



Improving social sustainability in supply chains

Case studies and insights for practitioners based on research of initiatives in the garment sector of Bangladesh

Product of a Danida funded research project:
The Regulation of International Supply Chains
(RISC): Lessons from the Governance of
Occupational Health and Safety in the
Bangladesh Ready-Made Garment Industry

September 2021



Purpose of the report

This report is a product of the academic research project *The Regulation of International Supply Chains* (RISC).

RISC seeks to shed light on how social sustainability issues – like working conditions and occupational health and safety – are governed in the Bangladesh ready made garment (RMG) industry. By looking at the many initiatives set in place in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza incident, the researchers seek to understand the landscape and scope of organizations and governance initiatives for social sustainability and their interactions.

Based on this understanding, the project aims to explore different forms of governance and their perceived effectiveness in the specific context and whether these are applicable for other supply chains. The research will be presented in several academic papers.

With this report, we aim to make a selection of the findings more easily accessible to practitioners working to improve social sustainability in the Bangladeshi RMG industry as well as practitioners working more broadly with sustainability of supply chains.

RISC brings together researchers from Copenhagen Business School, BRAC University Bangladesh, Tufts University, and professionals from the Danish Ethical Trading Initiative – a Danish multi-stakeholder initiative gathering companies, business associations, trade unions, non-governmental organisations (NGO's) and public institutions to promote ethical trade.

RISC is an academic research project funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Denmark and administered by the Danida Fellowship Centre: *The Regulation of International Supply Chains (RISC): Lessons from the Governance of Occupational Health and Safety in the Bangladesh Ready-Made Garment Industry.*

The research was conducted by, and the report written by:

Copenhagen Business School: Erin Leitheiser, Jeremy Moon, Markus Bernhart Tang, Jakob Winkler

BRAC University: Sharmin Shabnam Rahman, Shuvro Sen, Farhat Zaman, Gulfam Tasnim, Syeda Nusaiba Hossain, Sabrina Nourin

Tufts University: Jette Steen Knudsen, Ava Durant, Lyndon Sam, Marie Gray

Danish Ethical Trading Initiative: Sarah Dieckmann, Malene Skensved.

METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH BEHIND THIS REPORT

Inventory of projects

A database of relevant projects was compiled. Projects were identified using a combination of targeted searches and snowballing, and coded in main coding categories: initiative name / duration; target issues; donor type / country; implementing partner type / country; budget. Data was analysed using Excel.

Case studies

A selection of prominent initiative types was chosen for deeper case studies: on building safety (ACCORD, Alliance, Amather Kotha Helpline); on worker voice (Social Dialogue Programme); on worker skills (Sudokkho). The case study findings are based on desk research of printed and online publications, available data and other primary and secondary documents as well as interviews with representatives of main actor groups per initiative. Data was analysed using NVivo.

CONTENTS

This report presents a selection of findings from the RISC research. The first chapter is based on mapping of initiatives, and looks at international initiatives for worker safety in the Bangladesh RMG industry Industry from 2013 to 2020.

The following three chapters cover three different aspects of worker safety. The second chapter looks at basic safety and occupational health and safety (OHS), and examines three initiatives: the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety and the Amader Kotha Helpline, a grievance mechanism call-center solution. The third chapter focuses on 'worker voice', and examines the case of the Social Dialogue Programme (SDP), which aims to avoid workplace conflicts by capacity building for workers and management to communicate and cooperate on worker's rights, wages and working conditions in the work place. The fourth chapter focuses on skills, and features the case of Sudokkho, a program aimed at developing the skills training market to improve the skills of the workforce, contributing to higher wages as well as competitiveness of the industry.

Purpose of the report	2
1. Background and overview of initiatives	5
2. Basic safety and Occupational Health and Safety	8
3. 'Worker voice' through social dialogue	16
4. Skills development	23

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BGMEA, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BTEB, Bangladesh Technical Education Board
DFID, Department for International Development
DTE, Directorate of Technical Education
ETI, Ethical Trading Initiative
GBP, British Pound
GSI, Gender and Social Inclusion
IBT, Industry-based Training
ILO, International Labour Organisation
ISC, Industry Skills Council
JETI, Joint Ethical Trading Initiatives
OHS, Occupational Health and Safety
PTPs, Private Training Providers
RISC, The Regulation of International Supply Chains Project

RMG, Ready-Made Garments
SDC, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDP, Social Dialogue Programme
SMO, Sewing Machine Operator
TU, Trade Union
TVET, Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK aid, United Kingdom Aid
UNGP, United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights
USD, United States Dollar
WPC, Worker Participatory Committee

GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

The Accord – the Accord on Fire and Building Safety, see further description in chapter 2.

The Alliance – the Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety, see further description in chapter 2.

collective bargaining, negotiation of wages and other conditions of employment by an organised body of employees.

freedom of association, freedom for workers to join or form a trade union and engage in trade union activities.

grievance mechanism, a formal, legal or non-legal complaint process that can be used by individuals, workers, communities and/or civil society organisations that are being negatively affected by certain business activities and operations.

remediation, according to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, remedy may include apologies, restitution,

rehabilitation, financial or non-financial compensation and punitive sanctions (whether criminal or administrative, such as fines), as well as the prevention of harm through, for example, injunctions or guarantees of non-repetition.

social dialogue, is defined by ILO as all types of negotiation, consultation or simply exchange of information between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers, on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy. It can exist as a tripartite process, with the government as an official party to the dialogue or it may consist of bipartite relations only between labour and management.

worker voice, the ability and means of workers to express their views and influence decisions at work.



1. Background and overview of initiatives

The social sustainability of the RMG industry in Bangladesh

The RMG industry in Bangladesh constitutes 81% of the country's total exports, with over 4,000¹ factories employing more than 4 million people². The RMG industry has helped people out of extreme poverty by offering numerous jobs requiring limited qualifications, including to women, who make up approximately 60% of factory workers according to the ILO³.

The work is sometimes hazardous due to improper working conditions. Still, the dangerous work is not well-compensated. Increases in employment have been matched by a decline in real wages and workers take home up to 62% less than the income needed for their living, despite an increase in the official minimum wage.⁴

¹ There are varying estimates of the total number of RMG factories with BGMEA stating 4000+. A 2016 analysis by BRAC University in Dhaka counted more than 8000.

² https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/insights/bangladesh-garment-industry

³ https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_754669.pdf

⁴ https://impacttlimited.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Nice-Work-Impactts-Labour-standards-report-2006-2012_online-Copy-1.pdf

The industry is characterised by significant adverse environmental and social impacts, particularly for factory workers at the bottom of the supply chain. Notable social impacts include violation of workers' rights, poor working conditions, long hours, low wages, child labour and occupational health and safety (OHS) issues.

The collapse of the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh on 24th April 2013, led to the deaths of at least 1,132 and injuries of more than 2,500 garment factory workers, and brought wide-reaching attention to the troubles of the Bangladeshi RMG industry⁵. The Rana Plaza incident was not the first time people had died in a garment factory in Bangladesh. Building fires and factory collapses took the lives of 1,512 workers between 2005 and 2013 in Bangladesh⁶. In late 2012, more than 100 workers died in the fire in a building known as Tazreen⁷.

In the Rana Plaza, Tazreen and other cases of factory accidents, questions of responsibility have been raised, including questions concerning the roles of factory owners and management, the Bangladesh government, as well as consumers and brands and retailers sourcing from the factories. This report focuses on the international responses, notably from international brands and retailers and national and international government organizations.

Within Bangladesh there are rules and regulations for factories, industrial relations, wages, and employment. However, these rules and regulations lack enforcement from the relevant actors and agencies⁸.

Brands sourcing from Bangladesh carry their share of responsibility for the conditions in the industry as stipulated by the UN Guiding Principles, which obliges them to assess, mitigate and remedy adverse impacts of their business activities.

The conditions of the industry have motivated a range of initiatives to improve the social sustainability of the RMG industry. Objectives, target groups and methods vary as well as actors and donors who partner in different constellations.

It is this variety of efforts that the research behind this report takes its point of departure in.

5 https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/geip/WCMS_614394/lang--en/index.htm

6 <https://www.thedailystar.net/1-841-workers-killed-in-12-yrs-19973>

7 <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/dhaka/2019/11/23/justice-a-far-cry-in-the-tazreen-fashions-fire-case>

8 Leitheiser E (2021) How domestic contexts shape international private governance : The case of the European Accord and American Alliance in Bangladesh. Regulation & Governance (February). DOI: 10.1111/rego.12390.

International Initiatives for Worker Safety in the Bangladesh Ready Made Garment Industry, 2013-2020 – an overview

Following the Rana Plaza disaster there was a surge of international cross sector partnerships designed to address various aspects of worker safety such as building and fire safety, health or worker empowerment. RISC identified about 100 such initiatives. Many of these were in operation for over one year such that at the peak in 2017 there were 63 different initiatives in operation (61 in 2016, 60 in 2018). The number of new initiatives tailed off rather rapidly from 2021 onwards.

With budget data of 75 of the 100 initiatives we calculate that the average spending per project amounted to USD10,673,119.84, while the median amount of the project amounted to USD1,454,689.00, indicating that some projects in the higher percentile received a lot more funding than the rest of the projects.

The main donors were national governments (e.g. Swiss Development Agency), international organizations (e.g. the ILO) and brands and retailers sourcing from Bangladesh. Overall, public bodies were the funders for most of the initiatives.

The main implementing partners varied, including: Bangladesh organisations (e.g. Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies), Bangladesh chapters of international civil society organisations (Transparency International Bangladesh, Clean Clothes Campaign, CARE Bangladesh, Action Aid Bangladesh), international multistakeholder initiatives (e.g. Joint Ethical Trading Initiative), Bangladesh businesses (eg. factories, training institutes), international organisations (e.g. the ILO's Better Work) and other national governmental organisations (e.g. Germany's GIZ).

Whilst the main motivation for the initiatives was to improve worker safety, they sought to do so by a variety of routes, and most initiatives addressed several target issues. The most frequent targets of these initiatives were: industrial safety, labour rights, industrial relations, gender empowerment, sector development (including skills development), regulatory capacity, health and occupational health & safety.



2. Basic safety and Occupational Health and Safety

CASE STUDY: AMADER KOTHA HELPLINE

Of the total 100 initiatives identified, about 28% targeted industrial safety. On a count of 'initiative years'¹, industrial safety was the second most frequently addressed target area by the initiatives.

This chapter briefly introduces the two most prominent initiatives set in place as direct responses by brands to the Rana Plaza incident – the Alliance and the Accord – both focusing on building inspections.

We then examine the Amader Kotha Helpline, a supplementing initiative to the Alliance which takes a different approach by enabling the workers to report on building safety.

Responses to Rana Plaza – the Accord and the Alliance

After the Rana Plaza incident, a range of international initiatives were introduced which aimed at addressing different aspects of the core problem of factory safety. Two of the most prominent and early responses, which both reflected the involvement of international

¹ I.e. If an initiative runs for 3 years, it counts as 3 initiative years. Industrial safety was targeted by a total of 103 initiative years.

brands and retailers, were the Accord on Fire and Building Safety (Accord) and the Alliance for Bangladesh Workers Safety (Alliance). These two private sector-led initiatives aimed at assuming responsibility of building inspections.

Whilst the Alliance mainly attracted American brands, the Accord was preferred by European brands. The Accord stands out with its inclusive governance structure with an equal balance between trade unions and brands in the steering group, the legally binding commitment of signatories, and the brands' financial liability for remediation of fire and building safety issues revealed by inspections.

The formation of the Accord and the Alliance represented an essential step towards improving worker safety in the region. As of August 2021, the Alliance has impacted 714 factories throughout the time of the initiative, while the Accord has impacted more than 2200 factories, and currently covers 1,600 factories. However, the two initiatives cover only the suppliers of the signatory brands and members. This is only a share of the more than 4,000 total RMG factories in Bangladesh².

2 There are varying estimates of the total number of RMG factories with BGMEA stating 4000+. A 2016 analysis by BRAC University in Dhaka counted more than 8000.

FEATURES OF THE ACCORD AND THE ALLIANCE

- The Accord is a multi-stakeholder initiative, with a strong focus on collaboration between companies and trade unions. A committee with equal presentation from trade unions and brands with the ILO as the Chair is responsible for oversight. NGOs serve as witness signatories.
- The Alliance was operated with a Board of Directors primarily of business representatives, and no trade unions or NGOs.
- The Accord is an organisational novelty as it is the first time brands committed themselves legally to ensure financial feasibility of factory remediation – they are bound to provide financial assistance for factory compliance with their terms. Brands are accountable for the conditions in their supplier factories, and legally liable in their home country for failure to uphold these obligations.
- The Alliance provided funding of remediation via communal funding pools from brand members as well as through low-cost loans to factories, for which USAID provided a guarantee of up to USD18 million, whilst the Alliance members contributed with USD1.5 million – less than 10% of the total guarantee.
- At the founding, 23 European brands and 1 American brand joined the Accord. After 5 years, the Accord had more than 220 signatories.
- The Alliance consisted of 29 primarily North American brands, representing the majority of North American Imports of RMG from Bangladesh.

FUTURE OF THE ACCORD

Both the Alliance and the Accord were established with a termination date. As planned, the Alliance ceased its operation in Bangladesh on December 31st 2018. The Accord was also a 5-year agreement, but the parties agreed on a Transition Accord extending it for another 3 years to May 2021. The transition entailed the establishment of a Ready Made Garment Sustainability Council (RSC) with not only brands and unions but also local industry representatives. It took over the Accord's operations on 1st June 2020.

However, trade unions and NGOs warned that factory owners and government actors

might interfere too much with the governance of the Council. Trade unions withdrew their involvement in the RSC on June 1st 2021 to compel brands to negotiate a successor Accord with them.

As of August 25 2021, the parties have negotiated an extension of the Accord: 'International Accord for Health and Safety in the Textile and Garment Industry' effective from September 1, 2021, maintaining a steering committee with equal representation of brands and trade unions and with ambitions of establishing similar initiatives in other countries.

Accidents at work still happen in the RMG sector in Bangladesh, mostly fires, causing injuries and deaths.

Post Rana-Plaza accidents in the RMG in Bangladesh (2013-2020):³

Year	No. of Accidents	No. of Injuries	No. of Deaths
2013	01	50	09
2014	10	37	04
2015	04	43	0
2016	12	161	37
2017	08	20	19
2018	06	02	01
2019	08	55	03
2020	03	04	0
Total	52	372	73

Factory inspections are the primary instrument of the Accord and the Alliance, but there are other ways to address basic safety and OHS. Another approach is by establishing a grievance mechanism, through which workers themselves quickly can address issues as they occur during the daily working routine, rather than await occasional inspection. In this sense, the Alliance and the Accord can be perceived as top-down approaches to basic safety, while grievance mechanisms can be viewed as a bottom-up approach. This chapter will focus on an initiative that has established such a grievance mechanism, the Amader Kotha Helpline.

³ RISC research identified 52 accidents at work in the period of 2013 to 2020 by going through news reports.

AMADER KOTHA HELPLINE

Objective and background

Amader Kotha Helpline (Amader Kotha means 'our voice'), also known as Alliance Worker Helpline as it originated as a project of the Alliance. Amader Kotha Helpline operates as a call center, where workers in factories covered can call in anonymously and without cost regarding work-related problems. It was initially available to factories covered by the Alliance. As the Alliance expired, the Helpline became independent and expanded to other factories.

Structure and design

Amader Kotha Helpline serves as a communication tool between the factory workers and management. After receiving information on an issue from the workers' side, the Helpline communicates with the management of the respective factory. The Helpline representatives share the issues with the management and continue tracking the issue until it is resolved. Brands and management receive monthly reports on issues and resolutions for their factories.

The project offers training of workers on how to call the hotline. The program was designed for lead trainers to enlist four peer trainers in a factory, who would subsequently introduce the Amader Kotha Helpline to groups of 25 at a time. This structure is efficient in ensuring broader awareness, which is critical to the success of the program. Refresher training is conducted to remind management and workers of benefits.

The Helpline draws some of its success from the experience and roles that each implementing partner brings to the program as well as the synergy between the partners.

All implementing partners are Bangladeshi and bring unique resources and high levels of expertise. The NGO Phulki has good relationships with factory managers and with workers through its daycare centers. Clear Voice, a project of a private CSR-oriented enterprise, has relationships with many of the brands and a deep knowledge of the key elements for effective grievance channels. Elevate, another private enterprise, has excellent data management teams and analytic capacities that the other two partners do not have. The responsibilities of each partner are well defined and stated in a shared memorandum of understanding.

PARTNERS AND FUNDING

Funding

The Helpline was established and funded by the Alliance, but in 2018 the initiative became independent from the Alliance, and is now available to all factories and brands upon payment.

Implementing partners

- Clear Voice, a worker protection hotline service operating hotlines and building grievance mechanisms in supply chains. Clear Voice is the global project manager of the Helpline.
- Phulki, an NGO working to improve the lives of workers and their families in Bangladesh. Phulki receives the raw calls from the workers and process the cases.
- ELEVATE, the parent company of LabourLink, a leading business risk and sustainability solutions provider. LabourLink is the technical partner with local officers for support.

Implementing years

Phase 1 2014-2018, Phase 2 2018-ongoing

Impact and results

From 2014 to 2021, a total of 1180 factories joined the Helpline, making it available to 1.5 million workers. 40,000 problems have been raised through more than 33,000 inbound calls to the Helpline. Most calls are made from outside the factory. 70% of callers are men, and the majority of callers are between 19 and 29 with little working experience in the RMG sector.

“Even though we have clear responsibilities for each organisation, we are all very involved with every decision and the day to day sort of running of the Helpline and I think that’s what keeps us accountable to each other”. – Implementing Partner

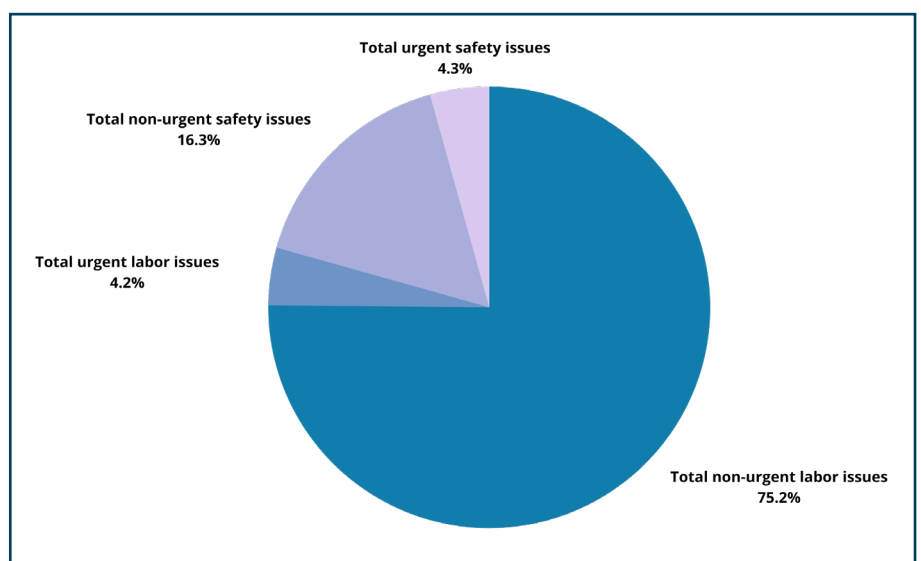
The number of calls is an indicator of the basic success of the Helpline. It is particularly interesting to note that the calls are now used to raise a much wider range of issues than urgent worker safety issues.

75% of calls are in the category non-urgent and non-safety-related. The most frequent calls are related to compensation, termination and verbal abuse, included in over 12,590; 4,338 and 3,160 calls, respectively. Of the calls that are non-urgent, labor issues have been progressively increasing since the beginning with 6,275 calls in 2020.

Meanwhile non-urgent, safety-related calls make up 16% of the total. These calls peaked in 2017 and 2018 with around 1,350 calls each year, mostly pertaining to active fires outside the factory. Other issues include inadequate health facilities, lack of drinking water and occupational safety hazards.

Urgent, safety-related calls make up 5% of total calls. Within urgent, safety-related calls, almost 500 are about active fires within the factory, 355 about building structures and 245 about locked factory exits. Urgent, safety-related calls peaked in 2016 and 2017, with around 400 calls each year.

Urgent, non-safety make up only 4% of the calls but are nonetheless significant, including worker unrest and physical abuse. Other issues include delayed wages, sexual harassment, forced and child labour, and corruption.



Percentage share of calls by categories (data and categorization by Amader Kotha Helpline).

Depending on the type of call, there will be different action procedures. Urgent safety and labour issues are reported directly to the factory manager as well as to buyers, if they have signed up for the Amader Kotha Helpline. Non-urgent issues are reported to the buyer only if the same type of issue has been reported more than five times in one month. The Helpline staff follows up continuously on all issues until they are resolved. Continuous follow-ups and answering of calls are a key feature for success, as a similar government call center has been unsuccessful due to lack of follow-ups and lack of answers to calls. The response to the Helpline in the sector has been positive: *“The acceptance of the Helpline in the sector is huge. Nobody told that the Helpline should be stopped.” (Donor).*

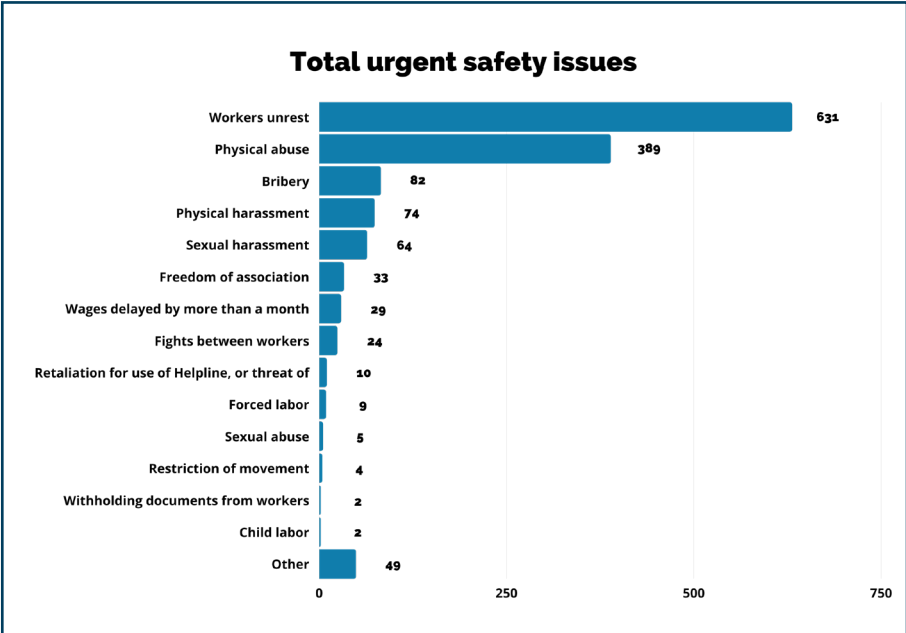
- 82% workers are satisfied with their Helpline experience
- 90% workers would use the Helpline again in the future
- 48% of satisfied users illustrated that their issue had not reoccurred after their call.

Business benefits

The main motivation for the establishment of the Helpline came from the brands, but also from suppliers and workers. All parties identify benefits of the program. These include higher worker safety, which the main actors believe lead to increased worker retention, low absenteeism, higher worker satisfaction and higher productivity. In this way, the program is not considered as an expenditure, but as an investment.

“Our Board of Directors think that if we can make the lives of our workers better then ultimately the company will benefit.” – Supplier.

The positive impact of Amader Kotha Helpline can also be seen in the uptake of the brands, that usually starts out with covering a few of their factories with the Helpline, to covering their whole supply chain with it. As a result, the Helpline has achieved considerable scale, with many factories and brands participating. This increases synergies and allows costs to be shared, decreasing the individual burden. This again leaves more funding available to increase the quality of training.



Reported issues in the urgent safety category 2015-2020 (data and categorization by Amader Kotha Helpline).

Lessons learned

Challenges with the program include bearing the indirect cost of training (i.e. time lost to production). It should be noted that the program was structured to rotate training limiting it to a fraction of the workers from different functions at any one time, rather than all the workers from one function. It can also be difficult to convince factory managers to conduct regular refresher training, even though this is thought to help workers remember the facility and its benefits.

The fact that the labor force is highly mobile (with many workers changing factories annually) presents a structural challenge, as the training is most effective for workers who stay at the same factory. Thus training for workers who leave may be considered a lost investment by factory management.

“The Helpline has also focused on the factory management to make them understand how to retain workers, how to drive efficiency in production, and how to make profit through ensuring the workers safety at the workplace. The management need to understand that the spend is not waste, it is an investment for the future.” – Donor.

COVID-19

The global pandemic brought a substantial increase in the number of calls to the Amader Kotha Helpline. By the end of March 2020, the call volume had almost doubled. During April 2020, 47% calls were related to COVID-19, mainly concerning health and safety, compensation, termination, and pay-outs.

During this crisis time, the Helpline tried to monitor the status of jobs, wages, and other compensation for the workers as factories were laid off and closed.

The Helpline informed factory managers about problems faced by the workers, and sometimes supported the workers and managers in finding solutions.

“We, as a Helpline, adjusted to that need from workers and developed specific COVID related support protocols to help workers. We were keeping up to date with the government regulations and lock down expectations”.

– Implementing Partner.

Insights for practitioners

Key features for success are related to the program's strategy and design, the motivation and benefits for participants and target groups, as well as the scale of participation of brands and factories.

Companies

- Helplines offer an effective grievance mechanism for risk management and responsible conduct in supply chains
- Helpline and similar services help buyers align with the UNGPs.
- Effective grievance mechanisms – like the Helpline – are associated with lower labor turnover and higher productivity
- Locally-rooted Helplines can provide support specific to the local context and sector

Policy makers

- Amader Kotha Helpline demonstrates the possibility of engaging workers in a 'bottom up' approach addressing workplace safety issues. This approach is less effective at addressing systemic issues like labour rights.
- In areas with weak or ineffective government institutions, privately-run initiatives can provide an important stopgap in promoting workplace safety and hold the potential for providing support outside of the workplace as well. However, such efforts call into question who should be responsible for their funding, and must be careful not to undermine or delay the development of effective public solutions.
- Continuous education, awareness and re-training is necessary for efforts like the Helpline to continue to be effective in the long-term

Project makers

- Consider the long-term purpose and strategy of the project, and align staff, funding and activities accordingly.
- Collaboration with a local implementing party helps drive increased legitimacy, broader outreach and greater impact
- Projects like Helplines provide an important avenue for raising issues, but must be accompanied by effective follow-up and problem-solving in order to truly be effective
- Continuous feedback, learning and iteration helps foster greater effectiveness
- Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of each program partner, and engage with high-level experts and advisors throughout
- Design projects to complement existing business practices and processes in order to ease implementation and drive uptake.



3. 'Worker voice' through social dialogue

CASE STUDY: SOCIAL DIALOGUE PROGRAMME

'Worker voice' is the concept of workers being able to express and communicate their interests and experiences at work to management and influence their working conditions.

With buyers and brands assuming more responsibility for working conditions in their supply chain, many also express support for worker voice to ensure labour rights.

Effective worker voice can alert not only factory management, but also buyers and brands on risks and shortcomings and can help ensure remediation. It can fill some of the shortcomings of audits, which provide only a snapshot of conditions. Amader Kotha Helpline, described in the previous chapter, is an example of a worker voice initiative supplementing the factory inspections of the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety. Moreover, worker voice can shift perspective from brands agendas to what workers find important.

Historically, trade unions would represent worker voice. Currently, worker voice initiatives can also consist of different elements from technical solutions gathering and organizing data from workers to capacity development of workers and management in day-to-day dialogue.

About 30% of the initiatives identified by the RISC research targeted labour rights making this the most frequently targeted issue, and on a count of initiative years, this target area was the most frequently addressed by the initiatives (n = 107 initiative years). This chapter examines the Social Dialogue Programme (SDP), as an example of the latter.

Worker voice in the RMG industry in Bangladesh

The RMG industry in Bangladesh is not only characterized by low levels of physical safety, but also low job security and remuneration, and harassment. Firing of workers that speak up about working conditions or are active in a trade union is a well-known phenomenon, discouraging worker voice.

Immediately after the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, there was widespread recognition that effective labor rights enabling worker voice could have prevented the thousand plus deaths and yet more injuries caused by the accident. If the workers in the building had felt empowered to speak to their managers and employers to demand a safe working environment, with the real option of refusing unsafe work without losing their jobs, lives and livelihoods could have been spared.

In this light, 'worker voice' can be seen as a key feature of efforts to ensure basic safety and occupational health and safety. This chapter takes a closer look at the SDP seeking to encourage and institutionalize social dialogue between workers and management.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE PROGRAMME

The SDP was initiated by the Joint Ethical Trading Initiative (JETI), a coalition of the Danish, Norwegian and UK Ethical Trading Initiatives with companies, trade unions and civil society as members. After Rana Plaza, the JETI conducted a human rights investigation of the RMG sector in Bangladesh, and found a lack of support for workers' rights particularly related to worker voice. Thus, JETI designed a program to incorporate workers voice in the workplace.

PARTNERS AND FUNDING

Funding

Funding has been provided by different public international development agencies:

- Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA),
- UK Department for International Development / UK aid
- Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad),
- Dutch Government.

Implementing partners

- Ethical Trading Initiatives (ETIs) of Denmark, Norway, and the United Kingdom, which are multistakeholder organisations with company, trade union and NGO membership
- The local office of the Danish trade union 3F
- The ETI-UK subsidiary ETI Bangladesh
- Quizzr, a Swedish company offering a digital training platform on workers' rights

Implementation years

2014 –ongoing.

Objective and background – the need for worker voice

The SDP addresses the lack of respect and protection of workers' rights and poor communication between workers and factory management. Retaliation towards trade unions (TU) is widespread in the RMG sector, in the form of time-consuming and complex union registration procedures as well as threats, unlawful dismissals or even violence against active members².

Factory owners might fear that if they allow workers to voice their opinion and organize, they will no longer have control over their workers and no work will be done. On the other hand, the workers fear that, without provision for worker voice, if they speak up, they might end up losing their jobs.

The primary objectives of the SDP are to build capacity with both parties, by raising awareness, and knowledge of workers' rights and establish structures and processes in the workplace to address workers' needs and enhance the rights of the workers.

Structure and design

SDP delivers various forms of capacity building training on social dialogue to: worker representatives in TU or elected worker representatives in the worker participatory committee (WPC); factory managers; and supervisors. Only 11.6% of RMG workers are involved in trade union related activities³. If there is no TU in a factory, the SDP promotes a WPC election (by secret ballot), for workers to elect their representatives.

Participants are both workers and management, while training focuses on both the rights and responsibilities of each party as well as on communication and negotiation. Training materials of the program had been developed by a former ILO official who had written the manuals on Social Dialogue for the ILO.

The workers are trained on: how to raise issues within the workplace; what they can expect to get out of this; how to negotiate their rights with employers collectively; and how to mitigate potential conflicts. The management of the factory is trained on how to negotiate with workers in a peaceful manner, without resorting to threats or verbal or physical abuse.

1 ILO*: Social Dialogue. Finding a common voice. <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/dialogue/download/brochure.pdf>

2 Solidarity Center, 2020: Bangladesh Garment Sector Union Organizing Chart. <https://www.solidaritycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Bangladesh.Union-registration-information.December-2020.pdf>

3 Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS), 2021: Impact of the COVID-19 on the Labour Market : Policy Proposal for Trade Union on Employment, Gender and Social Security for Sustainable Recovery.

INSIGHTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

According to the ILO, Social Dialogue includes 'all types of negotiation, consultation or information sharing among representatives of government, employments, employers and workers, or between those employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policy'¹.

THE BASIC CONTENTS OF THE TRAINING ARE:

- The nature of social dialogue, and the business case
- Human relations in the factory
- Labour Law issues and how to use the law
- ILO conventions
- Supervision of, and handling on-work problems i.e. grievance mechanisms and discipline handling
- Representation of workers in meetings
- Formal meeting procedures
- Rights and responsibilities of all actors
- Collective bargaining
- Gender equality

The program sought to maintain a high quality of the training sessions as trainers have a good understanding of local law related to Freedom of Association and social dialogue and can help participants interpret the local law. From the third phase in 2018-2019 blended learning was introduced in a cooperation with Quizr, a digital training platform, combining traditional class room methods with training by tablets for the entire workforce of a participating factory.

The Bangladesh ETI office is responsible for the day-to-day operations, data evaluation and training. The ethical trading initiatives facilitate brand engagement. Brands nominate supplying factories to participate, and invest their time and effort in dialogue with the supplier about the program. Factories can also join by their own initiative. A participating factory can also nominate other factories from their business group.

TRADE UNIONS VS. WORKER PARTICIPATORY COMMITTEES

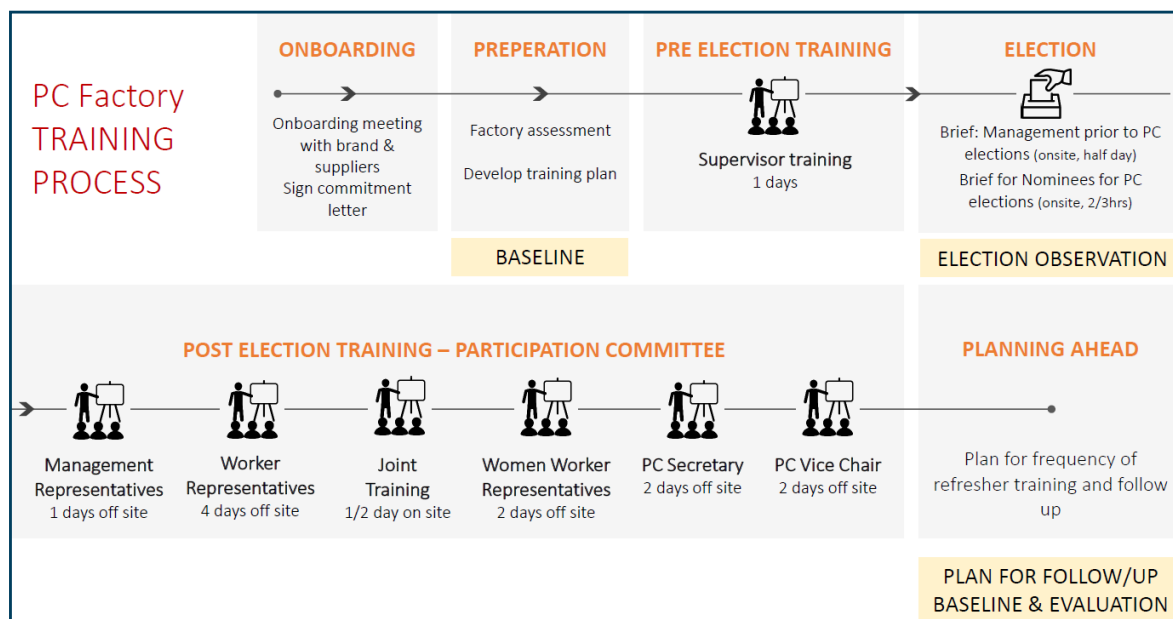
The SDP offers capacity development to both TU and WPC at the participating factories. In the absence of a TU at the factory, a WPC can fill some of the same functions in communication and problem solving. However, as the WPC is not a legal entity and does not have the ability to engage in collective bargaining, even a well-functioning WPC does not make a registered TU superfluous.

Impact and results

As of August 2021, throughout the four phases of the SDP, a total of 77 factories participated. Training was given to 759 WPC workers representatives, 161 TU members in WPC, 3,296 supervisors and 566 managers in WPC. This impacted 268,201 workers as their colleagues, supervisors and managers were trained in Social Dialogue.

Partners, brands and participating factories highlight the success of the SDP in improving workers' understanding of rights and responsibilities, and improving communication between workers and management in a trusting atmosphere.

Participating factories have not experienced any labour unrest leading to disruption of production in the project period.



Example of a factory training process under the SDP (graphics from the SDP).

Moreover, grievances that have been raised were resolved peacefully, as workers are able to speak with management to solve the problems together. Approximately 60% of the problems have been eliminated.

Business benefits

Implementing partners and participating suppliers and brands seem convinced of the success of the program in building trust and enabling communications and problem solving between workers and management, which in turn improves productivity. This can be from lower turnover, more efficient work procedures, no labour unrest or time consuming conflicts:

'Many workers are not usually comfortable sharing grievances like sexual harassment. WPC committee members helped a lot on this matter. For instance, where to go, where to share, to which channel to go and how issues will be resolved? This helped specifically female employees to get a clear message about this.' – Supplier

'The approach of social dialogue is to build communication, and relationship, with the ultimate goal of increasing productivity. So the main thing here was no workers would be unhappy, and no management would forcefully impose anything on workers. There will be a mutual understanding and through this the relationship will build up that ultimately will improve productivity.' – Supplier

Lessons learned

The SDP has gone through different phases, with changes in donors and implementing partners. Between the different phases the partners implemented evaluations to improve the program. Eg. in one of the evaluations, partners found that there was a need for more trainings for factory supervisors, as they are the link between workers and factory management.

GENDER GAP

There has been a gender gap in training participation. Despite the majority of RMG workers being female (accounting for between 50% and 77% of workers at participating factories), the share of female participants in the SDP trainings ranged from 6% to 35%.

This mirrors an under-representation of women in trade unions and participation committees, and in supervisory and management positions.

However, the SDP has been associated with an increased participation of women in democratic mechanisms such as participatory committee elections. Moreover, the SDP has enabled some female employees to feel sufficiently empowered to share grievances such as sexual harassment.

'Earlier, we used to be afraid of the supervisors because they used to scold and behave very rudely. Now there is nothing like that. Now we also do get leave if we want to.' – Female worker.

‘One of the lessons learnt was that factory supervisors on the floor play a crucial role in the implementation of the program, because they represent a layer between the senior management and the workers. If this layer is not engaged in the program, it is not possible for information to reach from the top to the bottom nor from the bottom to the top. So, in phase 3, we made training for all factory supervisors in a factory mandatory.’ – Implementing Partner

The program was adjusted following advice of the ILO to assess whether new participating factories already have a TU or an elected WPC and if it is well-functioning. Depending on the assessment, the factory will go through a customized program.

The program was challenged by a lack of coordination between initiatives for the factories. As a result factories often became involved in many different types of initiatives at the same time, which interfered with production.

It was challenging to convince factory owners of the importance of trainings, and their long-term value, compared to the short-term cost.

THE SDP HAS IDENTIFIED THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS:

- Improved communication between workers and management.
- Increased participation of women and representation of women in supervisory functions or participation in democratic mechanisms (either trade unions or worker participatory committees), through which their voices can be expressed.
- Decreased labour unrest.
- Efficient production: Workers now raise issues in a more systematic way to which management can respond. WPC members can help resolve such issues as health & safety and leave.

COVID-19 AND THE SOCIAL DIALOGUE PROGRAMME

Covid-19 hit the garment sector hard. Lockdowns in consumption countries resulted in closed shops, reduced sales and lack of either ability or commitment of brands to pay for their orders. Lockdowns in Bangladesh caused disruptions of production and logistics, and as factories reopened, the risk of spreading the disease had to be managed.

Some factories were unable to incorporate the lessons from the social dialogue into coping with the pandemic, due to the urgency: ‘Some factories basically bypassed everything that we’ve focused on in the social dialogue program so that participation committees were not sufficiently involved in handling the pandemic.’ – Brand

Others had well-functioning safety-committees that were useful in tackling the challenges of the pandemic, demonstrating the benefits of good social dialogue :

‘The safety committee worked functionally from risk assessment to floor visit and what they should do at that time due to the risk of the COVID situation.’ – Supplier.

Insights for practitioners

Companies

- Social dialogue can result in productivity gains, making it good business.
- Social dialogue reduces labor unrest and workplace disputes while increasing worker retention.

Policy Makers

- Legislation consistent with the ILO Core Labor Standards which ensure Freedom of Association are the bedrock for enabling worker voice.
- Initiatives focused on upgrading labor standards can help in areas where core labor rights may frequently be violated.

Project Makers

- Factories are already very busy, often with other initiatives. New projects and initiatives should complement existing efforts and bring real value.
- Buying brands can be a vital partner in implementing social dialogue in the workplace due to their ability to convince suppliers to engage and financially support capacity building efforts
- Projects and initiatives should be tailored to the local context, including its sector, geography and norms. Factory centered activities should be supplemented with sector perspective and actions.



4. Skills development

CASE STUDY: SUDOKKHO

The Bangladesh ready-made-garment sector has long benefitted from a massive, mostly unskilled, work force ready to work for low wages. But the future workforce will need upgrading to adapt to sector developments and expected automatisisation.

Between 2013 and 2020, a large number of international partnership initiatives (n = 39) address the broad problem of worker safety through skills development whether through programs addressing OHS, industrial safety, industrial relations, labour rights, or gender equality issues.

This chapter examines the Sudokkho program, aiming to support development of quality training, that meets the needs of the industry, as well as improve working conditions.

The importance of skills in the future of the RMG industry in Bangladesh

New competitive pressures suggest significant change will inform the skills demanded of workers in the industry. According to a 2016 report by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, the RMG sector demands 3.66 million skilled workers in 2021, and will demand 5.3 million workers by 2026. Sewing machine operators are at the top of the list for projected future demand, while quality inspectors are second.¹ For the RMG industry of Bangladesh to remain competitive, it is imperative that it invests in upskilling, digitization and automation to unlock productivity gains.

There are, of course, warnings that technological development and growing automation will bring fewer future jobs in the industry, but equally the viability of the industry is also seen to depend on upskilling². New advanced manufacturing processes throughout the production process are being introduced in existing factories and new, more automated, factories are opening every year. These factories have a significant competitive advantage, as many strictly fulfill compliance and regulations, while cutting production costs and lead times, and ensuring higher productivity. The machines reduce the dependency on labor and cut the quantity of jobs. According to the ILO, around 60% of garment workers will be unemployed by 2030 due to automation³.

Unskilled workers are more likely to be adversely affected by automation, and a large portion of the garment workers are unskilled⁴. It is thus highly important to provide appropriate and targeted skills training for unskilled workers, enabling them to take up the skilled jobs of the future.

One initiative specifically targeted towards enhancing the skills of workers in the RMG industry, is Sudokkho.

1 RMG and Textile Industry Skills Council, <https://www.rtisc.org/about>

2 McKinsey & Company, 2021: What's next for Bangladesh's garment industry, after a decade of growth?

3 According to Bangladesh Garments Accessories and Packaging and Exporters' Association (BGAPMEA), <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1166912.shtml>

4 Global times <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1166912.shtml>

PARTNERS AND FUNDING

Funding

Sudokkho was funded by UK aid through its Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) with a budget of up to 26.6 million USD.

Implementing partners

- Palladium, an international advisory and management company was responsible for fund management.
- Swisscontact, a Swiss non-profit-organisation, was responsible for the technical side.
- British Council, the United Kingdom's international organisation for cultural relations and educational opportunities- British Council was responsible for program coordination.
- The Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), a Bangladesh government Directorate under the Ministry of Education. Sudokkho built upon the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) reform agenda in coordination with the DTE, which is the executing agency of the program.

Implementing years

2015-2020

THE SUDOKKHO PROGRAM

In Bangla, 'Sudokkho' means 'well skilled' and refers to a person who has received training, developed skills and earned a reputation for being competent and knowledgeable.

The Sudokkho program tested and scaled up market-driven, quality skills training systems within the RMG and construction sectors.

Objective and background

The objective of the program was to increase wages and reduce poverty through better training and job opportunities for the poor. The program aimed to ensure increased income of 65,000 poor people, including women and disadvantaged people, after successful completion of training.

Sudokkho targeted the RMG and construction sectors, which both have high growth potential and ability to absorb large numbers of poor people in skilled and semi-skilled jobs.

By providing skills to the RMG labor force, the program did not only alleviate poverty, it also improved production capacity and efficiency of the sector.

To achieve these objectives, the program aimed at supporting the private sector training market and bring systemic change to make it strong and inclusive. The skills training market in Bangladesh is distorted by heavy dependence on subsidies from donors and the government of Bangladesh. Many of the private training providers build their business model on subsidies and therefore collapse when subsidies are reduced.

Skills training becomes irrelevant if trainees cannot link it to employment, and employers are usually interested only if training increases productivity. Therefore, Sudokkho aimed at strengthening the training market to become sustainable and effective in meeting industry demands. Sudokkho aimed to enable employers to value the training of workers for efficiency and productivity gains.⁵

⁵ UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review. Program Completion Review, p. 2, l. 53

Structure and design

Sudokkho was structured around the following components:

1. Supporting private training providers (PTP) to offer affordable quality training that enhances employability. Courses were aimed at people who were out of work, aiming to help them earn a decent, reliable income. The cost was partially paid by the trainee and the PTPs were paid in arrears, following students' enrolment, completion of training and successful employment. Sudokkho also contributed to improved curricula, manuals, tools, and equipment, and through instructor training, development of skills certification and quality assurance⁶.
2. Supporting private sector industries to develop and operate industry-based training facilities (IBT). Sudokkho provided advisory support and capacity building to international brands and factories in the RMG industry to setup their own training systems. There were no financial transactions between Sudokkho, the IBT partners and other industry-based stakeholders. IBTs primarily target workers that were already employed in factories to acquire the skills that lead to employment in higher valued semi-skilled or skilled jobs. The cost of trainings were paid for by the factories.
3. Supporting industry skills councils with skills training packages to meet industry occupational standards and capacity building of national training consultancy providers to sustain a long-term development process.

Impact and results

There is evidence of positive impact for workers and factories as well as systemic change, which was the objective of the program. The following results are from the section of the project focusing on the RMG industry.

According to Sudokkho, the program was able to create trainings that can reach the extreme poor at scale⁷. Whilst the trainings tended to be short, they were highly appropriate and with updated curricula.⁸ The aim of social inclusion was realized with women

RESULTS

- Sudokkho has worked with over 200 RMG factories, 73 PTPs, and established Industry Skills Councils (ISCs).
- 77,712 people graduated from Sudokkho RMG training (of whom 62,548 are women). Other groups include the extreme poor and socially disadvantaged groups.
- Sudokkho estimates that overall the project covering both RMG and construction sector generated £39 million of additional net income for those trained that can be attributed to their increased skills. Every £1 of donor spend generated £2.22 of additional income for trainees.

⁶ Implementing partner Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/training-approach>

⁷ UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review.

⁸ Implementing partner Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/sustainability>

constituting 80% of trainees, with effective targeting of the extreme poor and 'differently abled groups'.

The program has been judged to offer good value for money. The average training costs per trainee were 84 GBP for RMG IBT trainings. 45,023 people were trained through IBTs, of which 91% or 40,819 are women. The number of people who secured higher income from trainings for existing jobs and new employment is 38,584. However, salary increases vary and some workers report no increase in income.

The return on investment of the PTP training is claimed to be high, as trainees could earn back the training costs within two months of employment. 32,689 people graduated from RMG-focused PTPs, of which 21,729 were female. Sudokkho also aided a number of the PTPs in establishing specialized job placement units, which help graduates obtaining jobs after completed training. 33,348 graduates from within both the RMG and construction sectors, of which 11,488 were female, found employment through this job placement service.

Private training providers appeared convinced of the benefits of formally registering as Registered Training Organizations, due to Sudokkho's associated quality assurance system, verifying that trainings were relevant and of high quality. Sudokkho therefore supported the capacity building of the individual PTPs and the skills training market system.

Sudokkho also supported the establishment of functional industry skills councils (ISCs) and provided them with technical assistance. ISCs provide labour market assessment, develop relevant occupational standards, training curricula and materials and train assessors⁹.

More broadly, Sudokkho has provided policy support for the Bangladesh government, and its competency standards and assessment tools have been adopted by the Bangladesh Technical Education Board and National Skills Development Authority. The curriculum framework is now available to private and public training institutions in Bangladesh¹⁰.

“In most cases, helpers do not usually get much respect in a factory line. But through this program getting trained and working as an operator is a big thing. Many people get trained from outside by paying fees for those training. But they are still not able to give much production. Whereas this training has helped us learn more and we are able to give much higher productivity.” – Trainee

⁹ UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review.

¹⁰ <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/sustainability>

Business benefits

According to Sudokkho, the benefits of the program consisted of productivity gains for manufacturers resulting from the improved efficiency of a more skilled workforce.¹¹

Training included soft skills, awareness of gender and social inclusion, as well as occupational health and safety. This taught supervisors to improve performance of the overall production floor ecosystem. Factories stated that apart from productivity and efficiency, the soft skills resulted in a positive change in workplace behavior.

Sudokkho was thus successful in moving away from a skills training market dependent on subsidies. The program has convinced factories of the benefits of providing training and skills upgrading for a productive labor force. According to Sudokkho, top-tier factories are now willing to pay and invest in skills training for their workers based on the Sudokkho IBT model. The IBT model is being replicated more widely in the industry as other factories become aware of the benefits gained from such skills upgrading. The IBTs have been implemented in 194 factories.

Sudokkho encouraged factories to pay the training costs with an average initial investment of 13,500 GBP for an IBT facility, which has led to a total of 6.9 million GBP for training investment in the RMG industry. Every £1 of donor spend generated £0.37 of investment from RMG factories into setting up the IBT model in their factories.

The IBT model was an effective and efficient in-factory training system with faster training for skilling of unskilled sewing machine operators (SMOs), up-skilling of low performers and development of multi-skilled operators¹². The IBTs require workers to be out of the production line for shorter time (15 days) than other training schemes and have allowed factories to maintain full production capacity¹³. Sudokkho thus makes strong claims about its impact:

***“Sudokkho supported in operator training. After 15-20 days of training, the workers efficiency level rose by 65-70%. The output level has become more than the other employees. Sudokkho trainee’s return is much higher.”
– Factory Manager.***

¹¹ UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review.

¹² UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review.

¹³ Implementing partner Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/lessons-learned>

Lessons learned

Given that the Bangladesh skills training market was heavily subsidized and was often viewed as having low training capabilities unable to match market needs, Sudokkho aimed to build the institutional capacity of PTPs and make them financially viable with reduced subsidization¹⁴. The program was under pressure from the PTPs and the Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) to increase the subsidies paid to the PTPs. As Sudokkho maintained its private sector approach and continued limiting the number of subsidies provided, this resulted in difficulties attracting PTPs to its programs. This is because, the PTPs were only being compensated after the completion of training, and some trainees dropped out due to marriage, childbirth, covid-19, change in jobs or location. It is thus recommended that the donor community and government agree on a common strategy for the financial viability of the trainings to change the dependence on subsidies¹⁵.

One possible weakness in Sudokkho's system of paying PTPs based on their ability to assist graduates into job placements was that it incentivized misreporting and fraud. Sudokkho therefore needed to implement a strong system for monitoring and verification, and eventually dropped the idea of financially incentivizing PTPs for job placement services.

There was a lack of linkages between the PTPs and RMG factories. A key learning was that the employment ratio of new graduates could be improved by the PTPs aligning the graduation date with the narrow time gap for recruitment within the factories.

For the IBTs, factories should commit to automatically increasing the pay of upskilled workers upon completion of the training and after having their newly gained skills assessed. Pay increases usually happen after annual grade and salary reviews, but increasing pay after assessing new skills will help in managing human resources and retaining skilled staff¹⁶. Performance-based pay and promotion will encourage more workers to commit time to skills upgrading, which helps the factory to become more efficient, but also helps reduce worker turnover.

¹⁴ UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review.

¹⁵ Implementing partner: Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/lessons-learnt>

¹⁶ Implementing partner Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/lessons-learnt>

Industry skills councils face challenges with funding, despite strong support from the government. The progress of industry associations taking institutional ownership of the ISCs is very slow, and it is therefore unclear whether the ISCs will continue operations.

To achieve more success at a macro-scale the eco-system of the skills training market should be addressed as a whole. This entails establishing linkages within the industry, with trade unions and customers, and by showcasing success stories. Industry linkages, between e.g. PTPs and RMG factories are crucial for the skills market system to operate within optimal demand and supply. Sudokkho initiated industry linkages, but this intervention should be pursued by future skills programs more comprehensively. Sudokkho was able to achieve the amount of impact it did through close collaboration with government authorities in planning, implementation and evaluation of the program¹⁷.

“The program was a completely unique business model. Factories took time in understanding the model and the benefit the factories will get by being involved in the program.”
– Implementing Partner.

GENDER PERSPECTIVE

A disproportionate number of women are in low-skilled jobs in the RMG industry. Sudokkho promotes training that effectively supports women to enter into semi-skilled and skilled positions with possibility of better pay and career progression. Women can move from working as a sewing machine operator to become trainers, supervisors and assessors¹⁸.

Concrete measures and results:

- development of gender-sensitive learning materials and training curricula,
- gender criteria for selection of trainees,
- the majority (64%) of Sudokkho trainers were female.
- 22 PTPs who implemented quality standards have developed their own gender and social inclusion guidelines.
- RMG factories developed worker selection criteria for IBT, assuring they will select senior SMOs to be trained as trainers and that the majority of such trainers would be women.

¹⁷ UK – Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO): Sudokkho Project completion review.

¹⁸ Implementing partner Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/gender>

Insights for practitioners

Companies

- Investment in quality training of the work force is associated with improved productivity claims.
- Encourage supplier factories to implement performance-based pay and promotion of high productivity workers, while ensuring a proper basic salary

Policy makers

- Establish aligned strategies of both government and donor community for the financial viability of the trainings to reduce the dependency on subsidies¹⁹.

Project makers

- The holistic sector-focus targeting both training providers and the industry has worked well for the program.
- Close collaboration with the host country government is important to success and local ownership and implementation
- Avoid paying training providers for results mechanisms – or look into the design and incentive system for proper implementation
- Highlight the success stories from one factory to other factories – the results speak for themselves
- Not only functioning on ‘hard’ technical skills, but soft skills and gender and social inclusion an also be important for proper factory production.

19 Implementing partner Swiss Contact: <https://www.swisscontact.org/en/projects/sudokkho/lessons-learned>