**LIMA**) to gather information via tablet computers

Code of Ethics adopted



239 inspectors (53 women) complete comprehensive 40-day **foundational training** programme



A labour inspector talks to factory workers

A more effective and credible labour inspectorate

The ILO RMG programme has supported the reform of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) to help it become a more professional, credible and accountable regulatory body, that will not only support the garment sector but all industries in Bangladesh.

The Rana Plaza and Tazreen disasters highlighted the lack of adequate capacity to oversee industrial safety in Bangladesh. The Government therefore initiated a major reform of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) which saw it gain more budget, status and staff.

As part of this process, DIFE embarked on an ambitious drive to significantly strengthen its planning and operational mechanisms with the active technical support of ILO and its RMG programme. This process has resulted in the emergence of a more effective, credible and accountable inspection service that will not only benefit the RMG industry but every workplace across Bangladesh.



Unprecedented safety initiatives jointly taken by the Government, employers, brands, ILO and development partners have led to a tangible transformation in the Bangladesh garment industry, making it unrecognisable today from that of four years ago. This initiative has made a major contribution to this transformation. The BGMEA is fully committed to carrying on this work to forge a safer industry that reflects the label 'Made in Bangladesh' with pride.

Siddiqur Rahman

President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

A major reform process underway

The operational and management systems of DIFE have, to a large extent, been rebuilt from the ground up since 2013. The ILO's RMG programme has made a major contribution to this process. Key steps include the development of a road map for inspection management reform. This has resulted in the establishment of new management processes and a number of dedicated operational units within DIFE dealing with areas such as OSH and communications.

A labour inspection strategy sets the direction for efforts to improve Bangladesh's inspection system and the performance of its enforcement responsibilities consistent with international labour standards and national legislation. It identifies strategic priority areas and industries, such as RMG, tea and ship breaking, and measures to be undertaken over the next five years in these areas.

Processes to boost inspection efficiency have also been put in place. On 1 January 2017, DIFE formerly adopted an inspection checklist.

This is a key tool for labour inspectors to collect information on factories in a systematic and comprehensive manner. Data gathered is used to encourage or require employers to improve the factory to comply with the law. The checklist also considers areas not explicitly covered in the law such as violence against women in the workplace and gender-based discrimination. Standard Operating Procedures for labour inspectors have been adopted. Meanwhile a staff retention and motivation strategy for DIFE has also been developed.

In addition, monthly inspection targets for every district have been established as well as factory selection criteria and a factory grading policy.

The knowledge management process and systems of DIFE have undergone a major upgrade to drive efficiency, transparency and accountability. The launch of a public data base and website in March 2014 allowing inspection reports to be accessed represented a first step towards transparency and openness for the inspection service.



State Minister for Labour and Employment Md. Mojibul Haque presents a certificate to a labour inspector who has successfully completed fundamental training supported by ILO-RMG programme

NCCWE

The Rana Plaza disaster brought home the dangers faced by many workers in the Bangladesh RMG sector. While there has been good progress over the past few years to improve factory safety and workers' awareness of safety issues, much still remains to be done. It is vital that the progress made under this initiative is not allowed to fade away. Good practices and lessons learnt in making RMG workplaces safer need to be replicated in other sectors across the country.

Chowdhury Ashiqulalam

Member Secretary, National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE)

Labour inspectors are now beginning to use a tablet-based Labour Inspection Management App (LIMA) which considerably reduces the time to generate inspection reports. While importantly, by feeding inspection information directly into the knowledge management system, transparency is enhanced and information is immediately available upon which management decisions can be based. The system will also play a major role in monitoring the progress of factory remediation.

In view of the importance DIFE places on accountability and transparency, a Code of Ethics was adopted at the start of 2017. This provides guidelines, instructions and advice to all DIFE staff on how they should carry out their work to ensure that integrity remains at a high level.

Looking forward, the RMG programme has worked with the UK Health and Safety Executive to help map out the future of DIFE. Following analysis of its current status and activities recommendations have been made for the short, medium and long term development of the labour inspectorate.

Enhanced regulatory capacity

As part of the reform effort, new and existing DIFE staff have been provided comprehensive training in a number of areas with ILO support. This has ranged from basic training for new inspectors to more specialised areas such as fire assessment follow up.

A significant programme of foundational training took place from late 2015 to early 2017 helping 239 inspectors gain an in depth understanding of International Labour Standards and Bangladesh Labour Laws as well as areas such as team work and office management. As part of the reform process this course has become standard for all new inspectors.

In addition, labour inspectors have also received training on basic interpersonal communications skills that will benefit them when dealing with workers and

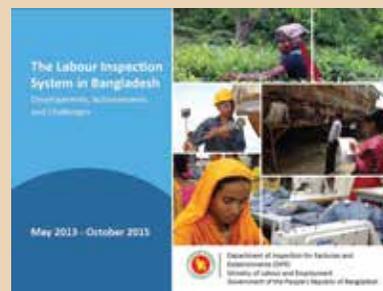
factory managers alike. In 2016, a resources centre based within the DIFE HQ was opened as well as an online portal for labour inspectors containing a variety of information resources.

Basic inspection equipment

The programme has supported DIFE through the provision of a range of basic equipment. This includes motorcycles which are used by male and female inspectors alike to travel to factories and establishments. Office and other specialist inspection equipment is being provided to DIFE so that it can function effectively. This includes tools for measuring sound, light and temperature levels as well as basic personal protective equipment that inspectors can both use as well as demonstrate to workers.

Publications

supported by
the ILO RMG Programme



Labour inspection annual report

As part of its efforts to enhance transparency the RMG programme has supported DIFE to produce an annual report highlighting its activities.

VIDEO STORIES

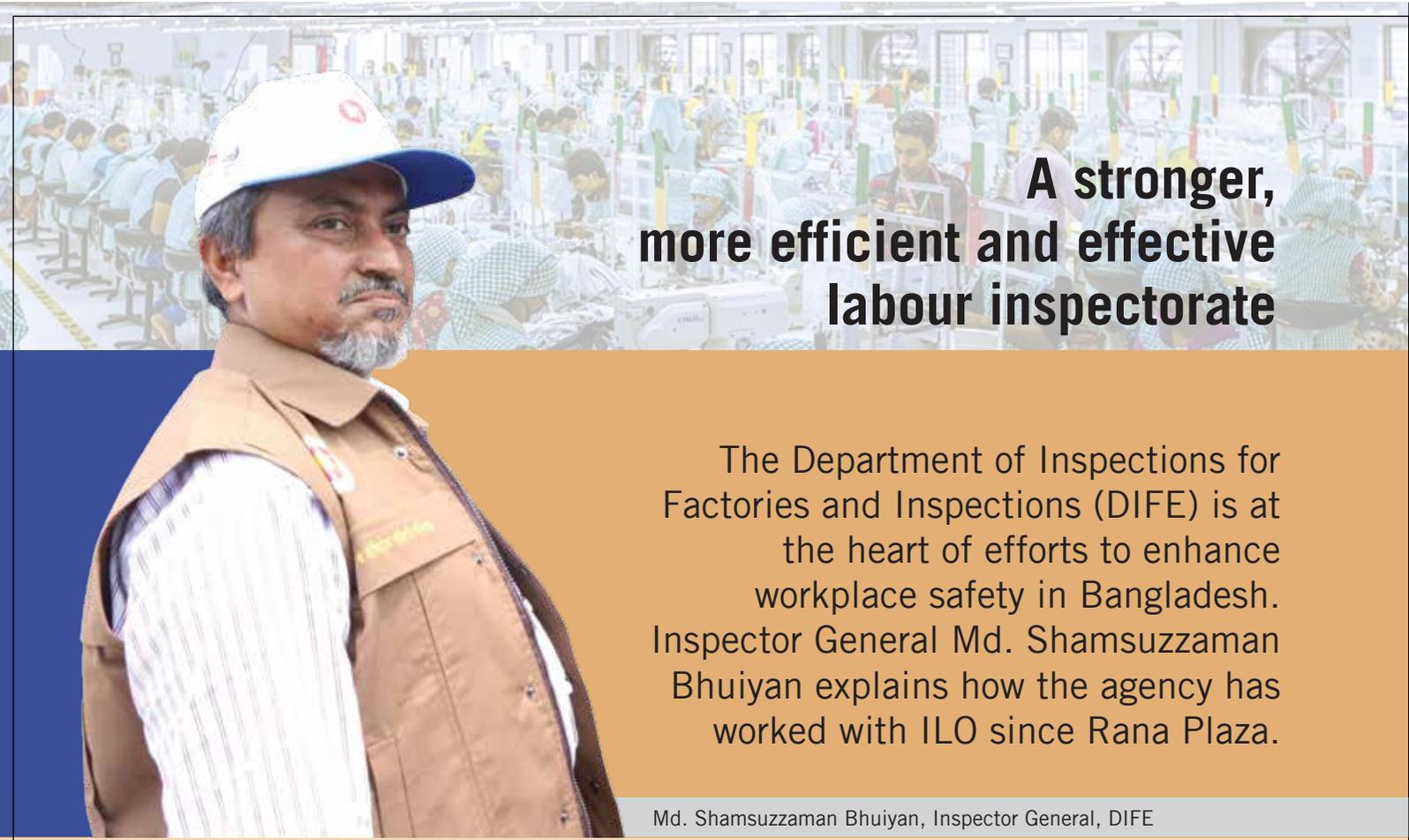


[Watch the video here](#)

Forging a stronger labour inspectorate

Follow the QR code or the link below to see how the ILO RMG programme has supported the reform of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments.





A stronger, more efficient and effective labour inspectorate

The Department of Inspections for Factories and Inspections (DIFE) is at the heart of efforts to enhance workplace safety in Bangladesh. Inspector General Md. Shamsuzzaman Bhuiyan explains how the agency has worked with ILO since Rana Plaza.

Md. Shamsuzzaman Bhuiyan, Inspector General, DIFE

How has DIFE changed since Rana Plaza?

In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse, DIFE underwent a major upgrade in terms of budget and resources. We have also hired more labour inspectors. ILO's RMG programme has played a vital role in the strengthening of DIFE. It has supported us by helping with our reform, organising foundational training for 239 labour inspectors and providing motorcycles, scooters, computers and other equipment.

What major achievements have there been?

After Rana Plaza, over 1,500 factories were assessed through the technical and financial assistance of ILO. Factory owners are now required to carry out remediation based on the findings of these assessment reports. To oversee this work, a Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC) has been formed. ILO is working closely with DIFE and other regulators to facilitate the RCC operation.

How has the inspection process improved?

ILO worked with us to improve our systems and develop a comprehensive inspection checklist and helped digitise it through the use of an app called LIMA (Labour Inspection Management Application). This technology has helped speed up the inspection process, make it more effective and more transparent. We have also prepared standard operating procedures covering all aspects of inspections and the operation of DIFE as a whole.

What progress has been made to create a culture of safety and health?

Much has been done. On 28 April 2016 we celebrated National Occupational Safety and Health Day for the first time. DIFE now has an OSH unit with 26 staff members. In addition, Safety Committees are being formed in over 200 factories, with ILO supporting the training of its members. We have developed an OSH kit to explain relevant laws and regulations to Safety Committee members so they understand their role and apply it. It is not possible for a labour inspector to be in a factory for 24 hours. So it is the responsibility of Safety Committees to keep an eye on safety issues in workplaces.

What will the future bring?

To keep pace with growing industrialisation in the country, our inspection capacity has to be further strengthened. The next phase will see us establish divisional offices and increase staffing at DIFE HQ. Factory remediation has to continue and hence we are planning to embed the RCC as an industrial safety unit within DIFE. Since Rana Plaza, no further major accident has happened in the RMG sector. This has been possible due to intensive inspections carried out by DIFE with the support of ILO, its donors and other partners.

Female inspectors on the front line to ensure worker rights and safety



By supporting training and reform, the ILO RMG programme has helped the labour inspectorate place greater emphasis on gender issues.

Earlier there were only a few female inspectors, but now more women have joined.

As 70 per cent of workers in factories are women, they can easily share their problems with us. They feel more comfortable to speak with a female inspector. I can easily mingle with them and do my work.

Labour Inspector (Health) Reshma Akhter is amongst a new generation of DIFE inspectors putting skills and systems supported by the RMG programme to use as she works to ensure the rights and safety of workers.

“I have been working for two years at Dhaka District office of the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE).

Since 1 January 2017, we have used a new check list. This includes some special areas for women workers. We check whether they receive maternity benefits, leave, wages, overtime and Eid bonus. We also see if there are child-care facilities and doctors in every factory.

We basically explore compliance issues in factories as per the Labour Law. Together with male colleagues, we working hard to implement the Labour Law.”

Labour inspection made easier with LIMA

A Labour Inspection Management Application (LIMA) has been developed for DIFE to facilitate better data management and reporting. This will contribute to enhanced transparency and accountability. LIMA currently contains four modules. A Factory Database Module allows factory owners to apply for various approvals and licenses. A Labour Inspection Module allows inspectors to plan and conduct inspections, prepare reports and carry out follow-up inspections. An OSH Module contains a Safety Committee database and an accident/injury reporting system. Finally, the DIFE MIS Module contains personnel management and other reporting systems. A number of reports are available publicly at <http://lima.dife.gov.bd>



MAJOR PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

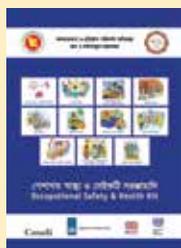
Building a culture of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) in the workplace



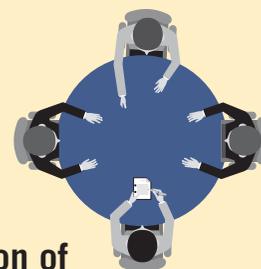
Improved legislative and policy environment



OSH units formed within labour inspectorate and employers organisations



OSH information Kits produced for 4,000 RMG factories



Support to formation of **210 Safety Committees**



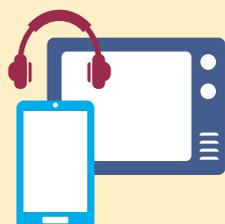
811,100 workers (55% women) **trained** on essential OSH



National **Occupational Safety and Health Day** celebrated



2,700 trade union members trained



General **OSH awareness** improved through campaigns



Celebrating OSH Day in the streets of Dhaka

Building a culture of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

While challenges remain, good progress has been made to build a foundation for a long-term safety and health culture in the garment sector. The ILO RMG programme has worked closely with the Government of Bangladesh, employers and workers organizations to contribute to these efforts.

Creating an OSH policy environment

At the policy level the ILO RMG programme has supported the implementation of the National OSH Policy as well as the formulation of a National Plan of Action for OSH which is under development. These documents set the direction for future OSH related actions, and help prioritize actions in areas with the biggest potential gains, not only benefiting the RMG sector but all workplaces.

The institutionalization of OSH

The institutionalization of OSH in Bangladesh has taken a major step forward through the support of the ILO RMG programme. A dedicated OSH unit has been established within the Labour Inspectorate. The unit's tasks are to train others on occupational safety and health and to act as the spearhead of government efforts to advise factories on proper standards and best practices on occupational safety and health. Employers' organizations have also strengthened their OSH capacity. The Bangladesh Employers Federation (BEF), Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA) have all set up in-house units to help support their members in OSH related issues.



OSH units have been launched within industry organizations

Capacity building on workplace safety

Major efforts have been made to build better awareness of OSH at all levels of the industry. Through training and education as well as broad awareness campaigns and materials, workers and employers are benefiting from improved safety practices.

The Bangladesh Employers Federation has, with the support of the programme trained some 811,100 workers in 585 RMG factories on the essentials of OSH. Utilizing Essential OSH (E-OSH) materials developed by the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin, a core group of 114 trainers was formed, comprising government, employer organization and private sector staff. They then trained 8,038 mid-level manager/supervisors who in turn have passed on the skills to workers on the factory floor.

Recognizing the vital role labour unions can play in safety, the programme has worked closely with the National Coordination Committee for Worker Education (NCCWE) and IndustriALL Bangladesh Council. Through a training of trainers approach, a network of union leaders and organizers has been built. Similarly to their government and industry counterparts, these trainers will undertake workplace outreach activities to build awareness of occupational safety and health amongst union members. In this regard, emphasis was placed on building awareness amongst female trade union organizers.

Support to OSH committees

The amendment of the Bangladesh Labour Act in 2013 introduced the need for Safety Committees to be established in any factory with over 50 workers. The main role of the Committees is to bring together management and workers to help create and maintain a safe workplace. The programme has worked closely with DIFE and employers organisations to pilot the formation of Safety Committees in 210 RMG factories. To support the functioning of the Safety Committees, the programme also supported DIFE to develop 'OSH Kits' for all RMG factories. These include materials to help the committee members both better understand key OSH issues and carry out their tasks.

Building awareness on OSH

Major efforts have taken place to help create better awareness at all levels of industry about the need for enhanced Occupational Safety and Health.

A campaign entitled 'Safe Workplaces, Go ahead Bangladesh', reached out to workers through a series of lively safety-related radio dramas aimed at building their awareness and understanding of key OSH issues. In order to make the campaign appeal to workers it was fronted by well-known local TV star Mosharraf Karim. A series of other awareness activities included the creation of a safety video as well as media events aimed at employers. Other materials such as simple brochures on OSH and Safety Committees aimed at workers as well as a colouring book aimed to help children understand the need for OSH have also been produced and distributed in large numbers nationwide.



Government, trade union and employer representatives launch a major OSH campaign

National Occupational Safety and Health Day

In 2016 the Government of Bangladesh celebrated National Occupational Safety and Health Day for the first time with a series of activities and a ceremony held in the presence of the President of Bangladesh Abdul Hamid. The 28th April has now officially entered into the list of national days celebrated.

In 2017 National OSH day was again celebrated with a march through the streets of Dhaka, events in different districts, newspaper articles, posters and a high level event. This not only helps boost awareness of safety but, importantly, helped raise the capacity of the labour inspectorate to organise large-scale public advocacy events.

National Plan of Action for OSH

ILO is building on its work to improve working conditions in the RMG sector by supporting efforts to develop a National Plan of Action (NPA) for OSH. The NPA will include measures and strategies to address workplace accidents and occupational diseases. It will also help ensure that in the long run, Bangladesh has a coherent and comprehensive OSH policy that covers the whole economy, including the informal sector.

Looking ahead

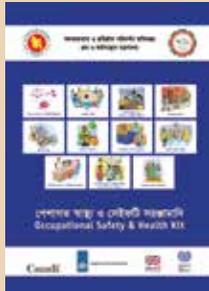
While there have been many achievements it is vital that momentum is not lost and that efforts continue to help a culture of Occupational Safety and Health take root in Bangladesh. Of particular importance is for what has been done in the RMG sector to increasingly benefit other industries as well as workers in the informal sector.

We see many issues in the workplace that affect women. There is a lack of toilets and drinking water, no separate rest rooms for pregnant women and problems with maternity leave or being paid the same as the men. I have learned many things here. This knowledge will help me develop my skills and now I can help others to learn these skills too.

Nilufa Yesmen Nelu of the Garment Workers Unity League, who took part in OSH training for female trade union organizers provided by ILO

Publications

OSH materials produced



OSH KITS

OSH kits containing information on basic information on a variety of OSH related areas have been produced and distributed to over 4,000 RMG factories.



OSH campaign materials

All materials from the 'Safe Workplaces, Go ahead Bangladesh' are available on DVD. These have been distributed to over 4,000 RMG factories.

10 tips on OSH

A basic awareness flyer giving simple safety information has been distributed around the country.



Safety colouring book

A colouring book for children helps build safety awareness from a young age.



What is a Safety Committee

A simple introduction to Safety Committees and what they do.



Safety Posters

A series of posters featuring TV star Musharraf Karim highlight key safety messages.

VIDEO STORIES

Safety tips from a star

A video featuring well known TV star Musharraf Karim highlights basic safety tips for workers.



[Watch the video here](#)



All about Safety Committees

A short video made by DIFE with support from the ILO RMG programme explains to workers the role of safety committees.



[Watch the video here](#)



Shahidul puts safety training to use

New skills learned during essential OSH training are being put to use on the factory floor.



One of the things Shahidul Islam learned from his training on Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) was how chemicals need to be stored and handled the right way.

Deputy Compliance Manager for the Masco Group, a major RMG producer, Shahidul explains that there are hundreds of different chemicals used in the production process and stored in the factory warehouses.

Shahidul says that before the training, he did not know much about chemical safety. The training helped him understand chemical data sheets and their compatibility. “After the training I decided to bring in a number of changes. This was much more than simply rearranging a bunch of bottles on a shelf, and required a lot of work. But we managed to pull it off.” The deputy manager says that the warehouse is now certified and the whole group is trying to follow the same system.

As one of the master trainers trained by the ILO’s RMG programme in collaboration with the Bangladesh Employers Federation, Shahidul has in turn trained seven batches of co-workers who have then gone on to train others. He says with much pride, “*You can talk to any of the workers here. They know about safety and the rules they are supposed to follow.*”

Shahidul admits however, that accidents will still happen despite all efforts to prevent them. “*The main thing is to be able to handle any situation. Whenever something was on the verge of going wrong or did go wrong the procedures kicked in and the workers on site took care of the situation by themselves. This is the benefit of having a trained workforce.*”

After the training I decided to bring in a number of changes. This was much more than simply rearranging a bunch of bottles on a shelf, and required a lot of work. But we managed to pull it off.

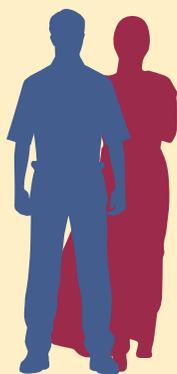
Shahidul Islam

Deputy Compliance Manager,
MASCO Group

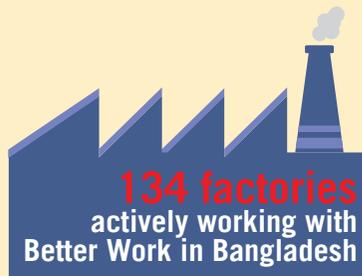
MAJOR PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS



Improving working conditions and competitiveness through Better Work Bangladesh (BWB)



280,254 workers employed in BWB factories



134 factories actively working with Better Work in Bangladesh



56% women workers



136 assessment reports purchased by buyers

15 international buyer partners



1,090 advisory visits



16 elected participation committees formed as 21,998 workers elect 158 representatives



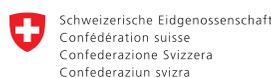
3,708 management and staff trained

Figures as of June 2017

Canada



Kingdom of the Netherlands



Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC





Better Work Bangladesh drives compliance and productivity

Better Work Bangladesh has rapidly established itself in the Bangladesh garment industry by working closely with RMG factories to improve compliance and competitiveness. It is set to increase its presence and help drive change amongst a larger segment of the sector. BWB programme manager Louis Vanegas explains some of the challenges and achievements to date.

What major challenges does the industry face?

The biggest challenge is that factories continue to base their manufacturing strategies solely on low wages and over-extended production capacity. This pushes people to work long hours which in turn leads to efficiency and quality issues, stressful conditions, and high staff turnover. If BWB identifies that a factory has problems with excessive hours we look for the root causes, as for each factory these can be different. For example, poor production planning and inefficient production processes are common factors that affects a factory's ability to deliver production as planned. This is why we are also training our Enterprise Advisors about manufacturing efficiency productivity practices. This is different to their usual social compliance work but we know that we can't fix one without addressing the other.

What value can BWB add?

Factories do not usually work for one customer but instead have multiple buyers. BWB is in a position to reach out to all buyers placing products in the facility and together have them address an issue. If we cannot get the buyers involved, we will not be able to make a difference.

What is the biggest achievement to date?

Many factories in our programme are starting to give us positive feedback. A major achievement has also been the buy in from industry stakeholders. So many programmes operate in Bangladesh that it takes time for them to believe we can deliver. BGMEA and BKMEA are now far more convinced, buyers are more interested and factories who at first were a bit wary are now more supporting. The government and trade unions are also on board, which is vital.

Looking forward, what does Better Work Bangladesh need to do?

We have to demonstrate that because of our interventions, working conditions and productivity improvements are significant in the factories that stayed with us. We have to show that factories which had critical compliance issues no longer have them. Our ultimate goal is to demonstrate that working conditions can improve while at the same time factories remain competitive and profitable.

How can BWB best practice benefit the entire industry?

As we continue our work, the factories in our programme will stand out as industry leaders in the area of corporate social responsibility. Also, this is an industry in which workers move around a lot. If we reach out to workers and management so they know about participation and safety committees, they will help spread that knowledge throughout the industry. Our goal is to work with 400 factories but will take on more if the demand is there.

For more information on Better Work Bangladesh please see <https://betterwork.org/where-we-work/bangladesh>



Taking the Bangladesh RMG industry to the next level

Collaboration with Better Work brings real benefits to garment workers.

With some 5,000 workers, a six-story building for another 5,000 in the pipeline and a long string of revamps, Crown Wears is a company setting the bar higher for the garment sector in Bangladesh.

Belonging to Sparrow Group, which supplies top international brands, the factory joined Better Work in 2015 and improvements to working conditions haven't stopped since.

Located in the country's central region of Mymensingh, some 75km north of the capital Dhaka, the factory provides full terms and conditions of employment, medical services and coverage of rent and living costs included in its workers' salaries, starting from the national monthly minimum of 67 US dollars.

Crown's Human Resources and Compliance Manager Nayim Ahmed said that, based on the factory's reports, the situation inside the facility has improved over the years and, mostly, after the company joined Better Work.

"Since then, we elected participation committees (PC), established a new medical ward and a childcare facility to host up to 35 children," Ahmed said. Also, following Better Work's advice, the factory distributes food to breastfeeding mothers and their children twice a day.

Ahmed says the factory also started an evaluation process to reward diligent workers. As per law, workers get a minimum five per cent increment on the basic salary every year. But Crown has provided between five and ten per cent increase on the basic salary depending on the workers' performance, he explained.

Crown Wears is trying to apply the country's legal limits on overtime hours by allowing only two extra hours on top of the worker's eight-hour day.

Still, workers welcomed this policy with mixed feelings, mostly because they see it as missing out on an opportunity to earn more money, rather than an improvement to their health conditions.

The factory tries to make up for it by sharing a percentage of profits with the workers on an annual basis, giving maternity benefits and providing cash for the total of unspent earned leave instead of half of it, as the law requires.

"Workers have now developed better communications with the management who, in turn, have started to care more about us. Previously, it would have taken a long time to get leave approved. Now, it has become a pretty speedy process. After seeing these improvements in the past two years, I am now expecting even more attention towards us."

Momotaj, a machine operator at Crown Wears

Workers embrace factory floor democracy in Bangladesh

Elected Participation Committees are a key ingredient for change in the RMG industry.



Workers elect their own representatives for a Participation Committee (PC)

In a first for the country, garment firms in Bangladesh are required to facilitate open elections for workers in factory committees. Better Work is helping guide the process.

An essential element of the programme is the establishment of representative worker-management Participation Committee (PC)s.

“PCs are the key ingredient by which we bring sustainable change,” says Ishrat Jahan, Enterprise Advisor, Better Work Bangladesh.

“They are the vehicle by which we begin to empower workers to know their rights, and speak up directly on issues that are important to them. Because PCs also have management representatives, we in effect create an enabling environment where social dialogue and labour peace is achieved.”

However, in a country where only a small number of the existing 4,000 garment factories have registered unions, the idea of openly elected worker representatives having a say in the running of factories was bound to meet some inertia.

Better Work provided a number of factories already participating in the programme with guidelines on the election procedure, including establishing an election committee, and continued to work closely with workers and management to support the process. And, in August and September of 2016, workers in 12 garment factories were able for the first time to hold open elections for representation on their Participation Committees. Although voting was not compulsory, more than 75 per cent of workers cast their ballot.

Building on the success of these elections Better Work aims to encourage democratic worker representation in all of the factories it advises in coming years.



PCs are the key ingredient by which we bring sustainable changes to the factory, They are the vehicle by which we begin to empower workers to know their rights, and speak up directly on issues that are important to them.

Ishrat Jahan

Enterprise Advisor, Better Work Bangladesh.



Women trade union members learn about workplace safety

Working for a more gender inclusive RMG sector

Over the course of the RMG programme a number of actions have taken place to contribute towards a more gender inclusive working environment in the RMG sector.

Women make up the majority of the RMG sector workforce and the industry has created a huge opportunity for many to forge a better life for themselves and their families. However, discrimination remains common, hindering the ability of women to enjoy their rights and achieve their full potential both as workers and as human beings. Key actions taken to help address this include the following.

Gender included in foundational training

Capacity building actions for labour inspectors have targeted men and women alike. In all, 53 female labour inspectors received foundational training supported by the RMG programme which included a dedicated module designed to give inspectors a better grasp of basic gender principles.

Labour inspection checklist covers gender issues

The labour inspection check list developed by the programme in collaboration with the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments includes a section dedicated to gender. As a result, inspections will now systematically cover areas such as maternity benefits while the checklist also places emphasis on violence against women in the workplace and gender-based discrimination issues.

OSH training and Safety Committee participation

A body of OSH master trainers was created including women from the labour inspectorate and employers organizations. Emphasis was also placed on building awareness amongst women trade union organisers so that they can help women workers deal with the many OSH related challenges facing them as well as encourage women to participate in safety committees and other mechanisms that can help give women workers a voice.

Support to Rana Plaza victims

Out of the 299 Rana Plaza survivors who received livelihoods support by the first phase of the RMG programme 231 were women. Women also made up the majority of those who received psychosocial counselling (2,605 out of 4,231).

VIDEO STORY

Female inspectors take to two wheels

RMG programme provided the labour inspectorate 100 motorcycles and 20 scooties so that both male and female inspectors can get to factories easier.



[Watch the video here](#)



Better Work Bangladesh supports women workers

Better Work Bangladesh is working to help change attitudes towards sexual harassment on the factory floor as well as to help female workers rise through the ranks.



Better Work training helps women workers progress in their career

Changing attitudes to sexual harassment

By creating awareness amongst RMG staff about sexual harassment in the workplace, Better Work is helping to reduce its incidence.

M. is a Bangladeshi supervisor, one of the 8,500 employees at a garment factory in the country's central city of Narayanganj. He is also one of over 400 employees spanning factory managers, supervisors and workers who have received BWB sexual harassment prevention training.

"I used to touch my female colleagues on their shoulders or back to encourage them to work harder or highlight a mistake. Also, I addressed them using inappropriate, vulgar language. Now I am aware this is wrong; I stopped it completely and told the other supervisors to do the same. We all thought this was no big deal before," M says.

According to BWB Enterprise Advisor Seema Robayeat the training is making a real difference: "People in the factory have now realized that certain things they used to say or do when interacting with others were wrong. People now take these violations seriously."

Empowering women workers

Better Work Bangladesh and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) are implementing a project in collaboration with Innovation for Poverty Action (IPA) to provide 240 female garment workers with the training they need to reach their full potential inside their factories.

Known as the "Women productivity toolkit," the project covers 30 BWB factories and offers technical training, as well as soft skills coaching, to the factories' best machine operators interested in occupying supervisory positions.

The training also aims to raise the workers' knowledge of the different processes carried out inside the factory, which eventually reflects on their task and leads to an overall increase in productivity.

"In Bangladesh's RMG sector, four out of every five production line workers are female whilst only one in ten supervisors is a woman," said Eleonore Richardson, IFC's Programme Manager. "This means 90 percent of the managerial talent in factories emerges from 20 percent of the workforce. This training will allow factory managers to tap into the full potential of the workforce by allowing greater career progression opportunities for women."

VIDEO STORIES



[Watch the video here](#)

Female inspectors to the fore

More female labour inspectors are now working to ensure labour rights and safe working conditions.



MAJOR PROGRAMME ACHIEVEMENTS

Rehabilitating injured RMG workers



3,137 (83% women) received career financial and family counselling

50 (88% women) received business development training



142 (89% women) received medical support



299 survivors (77% women) trained in livelihoods skills



As of April 2017, **176** running small businesses, **62** in paid employment



66 (25% women) received psychosocial counselling



Through this initiative over 1,500 garment factories have been inspected for structural, fire and electrical safety while over 3,500 have been inspected in total. The Bangladesh garment industry is in many ways setting new standards for compliance that could and should be mirrored by other garment industries worldwide.

A.K.M. Salim Osman

President, Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA)



A Rana Plaza survivor operates a small business

Rehabilitation for Rana Plaza survivors

It has been a considerable challenge for victims of Rana Plaza to reintegrate into both society and work life. ILO's RMG programme has supported 300 survivors to gain new employment skills as well as provided them with psychosocial and medical support.

In the aftermath of the collapse, ILO collaborated with GIZ and ActionAid Bangladesh to carry out an assessment of the needs of Rana Plaza victims. As a result, it was possible to develop a reintegration and rehabilitation programme that met the needs of victims and to identify active partners able to provide such services.

Subsequently, ILO supported 300 injured workers who were identified as most in need of support with counselling and livelihoods training in collaboration with NGOs ActionAid and BRAC.

Many survivors wished to set up their own small businesses rather than return to paid employment. A number of enterprises have been set up and further assistance is being provided to help them become better established.

As of April 2017, a telephone survey carried out by ActionAid managed to contact 238 of the 300 workers supported by ILO. Of these 176 were self-employed while 62 were in paid employment.

Psychosocial counselling is helping to address trauma and the return to the workplace. A number of self-help groups have been established, bringing together survivors where they can share experiences and provide each other with mutual support. Physiotherapy has helped address the physical challenges survivors continue to face.

Meanwhile career, financial and family counselling has also been supported by ILO's RMG programme to over 3,000 survivors and their dependents to help them better utilize compensation awards and develop a re-employment strategy.

While there have been wide ranging efforts from numerous stakeholders made to support Rana Plaza survivors, life is clearly still a struggle for many of them. Long-term support will be required to help them fully reintegrate into society.

Publications

Two publications have been produced by ActionAid with the support of the ILO RMG programme based on experiences from working with Rana Plaza survivors.



Psychosocial counselling guideline for the survivors of industrial disasters

This handbook has been developed to share practical guidelines for those working with survivors of traumatic incidents.



Handbook on career counselling

This handbook was developed to share practical guidelines for those working with survivors of traumatic incidents to find employment.

These publications can be downloaded from

www.ilo.org/dhaka/Whatwedo/Publications/lang--en/index.htm



Rana Plaza survivors take part in a theatre therapy session

I learnt some good things from the training. I learnt about the importance of good behaviour - if I behave well with vendors, they will come back again and this will help me to market our bags because this person will tell others. I am also charging new vendors less so that they will come back, and I am also always looking for new markets.

Adori Begum

A Rana Plaza survivor who opened a home-based paper bag business and took part in ILO supported training on how to run a small enterprise



From despair to a successful business

A mobile phone repair
business offers a brighter
future for one
Rana Plaza Survivor.

Uzzal Das in his workshop

Uzzal Das was working as a sewing operator on the 6th floor of Rana Plaza the day it collapsed. Pulled from the rubble many hours later, Uzzal had suffered severe head and leg injuries. After many months of treatment he began to consider what next to do in life. Unsurprisingly the thought of returning to work in a garment factory did not feature very high.

Before working at Rana Plaza, Uzzal had carried out mobile phone repairs. With a desire to set up a small business, he received small a grant worth BDT 40,000 from ActionAid Bangladesh which had been engaged by the ILO RMG programme to support Rana Plaza survivors.

To help him start his business Uzzal received training on Small Business and Entrepreneurship Development. This gave sound advice on planning a business and how to get started. A three-month training programme on mobile phone servicing also provided Uzzal with the confidence to launch his own business.

Deeply shocked by what he had been through, psychosocial counselling helped Uzzal get over the trauma and restore his confidence. He also joined a self-help group that brings together survivors on a regular basis to share experiences and to provide mutual support.

Uzzal started his mobile servicing business in 2014. His previous experience and training helped and he currently has a large number of regular customers as well as a growing reputation. Importantly, what Uzzal earns is sufficient to support his family.

Now I earn enough money per month by which I can manage my living expenses and can support my other family members. By the grace of almighty Allah I hope to expand my business in future.

Uzzal Das

Rana Plaza survivor



(Seated from left) Leoni Margaretha Cuelenaere, Netherlands Ambassador; Guy Ryder, Director General ILO; Mikail Shipar, Labour Secretary; and Jane Edmondson, Head of DFID Bangladesh sign a Memorandum of Intent to support a second phase of the RMG programme in Dhaka in December 2016. Canada is also considering its support for the initiative

Development partners pledge support to long-term sustainable reform in RMG sector

Underpinning the progress made by the ILO's RMG programme has been the outstanding support of its three donors: Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. While the first phase delivered many key achievements, the process of enhancing workplace safety in the Bangladesh garment sector must continue. For this reason a second phase has been developed to run from July 2017 to June 2023. This will focus on four strategic areas namely:

- Ensuring factory safety through remediation
- Governance building - Supporting the government to effectively regulate industrial safety and continuing to back labour inspection reform
- Occupational Safety and Health - Improving OSH in both policy and practice
- Better Work Bangladesh - Improving working conditions and productivity

Funding to the second programme phase will be again provided by the Netherlands and the United Kingdom while at the time of writing Canada was also considering its ongoing support. The long-term backing of these donors marks their strong commitment to enhancing working conditions in the sector and the lives and livelihood of some four million workers.

Ensuring factory safety through remediation

During the 2nd programme phase the Remediation Coordination Cell will become fully operational. Its staff, systems and processes will be strengthened to effectively oversee the remediation process in existing National Initiative factories as well any new factories that come under it (i.e. former Accord/Alliance or newly established factories). Support will be provided to the development of a binding compliance and escalation protocol which will provide the basis to sanction any factory that does not undertake necessary remediation.

Factory owners will be made more aware regarding potential sources of remediation financing and actions undertaken to keep workers and buyers informed of the process and to provide the opportunity for them to voice any concerns. This will help ensure that factories have access to funding to carry out remediation and that other stakeholders are involved in the process.

Occupational Safety and Health

The second phase of the programme will see a continuation of efforts to improve OSH in both policy and practice. In order to create a regulatory environment in line with international standards and best practice a review of national OSH regulations/policies, including gender specific issues will take place.

A consultative tripartite process to develop a National Plan of Action (NPA) on OSH will continue with emphasis on the RMG as well as other high risk industries. Further support will be provided to government and employer OSH units to enhance their capacity to drive Safety Committee formation and operation. Further support will also be provided to enhance the ability to trade unions to support OSH at enterprise level while emphasis will be placed on safety and welfare issues relating to women (e.g. gender based violence).

Governance building

An analysis of national policies on building and fire safety will take place and recommendations for revisions and amendments made so that the effective coverage of national laws and policies is expanded to better promote workplace compliance. A one-stop-shop will be established to facilitate factory licensing and registration supported by an integrated knowledge management system. Training will also be provided to staff of regulators to enhance their capacity to support the one-stop-shop.

Backing for labour inspectorate reform will continue. The capacity of DIFE will be further strengthened through the development and delivery of a long-term training strategy while its business processes and information and data management systems will be greatly improved to drive efficiency and transparency.

Better Work Bangladesh

During the second phase of the RMG programme Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) will upscale its core actions to actively work with 400 RMG factories. BWB expects to see its revenue recovery from factories and buyers increase and greatly support the ongoing sustainability of the initiative. The main focus will remain on the assessment, analysis and remediation of compliance issues.

The capacity of compliance support structures such as in-factory Trade Unions, Participation and Safety Committees will be built. Emphasis will also be placed on supporting the capacity of women workers and management attitudes towards them attaining supervisory positions. Joint programmes with other agencies/NGOs will also be supported aimed at enhancing women's welfare, nutrition and disability inclusion.

Gender

Designed as an emergency response to the Rana Plaza disaster, the first phase of the RMG programme did not place significant direct emphasis on gender issues. However, with the majority of RMG workers women, it was clear during the first phase that gender issues must be fully addressed. For this reason a strategy has been developed to direct the effective mainstreaming of gender during the programme's second phase.

Emphasis will be placed on helping make policies and regulations more gender responsive as well as building stakeholder capacity at all levels relating to gender. Greater awareness will be developed within the labour inspectorate. The OSH component will also highlight gender-related health and safety issues.



This initiative has helped union representatives gain a better understanding of their rights relating to safety as well as establish Safety Committees that give worker representatives a voice. However, there can be no true workplace safety without full respect for labour rights. Much more needs to be done in this respect and it is important that the ILO and its development partners continue to help redress this deficit in RMG sector as it is the biggest GDP contributor to the Bangladesh economy.

Towhidur Rahman

Secretary General, IndustriALL Bangladesh Council



Fire officers train with the mobile units

Supporting the Fire Service and Civil Defence

As part of its support to the Government of Bangladesh to enhance safety in the RMG sector, the programme has worked closely with the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence (FSCD) in a number of areas.

Enhanced inspection capacity

The FSCD played an integral role in the harmonisation of standards that provided the foundation for the safety inspection of virtually all export oriented RMG factories. The FSCD has also played a key role in following up on the findings of fire safety inspections. Support in these areas was provided by the ILO RMG programme together with the USDOL-funded Fire and Building Safety initiative.

Mobile training units

The initiative provided two mobile training units to the FSCD. The units allow for FSCD staff to practice fighting fires in a number of situations they may encounter in RMG factories. These include dealing with fires in enclosed spaces as well as flashovers. The mobile units will be taken to various fire stations to allow fire crews around the country to practice with them. While the goal of the programme is to boost safety in the RMG sector, the skills learned will benefit the fire service as they tackle fires in all industries as well as domestic situations.

Online fire licensing system

With support from the ILO's RMG programme as well as the USDOL-funded Fire and Building Safety initiative FSCD has developed an online fire licensing system allowing business owners to apply for a fire license over the internet. The licenses are granted after a verification visit from the fire service. Fifty fire inspectors have been trained on the system and given tablet computers which they use when visiting establishments so that verification is stored directly in a central database. This enables improved analysis and reporting on fire safety issues. The system also allows for reports of fire incidents to be made via SMS, email and mobile app. The online fire licensing application is available at <http://efirelicense.gov.bd/>

Motorcycles for inspectors

To help fire inspectors get to the factories they need to visit the RMG programme provided the FSCD with 50 motorcycles. These make a huge difference when it comes to navigating Dhaka's choked roads.

For more information

A brochure highlighting the role of the Fire Service and Civil Defence in enhancing fire and building safety in Bangladesh can be downloaded at www.ilo.org/dhaka



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