



Implemented by:
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In cooperation with



Informal Workplace Based Dialogue Network

Cooperation and
data-based learning loops



A relevant workstream of the STILE project focused on cooperation mechanisms with private and civil society partners to enhance the social and environmental standards in the (textile and leather) industry of Bangladesh.

This was addressed with manifold initiatives that aimed towards contributing to more knowledge, to inform project implementation and to more targeted current and future activities.

From this approach, we would like to share

1. an institutional approach to cooperation and
2. a methodological approach to enhancing data inputs to permanent activities.



The Institutional Approach: Workplace Based Dialogue Network (WBDN)

The informal Workplace Based Dialogue network was prepared in 2021 and consolidated in 2022 until 2024.

The original group consisted of ILO / Better Work, Solidarity Center, BRAC, ETI, CARE, H&M, TDH Italy, Laudes Foundation, FAIRWEAR Foundation, Li & Fung and BSR (now RISE). Most of these organizations implement activities in the factories around Social Dialogue and engage NGOs for training offers.

As many of them engage the same NGOs, there is a considerable overlap in the use of these training providers.

Another common approach is to use so-called One-Stop Service Centers (= Women Cafés = Workers Cafés = Workers Community Centers = EKATA) to reach out to workers. Reaching out to workers include training offers regarding their rights and access to remedies and legal support, but also financial or health advisory or counseling.



The WBDN would meet every 2-3 months to discuss general topics, but also work on specific workplans. This included partnering up with ETI on the Women's Ratio in RMG study (ResearchReport-GIZ-ETI-BRACU.pdf (etibd.org)), as well as with ILO, ETI and BSR/RISE for the Role of Supervisor study (giz2024-en-study-on-the-role-of-supervisors-in-RMG-sector-of-bangladesh.pdf). Some insights from these two collaborations include the following:

The former revealed that the current ratio has declined to approximately 53% and this is related to the family expectations for the women to take over domestic responsibilities, which contradicts the assumption of women empowerment that was very much involved in the original setting of the RMG sector in Bangladesh in the 1980s and 1990s.



The supervisor role research addressed the incoherent legal use of considering supervisors as workers or as part of the management. While it showed adding salary to the individuals, the working hours and the lack of a continuous career path make it unattractive for women to aim for such a promotion.

“Stakeholders unanimously pointed out the vagueness surrounding the legal classification of supervisors. In the existing setup, labour courts often classify supervisors as workers, while factories categorize them as staff. This incongruence leads to complexities concerning their entitlements, such as overtime pay and other benefits” --> “One proposal suggests the inclusion of supervisors in the minimum wage gazette under "Schedule B," (...).” (p. 88).

“From the survey data, it is evident that there is a noticeable gender pay gap in the higher salary brackets. Specifically, 14.29% of male supervisors earn more than Tk. 25,000, compared to only 4.14% of female supervisors. This indicates that a higher proportion of male supervisors are in the top salary brackets. Overall, while there is a fair representation of all genders in the middle salary brackets, the data suggests a gender pay gap at the higher end of the salary spectrum in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. On average Male supervisor gets Tk 593 more.” (p. 82).

“The overall table indicates that "Household responsibilities" (61.2%), "Childcare" (40.0%), and "Family issues" (28.3%) are perceived as the most significant challenges for female supervisors. This perspective is more pronounced when you look at the table for female supervisors alone, where "Household responsibilities" and "Childcare" jump to 88.8% and 61.0%, respectively.” (p. 83).



What happens now after STILE closed?

The informal WBDN might be continued under STILE II (2024-2027) project.

Laudes Foundation has expressed interest to use this space or create a similar space to discuss the consequences for workers of a Just Transition.

The **Asia Foundation** is presented the results of the first phase of its Oporajita Project (H&M Foundation) to the WBDN in December 2024.

Other stakeholders (**ILO or ETI**) may also be interested to continue with the **WBDN**.



The Methodological Approach: Research and join learning / dissemination

The methodological approach in identifying a need for further information (beyond the WBDN), applying research and then discussing and disseminating results amongst stakeholders aimed to strengthen specific institutions and highlight topics.

The topics that were identified as relevant are:

- Governance of licensing processes to set up and operationalize factories
- Consolidating Anti-Harassment Committees to address gender-based violence but also enhance social dialogue within factories
- Identify post-industrial waste supply chain challenges and required next steps to incorporate feedstock into recycling processes and, thus, contribute to a more circular approach.
- Add data/facts to discussions around the women's ratio amongst workers in the RMG sector and the legal and practical nature of line supervisors as a career possibility for women

- Exploring the impacts of climate change and environmental risks on garment workers and their communities in Bangladesh and identify how trade unions can strengthen their capacities on how to deal with these challenges
- The topic of “Just Transition” in Bangladesh, particularly concerning workers and rights holders, is increasingly being addressed by various stakeholders, including the Laudes Foundation, Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS), and Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI). Through a financing agreement with GIZ, the BILS explored the impacts of climate change and environmental risks on garment workers and their communities in Bangladesh. Surveying 402 RMG workers across 21 clusters and 160 factories in Gazipur and Tongji, the study “Assessing Exposure and Vulnerabilities of RMG Workers to Climate Change and Environmental Causes” found that half of the workers are not aware of climate change as a challenge. Notably, 99% of RMG workers are internal migrants, with a quarter mentioning climate-related factors like crop failure or floods as reasons for migration. Several key vulnerabilities in workers’ communities and at their workplaces were identified, for example health issues related to heat exposure and pollution, including dehydration and respiratory problems. Grievance mechanisms at both community and factory levels were largely ineffective. Moreover, the research has shown that trade unions lack awareness and capacities in addressing these issues. The study offers several recommendations, including enhancing awareness, improving working conditions, and establishing effective waste management systems. Another actor that highlights the urgent need for greater awareness and action regarding the impact of climate change on garment workers in Bangladesh is the ETI. The results of the study “Perceptions of Stakeholders Towards Climate Change, Just Transition & Environmental Sustainability in the Bangladesh RMG Sector”, commissioned by ETI and conducted by BRAC University, indicate a substantial lack of awareness, with most respondents unfamiliar with the term “Just Transition”. However, when the concept was clarified, workers accurately identified, for example, the impacts of climate change on their health.

A woman wearing an orange patterned hijab and a light blue uniform is looking down at a blue clipboard she is holding. She is in a garment factory setting, with other workers and sewing machines visible in the background. The background is slightly blurred, focusing attention on the woman in the foreground.

What Happens Now After STILE Closed?

- The results of the Gender focusing studies were and will continue to be widely used
- **Readymade Garments Factory Setup | Setup a Factory in Bangladesh (factorysetupbd.com)** the website with the licensing and certification processes has been handed over to Federation of Bangladeshi Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FBCCI). In an event presided by the State Minister of Commerce on May 14th, 2024, FBCCI, CPD and GIZ signed the formal handing over
- Fairwear Foundation / IGScircular approach.
- The challenging space of cutting waste from CTM factories, the so called “Jhut” has been analyzed in a cooperation with H&M and presented to a broader audience in the Sustainable Apparel Forum in 2024: **Study for a Regulatory Framework to Enable Recycling of Post – Industrial Waste (Jhut) for the RMG Industry in Bangladesh — Asia Garment Hub**



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