



Swedwatch report #47

A LOST REVOLUTION?

Empowered but trapped in poverty. Women in the garment industry in Bangladesh want more.



Finnwatch Church of Sweden



PEACE & LOVE
FOUNDATION

**SWED
WATCH**



Swedwatch is an independent research organization whose task is to critically examine Swedish business relations with developing countries focusing on environmental and social concerns as per international human rights law and standards. Swedwatch has member organisations within the Swedish civil society. All reports and films are published on the website, see www.swedwatch.org



RFSU's aim since it was founded in 1933 has been to give people the means to change their lives for the better. Through information, advocacy and clinical work RFSU wants to reduce the lack of knowledge, change stereotypical opinions and increase sexual health, both in Sweden and internationally. RFSU believes that sexual and reproductive health and rights are human rights and essential for democracy building as well as for women's and men's well being. www.rfsu.se



Finnwatch monitors Finnish companies in developing countries and economies in transition. Finnwatch is interested in the consequences of Finnish companies' operations on human and labour rights, the environment and developmental and social consequences in the South. www.finnwatch.org



The Church of Sweden works for a just world without hunger, poverty or oppression. It works to exert an influence on public opinion in Sweden and with development cooperation and emergency relief together with local partners in about 40 countries. www.svenskakyrkan.se



Peace & Love Foundation works for diversity in society, equality for all and against discrimination. P&L Foundation believes in the power of each and every individual, as well as that being different is something to be proud of and should be seen as an asset for the individual and for society. Human rights are the foundation and most important part of freedom, justice and peace on earth. www.peaceandlovefoundation.nu

Author: Anna Kakuli & Viveka Risberg.

Complimentary research: Najmun Nahar & Gabrielle Gunneberg.

Photo & layout: Amy Helene Johansson. Photo copyright: Amy Helene Johansson.

Print: US-AB, Stockholm 2012.

This publication has been produced with the assistance from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) through the program Business for Development (B4D). The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of Swedwatch and does not reflect the view of SIDA.

Contents



Shapla's parents take care of the children when she is working at the factory. Their house is made of concrete. Some members of the family sleep on a mattress like this on the floor. During the day, the mattress is rolled up and put away (this photo was taken during the early morning). There are moisture spots on the wall. In 2010, the water flooded up to this point.

- Foreword.....6
- Summary10
- 1. Methodology.....13
 - 1.1 The sample.....13
 - 1.2 A multimedia documentary13
 - 1.3 Challenges and weaknesses.....14
- 2. Background15
 - 2.1 The fight against poverty.....15
 - 2.2 The backbone of the economy16
 - 2.3 Wages and violence17
 - 2.4 Living wages.....20
 - 2.5 The fragmented unions.....21
 - 2.6 Gender gap in wages.....22
 - 2.7 Some aspects of women and empowerment23
 - 2.8 Violence against women25
 - 2.9 Sexual and reproductive health and rights27
- 3. Expanding the boundaries of CSR29
 - 3.1 Aligned international frameworks.....29
 - 3.2 Human rights due diligence31
 - 3.3 Inclusive, interdependent and universal rights33
- 4. Women's voices37
 - 4.1 Separation from children38
 - 4.2 Poor housing conditions.....40
 - 4.3 Anxiety and poor health46
 - 4.4 Harassment and sexually transmitted infections52
- 5. Company initiatives56
 - 5.1 Varied activities56
 - 5.2 BSCI57
 - 5.3 Buyers forum57
 - 5.4 BSR and HER-project.....58
 - 5.5 Suppliers' voices.....59
- 6. Bringing back state governance60
 - 6.1 Code of conduct – an insufficient instrument60
 - 6.2 Capacity building and collaboration61
 - 6.3 Some Public Partnership Projects.....62
- 7. Discussion and conclusions.....64
- 8. Recommendations67
- Appendix 1,2,3,4.....70
- References75



Foreword

Before the garment industry boom, most women in Bangladesh worked in the agricultural sector. After the 1980s, there was a huge boom in the private industrial sector, specifically female dominated garment sector. Today, female garment workers are the backbone of the Bangladeshi economy in an industry generating billions of dollars each year. It should be a women's revolution, but is it?

The female-led industrialization has given millions of women the opportunity to provide for their families. Academics agree to some extent that the Bangladeshi women are in the midst of a revolution, however, they are not as yet empowered financially, or socially. But they have a choice; they can look for a job in a factory in the city instead of staying at home in the village.

However, the term 'revolution' implies a fundamental change in power. The workforce in the garment sector is comprised of women and men who are not empowered enough to demand a fair remuneration. This condition is a prerequisite for the industry's prosperity.

In a time when the role of the private sector as poverty reducer is emphasized in the international debate on sustainable development, the garment sector and its impact in Bangladesh constitutes a crucial case study. Multinational companies have been doing business in the main cities Dhaka and Chittagong since the early 80s, the garment sector has been a forerunner in implementing responsible supply chain management policies. Companies such as Nike, Levi Strauss and H&M have decades of experience within the sphere of Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR.

Yet, despite extensive audit programs that include workers interviews, buying companies are quite unaware of the life situation of sewing machine operators; their housing conditions, family structures, food provisions and mandate to complete or terminate an unwanted pregnancy. The companies' knowledge seems to end just outside the factory walls.

International frameworks define the corporation's responsibility as the duty to respect human rights in all situations that are connected to all its operations, everywhere. In the Bangladesh context, where eight out of ten workers are female, needs and challenges of women should be extra considered.

The Swedwatch study is a human rights impact assessment in a challenging context. Some of the findings are alarming, they indicate poverty, health deficiencies and inequality; breached human rights.



Mahfuza washes her face while a neighbour is waiting for her turn at the waterpump.



Mahfuza has to leave her two children in the village since she cannot afford to keep them in Dhaka with her.



These three women share a small room with another family. The room is separated by a bamboo wall.

RFSU has, through its partner organizations, worked in Bangladesh for many years. Finnwatch is releasing the report in Finnish, adding interviews with Finnish brands sourcing in Bangladesh and similar markets. The Church of Sweden has worked, through its partners, for many years in Bangladesh. Peace & Love Foundation has both academic CSR competence and youth activists that engage in fair trade and global equality. These organizations have contributed to the report.

Investing in women brings a good return of investment. Conceivably, many of the obstacles demand a shift in mindset, new strategies and new platforms for joint action.

Stockholm, April 2012

Viveka Risberg
Director, Swedwatch

Åsa Regnér
Secretary General, RFSU

Sonja Vartiala
Executive Director, Finnwatch

Gunilla Hallonsten
Policy Director, Church of Sweden,
International Department

Michael Toivio
Ambassador for Peace & Love Foundation

Executive Summary

This study focuses on what consequences the low wages and long working hours have for garment workers in Bangladesh. In this industry, eight out of ten workers are women, hence the study mainly targets female garment workers. They are all employed in factories exporting for European and American multinational brands. The women's stories reveal a list of human rights violations that are partly consequences of the companies' buying practices. Not that the companies are solely to blame. Bangladesh struggles with poverty, corruption, climate change and patriarchal structures. Nevertheless, the garment industry plays a vital role in Bangladesh since 30 years back and is accountable for its human rights impact.

The international fashion brands play a dual and contradictory role in Bangladesh. Levi's, Nike, H&M, Tesco, Walmart and other companies contribute to the creation of millions of jobs. Codes of conduct and factory auditing have developed the industry and raised the standards. At the same time, the main reason for sourcing in Bangladesh is the low production cost. By pressuring price and lead time, the companies contribute to an unsustainable situation for the workers, who are trapped in poverty.

Despite many good attempts within the sphere of CSR, the root cause to many problems is yet not solved: the low wages, which are forcing people to work an excessive amount of overtime. Consequently, the employment does not lead to the emancipation or improved life quality of the women who are instead exhausted, undernourished and deprived of their human rights, and carry the double burden of the additional heavy workload from household duties. Mothers are often separated from their children due to long working hours, poor childcare and housing facilities.

The garment workers' monthly wages are not enough to cover basic needs. They cannot afford sanitary towels during menstruation, and rarely buy meat. Poor housing conditions make them vulnerable and exposed to harassment, abuse and unwanted pregnancy. Due to patriarchal structures, low awareness of workers' rights and lack of time, many women are reluctant to join a local union.

These women constitute the backbone of the Bangladeshi economy. In 2011, Bangladesh earned 18 billion dollars from garment exports. The sector continuously expands due to consumers' endless demand for cheap and fast fashion. At this moment in time China is losing orders to the Bangladesh market, which is expected to double by 2015. Hence, the prognosis for the industry is good.

At the same time, the minimum wage still stands at 3,000 taka per month (240 SEK or 27 Euro). The women in this study earn on average 4,000 taka per month,

including 2-4 hours of overtime per day. There is no systematic national wage review in sight. The expression of discontent among workers and trade unions is severely oppressed by the police authorities. Union leaders and activists are being harassed, tortured and even murdered.

It is the State's duty to protect human rights. The minimum wages in the apparel industry in Bangladesh is set by the official Wage Committee. A heavy responsibility for the garment workers' situation rests upon on the Government of Bangladesh, tightly linked to the trade associations BGMEA and BKMEA. This study shows that a number of companies have advocated towards the Bangladeshi Government for a systematic and regular increase of the minimum wages. However, the attempts have been few and without any official response.

The Swedish Government and SIDA plays an important role to ensure that the trade, development and foreign policy agendas do not conflict.

According to international standards for Corporate Social Responsibility, CSR, companies can know and show respect of human rights through:

- Human rights due diligence in order to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their impacts on human rights.
- A process to enable the remediation of any adverse human rights impact they cause or to which they contribute.

Companies should consider the severity of human rights impacts as per the scale (the gravity of the impact), scope (number of individuals impacted) and irremediable character of the impact (the ability to restore those impacted to a situation at least the same as before the impact).

Consequently, contextual conditions like the low wages, the limited freedom of association and the large majority of female workers (3 million) should be particularly taken into account when human rights impacts in Bangladesh are being addressed by the international brands who chose to buy apparel there.

This study shows that a gender angle is missing within the companies' CSR strategies. There is also a general lack of knowledge of the situation beyond the factory walls. Among the suppliers, there is a lack of awareness of women's rights, their specific needs and their potential.

Lastly, many female garment workers in Bangladesh are proud of being breadwinners and wish for a career in the sector. They think the factory premises are good with access to clean drinking water, toilets, a comfortable temperature and good lighting conditions. Thirteen of the 30 women interviewed also mention that they feel they can talk to managers or welfare officers when problems occur.

According to interviewed scholars and activists, the women's situation has improved during the last 20 years. They are in the midst of a revolution, yet not decently compensated for their work.

Swedwatch recommends that buying companies:

1. Advocate for living wages in collaboration with other buyers. This should be done with input from labour unions and NGOs and be discussed with government officials and BGMEA/BGKMEA. A plan with time limits should be set.
2. Make a distinctive change in purchasing practices in order to share costs with suppliers and make a regular wage raise possible on a national level.
3. Protest against the harassment of unions and union leaders. Advocate for workers' right to organize according to ILO conventions no 87 and 99.
4. Focus more effort on gender perspectives when risks are assessed, strategies are made, policies are implemented and activities evaluated and monitored.
5. Join multi-stakeholder initiatives and projects.
6. Collaborate with peer companies, local stakeholders, the Government and others to mobilize strength and influence.

Swedwatch recommends that the Swedish Government:

1. Promotes the *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* and strongly stresses companies' responsibility to respect human rights.
2. Promotes, supports and aligns the efforts of Swedish companies locally when they address human rights issues in poverty contexts. Embassies can play a vital role in opening doors and bridging between private and public spheres.
3. Ensures that the trade, development and foreign policy agendas do not conflict.
4. Aligns its work with other domestic actors such as export credit agencies and public pension funds to ensure that they use their influence, and place demands on companies to set up robust due diligence processes to control their human rights impact.
5. Includes a focus on issues regarding working women in the forthcoming development cooperation with Bangladesh.
6. Adheres to the conclusions in the UN High Level Panel on Global Sustainability report *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing* (2012).

1. Methodology

1.1 The sample

The information was procured in 2011 and 2012 through field and desk research. The primary data is based on 30 interviews with female garment workers, undertaken from March-June 2011. They were all employed in factories exporting for European and American multinational brands. 13 of 30 interviews were conducted off-site in the women's homes in the areas of Uttara, Mirpur, Mughda, Malibagh, and Savar in greater Dhaka. The remaining 17 interviews were conducted on-site (on the factory premises).

The interviews were conducted by Swedwatch in co-operation with researchers from the Population Services and Training Center (PSTC), a partner organization of RFSU, the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education. A local project coordinator was assigned by Swedwatch to monitor and ensure the quality of the interviews and safety of workers interviewed. A number of local experts helped Swedwatch to gain access to the slum areas and get in contact with the women. For confidentiality reasons, these experts are not mentioned by name in this report. The term 'slum' implies informal settlements with lack of clean water, sanitation and other basic services.¹

Factory visits and interviews with major Swedish buying companies, international buying companies and NGO representatives have taken place in Bangladesh as well as in Sweden. A second field trip was made in April 2012 in order to collect complementary data from unions, suppliers and buyers.

Eleven brands were asked about their CSR strategies: Axstores, Gina Tricot, H&M, KappAhl, Levi Strauss & Co, Lindex, M&S, MQ, New Wave Group, RNB and Tesco. There is a wide range of competence, efforts and resources between them. The study is not scrutinizing the individual companies in depth. Individual efforts are mentioned by relevance. The report aims on painting a picture from the field and a general view on the sector's role. For further information, see Appendix 1.

1.2 A multimedia documentary

A multimedia documentary was produced in parallel with the field research in Dhaka. The photographer, Amy Helene Johansson, was assigned by Swedwatch to produce the film with the assistance of the project co-ordinator. The purpose of the film is to highlight the living situation of women in the slums of Dhaka.

¹ UN-HABITAT, Sustainable Urbanization: local action for urban poverty reduction, emphasis on finance and planning, What are slums and why do they exist? UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder, 2007.

The three-month film production has provided Swedwatch with valuable insights into the daily domestic lives of the women and strengthened and deepened the research's qualitative input. RFSU has contributed financially to the multimedia documentary.

1.3 Challenges and weaknesses

Gaining access to the women workers proved to be a challenging task. The first local NGO that was contracted by Swedwatch to carry out the off-site interviews (in the women's homes) withdrew from the assignment as a result of threats and pressure from authorities and suppliers. To be seen asking questions to women in domestic areas can be regarded as subversive behavior even for a reputable local NGO. Informers could easily forward information to authorities and suppliers who would be adversely affected by the information being spread. In this case the NGO was already contracted by several suppliers to do training on their factory premises. Even though the assignment for Swedwatch concerned the worker's private domestic areas the NGO felt they needed clearance from the suppliers to conduct the off-site interviews. The subsequent request was turned down by the suppliers. A few weeks later, the National Security Intelligence (NSI) and Special Branch (SB) paid a visit to the NGO's office and picked up and temporarily detained several researchers for questioning. Eventually, Swedwatch was assisted by other local guides and interviewers.

In order to gain access to factories Swedwatch asked H&M for assistance. Swedwatch's director previously worked as Code of Conduct manager at H&M in Bangladesh from 2006-2009. H&M contacted a few suppliers who agreed to receive the researchers. In terms of standard, their factories are medium in scale and quite representative for average exporting garment suppliers in Bangladesh. The supplier Babylon Garments received Swedwatch's research team several times and also approved film shot on their premises.

Assigning a local native language speaking research co-coordinator was crucial in order to ensure quality and methodology. Nevertheless, the women's descriptions of illnesses had to be cross-checked with doctors who translated the expressed symptoms into medical terms. The language uncertainties are obviously linked to the level of awareness and education.

The crowded homes left little space for privacy. Some of the women tried to avoid or were reluctant to answer the questions about sexual harassment.

Expert reading is done by Johan Stellanesson, Regional Coordinator, Asia, at RFSU, human rights lawyer Hanna Gerdes at the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights, senior researcher Radu Mares at the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law and general secretary and activist Nazma Akter at Awaj Foundation in Bangladesh.

2. Background on Bangladesh and the garment industry

2.1 The fight against poverty

Bangladesh is well on track to achieving a number of indicators in the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) in the areas of primary schooling and closing the gender gap in primary and secondary education. The under-five child mortality rate has been reduced by 50% since 1990. Of the 52 MDG targets, Bangladesh is on track on 19 targets and 14 targets need attention.²

Bangladesh's fight against poverty is a success story, called 'the Bangladesh miracle' by Hans Rosling, Professor of international health at Karolinska Institutet (KI) in Stockholm.³ 30 years back, every woman on average gave birth to seven children. Today it's less than three. Family planning has improved women's health and reduced maternal mortality.⁴

Nevertheless, half of the population still lives on less than 1.25 dollar a day.^{5 6} Inflation is high and escalating food prices hinder the pace of poverty reduction. Rice and wheat prices increased 19 and 45 percent respectively between June and December 2010.⁷ Out of 169 countries on UNDP's Human Development Index, Bangladesh ranks 146 (2011).

Bangladesh's greatest challenge by far is the dense population and the rapid urbanization. Half a million people migrate to the capital Dhaka each year. Most of the women come to gain work in the garment factories.⁸ Garment workers are placed among the urban poor.⁹

2 United Nations, *The Millennium Development Goals work! Brief examples of country progress*, n.d. <http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/successstories.shtml> (28 February 2012). United Nations Development Programme, *Bangladesh: MDGs and Bangladesh*, n.d. <http://www.undp.org.bd/mdgs.php> (28 February 2012)

3 Gapminder. *Bangladesh Miracle*. <http://www.gapminder.org/videos/gapcasts/gapcast-5-bangladesh-miracle/> (4 April 2012)

4 Ibid

5 UNICEF. *Bangladesh Statistics*. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_bangladesh_statistics.html#92 (4 April 2012)

6 The World Bank. *Bangladesh Economic Update, April 2011*. Permanent URL: <http://go.worldbank.org/RE2CP032X0>

7 Ibid

8 International Labor Organization, Asia-Pacific Industrial Relations Network, *Garment women still struggle with pay scale and life in Bangladesh*, n.d. <http://ap-irnet.ilobkk.or.th/news/garment-women-still-struggle-with-pay-scale-and-life-in-bangladesh> (9 August 2011)

9 World Bank. *Dhaka: Improving Living Conditions for the Urban Poor*. Bangladesh Development Series Paper No. 17. The World Bank Office, Dhaka 2007

2.2 The backbone of the economy

The Ready Made Garment (RMG) industry developed in the late 70s and eventually became the backbone of the Bangladesh economy. Currently Bangladesh is the world's third largest garment producer and experts forecast a continued high growth.¹⁰ The global management consulting company McKinsey estimates that the Bangladesh market will double by 2015 and almost triple by 2020.¹¹ This forecast is based on the expected decrease in sourcing from China.

“While China was once considered ‘the place to be’ for sourcing, the light is starting to shine ever brighter on Bangladesh”, states McKinsey in its report from 2011. The shift is explained by labour shortages and increasing wages in the coastal regions of China and Western buyers’ capacity reaching its limits, according to the same source.¹²

The RMG sector accounted for 13 percent of Bangladesh GDP and 80 percent of the Bangladesh exports in 2011, earning 17.9 billion USD.¹³ 8.4 billion were earned from woven garments and 9.5 billion from knitted.¹⁴ In 2012, the industry employs 3,6 million people. The official figure from the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, BGMEA, states that eight out of ten workers are women.¹⁵

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) is the largest export-oriented trade association with 5,150 members. The 27-member elected board of directors advocates the interests of its garment industry owner members and private sector-led economic growth. BGMEA is closely linked to the Government. 29 BGMEA members and two former BGMEA presidents were elected as members of parliament in the latest parliamentary election in 2008.

Bangladesh Knitwear Manufactures & Exporters Association (BKMEA) has 1,758 members. BKMEA (for knitted garments) is also run by a 27-member board of directors and closely associated with BGMEA.

10 A. Berg, S. Hedrich, S. Kempf, T. Tochtermann. *Bangladesh's ready-made garments landscape: The challenge of growth 2011*, McKinsey & Company, Inc.

11 Ibid

12 Ibid

13 Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA). *Facts & Figures of Knitwear Sector*: Statistics for the fiscal year, 2010-2011. Data from state-owned Export Promotion Bureau/EPB. http://www.bkmea.com/facts_figures.php (4 April 2012)

14 Ibid

15 Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) *BGMEA at a glance*. Table 1: Growth of the industry and Employment. <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/aboutus> (4 April 2012)

Leading exporting countries of clothing, 2010

Exporters	Export value in billion dollars	Share in world exports (%)
China	130	36,9
European union	99	28,1
Bangladesh	16	4,5
Turkey	13	3,6
India	11	3,2

Source: World trade statistics 2011. World Trade Organization

2.3 Wages and violence

Compared to other formal sectors, the garment industry in Bangladesh provides among the world's lowest wages.¹⁶ A garment worker needs to work half a week to be able to buy a kilo of meat.¹⁷ The Swedwatch study has focused on the consequences of the low wages to add another perspective. This chapter will summarize the background and industrial context of the wage structure and specifics in the Bangladeshi industry. Eventually, a pattern will emerge where wages and violence are shown to be closely and fatally connected.

Over the last 17 years, the salaries of garment workers have increased three times. In 1994, the minimum wage was set at 930 taka. In 2006, massive labour unrest struck Bangladesh and the Government formed a Minimum Wage Board that included business and worker representatives. The Wage Board announced the minimum wage set at 1,662.50 taka (15 Euro) in October 2006.¹⁸

Three and a half years later, following widespread labour protests involving 100,000 workers in June 2010, the Wage Board considered raising the monthly minimum wage to 3,000 taka (27 Euro).¹⁹ The labour unions and other parties such as the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) demanded a minimum wage of at least 5,000 taka.^{20 21}

16 International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions, *Bangladesh Garment Workers Protest Low Wage Increases, Continued Repression*, n.d. <http://www.icem.org/en/78-ICEM-InBrief/3953-Bangladesh-Garment-Workers-Protest-Low-Wage-Increases-Continued-Repression> (21 February 2012)

17 Hovland Steindal E, *Mye arbeid sma marginer - en undersøkelse om tekstilarbeideres kjøpekraft*. The Future in our hands 2010.

18 Exchange rate according to OANDAS's exchange rate March 19, 2012

19 Ibid

20 The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. www.ethicaltrade.org

21 The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF). *Bangladesh Unions Demand Measures to Supplement the Newly-Increased Minimum Wage*. Press Release. 5 August 2010. <http://www.itglwf.org/lang/en/Bangladesh.html>

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina urged the industry to compromise. “It is not possible for the workers to live on the wages they get now,” Hasina told the parliament, adding that she believed the negotiations would find an ‘acceptable solution’ to a wage increase.²²

Faruque Hassan, the then acting president of the industry association BGMEA, replied by stating that Bangladesh was being “unfairly maligned” over wages. “Our competitors, for example Cambodia, Vietnam, they are paying very similar wages to us, very similar amounts per hour,” said Faruque.²³ He expressed a fear that a wage hike or further unrest risked jeopardizing the future of the industry.

On the 28th of July 2010, it was announced that the minimum entry level wage would be increased to 3,000 taka. The Prime Minister said that her government would not tolerate any more protests. Since the new minimum wages fell short of the demands, the protests continued following the wage rise. The labour leaders and workers claimed the raise was inadequate and did not match the rapid inflation and high cost of living. Protesting workers were met with violence. According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), six workers were killed during 2010 and nearly 600 were injured.²⁴

A demand from the BGMEA for the creation of a special industrial police force in the four export-oriented zones with a heavy concentration of garment factories, Ashulia, Savar, Gazipur and Narayanganj, was addressed and implemented in 2011 despite protests from unions and NGOs.

Amnesty International, in its Annual Report 2011, urges the Bangladesh authorities to stop executions by a special police force, Rapid Action Battalion (RAB), accused of involvement in clashes with garment workers and hundreds of killings.²⁵

In the World Report 2012, Human Rights Watch (HRW) is concerned that the Government is tightening its control over civil society organizations. The report refers to the prosecutions of union leaders, delayed foreign grants to NGOs and a new bill proposing restrictions on media, which is still under consideration.²⁶

The killing of the activist Aminul Islam in early April 2012, represents a disturbing escalation in violence. Islam was an organizer for the Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity, a group that argued for higher pay and better working conditions. The group helped lead protests in 2010 as the increase of minimum wages was not as much as some workers’ groups had wanted. Soon after Islam was arrested and, he and other labour activists said, was tortured by the police and intelligence services. Islam was found murdered with several marks of tor-

22 The Sunday Morning Herald, *Crunch time for Bangladesh garment firms*, 25 July 2010.

23 Ibid

24 International Trade Union Confederation, *Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights 2011*.

25 Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2011*.

26 Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2012*.

ture found on his body the first week of April 2012. The industry’s main trade group, BGMEA, has called for a full investigation into Islam’s death. In Washington, labour rights groups have also called for an investigation and said the United States and multinational companies should put pressure on Bangladesh to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation.²⁷

This chain of events: poverty wages - workers’ denied right to freedom of association and breached right to organize - violent strikes - police brutality, constitutes a risk for buyers and suppliers, a reputational risk as well as a risk for delays, affected quality and extra costs. According to BGMEA President Md. Shaiful Islam, it is the international buyers who are to blame for the situation since they “are asking for more, but paying less”.²⁸

The buyers on the other hand, have signaled they are disturbed by the turbulence. In 2010, twelve international brands sent a letter to the Government in a joint attempt to vouch for regularly revised wages. (See Appendix 4.) A personal follow-up letter was sent by CEO Karl Johan Persson in August 2010 to the Bangladesh Prime Minister, addressing the importance of regularly revised wages and opposing the arrestments of labour activists. The Government never replied to any of those letters.²⁹ Tesco also tells Swedwatch they have met government ministers in person in an effort to secure improved conditions such as minimum wage reviews. It is not known to Swedwatch whether any other company has done similar efforts.

The wage politics is a delicate task for the Government and the industry associations. For years, other ways than raising wages have been used in order to meet workers’ demands: Higher living costs have been compensated by bonuses, subsidies and overtime compensation have been added to the basic salary.

It is already clear from published academic research that labour costs typically constitute 1-3 percent of each garment produced in the developing world. It is also commonly acknowledged that large increases in labour costs do not require correspondingly large increases in retail price.³⁰

The question is not if the minimum wage should be raised but when and by how much. There is also an issue of proper implementation. Who will monitor that the workers are properly graded according to their skills so that the seven levels wage scale is correctly adapted? And what is a reasonable raise, adjusted both to the living costs of workers and the global competitive market? Several calculations have being made by activists, NGOs and companies. Thus far there is no consensus and a systematic wage revision is still not in sight.

27 Julfikar. A. M, Vikas. B. ”Killing of Bangladeshi Labor Organizer Signals an Escalation in Violence”. The New York Times, 9 April 2012.

28 Interview with Md. Shaiful Islam, President of BGMEA, Dhaka 4 April 2012.

29 E-mail from Maritha Lorentzon, Social Sustainability Coordinator, H&M, 29 March 2012.

30 Hussain, Z. *Financing Living Wage in Bangladesh’s Garment Industry*, 8 March 2010, in *End Poverty in South Asia: Promoting Dialogue on Development in South Asia*, World Bank Blogs, <http://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/blogs/zahid-hussain> (17 March 2012).

2.4 Living wages

A ‘living wage’ ensures minimum acceptable living standards.³¹ Both NGOs and companies agree that the current minimum wage, 3,000 taka, is below what can be considered a living wage. But calculations for monthly expenditures and acceptable living standards vary. Asia Floor Wage estimates the monthly living wage to 12,248 taka, War on Want to 8,896 taka while the company The Arcadia Group estimates a living wage to 5,333 taka. The garment factory clusters are mostly centralized around the cities of Dhaka and Chittagong where the living costs are higher than in the rural areas. Hence workers’ purchasing power varies depending on where they live.

In order to reach a common approach, organizations and companies have taken on their own and joint initiatives to find solutions. Fair Labor Association (FLA) has arranged several stakeholder forums with focus on salaries.³²

The same year, Swedwatch’s member organization Fair Trade Center studied nine Swedish retailer companies and their wage strategies. In the report, the buyers underlined the importance of joint action for better wages, such as cooperation between trade- and multi-stakeholder initiatives.³³ (Read more in chapter 5.)

Excessive overtime is a well-known problem. According to Bangladeshi law a standard workday is eight hours and a standard workweek is 48 hours but can be extended up to 60 hours.³⁴ In practice, workers usually work 10-12 hours a day, sometimes more, six days a week, to meet production targets and to earn extra money. One focus area in buying companies’ factory audits is checking that worked hours are being properly compensated.

With suppliers’ wage practices in focus, “Fair wage” is another approach that has gained ground. According to Professor Daniel Vaughan-Whitehead, initiator of the Fair Wage Network and Senior Wages Specialist at International Labor Organization (ILO), assessment is an essential step to identify wage practices among suppliers.³⁵

Vaughan-Whitehead has assessed wage practices among 100 suppliers in Asia and has compared the wage practices among suppliers in Bangladesh to those in China, Vietnam, India and Turkey.³⁶ The data, collected through the 2010 FLA

31 The Fair Labor Association *Wage Fairness: It's not just about the money*. 9 March 2011

32 The Fair Labor Association is a multi stakeholder initiative. <http://www.fairlabor.org/>

33 Riddselius. C. 2011.

34 Ibid, U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy. 2010 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh. April 8, 2011 and Government of Bangladesh. Ministry of Labour and Employment. Labour Law 2006.

35 H&M. *H&M joins the Fair Wage Network Initiative to promote better wage practices in global supply chains*. Press Release. 1 September 2011.

36 D. Vaughan-Whitehead. *"How 'fair' are wage practices along the supply chain? Global assessment in 2010-11*. Conference paper, Better Work 2011.

auditing process, showed that fake records were prevalent among suppliers in Bangladesh. Dual record keeping (preparing official records for authorities and labour inspections) was found at all enterprises studied in Bangladesh, indicating that they all had something to hide in terms of wages, excessive working hours or other working conditions.

The results showed that Bangladesh had among the highest number of working hours with an average of 76 working hours a week. In Bangladesh, China, India and Pakistan overtime was hugely underpaid and far below the legal standard.³⁷

When a decent wage is eventually set, implementation and compliance with the law is key for fairness and justice.

2.5 The fragmented unions

Trade federations in Bangladesh are generally fragmented and often connected to the dominant political parties. To be able to operate, a permit and registration is needed from the authorities together with at least 30 percent worker representation at the workplace. Most trade federations function through a head office in Dhaka, often funded by international aid, and with few or no activities at the factories.³⁸

Few independent trade unions can be found who have leverage over factory owners and the Government. But at many factories the trade unions do not function at all. Overall membership in trade unions is low, around three percent of the total workforce. This figure is approximately equal to membership figures in Pakistan, but substantially lower than in neighboring India and Nepal.³⁹

The weak structure of trade unions in Bangladesh dates back to, among other things, the historical context of a struggle for independence and an opposition against militarized authoritarian regimes.⁴⁰

Women membership and leadership in trade unions is consistently lower than male membership. Several possible reasons for this can be identified; low level of awareness regarding rights, venues and times for meetings do not take into consideration the long working hours of female workers, patriarchal attitudes in trade union leadership, fear of losing employment which could threaten the family survival, and pressure from family members not to get involved in activities outside of their home and work.⁴¹

37 Ibid

38 LO-TCO Secretariat – International Trade Union Development Cooperation. *Trade unions in the world – The political, social and trade union situation in 135 countries, Bangladesh*, n.d. <http://www.lotcobistand.org/bangladesh> (8 February 2012)

39 Ibid

40 Lewis. D, Bangladesh – *Politics, Economy and Civil Society*. 2011

41 Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies for ILO, *Women's participation in trade unions in Bangladesh: Status, barriers and overcoming strategies*, August 2009

As already mentioned violent protests are part of the garment industry. Poor working conditions and low wages have been common reasons for recurring protests and strikes. The arrests of trade union leaders and clashes between protesters and police leading to severe injuries and even death among garment workers can also explain women's concern about joining trade unions.^{42 43} But above all, low awareness of workers' rights is an obstacle for engagement in unions.⁴⁴

In parallel, unions and NGOs that focus on women are growing in number and importance. The Awaj Foundation, Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), Karmojibi Nari and the Human Rights organization Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) are examples of organizations that regularly schedule health projects and legal rights education.⁴⁵

2.6 Gender gap in wages

Statistics about women's wages in the garment sector are not continuously reported but studies show a wide income gap between female and male workers.⁴⁶ Women workers earn 25 percent less than men for the same job.⁴⁷ These results are in line with the general pay gap in Bangladesh, where women earn an average of 23 percent less per hour than men.⁴⁸

According to Nazma Akter, General Secretary of the Awaj Foundation, the predominant reasons for the wage discrepancy are women's low access to training and education, less bargaining power, and a dominance of patriarchal practice in the factories which hinders women's ability to raise voice collectively.⁴⁹

The average monthly income for the 30 women interviewed in this study is 4,250 taka (50 USD/ 40 Euro) including overtime compensation. The individual salaries vary between 2,270 taka and 6,000 taka, which indicate that women are placed in the middle and lower grades. Five women stated that they have control, or a say, in how their wage is used. The rest of the women give their wage to their husband, father, brother, aunt or parents.

42 The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). *Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights 2011*.

43 In early April 2012, the body of union leader Aminul Islam at the Bangladesh Centre for Worker Solidarity (BCWS) was found with signs of torture. In a letter to Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wazed, Human Rights Watch deputy Asia director Phil Robertson raised concerns. "There has been a rash of enforced disappearances in Bangladesh, with bodies sometimes turning up far from where the person was last seen alive", he wrote.

44 Email from Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, 3 April 2012.

45 <http://karmojibinari.org.bd>, <http://www.askbd.org/web/>, <http://www.blast.org.bd/index>

46 Rahman. M, Bhattacharya. D, Moazzem. K, Shahrin.A. *Gender and Trade Liberalization in Bangladesh: The Case of the Ready Made Garments*. USAID Bangladesh. 2007. P 42.

47 USAID, *Thematic Brief, Gender and the garment and Textile Industry – evidence from Bangladesh and the Dominican Republic*. p. 5, 2008

48 S. Kapsos. The Gender Wage Gap in Bangladesh, ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series, 2008

49 Email from Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, 3 April 2012.

2.7 Some aspects of women and empowerment

Naila Kabeer Kabeer is Professor of Development studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, specialized in poverty, social exclusion and gender in relation to labour markets in South and South East Asia. She has studied social and economic interactions between households, communities and the wider economy for many years.

Kabeer defines 'empowerment' as the ability to make choices. To be disempowered is to be denied choice. Empowerment also entails change.⁵⁰ People's ability to exercise choice involves three interdependent dimensions:

- *Resources* - materials, such as wages or land, and social or human skills and knowledge.
- *Agency* - includes collective, as well as individual, reflection and action such as bargaining, negotiating and protesting.
- Realized *achievements*, or the failure to do so, constitute our third dimension of power.

When comparing today's workers with those Kabeer interviewed in 1987, she sees progress.

— We are in the making of a revolution and the Bangladesh garment workers have been a part of that. I hear a lot greater awareness, I see a lot more willingness to fight, and I see the growth of the unions trying to represent women. A job at a garment factory gives pay and a visibility in terms of their economic contributions.⁵¹

In a study published by the Institute of Development Studies in 2011, Kabeer and two fellow researchers came to the following conclusion: in order to bring sustainable empowerment to women's lives, a change is needed in women's consciousness and understanding, in their material security and well-being and in their capacity to renegotiate relationships.⁵²

— This has transformed the mindsets of young women about their future. If they don't want to marry someone they don't want, there is always the possibility of a job in the garment factory. These women have become more conscious of their rights than any other group of women in Bangladesh history.⁵³

50 Kabeer, N, *Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women's Empowerment*, in *Discussing Women's Empowerment - Theory and Practice*, ed. A. Sisask, pp. 17-59. 2001

51 Telephone interview with Naila Kabeer, professor of Development studies at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 9 March 2010.

52 N. Kabeer, S. Mahmud, S. Tasneem. *Does Paid Work Provide a Pathway to Women's Empowerment? Empirical Findings from Bangladesh*. IDS Working Paper 375. Institute of Development Studies 2011

53 Kabeer, 9 March 2010.

The garment sector's expansion in the 1990s was rapid. The factories in and around Dhaka and Chittagong drew young women from the countryside. Overrepresented were women from households with little or no land, prone to food-shortages during the year, many of which had no educated adult members.⁵⁴

Kabeer compares the jobs these women would have performed in the informal sector to the jobs the garment sector offers to some regular degree.⁵⁵

- A job at a garment factory gives pay and a visibility in terms of their economic contributions. It also expands the availability of choices to women. The very fact that they are now earning wage on a regular base means they are seen by their family as contributing to the family.⁵⁶

According to Kabeer, patriarchal protection, the idea that a woman is looked after by her father, husband or son, has become unreliable in Bangladesh. Marriages are not as stable as they used to be leading to divorces. Women who work in the garment industry try to save enough money for dowries or to start up their own businesses. Many self-employed women have a history in the garment industry.⁵⁷

- The social arena that the garment factory constitutes is another important aspect. It brings women together in large numbers in a way other jobs for women in Bangladesh do not.⁵⁸

Kabeer concludes that work in the public domain has brought “its share of pain”. The women are empowered but are still being exposed to harassment, abuse and health hazards.⁵⁹

- I think it is very important getting things right within the companies' control. That means regular payment of wages on time and showing respect on the factory floor. Giving the kind of rights that are in the local labour laws, paid leave etc. If productivity rises, the women's wages should rise as well. Proper notice if you are going to fire someone. A lot of workers tell me that they can get sacked overnight. Beginning with the labour laws of the country, and observing those would be a very good start. And allowing workers to organize.⁶⁰

54 N. Kabeer, S. Mahmud *Rags, Riches and Women Workers: Export-oriented Garment Manufacturing in Bangladesh*, in Linking Women Producers and Workers with Global Markets. Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004

55 Naila Kabeer studies social and economic interactions between households, communities and the wider economy, specialized in poverty, social exclusion and gender in relation to labour markets in South East Asia.

56 Kabeer, 9 March 2010

57 Ibid

58 Ibid

59 Kabeer, N. Mahmud, S. and Tasneem, S. *Does Paid Work Provide a Pathway to Women's Empowerment? Empirical Findings from Bangladesh*. IDS Working Paper 2011

60 Ibid

The harsh factory conditions have been experienced by Nazma Akter. She was 11 when she started working in a garment factory. She left after seven years. Today, some 25 years later, Akter is President of the Joint Garment Workers' Federation and General Secretary of the Awaj Foundation which provides legal aid and conducts rights-based awareness campaigns.

Akter was nominated to represent the garment workers in the wage commission negotiations in 2010. She also worked on the previous negotiation round in 2006. According to her, most young women come to Dhaka with a friend or relative and get linked to new networks in the city quite easily. But they are exposed to alien situations and have no one to protect them, which can be a hard experience for a young girl in a society built on patriarchal structures.

- They have no prior knowledge about rights, hazardous workplaces, and the painful living conditions in the urban slum. They have to learn everything by practice, says Nazma Akter.⁶¹

Nazma Akter is a well-known profile among garment workers, something Swedwatch experienced when visiting workers with her in the slum area. She points out how expensive accommodation is for most garment workers, rents varying from 2,500 and 3,500 taka per month. Even a room can cost as much as 4,000 to 6,000 taka a month, and then the accommodation is shared by several people, according to Akter. Her experience is that most female workers have difficulties with childcare.

- The workers are not interested in using the daycare centers at the factory. Some centers are not safe and expose the children to chemicals or mosquitoes. If the childcare centers are adequate, the women will bring their children.

The local women's organizations that Swedwatch interviewed meet female workers who are undernourished, suffer from anemia and are drained of energy. They sleep 3-4 hours per night and have symptoms of illnesses they are unaware of. The knowledge about menstruation is poor and the awareness of rights is low. They do not feel safe and secure.⁶²

2.8 Violence against women

Violence against women is widespread in Bangladesh and was the most reported crime to the police in the first six months of 2011. Many crimes are never reported so the statistics can be viewed as indicators. Out of 7,285 complaints made

61 Interview with Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, Bangladesh 29 December 2011.

62 Interviews with: Rokeya Rafique, Karmojibi Nari and Shafiqul Islam. Program Director at PSTC. Nazneen C. Huq HER project, country manager Bangladesh. Bangladesh 17 April 2011

1,586 were rape cases.⁶³ According to Human Rights Watch's observations in 2012, violence against women including rape, dowry-related assaults, acid attacks, and sexual harassment continue.⁶⁴

The state of Bangladesh adopted a national law against domestic violence in 2010. The women's movement worked for several years on drafting the bill: the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Bill.⁶⁵ Consequently, penalties for violations have increased but the laws are not always enforced.⁶⁶ Laws concerning sexual harassment have also been criticized as being poorly drafted which can complicate law enforcement.⁶⁷

Studies also show that female garment workers are vulnerable on their route to work and often walk in groups to provide some protection. Some stay the night at the garment factory. Others have reported having to pay ten percent of their wages for 'protection'.⁶⁸

The so-called "eve teasing" takes a heavy toll on women. In 2010, the Education Ministry even designated an "Eve Teasing Protection Day" (13th June).⁶⁹ The announcement was made after the increasing concern over the worrying number of women who had committed suicide to escape eve teasing, a euphemism for sexual harassment. It was reported that several girls and women had committed suicide during a period of four months as a direct result of the attacks.⁷⁰

The same week in June 2010, the State of Bangladesh announced deployment of women police officers to international peacekeeping operations. Consulting editor at the Daily Star, Irene Khan, commented in an article:

*"Progress on one side and retrogression on the other, they exemplify the schizophrenic state of affairs for women in Bangladesh today. In a country where the prime minister, foreign minister, home minister, agriculture minister, deputy leader of the House and the leader of the opposition are female, women and girls cannot walk on the streets, use public transport, or go to school, shops, parks or other public places without often being taunted, harassed, humiliated, sexually molested and assaulted - and in some cases, attacked with acid, abducted and raped."*⁷¹

⁶³ Amnesty, 2011

⁶⁴ Human Rights Watch, 2012

⁶⁵ International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh, *From research to legislation: ICDDR, B celebrates the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in Bangladesh*, n.d (30 March 2012)

⁶⁶ Regeringskansliet, Utrikesdepartementet, *Mänskliga Rättigheter i Bangladesh 2010*

⁶⁷ A Celebration of Women. *Sexual harassment in Bangladesh*. <http://acelebrationofwomen.org/?p=49511> (4 April 2012)

⁶⁸ World Bank, Dhaka 2007

⁶⁹ Regeringskansliet, 2010, Salim Mia. *Bangladesh 'Eve teasing' takes a terrible toll*. BBC News, Dhaka, 11 June 2010 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10220920> (2 April 2012)

⁷⁰ Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) human rights organization <http://www.askbd.org/web/> (1 April 2012)

⁷¹ Irene Khan. *Eve teasing or Adam terrorising?* The Daily Star, 19 June 2010 <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=143182>

According to the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association (BNWLA), almost 90% of girls aged 10-18 are victims of public sexual harassment. The perpetrators range from college students and unemployed youths to street vendors, rickshaw pullers, bus drivers, fellow passengers, colleagues and supervisors.⁷² Women's activists that Swedwatch talked to also mention rape by local 'goons' and sexual abuse by factory mid-level management as common.⁷³

2.9 Sexual and reproductive health and rights

As mentioned earlier in the report, health in Bangladesh has improved significantly and the country is well on track to meet some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) among others the maternal mortality ratio. However, much remains to be done to improve primary healthcare and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). There are more than 12,000 maternal deaths annually, one out of four (26 %) births are attended by a skilled health personnel and the contraceptive prevalence rate in the country is 56 percent.⁷⁴

Awareness of SRHR contributes to decreasing poverty and discrimination and is seen as a precondition for the development of individuals and communities.⁷⁵ Women's empowerment and labour market participation are seen to have a positive effect on women's reproductive health. However, economic progress and investment in women will not necessarily result in better health if women do not have proper access to sexual and reproductive health services.⁷⁶ As regards female garment workers in Bangladesh, action is needed from all stakeholders to improve the female workers' sexual and reproductive health and rights.

RFSU's partner organization in Bangladesh, the Population Services and Training Center (PSTC), has a specific SRHR project targeting garment workers and women and men in their community. Through the activities (clinic with full SRHR services, counselling, distributing contraceptives, sexual education and personal hygiene etc.) PSTC meets female garment workers that have poor knowledge about menstruation, sanitation and sexual and reproductive health and rights.⁷⁷

According to Nazneen C. Huq, country manager for the factory-based health project, HER-project (presented in the coming section 2.3.) many women at the factories have never been exposed to awareness building about health or SRHR.

⁷² Bangladesh National Women Lawyers Association <http://www.bnwlabd.org/>

⁷³ For example Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, email dated 3 April 2012.

⁷⁴ The World Bank. *Bangladesh - Reproductive health at a glance*. Report Number: 62965 Volume No: 1. 2011. Embassy of Sweden, Dhaka. The health sector. http://www.swedenabroad.com/Page_____116428.aspx

⁷⁵ RFSU. <http://www.rfsu.se>

⁷⁶ The World Bank. Report Number: 62965 2011

⁷⁷ Shafiqul Islam. Program Director at The Population Services and training center (PSTC). Bangladesh 19 April 2011.

- The very basic things they don't know. They don't know how to manage menstruation and many are absent because of menstruation, Huq says.

According to Parveen, doctor at MBM factory, almost 80 percent have knowledge about contraceptive but few women have the awareness needed for menstrual management and abortion. No studies have been found as to how common abortion is among garment workers but doctors, experts and NGOs witness both safe and unsafe abortions among the women. There are official clinics, both private and state-owned, that undertake the so-called menstrual regulation in a safe way.⁷⁸

Awaj Foundation is an NGO that works for the legal empowerment of female garment workers in Bangladesh. The organization also works with improving women workers' health and cooperates with a number of factories, BGMEA and international buyers. Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, sees how the lack of knowledge about sexual and reproductive issues causes many unwanted pregnancies.

- The young girls and boys get married but are not educated about sex. Many female workers get pregnant and go for risky abortions at local clinics. Workers having problems with bleedings after poor abortions is common, according to Akter.

Even if the number of deaths caused by unsafe abortions has been reduced in Bangladesh, complications in connection to abortions are common and abortions are still performed by traditional healers.⁷⁹

This is also the experience of Nazneen C. Huq, country manager for the Her-project in Bangladesh. She says female garment workers with unwanted pregnancies go to the pharmacy and ask for medication or sometimes go to unqualified clinics and end up in critical situations.

All in all, the level of knowledge amongst health professionals and medical staff regarding SRHR is generally low and if talked about at all, it's problem oriented and not rights based.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Anna af Ugglas. Technical Officer - Midwifery at UNFPA. 19 March 2012 (e-mail)

⁷⁹ Rahman.M, DaVanzo, J, and Razzaque, A. *The Role of Pregnancy Outcomes in the Maternal Mortality Rates of Two Areas in Matlab, Bangladesh*. International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Volume 36, Number 4 (p 170-177) 2010

⁸⁰ Johan Stellansson, Regional Coordinator Asia, RFSU, The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education

3. Expanding the boundaries of CSR

In 2011, major steps were taken in international 'soft law' as regards corporate responsibility to respect human rights: the adoption of the UN Guiding Principles for Business and Human Rights and the revision of the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises.⁸¹

This study has its starting point in this new landscape with the UN Guiding Principles being the predominant benchmark endorsed by the international community.⁸²

In 2005, Professor John Ruggie was given the mandate as Special Representative for Business and Human Rights by the UN Commission on Human Rights to identify and clarify existing standards and practice for companies in the field of human rights.⁸³

At the time, the UN Global Compact was the predominant initiative for businesses committed to align their operations and strategies to respect human rights. Ruggie presented a policy framework in 2008, "Protect, Respect and Remedy", emphasizing three pillars: the state duty to protect human rights, the corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and access to effective remedy.⁸⁴

The three pillars form a complementary whole, and support each other. The second pillar, the corporate responsibility to respect, exists independently of States' good or bad performance in fulfilling their duties. The main focus in this report is the second pillar but we will also explain why the first and third pillar need to be in place and support the second.

3.1 Aligned international frameworks

The "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework was followed by a set of Guiding Principles that were adopted unanimously by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011.⁸⁵ Key elements in the UN Guiding Principles are also incorporated in the ISO 26000:2010 and Social Responsibility Standard and the World Bank's International Finance Corporations (IFC) Performance Standards on Environmental

⁸¹ Ruggie. J. *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations "Protect, Respect and Remedy" Framework*. Advanced edited edition. A/HRC/17/31. March 2011. (hereinafter Ruggie. J, 2011)

⁸² Ibid

⁸³ The mandate is contained in Commission on Human Rights resolution 2005/69.

⁸⁴ Ruggie. J. *Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises*. A/HRC/8/5. April 2008. (hereinafter Ruggie. J, 2008)

⁸⁵ Ruggie. J, 2011. para 9

and Social Sustainability.⁸⁶ In October 2011, the EU Commission aligned their communication on CSR with the updated OECD Guidelines and the UN Guiding Principles.⁸⁷

Hence an international alignment within the area of business and human rights is taking place. The UN Guiding Principles can be seen as a “road-map” for states and business enterprises and will be used in some examples below.

According to the UN Guiding Principles companies can do harm by:

- a. **Causing** and **contributing** to adverse human rights impact through their own activities.
This means that a company can be putting right holders (workers) at risk through their buying practices, e.g. by cutting costs or shortening lead times that result in excessive overtime and low wages.
Remediation is required.
- b. Be directly **linked to** adverse human rights impact through their operations, products, services or business relationships.
This means that a company is responsible not only for its own operations but for how the products or services are being produced anywhere in the supply chain.⁸⁸

In both situations, companies are required to address negative impacts.⁸⁹ In the first case, companies must provide remedies or play a role in remediation by other actors when adverse human rights impact has occurred.

Companies can know and show respect of human rights through:

- a. A policy document that publicly states their responsibilities, commitments and expectations.
- b. Human rights due diligence in order to identify, prevent, mitigate and account for how they address their impacts on human rights.
- c. Process to enable the remediation of any adverse human rights impact they cause or to which they contribute.⁹⁰

Companies should also consider the severity of human rights impacts as per the scale (the gravity of the impact), scope (number of individuals impacted) and

86 The International Finance Corporation (IFC) of World Bank Group. *Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability*. 2012

ISO (International Organization for Standardization) ISO 26000:2010, *Guidance for social responsibility*. 2010

87 European Commission. *A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility*. COM(2011) 681. 2011

88 J. Ruggie. 2011. P 14

89 United Nations Human Rights, office of the commissioner for Human Rights. *The Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights. An Interpretive Guide*. November 2011

90 J. Ruggie. 2011. para 15

irremediable character of the impact (the ability to restore those impacted to a situation at least the same as before the impact). Consequently, when addressing human rights impacts in Bangladesh, contextual conditions like the low wages and dense population should be taken into consideration when analyzing the human rights impacts (scale), as well as the 3,6 million workers impacted among which 3 million are women (scope).

The alignment of the forementioned international guidelines on corporate responsibility reinforces governments’ joint efforts for development through the Millennium Goals (MDGs).⁹¹ In January 2012, the UN Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel on Global Sustainability presented a new blueprint for sustainable development.⁹² The report emphasizes the need for shared responsibility and joint efforts between public and private sectors in order for the MDG’s to be met. The recommendations are designed to “put sustainable development into practice and to mainstream it into economic policy”.⁹³ The High-Level Panel’s members are from 22 countries and have agreed on concrete proposals on the way forward in three key areas:

1. Empowering people to make sustainable choices,
2. Working towards a sustainable economy and
3. Strengthening institutional governance to support sustainable development.⁹⁴

The Panel’s final report, *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing*, contains 56 recommendations to put sustainable development into practice.⁹⁵ The three pillars from the UN Guiding Principles (State, Company, Remediation) are reflected also here.

3.2 Human rights due diligence

An important aspect of corporate responsibility is due diligence. A human rights due diligence includes an impact assessment to understand how activities may affect human rights. The assessment should be done on an ongoing basis. Awareness of human rights impacts should be fully integrated within the company as well as communicated externally.

Human rights due diligence processes are essential for companies in order to prevent and mitigate violations of human rights. Companies have a responsibility to

91 UN Homepage. *The Millennium Development Goals work! Brief examples of country progress*. <http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/successstories.shtml>

92 The High-level Panel on Global Sustainability presented its report to the Secretary-General on 30 January 2012 in Addis Ababa. The 22-member Panel, established by the Secretary-General in August 2010 to formulate a new blueprint for sustainable development and low-carbon prosperity, was co-chaired by Finnish President Tarja Halonen and South African President Jacob Zuma. <http://www.un.org/gsp/report>

93 Ibid, P.96

94 The 22 members of the High Level Panel on Global Sustainability included current and former heads of state and government, ministers, and representatives of the private sector and civil society.

95 The United Nations Secretary-General’s High-Level Panel for Global Sustainability. *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing*. Recommendation 34, p.84, 2012

Recommendations from the UN High level Panel on Global Sustainability 2012

Recommendation 2
“Governments should respect, protect and provide for human rights, including the right to take part in government directly or through freely chosen representatives.”

Recommendation 31
“Businesses should seek to align their business practices with universally accepted principles concerning human rights, labour, environmental sustainability and the fight against corruption, such as those set forth in the Global Compact.”

Recommendation 6
“Governments, the private sector, civil society and relevant international development partners should work together to provide vocational training, retraining and professional development within the context of lifelong learning geared to filling skills shortages in sectors essential to sustainable development. They should prioritize women, young people and vulnerable groups in these efforts.”

FACTS

know. In the process of attaining knowledge, three sets of factors should be considered by the company:

- 1. The country contexts in which its operations take place.
- 2. What human rights impact its activities may have within that context.
- 3. Whether it might contribute to abuse through the relationships connected to its activities.⁹⁶

A human rights due diligence process should include:

Policy: Companies should adopt a human rights policy to publicly describe the company’s commitment to fulfill their responsibility to respect human rights. The policy can be a stand-alone statement or integrated into a code of conduct

Impact assessment: Companies must take proactive steps to understand how actual and proposed activities may affect human rights. Who may be affected? How are they affected? The impact assessment will depend on the context. Special challenges in relations to human rights may be operating in an area of weak governance or conflict, or children rights. Based on the data, companies should refine their plans to address and avoid potential negative human rights impacts on an ongoing basis.

Integration: Human rights policies should be integrated throughout the company.

96 Ruggie. J, 2011, para 11 and 17

Tracking performance: Monitoring and auditing processes permit a company to track ongoing developments, even if the procedures may vary across sectors and among company departments. The performance should be based on regular reviews of human rights impacts.⁹⁷

3.3 Inclusive, interdependent and universal rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights from 1948 affirms that all human beings have the right to freedom from want and freedom from fear. These human rights are inclusive, interdependent and universal.

Businesses can affect the entire spectrum of internationally recognized human rights. Therefore, all rights must be considered by all businesses in all situations all over the world.⁹⁸ The rights to health, housing, water and food are not less relevant for business than the rights concerning working conditions and personal security.

In this study, Swedwatch has identified breaches of the following human rights:⁹⁹

Freedom of association	Right to equal pay for equal work
Right to organize and collective bargaining	Right to equality at work
Right to non-discrimination	Right to just and favorable remuneration
Right to a safe working environment	Right to rest and leisure
Freedom of movement	Right to family life
Right to life, liberty and security of the person	Right to physical and mental health, access to medical services
Sexual and reproductive health and rights	The right to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health
Right to an adequate standard of living (including food, clothing and housing)	A child’s right to not be separated from his parents against his will
Right to education	Right to privacy
Right to hold opinions, freedom of information and expression	Right to participate in cultural life, the benefits of scientific progress and protection of authorial interests
Right to social security	Political rights

97 Ruggie. J, 2011, P 14.

98 A/HRC/17/31 (2011) Annex and para 12, A/HRC/8/5 (2008) para 24

99 The rights of the minority (the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), is usually relevant in Bangladesh where many workers have indigenous origin. In this study no minority groups were however represented in the sample.



From a woman's perspective - Fatema's story

Fatema is 20 years old and lives with her husband and baby daughter in the area of Azampur. They live in one room and share one bed. They have no radio or television. Fatema's husband works in a buying office but doesn't earn enough for the family's needs.

Fatema has studied to class five. For the last three years she has worked as a sewing machine operator in an export factory in central Dhaka. She goes to work by foot at 7 am and should return at 8 pm but often works until 9 pm. Her salary is 3,000 taka (26 Euro, 35 USD) plus overtime per month. She gives the salary to her husband who uses the money for rent and food. No money is saved for the future, but sometimes he sends money to his parents in the village.

Fatema does all the household work. She starts queuing early in the morning for cooking since the stove is shared with several other families. Before she goes to work she prepares breakfast, food for the baby and lunch for her husband. She also queues for washing, showering and visiting the one toilet shared with 5 other families (16 people, both male and female).

Back from work around 9:30 in the evening, Fatema cleans and cooks. The regular household work is finished by 1:00 am. She then goes to bed and wakes up at 5:00 am.

Fatema finds the security good at home but the supply of water and electricity is always a problem. During the monsoon, water comes into the house and all the belongings must be kept on the bed. Then she cannot cook or go outside.

There is no doctor at the factory and Fatema does not have the time to visit the doctor during workdays. She has pain in one kidney and often suffers from fever. The nearest pharmacy has medicine and she tries to take care of her health by eating vegetables, dahl pulses, or mashed potato three times a day. The family can afford fish three days a month and meat once a month.

During menstruation Fatema uses old cloth that she changes three to four times a day. Sometimes she does not have time to change the cloth during work. Menstrual problems is not something one discusses, but if she feels sick Fatema talks to the welfare madam. Then she can take sick leave and go home. The contraceptive pills she takes are bought in a medicine shop for 50 taka every third month.

When at work, Fatema's eight month-old daughter is cared for by her mother. Fatema worries that her baby does not receive proper care. However, she doesn't want to take the baby to the factory because they do not have enough space to keep many children and the morning traffic is frightening.

Fatema likes the factory environment but due to her poor health, she thinks that she cannot continue to work for too long. The earnings are also not enough to survive on in the city.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Fatema is a fictitious name. All interviewed female workers quoted in this report are anonymous.

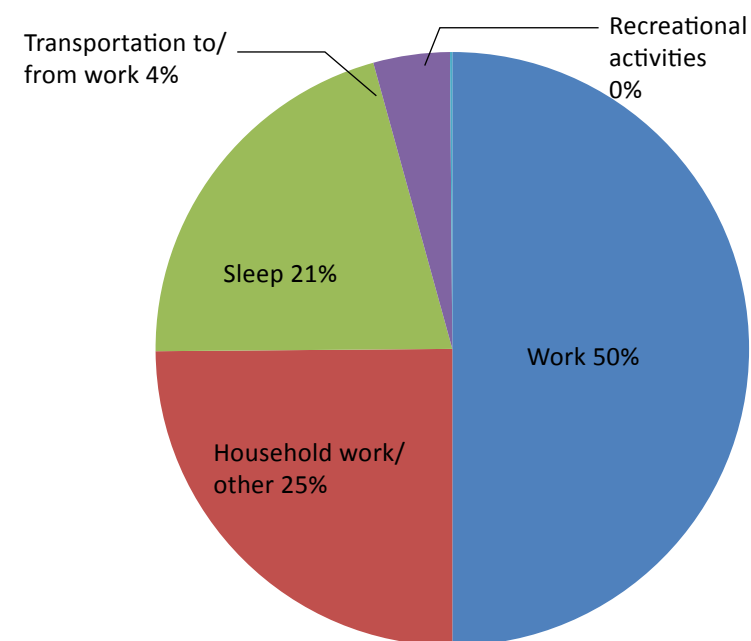
4. Women's voices

The setting in the urban slums makes the everyday life of women a struggle. Tradition also places a burden on these women. In Bangladesh the responsibility for all domestic work falls on the women. All the women interviewed describe how they cook, clean, wash clothes and shop for food. Whilst 17 of the women do all household work by themselves, 13 women share the work burden with a mother, mother-in-law or a sister-in law. One of the women interviewed has a husband that cooks when she is at work.

"After coming back from work I have to do all the household work like cleaning, cooking, chopping vegetables and preparing dinner. Sometimes I get tired, I don't want to work at home. But it's my responsibility to do all the household work."

To be able to take care of the household the women must get up early in the morning and go to bed late at night. Eight women sleep less than five hours a night and six women have a regular sleep of 3-4 hours a night. The shortest workday was eight hours (one woman) while two women regularly work 15 and 16 hours per day. On average the interviewed women work 13 hours per day.

The graph shows the average time share in percent for different activities during a 24-hour day among the 30 women in the study:



4.1. Separation from children

Among the 17 women with children, 12 women were forced to leave their children with their parents or their husband's parents when they were at work. In a few cases, the children were taken care of by other relatives, such as older siblings. Almost half, eight of the women, live in separation from their children who remain in their home villages.

"I often get upset because I am living in the city alone without my children. I am tense and always worry about my children."

The women living in separation from their children feel they have no other alternative. Dhaka is an expensive city and the women say they cannot afford to keep their children in the city. This study indicates that the lack of time and money are the two main obstacles preventing women living with their children in Dhaka.

"My body is here in the city only for hard work in the garment factor and my mind is crying for my children in the village."

The number of visits to their children in the village was not investigated, but two of the women visit their children once a year and one woman visits her children every 6 months. The reasons they do not see their children more often is the heavy workload and high travel costs. Mothers dislike the arrangement of living in separation from their children and describe traumatic separations and pleading phone calls from crying children to be brought to their mother or parents in the city.

"Both children said 'Mummy, please stay with us, and send papa to the city for money', I felt so sad and I got very upset when I left them in the village. I couldn't control my tears. When they had fallen asleep, I left the village with my husband in the night."

In the best interest of the child

All actions concerning children shall be in the best interest of the child. The principle of the superior interest of children is tied to the necessity to protect children. This principle involves two important rules: All the decisions regarding children have to be taken in the exclusive interest of each child to ensure their immediate and future well being. All the decisions and acts must imperatively guarantee the child rights.¹⁰¹ The principle of best interests applies to all actions concerning children, whether public or private organs take them. It regards action such as the promotion of the child's care and wellbeing, and also measures to support parents and others who have day to day responsibility for realizing children's rights. Separation of young children from their parents may have adverse consequences on the child's physical dependence on, and emotional attachment to, their parents. The lack of adequate parenting and parenting under acute material or psychological stress are situations that are most likely to impact negatively on young children.¹⁰²

101 The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)

102 General Comment 7/Rev. 1 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm>

The inability to take care of their children or take part in their daily lives is distressing for all the mothers interviewed. They are worried and anxious for their children's welfare regardless of who is taking care of them. Grandparents are too old to take proper care of their children, according to several of the women. Some of the mothers also worry about their children walking out on to the streets or falling into the water.

"My 12 year-old sister used to take care of my 4 year-old son. When my sister went to school he stayed at home alone. I was very tense at work when my son was home alone. But I have to walk a long distance to the factory, and the traffic is heavy in the morning, so I couldn't bring him to the factory."

The difficulties garment workers face in arranging adequate childcare is known, and garment factories with more than 40 female workers in Bangladesh are obliged by national law to provide a childcare facility within the factory grounds.¹⁰³ Despite this only one of the 30 women in this study brings her child to the factory childcare facility. She says there is no alternative and that she is constantly concerned about travelling with her child in traffic.

Five of the women in the study give the heavy traffic in Dhaka as a reason for not taking their children to the childcare facility. The constant traffic jams, bad roads, poor public transport and lack of pavements are given as reasons why children are not brought to the factories.¹⁰⁴ Almost all of the interviewed women walk to work and the walk is both tiring and dangerous, especially for small children. The Swedish clothing companies interviewed in this study verify (in the following chapter 7) that the childcare centers at the factories are poorly utilized.

"I was so worried that my son could walk out alone in the street or fall into the lake. So my husband and I decided to send him to the village. My mother will look after him there. At least we will not be worried, he can stay with someone. Of course my son is affected by our work, but we need to work. We have to survive."

Phulki is an NGO in Bangladesh that has been consulted to set up daycare centers at 150 factories. They also run 38 community-based childcare centers for parents with low incomes. According to Suraiya Haque, executive director of the organization Phulki, the female garment workers at many factories do not trust the childcare facilities offered since they are not open regularly.¹⁰⁵

— One day it is open, and the next day it is closed, even though the factory makes sure the center is open when they are audited. Some of the factories

103 ILO. Bangladesh Labour Law, 2006. ILO's database Natlex.

104 Sultana. M. *Dhaka city's traffic jam and planned solutions*. The Financial Express. 14 December 2010.

105 Suraiya Haque, Executive Director, Phulki. 3 January 2011

that run the center on their own don't have trained carers and the women don't trust them, says Haque.

Since childcare at the factory is a compliance issue the quality should be checked thoroughly, according to Suraiya Haque, who states that money is not the issue behind poorly run childcare centers at garment factories.

— The costs are peanuts for the factories. The problem is the attitude and the lack of knowledge, Haque says.

4.2 Poor housing conditions

All but one of the 30 interviewees share a room or shanti (small 'house' in the slum) with several other people or families. In some cases even small bedrooms are shared. Most of the interviewed women highlighted the problems with sharing kitchen, toilet and shower facilities with several other families. They added that they queue for cooking, washing-up and the use of the bathroom facilities.

"There is always a queue for cooking, washing, showering and the toilet."

Only one of the 30 women interviewed has a private kitchen, the remaining women share a stove with 2-6 families or households. Three women use a mud stove heated by wood. Two of the women use the mud stove because they cannot afford electricity, and one uses it to avoid queuing.

The right to adequate housing

'Adequate housing' means more than simply a roof over one's head and four walls. It should be seen as the right to live somewhere in security, peace and dignity. Another important dimension that defines adequate housing is privacy, lighting, ventilation, location and the surrounding basic infrastructure. The **location** must ensure easy access to work and basic facilities such as health and education at a reasonable cost.

It also encompasses **legal security** of tenure and **affordable** rent of housing. The adequate housing must provide **habitability** with security from cold, heat and other natural elements such as rainwater and flooding. Vulnerable groups, such as women and children, should be given particular priority and have access to appropriate facilities for specific needs.¹⁰⁶

106 See ESCR-Net on Right to Housing and General Comment 4. Appendix 3.

Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority (WASA) supplies Dhaka's slums with water through plastic pipelines.¹⁰⁷ The water is either tapped into the house or collected from a common tap. The water quality is poor and should be purified or boiled before drinking.¹⁰⁸ Neither is possible for the inhabitants due to practical constraints.¹⁰⁹ Water is also purchased from privately owned wells but the prices can be 15 times higher than the official rate. Gaining access to water in Dhaka is time consuming and it can take up to two hours to collect water.¹¹⁰

"We have to wait a long time to get water for showering, drinking and cleaning."

All 30 women in the study have access to tap water where they live. More than 40 percent of the women interviewed specifically stated that they boil or try to boil the water before drinking. Even though all of the women's households have access to water, the access is not reliable. Sometimes they have access to water only 2-3 hours per day. The women stress that too many people have to share water and this leads to long queues for showering, drinking, cooking, cleaning and so forth.

Table over the 30 respondents housing conditions in Dhaka:

Housing conditions	Number of women
Living in one room	28
Have a private kitchen	1
Sleep on the floor	3
Have a radio or TV	1
Share one room with 2-4 persons	19
Share one room with 5-6 persons	7
Live alone	1
Share a kitchen	29

107 Skirble.R. *Fight for Water Hits Crisis Levels World-Wide*. Voice of America, 22 March 2011.
108 UNICEF. *World Water Day 2011: Call for concerted efforts to ensure the rights of safe water*. UNICEF, Bangladesh, Press release 22 March 2011.
109 Email from Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, 3 April 2012.
110 World Bank, Dhaka 2007.

Water Aid has been working in Bangladesh since 1986 in partnership with rural districts, city corporations and municipalities. Khairul Islam, the country representative for Water Aid in Bangladesh, says that the queues for collecting water, washing, cooking and using toilet facilities are characteristic of the slums.¹¹¹ Water Aid in Bangladesh runs urban water projects (establishing tube wells or communal water points) and operates in areas where many of the garment workers live.¹¹² Islam describes the water and sanitation problems as enormous and confirms that the water and sanitation situation places a heavy burden on female garment workers.

— The factories are fine. The hardship starts the minute they walk out of the factory, says Islam.

The vast difference between the environment at work and home is also brought up in the interviews. All women in the study think the factory premises are good. What they find positive is the access to clean drinking water and toilets and they find the temperature, ventilation and light conditions very good.

The women themselves stress that there are too few toilets in the domestic areas and there are not always separate male and female toilets.¹¹³ In addition, the toilets can also be situated far from the house, offering poor access and increasing the risk of harassments from men.

“Our life is always a struggle with bad housing conditions.”

A majority of the interviewed women have access to electricity in their homes. At the same time, our study indicates that there are often problems with the access. 60 percent of the interviewed women state that the electricity is disconnected a few hours every day. Three women also highlight the high cost of electricity as a problem.

“When rain and flood water rushes into our house we have to sit on the bed until the water disappears. We can’t go outside. Fish, frogs and snakes come into the house. We are afraid in the dark night, sleepless. We can’t cook, we can’t eat, and we can’t go to the toilet at that time.”

The interviews were conducted during the dry season. About 80 percent of rain falls during the monsoon season in Bangladesh, which commences in June and lasts until September.¹¹⁴ During the heavy monsoon the housing conditions in the

111 Interview with Khairul Islam, Country Representative for Water Aid, Bangladesh. Bangladesh 18 April 2011.

112 www.wateraid.org

113 One of the interviewed women states that “Almost 35 people share one toilet”

114 James Heitzman, J. Worden, R. *Bangladesh: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1989.

slum areas degenerate significantly. All 13 women interviewed off-site described how the seasonal rainwater floods their houses and traps them and their children in their homes. They are forced to stay inside on the bed, sometimes for up to 3-4 days. Toilet visits and cooking is a major problem. Everything becomes dirty, so everything has to be kept on the bed. One of the interviewed women says, “It feels as if we live like birds”.

Wants of the interviewed women:

- 50 % - a bed
- 32 % - a table and chairs/sofa
- 32 % - a cabinet
- 25 % - a freezer

There are no improvements on a broad basis being made in the female garment workers’ housing conditions. NGO involvement in housing programmes in the slums of Dhaka has been limited and only a few housing projects by NGOs for female garment workers have been highlighted. Previously, hostels for garment workers were built in Dhaka by the development organization BRAC in corporation with the NGO Nari Uddyog Kendra (NUK).¹¹⁵ As mentioned in the background section of the report an agreement was signed between BGMEA and the Government of Bangladesh to jointly support a project to establish dormitories for female garment workers in Chittagong.

Right to water and sanitation

Safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is a human right essential to the full enjoyment of life and all other human rights.¹¹⁶ Fulfillment of the right to adequate food and housing (living standard) cannot be achieved without access to clean water. The water must be **available** in sufficient amounts and with continuous access. The **quality** of the water requires it to be safe and free of harmful substances. Contamination of drinking water constitutes a violation of the right to water, even if it is through neglect. The water and water facilities must also be **accessible**; there should be a sufficient number of water outlets to avoid prohibitive waiting times. It should also be within reasonable distance from the household and **affordable** for all, regardless of income. States must adopt and implement a national strategy and action plan that address the issue of water.^{117 118}

115 Faiz Rashid.S. *Strategies to Reduce Exclusion among Populations Living in Urban Slum Settlements in Bangladesh*. Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition”, 2009 nr 27 (page 574–586.)

116 UN News center. *General Assembly declares access to clean water and sanitation is a human right*. 28 July 2010 <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35456&Cr=SANITATION> (2 April 2012)

117 See the ESCR-Net on Right to Water and General Comment No. 15. See Appendix 3.

118 United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). *UN united to make the right to water and sanitation legally binding*. News 1 October 2010.



Above: Although the monsoon has not started yet, rain water floods the alleys between the houses. Below: The queues to the cooking stoves are long, as the workers arrive home in the evening.



Children in a factory day care centre.

The boy to the right is four years old.

SW: Who takes care of your baby when you are at work?
Does the factory have a child care center?

Respondent: My little sister takes care of my son. She is twelve years old and when she goes to school my son stays alone at home with the door locked. I am very worried when I am at work and my son is alone. But I have to walk far to the factory and I do not want to take my son in the traffic jam. We have a child care center in our factory, but very few children stay there.



The price of staple foods, such as rice, is escalating.



Toilet in a residential area.



Civil status and education level of the 30 interviewed women:

	Interviewed at work	Interviewed in domestic sphere	Total
Average age (years)	22	23	23
Married	9	6	15
Unmarried	7	3	10
Widowed	1	1	2
Divorced/separated	-	3	3
Primary education	13	7	20
Secondary education	4	2	6
No formal education	-	4	4

4.3 Anxiety and poor health

The majority of the respondents (28 of 30) complained of health problems. An analysis of the qualitative interviews show that the respondents suffer from headaches, pains in the neck, legs and hands, urinary infections, irregular menstruation and weight loss.

"I often have fever, headache and feel tired."

More than half of the women (16) were frequently upset and suffered from anxiety and stress about their children, money and the fear of falling sick and losing income.

"I never visit the doctor because I don't have time when I work. I can't leave my work, even if I have pain."

Despite this they do not visit the factory doctor or external clinics due to the lack of time and money. Some of the women said they are not always allowed to visit the doctor if the work pressure is high. The majority of the women say that they only visit the doctor if they are seriously ill.

"If there's too much work pressure they don't give the permission to even go to the doctor."

The supplementary interviews with the factory doctors confirm the women's poor

health and general feeling of weakness.¹¹⁹ The interviews made with three factory doctors and three welfare officers at four different factories show that:

- The most common health problems among female workers are gastric problems, diarrhea, fever, gynecological problems (fungal infections, trichomoniasis), menstrual problems (e.g. irregular menstruation), skin diseases, malnutrition, nausea, tuberculoses and urinary tract infections.
- The women have low awareness of personal hygiene, nutritious food, sexually transmitted infections, menstruation and pregnancy.
- They cannot afford to buy sanitary towels and medicine.¹²⁰

Malnutrition is widespread among women in Bangladesh. 50 percent of the women suffer from a chronic shortage of energy.¹²¹ Health assessments of garment workers show that 85 percent of female garment workers suffer from malnutrition and that anemia is a key health issue.¹²²

According to the factory based health and business project "HER-project" run by the organization Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), female garment workers lack knowledge about the nutritious value of foods and drink insufficient amounts of water.¹²³

"I know I have to eat good food sometimes, like egg, banana, milk and meat. But I can't buy this expensive food. We are just eating to survive, not for nutrition."

The problems with malnutrition are confirmed by Doctor Romman Chowdhury at Babylon Garments and Doctor Nahid Parveen, the Medical Officer at MBM Factory.¹²⁴ Six of the women in the study say that they avoid drinking water when the workload is high in order to avoid toilet visits at the factory.

Even though none of the factories have formal restrictions for using the toilet, the women say they do not want to hamper the production by wasting time and thereby angering the line manager.

Poor practice during menstruation creates illness and infections. Although poor menstrual management has a negative impact on women's personal life and workplace performance, there is little research done and societies and companies neg-

119 Interview with Romman Chowdhury, Medical Officer. Babylon Medical Center, Bangladesh, April 2011.

120 Ibid. Chowdhury stresses that factories that provide treatment do not always provide medicines free of charge.

121 Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). *Nutrition Country Profile Bangladesh*. www.fao.org

122 S. Akhter, AFM Salahuddin, M Iqbal, ABMA Malek, N. Jahan. *Health and Occupational Safety for female Workforce in Garment Industries in Bangladesh*. Journal of Mechanical Engineering. Vol. ME 41, No. 1, June 2010

123 BSR/HERproject. *Female Factory Workers' Health Needs Assessment: Bangladesh*. HER-Project July 2010.

124 Parveen, Chowdhury, April 2011.

lect the issue. The off-site interviews show that all women use ‘cloth’ (usually old, torn pieces/strips of cotton saris) during menstruation and that their hygiene practice during menstruation is poor.

“It’s a pain to use the same menstrual cloth, but I don’t have any choice.”

When the women change the cloth at work most of them use another part of the same cloth or wash and re-used it, wet or damp. There are no facilities in the factories, or in the domestic area, to dry the rags in sunlight as required. They are usually hung in a cupboard (almari) or hidden under other clothes. For the woman the most important thing is that no one can see the cloth while it dries.

“I don’t dry it in the sunlight, I put it in a hidden dark place in my room far from people’s eyes.”

Most of the women interviewed are aware that cloth collected from the factory floor can be harmful if used for protection during menstruation. Despite this 12 women have used, or use, cloth or lump that they pick up from the factory floor when menstruation comes suddenly or additional cloth is needed. The cloth can be hard, dusty and might contain chemicals.

The women know that the bleedings come once a month but that they do not know much more than that.

“I am not used to talking about menstruation.”

Right to Food

The right to food is essential for a dignified life and crucially important for the realization and enjoyment of other rights. Every person should have physical and economic **access** to **adequate** food at all times. The access of food for an adequate diet that is necessary for a healthy life. Everyone should have food **available** in quantity and quality sufficient to their dietary needs as individuals. The food should be accessible in ways that are **sustainable** and so that other basic needs are not threatened or comprised.¹²⁵

For legal instruments and additional resources see Appendix 3.

125 General Comment No. 12 and the ECSR- Net on Right to food . See appendix 3.

Menstruation practice in Bangladesh

During menstruation the vast majority of women in Bangladesh use cloths (rags torn from old saris). After usage, the cloth is washed in a pot or tub called bodna inside the latrine. Women use hidden places at home to dry the cloth as it is associated with shame and indignity. It is however important to dry the cloth in the sun to kill bacteria. The poor washing and drying practice leads to unclean and sometimes damp rags, which can cause urinary and vaginal infections.¹²⁶

Menstrual management and menstrual regulation

When studying and describing menstruation in Bangladesh it is important to distinguish between the two different interpretations. Menstrual management includes washing abdomen and hands during menstruation, changing cloths/towels frequently and washing cloths with soap and drying them in the sun. Menstrual regulation is another name for abortion. Abortion is illegal in Bangladesh but there is a policy on menstrual regulation that in practice allows “legal” abortion by allowing termination of unwanted pregnancy (practiced by surgical method) up to 10 weeks from the last menstrual period.¹²⁷

The findings on menstrual management of the whole group of respondents (all 30 women) are not representative since the women interviewed at Tiffany’s and the Babylon group were subject to awareness campaigns when the interviews were made. These women had recently started using sanitary towels and the women at the Babylon Group could buy subsidized sanitary towels for 30 taka a package.¹²⁸

However, even at the factories providing cheap sanitary towels the women could not always afford to buy them. Among the 17 women interviewed at the factories offering subsidized towels, seven women still used cloth. According to the factory doctors and the compliance officer at Tiffany’s most female workers want to use sanitary towels but they cannot afford them.¹²⁹

— We have sanitary towels here, which are helpful. We suggest they use them but they can’t afford to buy the sanitary towels, said one compliance officer.

In the supplementary interviews with factory doctors and welfare officers the following problems relating to menstruation were identified: low awareness, shyness, poor sanitation facilities, lack of drying areas, costly sanitary towels and social taboos. Thirteen of the 30 women interviewed mentioned that they feel comfor-

126 UNICEF. *Tackling menstrual hygiene taboos. Case study 10.* Nehraz Mahmud, A. T. M. Shaifullah Mehedi. *Baseline Study on the Menstrual Hygiene Situation in Three Slums of Mirpur.* Submitted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). Water Aid 2011.
127 Anna af Ugglas. Technical Officer - Midwifery at UNFPA. E-mail 2012-03-19, Bangladesh, National Institute of Population Research and Training. *Bangladesh maternal mortality and health care survey 2010.* 2011
128 Interview with Abidur Rahman, director of Babylon (Mirpur) combined with visit to Babylon Groups sanitary napkin factory in Mirpur, Dhaka 2010 04 18
129 Interview with Suraiya Akhter, Compliance officer and Nazira Begum, Senior Medicial Office, at Tiffany’s Wear Limited in Bangladesh, March 2011.

table talking to managers or welfare officers about work-related problems. When it comes to private matters the women only share them with female friends or relatives.

- Women feel uncomfortable talking about their menstruation due to shyness. Some women hesitate to come to us for advice on this issue, says Dr. Nahid Parveen at MBM Factory in Bangladesh.

According to the doctors and welfare officers the women get sick due to drying the menstruation cloth under garments in dirty and dark places.¹³⁰

- They most often come with a urinary tract infection. The reason for this is that they do not wash properly and do not drink enough water. They become reluctant to urinate because of pain. Often they come with high fever and acute lower abdominal pain. Consequently they cannot work properly at that time, says Dr. Nahid Parveen at MBM Factory in Bangladesh.

Dr. Romman Chowdhury, Medical Officer at Babylon Medical Center in Bangladesh, treats about four out of ten female workers for gynecological problems.

- Generally, female garment workers are not aware about menstruation and related risks to gynecological health and rights, says Chowdhury.¹³¹

According to Nargis Parveen, welfare officer at Tiffany’s with 10 years experience of urban healthcare, you have to take two things into consideration when trying to improve the female workers menstrual management. The women’s low knowledge about personal hygiene and their financial situation.

- If they can’t afford the basic necessities, how can they spend extra money on menstrual management? We try to help them within their ability. If they use cloth they need to know that it must be washed properly and dried out in the sun in an open space, says Nargis Parveen, welfare officer at Tiffany’s.

The Swedwatch findings are in line with a study from Water Aid in 2011, Baseline Study on the Menstrual Hygiene Situation in Three Slums of Mirpur.¹³² Water Aid’s study on the menstrual hygiene situation in three slums in Dhaka shows that:

- Six out of ten women living in the slums do not know where the menstruation blood comes from. (12 percent think it comes from the urine path, 7, 5 percent think it comes from the belly.)
- The women cannot afford sanitary towels. Three out of five respondents would

130 Interview with Ms. Nargis Parveen, Welfare officer and Nazira Begum, Senior Medicial Office, at Tiffany’s Wear Limited in Bangladesh, March 2011

131 Interview with Dr. Romman Chowdhury at Babylon Group in Bangladesh, April 2011.

132 Nehraz Mahmud, A. T. M. Shaifullah Mehedi. Water Aid 2011.

buy sanitary towels if they could get them at a lower price. (60 percent were willing to pay 21-40 tk.)

- One out of four women was reluctant to use sanitary towels since they were unfamiliar with them. Three percent said their husband or parents did not permit them to use sanitary towels because of shame.

In 2007, the women’s organization Phulki made a survey of female garment workers’ difficulties during menstruation. It showed that 95 percent of 200 garment workers used rags because sanitary towels were too expensive.¹³³

As regards menstruation management Dr. Khairul Islam, country representative for Water Aid, Bangladesh, recognizes the need for NGOs to also discuss the disposal of sanitary towels.

Five of the women in the Swedwatch study that use sanitary towels said they disposed the towels in a dustbin in the factory toilet. At home, three of the women buried their used towels in the ground. The disposals also cause problems with the drainage at the factory.

- Sometimes when the pipes get blocked we find cloths in the sewerage. We then make the checker aware of this and instruct them to tell everyone who uses the toilet to not dump any wastage in the lavatory and keep an eye on this, says Amjad Hossain, Manager at Tiffinys.

Right to health and sanitation

Every human being is entitled to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and live a life in dignity. This takes into account both biological and socio-economic preconditions. Underlying conditions that can lead to a healthy life are food and nutrition, housing, safe and portable water and sanitation. It also includes access to health-related education, including sexual and reproductive health.

Essential elements regarding health include **available** health facilities in sufficient quantity, such as adequate sanitation facilities, hospitals, clinics, trained medical and professional personnel and essential medicines. It should also be **physically accessible** for all sections of the population, especially women. The service must be **affordable** for everyone, including social disadvantage groups, whether publicly or privately provided. It also includes the right to seek, receive and impart **information** on health issues. Health facilities should also be in accordance with **acceptable** medical ethics and culturally appropriate and of good quality.¹³⁴

133 Phulki. *Identifying the difficulties of the female garments workers during their menstruation period and an effective solution* Survey conducted at Dada Ltd. 2007

134 General Comment 14 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm> and ESCR-Net on Right to Health http://www.escr-net.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=401360

4.4 Harassment and sexually transmitted infections

All but two of the women in the study walk to work. The walks vary between five to 60 minutes, while two women have a one-hour bus ride to the factory.

“Often I work until midnight. I’m afraid to go back home at night.”

The women interviewed were asked to describe any situation, place or person they are afraid of. While 23 out of 30 claimed they are not afraid, 12 women said they have been sexually harassed on their way to or from work. Stalking and sexual harassment of women in public areas is common in Bangladesh.¹³⁵

Three of the interviewed women shared experiences of severe sexual violence. These women were hit and raped by their husbands or other relatives.

“When he wanted money I couldn’t give him any. Then he quarreled with me, hit me and even had forced sex with me against my will.”

According to Parveen, the doctor at MBM factory, female workers are not very open about this kind of domestic violence and harassments.

— They are not aware of their rights. They might be physically injured by their husband and come for treatment but they never explain how the injury occurred due to shyness and fear. They will often tell their co-workers but not us, says Parveen.

“I feel afraid when I go back home alone from work. We are garment workers so some people tease us. Maybe they think we are cheap girls. But they don’t know we are working for survival and we are working for our country.”

According to the three factory doctors the rates for sexually transmitted infections (STI) are not so high among the female workers. The most common diseases the doctors find are Chlamydia and Trichomoniasis. When it comes to sexually transmitted diseases, Nargis Parveen, welfare officer at Tiffany’s, says the female workers have to be counseled very carefully to speak up.

— Sometimes symptoms of STI such as cases with itching are evident. But it is difficult to get information about the husband’s health, whether he has any diseases, germs, STI or anything suspicious, they hide the information

¹³⁵ Dirk Westhof, *A perspective on gender equality in Bangladesh. From young girl to adolescent: What is lost in Transition?* UNICEF Bangladesh, 2011

from us. Regardless of how they are abused by their husbands, they still feel obligated to protect them. That is why we sometimes face difficulties in finding the cause of the illness and treatment required, says Parveen.

In cases of STI, Parveen stresses how important counseling is to make the woman and her partner aware of the disease.

—If the partner does not cooperate, the disease will continue, but if they both cooperate, a positive outcome can be reached, according to Parveen.

The current knowledge on the prevalence and incidence of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh is low, and screening is not commonly offered or utilized.¹³⁶

“I was sleeping and my husband’s brother touched my body. I immediately woke up and screamed. He ran away. It has happened many nights, it even happened in front of my husband’s eyes once.”

The awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights issues varies among the respondents in this study. Six of the interviewed women say that they have been informed about health and hygiene issues at work but they have not received specific training on menstrual management. One woman says she received information about HIV/Aids together with information about Health and safety at the factory.

“At work I feel safe, but on the way home at night I feel insecure. There are some bad men who look down on me and tease me when I go back from work at night.”

The women’s willingness to talk about sex also varied. While the unmarried women gave short answers saying they do not use contraceptives, three women talked openly about sexual assault from husbands or relatives. The women were asked about the use of contraceptives as a follow-up question and four of the women shared what type of contraceptives they used.

It is difficult to draw conclusions about the women’s experiences of unwanted pregnancies. The women were asked if they had experienced an unwanted pregnancy and all gave a surprised or shy “no” as an answer. One woman said she is careful and uses contraceptive pills to avoid an unwanted pregnancy. No woman said that she had had an abortion, so-called menstrual regulation in Bangladesh.

¹³⁶ Johan Stellansson, Regional Coordinator Asia, RFSU, The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education

DREAMS and WISHES:

The majority of the female garment workers in the study has dreams and wishes for the future. Several women express their gratitude for having a job. They explain that they want to continue their work, but think that it is hard work for very little pay. To be promoted and earn more is a common ambition.

A few of the interviewed women seem to lack aspiration in life and have stopped dreaming. They feel that they work very hard but their lives are poor.

Some dreams and wishes shared in the interviews:

- Continue to work, do well, get promoted and earn more money.
- Get a good salary to survive.
- Give the children a better life and proper education.
- Have a home of my own.
- Complete my studies.
- Live in a good brick house.
- Have a stove and a bed.
- Buy food.
- Earn more money and buy a piece of land and build a house in the village.
- Eat and live in a good house and send the children to school and live with the children.
- A normal life, not only struggle to survive.
- Buy a sewing machine.
- Move back to the village. Start my own business and stay with my child or take my child to city.

Right to security

Violence against women constitutes a violation of the rights and fundamental freedoms of women, according to the United Nations (UN).¹³⁷ The UN continues to state that women are entitled to the equal enjoyment and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms in the economic, social, cultural field. This includes for example the right to liberty and security of person. States should legislate in force to protect women against all kinds of violence in everyday life including for example sexual violence, abuses in the family and sexual harassment at the work place.¹³⁸

Major findings on the 30 respondents living and working conditions:

	Yes	No	No answer
Walk to work	27	3	
Have been harassed on their way to/from work	13	16	1
Avoid toilet visits due to heavy workload	10	20	
Eat meat or fish more than once a week	14	16	
Use cloths/rags during menstruation	20	10	
Take part in recreational activities	2	28	
Have control over their wage	7	23	
Regularly work more than 8 hours per day	24	2	4
Utilize child care facilities at the factory (total 17)	1	16	
Live separated from their children (total 17)	8	9	
Sleep less than 6 hours per night	10	15	5

137 United Nations General Assembly Resolution 48/104 of 20 December 1993
138 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom12>

5. Company initiatives

Companies can affect the entire spectrum of internationally recognized human rights. They must respect all rights in all situations all over the world.¹³⁹ Many companies are well aware of the UN Guiding Principles and work on strategies in order to sharpen their focus on human rights.

5.1 Varied activities

Based on the findings, Swedwatch wanted to know how the poverty-linked problems are reflected in the companies' CSR strategies and activities. Ten brands sourcing in Bangladesh were interviewed about their CSR-work: Axstores, Gina Tricot, H&M, Kap-pAhl, Levi Strauss & Co, Lindex, MQ, New Wave Group, RNB and Tesco. The interviews reveal that the CSR activities are mainly factory based. All ten companies express a need for better involvement with the local community and other stakeholders but only three expressed a strategic thinking on how to involve the local community.

The focus of the running projects is on improving working conditions, addressing worker's rights-related issues such as health and safety, reducing working hours, raising productivity and improving skills. Auditing is still central, but the CSR-managers at seven of the Swedish companies think that current audit methods do not emphasize women's rights enough nor issues of special interest for women. One example raised by the companies is the unsatisfactory inspection of childcare centres. An audit covers compliance with the law meaning the existence and availability of a childcare centre. The quality of the childcare, or the reason for why it might not be utilized, is not investigated. The companies stress a similar situation regarding factory health clinics.

A majority of the companies admits a lack of knowledge concerning several gender specific issues. The companies are unaware of menstrual management procedures; what kinds of protection women use and how waste disposal is handled at the factory. Their knowledge is also poor about availability of toilets and how childcare centers work in practice. Seven companies indicated that their suppliers do not analyze the reasons why female workers are absent, nor the link between health and productivity. Very few companies do home visits and off-site interviews.

When the companies were asked about their social initiatives for women outside the factory premises, the forerunners could name a few community-based projects with focus on health, working skills and empowerment. To address the issue of violence against women, RFSU, one of the organizations behind this report, advises one of the large companies in its support line project for women. The support line is partly staffed by women from the Acid Victim Organization. Some companies engaged in philanthropic investments while others did not run any projects at all.

¹³⁹ Ruggie. J, 2011 Annex and para 12, Ruggie. J, 2008 para 24

An understanding of the impact the companies have on the women's lives, and awareness on female workers' specific needs and potential, is growing among the CSR representatives.

In summary, the interviews reflect that the companies:

- think they have an impact and leverage both inside and outside the factories.
- have a responsibility to promote gender issues.
- need better knowledge about what problems female workers face.
- have audit systems that do not highlight gender specific issues.
- lack knowledge about Bangladeshi women's' menstrual management.
- can improve workers health by awareness raising among women, management, doctors and welfare officers.
- lack suppliers that analyze the reasons behind female workers' absence or the link between women's health in the workplace and productivity.

The large companies stress a need for broad collaborations with a clear focus to reach an impact.¹⁴⁰

5.2 BSCI

Business Social Compliance Initiative, BSCI, was launched in 2002 by the Foreign Trade Association. Over 800 companies are part of this initiative with a common Code of Conduct and one monitoring system on social compliance. BSCI is "aiming to achieve a gradual progress towards improved working conditions in the factories and farms they source from." ¹⁴¹ Lindex, MQ, RnB Retail and Brands, Gina Tricot and Åhlens are members of BSCI.

There are a number of points of criticism of the BSCI model, being a company-lead organisation without involvement of trade unions or NGOs in its leadership. Mainly, NGOs concerns regard poor transparency, as its auditing database is not public. In terms of specific issues such as sandblasting, BSCI has issued non binding recommendations.¹⁴²

5.3 Buyers forum

Buyers forum was initiated by several international buyers and the International Finance Cooperation (IFC), part of the World Bank group, in Dhaka 2002. A growing number of international textile buyers adopted compliance strategies during the 1990s. Various brands were sourcing from the same factories and variation

¹⁴⁰ Interview with Maritha Lorentzon, Social Sustainability Coordinator, H&M, 13 December 2011.

¹⁴¹ BSCI, <http://www.bsci-intl.org/our-work/our-companies-commitment/our-companies-commitment>, collected 2012-04-20.

¹⁴² Mail from Ineke Zeldenrust, Clean Clothes Campaign, 15 March 2012.

in demands from the buyers risked creating a "compliance fatigue" among suppliers. The Buyers forum has been working on standardizing a common compliance approach. Currently, cooperation in the Buyers forum focus mainly on issues regarding environmental compliance. Some of its activities are being published on the companies' websites. Part of Buyers forum are Lindex, Adidas, B&C European Style, Bestseller, C&A, Carrefour, Disney, Gap, G-star, H&M, Hanes Brand, Inditex (Zara), IKEA, JC Penny, Jones New York, Karstadquelle, Kapp-ahl, MQ, Kwintet, Levi's, Lindex, Marks & Spencer, Mothercare, Nike, Newlook, New Wave, Primark, PVH, Sainsbury, Sears, Tesco, Target and Walmart.

5.4 BSR and HER-project

An initiative that has gained ground is the HER-project (Health Enables Returns) run by Business for Social Responsibility, BSR.¹⁴³ The HER project is a factory-based health and business program that shows a clear business case when improving female workers health.

The health risks among women identified by the HER-project are anemia and poor nutrition, reproductive tract infections, low access to family planning, poor maternal health, sexually transmitted infections and diabetes.

These health risks can cause absenteeism and exhaustion.¹⁴⁴ In two studies, BSR explains the dual benefit from improved women's health. The first study, conducted in Bangladesh in 2007, showed that better services and health education for women reduced absenteeism by 18 percent over 18 months. Staff turnover decreased by 46 percent. The workers said the availability of the services had made them more likely to have positive attitudes towards the factory management and less likely to be absent or to leave the company. The study concluded that every 1 USD spent on health services saved the company 3 USD.¹⁴⁵

In 2011, a second study was made on factories in Egypt and Pakistan. The results showed the same patterns and the program delivered a 4 USD return for every USD invested.¹⁴⁶

Nazneen C. Huq, country manager for the HER-project in Bangladesh, says the studies have been very useful when initiating the project at new factories.¹⁴⁷ According to Huq, many women in the factories have never received any education or

143 <http://herproject.org/>

144 Yeager. R. *Investing in Women in a Better World*, BSR. 2010.

145 Chowdhury. S. Wofford. D, Dupont. V. *Effects of a Workplace Health Program on Absenteeism, Turnover, and Worker Attitudes in a Bangladesh Garment Factory*. Extending Service Delivery (ESD)/United States Agency for International Development (USAID)/BSR 2007.

146 Yeager. R. *HER project: Health Enables Returns. The Business Returns from Women's health Programs*, BSR. 2011.

147 Interview with Nazneen C. Huq, HER-project Country manager, Bangladesh. 2001 04 17

training about health or Sexual- and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR). They are not aware of the most basic things.

— They don't know how to manage menstruation. Many women are absent from work due to menstruation.¹⁴⁸

By strengthening the medical facilities at, or nearby, the factory in combination with training sessions on health and hygiene, improvements are being made. Huq describes how the women stay after training sessions and ask questions about menstruation and raise other intimate concerns. She emphasizes that it takes time to change mindsets and that women's health awareness raising must continue.¹⁴⁹

In Cambodia, the International Labour Organization's (ILO) Better Factories program highlights the benefits that improved health and nutrition has had both on workers and business. Better Factories notes that factories with canteens have ten percent less sick leave than factories without canteens.¹⁵⁰ ILO's Better Factories program recommends meals and snacks at the workplace, awareness raising on nutrition, good hygiene and access to drinking water in the factories.¹⁵¹

5.5 Suppliers' voices

Managers at four factories supplying for international brands have been interviewed.¹⁵² Swedwatch also visited the Babylon Group's community-based health clinic and production site for sanitary towels a few kilometers outside of Dhaka.¹⁵³

In summary, the interviews reflect that the factory managers:

- consider female workers' poor health conditions a problem
- see a need for awareness raising for workers on health and hygiene
- do not analyze the reasons behind absenteeism.

One supplier was surprised by Swedwatch's detailed questions about menstrual management while others openly discussed the topic since they had started distributing subsidized sanitary towels.

— I don't have any idea about absence due to menstruation. We have female welfare officers that deal with these kinds of issues, said the supplier.

148 Interview with Huq, Ibid.

149 Ibid

150 Makin. J. *Cambodia: Women and Work in the Garment Industry*. ILO Better Factories Cambodia, the World Bank Justice for the Poor Program, CARE International and UNIFEM. 2007.

151 *Nutrition and Workers' Health*. Fact sheet. 08 Dec 2011. Better Factories Cambodia.

152 Interviews conducted at MBM, Tiffany's, Babylon Garments and Casual Wear Ltd March 2011.

153 Babylon Groups sanitary napkin factory in Mirpur, Dhaka. Educational visit by A. Kakuli, V. Risberg. N. Nahar at Swedwatch. 18 April 2011.

6. Bringing back state governance

Corporate Social Responsibility was the private sector's answer to the lack of good State governance. In the 1990s, companies producing in developing countries were criticized for sourcing where human rights problems were rampant.¹⁵⁴

Nike's image was particularly tarnished. Underpaid workers, child labour and poor working conditions in Asia made headlines and led to consumer boycotts. The companies were operating in a space where human rights were not protected, and in order to mitigate abuses, private, voluntary codes of conduct and a variety of monitoring mechanisms emerged as the principal way global corporations seek to remediate poor working conditions.¹⁵⁵ Factory audits became the monitoring method to oversee the implementation of the code in the factory.¹⁵⁶

Labour advocates soon argued that the corporate self-regulation process remained insufficient due to its lack of independence. Neil Kearney, then Secretary General of the International Textile, Garment, Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF), said: "Self-assessment, no matter how well applied, will not deliver credibility. [Only] verification will confer legitimacy and credibility."¹⁵⁷

The limits of corporate self-regulation stimulated the creation of a number of so-called multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs), which involve a variety of business interests, NGOs, and/or trade unions trying to develop (more) systematic and effective approaches to code implementation, monitoring and verification, as well as developing structures for accountability to civil society.¹⁵⁸

6.1 Code of conduct - an insufficient instrument

Scholars, activists and union representatives have also accused 'CSR' of hindering governments and unions to protect workers. Corporate practices such as codes and factory auditing is said to build a parallel and private system of governance to traditional state governance.¹⁵⁹ As it is put in a Raoul Wallenberg Institute publication from 2011:

154 Locke Richard and Romis Monica, Improving Work Conditions in a Global Supply Chain, Vol. 48 No.2, MIT Sloan Management Review (2007), p. 55.

155 Locke R, Amengual Matthew & Mangla Akshay, Virtue out of Necessity? Compliance, Commitment, and the Improvement of Labor Conditions in Global Supply Chains, Politics Society 2009; 37; 319, <http://pas.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/37/3/319>.

156 S. Skadegaard Thorsen, S. Andreasen. Remodelling Responsible Supply Chain Management: The Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights in Supply Chain Relationships in The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Foundations and Implementation. ed Mares. R. (The Raoul Wallenberg Institute Human Rights Library. Volume 39. 2012) P 134-135.

157 The Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI), *A Critical Perspective*, Clean Clothes Campaign, 2005.

158 S. Skadegaard Thorsen, S. Andreasen, 2012. P 134-135.

159 Ibid

"If no or very little state governance exists, this is an understandable response by corporations; however, problems occur if their actions undermine the development of well-functioning state governance systems".¹⁶⁰

According to the same source, the use of codes is in itself an insufficient instrument in meeting the companies' duty to respect. Furthermore, previous research indicates that the use of codes benefit male workers more than female, first tier suppliers and not sub-suppliers, and the improvements are temporary and factory-based, not long-lasting and structural.¹⁶¹

The key question is whether workers have really benefited from the emergence of corporate codes of conduct? As already indicated, previous and current research paints a mixed picture. In a study utilizing Nike's internal rating of 800 factories in 51 countries, it was found that monitoring alone appears to have produced only limited results.¹⁶²

In a forthcoming study by the same writer, Richard Locke, MIT Professor of Political Science and Management, factory audit data from four global firms regarded as leading in ethical supply chains (Nike, Coca-Cola, HP and HVP) will be published in the book "Promoting Labour Rights in a Global Economy". There are four main areas of concern in the study:

1. Compliance programs and audits help gather information, but do only highlight problems without sustainably remedying them.
2. Assistance to factories to improve their managerial and technical capabilities did produce only some benefits in improved working conditions.
3. To achieve significant and sustained improvements, the relationship between a company and its suppliers should be more collaborative.
4. Current business models with just-in-time manufacturing and slimmer inventory are contradicting sustained improved working conditions.¹⁶³

The existing empirical evidence supports the conflicting claims about the effectiveness of codes of conduct and factory auditing. The method has been successful in raising factory standards and working conditions during the 2000s. However, a sole monitoring process can even be regarded as a potential hinder for sustainable development.¹⁶⁴

160 Ibid

161 S. Barrientos and S. Smith, Report on the ETI Impact Assessment 2006: *The ETI Code of Labour Practice—Do Workers Really Benefit?*, Inst of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2007.

162 Locke, Richard M, Qin Fel & Brause Alberto, Does monitoring improve labor standards? Lessons from Nike, Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol.61, No 1 (October 2007). Cornell University, 0019-7939/00/6101

163 The Economist, March 31st – April 6th 2012, p. 68.

164 S. Skadegaard Thorsen, S. Andreasen, 2012. P 134-135.

6.2 Capacity building and collaboration

After a decade of limited and mixed results emerging from monitoring, a more collaborative approach has evolved. Companies aim at shifting focus from monitoring compliance to capacity building and engaging in MSIs.¹⁶⁵

These initiatives have increased the credibility of voluntary private initiatives by creating space in which trade unions and NGOs have a voice in furthering the development of regulatory initiatives.¹⁶⁶ In the apparel industry the most important MSIs are Fair labor Association (FLA), Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) and Fair Wear Foundation (FWF) and ILOs Better Work.¹⁶⁷

An increased need for inclusion of the public marks a key difference in the history of CSR.¹⁶⁸ So-called Private Public Partnerships are less formalized initiatives than MSIs, through which individual, or a group of companies, interact with authorities in order to reach common goals. Collaboration between companies and states are in line with the international aligned guidelines for responsible businesses. The UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability recommends governments and business to "build strategic partnerships between themselves and local communities for the implementation of sustainable development investments."¹⁶⁹

6.3 Some Public Partnership Projects

Swedwatch has contacted the largest international brands sourcing in Bangladesh and the local trade association and asked them about ongoing Private Public initiatives. This chapter presents some of their answers. Swedwatch has not been able to verify any of the mentioned projects.

2011, Marks & Spencer, M&S, initiated 'Ethical Model Factories' to set up factories that could demonstrate best practice for compliance, illustrate solutions and consult with its workforce giving equal rights and better pay and conditions. M&S partnered with local organisations including the German government agency Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) the Bangladesh Institute of Management and GSD (General Sewing Data) to deliver the training.

165 Ibid, p.134-135. Sune Skadegaard Thorsen is an expert advisor to the Global Business Initiative on Human Rights and founder of a business sustainability consultancy based in Copenhagen, Global CSR. It divides responsible supply chain management (RSCM) into the 1st, 2nd and 3rd generation. RSCM 1.0 involves a Code of Conduct and audits. RSCM 2.0 is the developed attempt to address some of the pitfalls of the RSCM 1.0 approach. RSCM 3.0 aims on state inclusion.

166 S. Skadegaard Thorsen, S. Andreasen, 2012. P 134-135.

167 www.fairlabor.org, www.ethicaltrade.org, www.fairwear.org, www.ilo.org/dhaka

168 S. Skadegaard Thorsen, S. Andreasen, 2012. P 134-135.

169 The United nations Secretary-General's High-Level Panel for Global Sustainability. *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing*. Recommendation 34, p.84, 2012.

M&S is now rolling out the learnings across all its factories in Bangladesh and will replicate the project in India and Sri Lanka.¹⁷⁰

Tesco is engaged in ETI and other Private Public projects which are co-funded by the English Department for International Development (DfID). These projects aim on improving productivity, management and employee relations on the factories.¹⁷¹ The company maintains good relationships with trade unions and have met government ministers in person in an effort to secure improved conditions such as minimum wage reviews, says Tesco to Swedwatch.¹⁷²

Levi Strauss & Co. is participating in the ILO/IFC Better Work Bangladesh initiative. The company's list of suppliers is public. Levi's engagement includes work with supplier management, local NGOs, international NGOs and trade unions, other buyers and the government, says Levi Strauss & Co. to Swedwatch.

Among the Swedish companies, only H&M has explored collaboration with authorities. The company has partnered with government authorities in both Sweden and Bangladesh.¹⁷³ A sewing training project has been launched with the Bangladesh Government Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training (BMET) and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA). The aim is to improve the quality of the governmental garment industry education and increase the number of skilled workers. The project is jointly financed by SIDA and H&M (50/50), BMET provides the premises.¹⁷⁴

Small and medium sized companies express a need for deeper knowledge and suggest co-operation within the industry and with local and international NGOs and institutions.

This is also what BGMEA requires when it comes to improving female workers' health. Nahid Hassan, one of the directors at BGMEA's Board of Directors and the managing director of Shomahar Sweaters Ltd, agrees on the need for Private Public partnerships to improve female workers' health and living conditions.¹⁷⁵

— Promoting health issues and spreading the benefit to every single person cannot be a job BGMEA can undertake alone, due to its capacity constraints. The contribution of the Government and development partners is appreciated but more needs to be done, says Hassan to Swedwatch.¹⁷⁶

170 <http://www.csr360gpn.org/magazine/feature/ms-ethical-model-factories/>

171 <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/work-with-us/funding-opportunities/business/responsible-and-accountable-garment-sector-rags-challenge-fund-/rags-projects/tesco-stores-ltd/>

172 Email from Paul Dearman, Ethical Trading Manager, Tesco. 2012-03-19.

173 H&M. Sustainability update. *Sustainability - A Message from Helena Helmersson. Projects in Bangladesh*, www.hm.com, 2012-02-20.

174 Interview with Anna Rosendahl, Programme Manager, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), 30 March 2012.

175 Interview with Nahid Hassan, director BGMEA/Managing director of Shomahar Sweaters Ltd. 15 December 2011 (e-mail).

176 Ibid

Hassan thinks that buyers, NGOs and the Government should all provide additional contributions to ensure a “dedicated and wider coverage of healthcare facilities to the workers”.¹⁷⁷

At the time of writing, BGMEA tells Swedwatch it runs Private Public Partnership activities together with the Government, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), World Trade Organization (WTO) and other partners to provide workers with pre-medical treatment. BGMEA also runs 12 health centers and works with awareness raising on reproductive health, AIDS, tuberculosis and life skills.¹⁷⁸

In June 2011, an agreement was signed between BGMEA and the Government of Bangladesh to jointly support a project to establish dormitories for female garment workers in Chittagong. According to Hassan 3,000 garment workers will receive accommodation and the project will take around two years to be completed. BGMEA and the Government are also planning to establish another dormitory in Ashulia, an industry intensive area close to Dhaka city.¹⁷⁹

— We are also lobbying the Government to build Special Economic Zones for the garment industry with dormitories and proper township facilities including entertainment, schools and hospitals. In addition, we have applied to the Government for soft loans to individual factories to establish dormitories of their own, states Hassan.¹⁸⁰

Swedwatch has not been able to verify the projects and plans mentioned by BGMEA, but will follow the development of the same.

7. Discussion and conclusions

Women workers in Bangladesh have played the lead role in a historical change of events. They are to some extent empowered, but many carry a double burden of the additional heavy workload from household duties. Poor financial means, low awareness of their rights and patriarchal structures keeps them trapped in poverty.

Increased purchasing power is the major requirement for improvements. Nothing else can be accepted other than an immediate mobilization among buying brands for a fair national wage structure that ensures workers living wages.

The buyers and suppliers have raised the factory standards through monitoring, investment and mutual capacity building. Besides the basic factory monitoring

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

¹⁷⁸ Ibid

¹⁷⁹ Ibid

¹⁸⁰ Ibid

processes, a number of social projects are ongoing in Bangladesh, driven by the international buyers. These include education on health, life skills and rights as well as fire safety projects, sewing training for underprivileged young people, workers-management dialogue training, skills and productivity projects. To some extent, companies’ good intentions are moving outside the factory walls and initiatives are taken to multi-stakeholder projects.

This study shows that the agents concerned, the working women, need to be involved in the processes. Their priorities, challenges and potential should be considered in the companies’ forming of strategies for improvements. Companies are advised to support NGOs to facilitate dialogue with workers and to provide labour rights and health related training.

The oppression against unions in general and union leaders specifically is unacceptable. Here, international brands must firmly protest any harassment or violence against unions and union leaders. The international brands should support a positive development for functional unions in Bangladesh. Improved workers-management dialogue is one plausible starting strategy.

The poor housing conditions lead to violations of a number of human rights. The State has a duty to provide adequate housing but companies are part of the chain of events. Companies should mobilize and put pressure on the Government to move forward to ensure the worker’s rights and well-being.

Many of the problems require a long-term strategy but it can be combined with more immediate initiatives. Menstruation and transportation are issues that could be facilitated with an immediate positive effect for both workers, employers and buyers. Sanitation facilities at work for managing hygiene in general, and menstruation specifically, could contribute to improving the women workers’ life quality. Needless to say, improved sanitation only at the work place is not sufficient.

The most unexpected finding in the study was the common and often traumatic separation between parents and children. The situation for migrant workers in Bangladesh, where salaries are insufficient for saving, schools in rural areas are substandard and living conditions in villages are generally poor, is not as well documented as Indian and Chinese migrants. The principle of the superior interest of children is tied to the necessity to protect children. What drives mothers to send their children away must be addressed by involving both private and public stakeholders and remediated.

‘Business and human rights’ is a complex, overlapping and horizontal arena on which the concept ‘CSR’ does not seem to cover all aspects, since it is a company-based, vertical strategy to ensure safe working conditions above all. Private Public Partnership solutions are one way forward in the industry’s (all stakeholders) duty to protect and respect all human rights. Efforts by brands and suppliers should be combined with well-functioning state governance systems.

The broader aspect of businesses responsibility is framed in guidelines which are permeated by the same principles. Companies have a responsibility for all rights in all business relations, contractual or not, in the factory or not.

The study confirms that the garment industry contributes to a stable and high growth, but the workers are being deprived from their rights due to poverty.

Lastly, the women express pride in their work, an ambition to develop and be promoted. They like the factory environment. Many dream of starting their own sewing business later. Above all, what is commonly expressed by all the mothers interviewed, is the concern for their children and a dream to give them a better life.

When the garment industry is one of the main tools for development in Bangladesh in terms of growth, the women have little time and resources to gain personal benefits from the employment. The private sector and governments have yet much to prove when it comes to contributing to reducing these women's poverty, contributing to a sustainable development and sharing the wealth.



8. Recommendations

Swedwatch recommends that buying companies:

1. Advocate for living wages in collaboration with other buyers. This should be done with input from labour unions and NGOs and be discussed with government officials and BGMEA/BGKMEA. A plan with time limits should be set.
2. Make a distinctive change in purchasing practices in order to share costs with suppliers and make a regular wage raise possible on a national level.
3. Protest against the harassment of unions and union leaders. Advocate for workers' right to organize according to ILO conventions no 87 and 99.
4. Focus more effort on gender perspectives when risks are assessed, strategies are made, policies are implemented and activities evaluated and monitored.
5. Join multi-stakeholder initiatives and projects.
6. Collaborate with peer companies, local stakeholders, the Government and others to mobilize strength and influence.

Swedwatch recommends that the Swedish Government:

1. Promotes the *OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises* and strongly stresses companies' responsibility to respect human rights.
2. Promotes, supports and aligns the efforts of Swedish companies locally when they address human rights issues in poverty contexts. Embassies can play a vital role in opening doors and bridging between private and public spheres.
3. Ensures that the trade, development and foreign policy agendas do not conflict.
4. Aligns its work with other domestic actors such as export credit agencies and public pension funds to ensure that they use their influence, and place demands on companies to set up robust due diligence processes to control their human rights impact.
5. Includes a focus on issues regarding working women in the forthcoming development cooperation with Bangladesh.
6. Adheres to the conclusions in the UN High Level Panel on Global Sustainability report *Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing* (2012).



A long day's work is done and the kitchen area gets crowded. The children and men help to cook.



Above: Many women wish they had showers in the factory, where the conditions are better than at home.
Below: Women having lunch at a Babylon Garments.



Some typical houses in Dhaka where garment workers live. The water rise is a daily threat to the slum dwellers.



Furniture are removed so that the floor inside can be repaired in an effort to prepare for the monsoon.



Shapla is covered with soap as she cleans herself outside her house.

Appendix 1

Questions and selection of respondents

A questionnaire for in-depth interviews with 30 women working at exporting factories in Dhaka was developed by Swedwatch in co-operation with RFSU. The questionnaire worked as a template for the interviews. The questions were structured into the following chapters:

- Individual description of everyday life
- Housing conditions and childcare
- Nutrition and medical care
- Menstrual management and water sanitation at home
- Work environment and sanitation
- Awareness and influence.

The interviewers were instructed to follow the questionnaire, with a flexible approach that took approximately 45 minutes. Follow-up questions could also be asked, depending on the situation. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated into English. Swedwatch's representative Najmun Nahar reviewed the interviews to ensure quality, security and consistency.

Selection and respondents locations

The interviewees are between 17 and 40 years old. All of them are employed by factories supplying international brands, some of them Swedish brands. Among the 30 women, nine were unmarried, 17 were married with children, and three were married without children. The workers name, age, employer and address are strictly confidential apart from two of the women who decided to contribute their stories in the multimedia documentary produced in parallel with the report.

Off-site interviews

13 of the interviews were conducted in the women's homes in Uttara, Mirpur, Mughda, Malibagh, and Savar, areas just outside Dhaka. They were employed at Dada Garments, Fashion Plus, Nadia Garments Limited, Chaity Garments and Complex Group's export garment factories in Uttara and Tongi.

The support and help from local NGOs, PSTC and Away Foundation, has been invaluable in gaining access to the respondents in their home locations. Initially six living areas with a high density of garment workers were selected and visited by the Swedwatch project co-ordinator. Then the time-consuming selection of women was made in the field. Often the inquiry for an interview and an explanation of the purpose, also needed to be put to family members and relatives.

On-site interviews

17 interviews were conducted at Babylon Group, Casual Wear, Aboni Knitwear, Tiffins and MBM Garments, producing garments for international brands. The factories are located in the areas Hemayet Pur, Mirpur-12, Mirpur-7 and Mirpur-14. The women were selected by Najmun Nahar and interviewed in private con-

ference rooms, however, the answers received in the factory environments were restrained compared to those given by the women interviewed in their homes. Interviews were also conducted with the factory managers at the selected factories, and three doctors at different factories and four welfare officers at three of the factories. Three doctors working for PSTC's clinics were also interviewed.

Interviews with local representatives

In addition to the workers' interviews, Swedwatch also visited Bangladesh one week in April 2011. During this time meetings took place with company representatives, NGOs, union representatives, local experts and workers in their domestic environment. The visit gave a comparative perspective to the findings from the desk research and the worker's interviews.

Appendix 2

The research team and others involved

Swedwatch's researcher Anna Kakuli is the main author of the report. The photographer Amy Helene Johansson produced the multimedia documentary. Viveka Risberg is responsible for publishing. Najmun Nahar was assigned as project co-ordinator in Dhaka from March to June 2011.

Community development consultant Gabrielle Gunneberg was assigned by Swedwatch from January to May 2012 to inform buyers and suppliers about the study and gather complementary information. The legal adaption has been undertaken by Annilie Nyberg, Legal Adviser LL.M.

Finnwatch has translated the report into Finnish and added information from six Finnish buying companies sourcing in Bangladesh. Finnwatch and Swedwatch will have a joint release in May 2012.

Companies interviewed

Swedwatch conducted interviews with corporate CSR-managers at seven Swedish clothing companies in September and October 2011: Axstores, Gina Tricot, H&M, Lindex, KappAhl, MQ and RnB. The Norwegian Varner-Gruppen, Levi Strauss and Tesco were interviewed by mail in March 2012. The local CSR responsables in Dhaka at Levi Strauss, Gap, Nike, and Tesco were interviewed in April 2012.

The main purpose of the interviews with the buying companies was to map to what extent the CSR strategies focus on women's rights and economic, social and cultural rights.

Appendix 3

Legal instruments and additional resources for further reading.

Right to Food

- General Comment No. 12
- <http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G99/420/12/PDF/G9942012.pdf?OpenElement>
- and the ECSR- Net on Right to food http://www.eschr-net.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=401399
- Universal Declaration on Human Rights, art.25. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women art 12.2 & 14.2 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>
- International Convent on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 11.1. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example art. 27(1),(3). <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- General Comment 12 of the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm>
- Special Rapporteur on the Right to food. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/food/index.htm>

Right to Water and Sanitation

- See the ESCR-Net on Right to Water and General Comment No. 15 . http://www.eschr-net.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=405623 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm> . <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=10403&LangID=E>
- Universal Declaration on Human Rights, art.25. <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>
- International Convent on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 11 and 12. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example art. 24(c),(27). <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- General Comment 15 of the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm>
- Special Rapporteur on the human right to safe drinking water and sanitation. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/WaterAndSanitation/SRWater/Pages/SRWaterIndex.aspx>

Right to Housing

- See ESCR-Net on Right to Housing and General Comment 4
- http://www.eschr-net.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=401410 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm>
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women art 12.2 & 14.2 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 25 (1). <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>

- International Convent on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 11.1. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, for example art. 27
- <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- General Comment 4 of the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm>
- Special Rapporteur on adequate housing. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Housing/Pages/HousingIndex.aspx>

Right to Health and Sanitation

- General Comment 14 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm> and ESCR-Net on Right to Health http://www.eschr-net.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=401360 General Comment 14 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm> and ESCR-Net on Right to Health http://www.eschr-net.org/resources/resources_show.htm?doc_id=401360
- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, art 25 . <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/index.shtml>
- International Convent on Economics, Social and Cultural Rights, art. 12
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women art 12.1 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm> . <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cescr.htm>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child
- <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- General Comment 14 of the Committee on the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cescr/comments.htm>
- Special Rapporteur on the Right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/health/right/>
- World Health Organization, WHO. www.who.int/topics/womens_health/en/

Right to Security

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/cedaw.htm>
- General Comment 12 of the Committee of All Forms of Discrimination of Women. <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/recommendations/recomm.htm#recom12>
- Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences. <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/SRWomen/Pages/SRWomenIndex.aspx>
- Declaration of Elimination of Violence against Women. <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/48/a48r104.htm>

Right to childhood

- General Comment 7/Rev. 1 <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm>
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, art 3 and 18. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm>
- General Comment 7/Rev. 1 and 12 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child. <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/comments.htm>

Appendix 4

A copy of the letter that the signatories sent to the Bangladesh Government. See chapter 2.3.

January 7, 2010

The Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Office of the Prime Minister, Tejgaon, Dhaka

Cc to: Hon'ble Minister of Labour and Manpower, Hon'ble Minister of Commerce, President BGMBA, President BKMEA, The British High Commission, The European Commission and Delegation to Bangladesh, The Embassy of Sweden, The Embassy of the United States of America, The Embassies of the buyers signed this document

Honorable Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina,

As significant purchasers of apparel and textile products from Bangladesh our companies have been observing with great concern the welfare of garment workers and the increasing unrest in the textile and garment industry in Bangladesh.

We have a long term commitment to sourcing from Bangladesh, under the conditions that the industry is in compliance with local and international labour and environmental laws, as such considerations are an integral part of our business practices.

It is our collective understanding that the Government of Bangladesh and you have highlighted as part of your party manifesto your commitment towards addressing workers needs and demands. Your commitment gives us confidence that worker's grievances should be addressed as it is a priority agenda for you and your government.

As you are aware, the increased cost of living during 2008 and 2009 has contributed to the unrest among workers in the garment sector as wages have not been regularly revised. The garments sector is one of the leading foreign currency earning sectors in Bangladesh. Unrest among the workers in this sector is seen as a risk among our companies and could cause damage to the reputation of Bangladesh as a reliable sourcing market.

We do not support the violent protests nor do we believe that this is the correct way forward but we recognize and do understand that the unrest among workers has become a reality. All signatories to this letter are socially responsible companies expecting that workers producing our products are properly compensated by their employers. It is a disconcerting fact that the current minimum wage level in Bangladesh is below the poverty line calculated by the World Bank and thus does not meet the basic needs of the workers and their families.

We appreciate that the Government of Bangladesh, BGMBA and BKMEA have recognized the increased cost of living and have taken steps to subsidize food for garment workers. However the issue of minimum wage review still remains unaddressed. We request that the Government of Bangladesh urgently form a review board and address the minimum wage issue in the garment sector with a built in mechanism of a yearly review.

We hope that this letter and our request is treated with high priority, and are looking forward to a swift action by the Bangladeshi Government regarding this urgent matter.

Thanking you,



References

- Action Aid. Sticked Up, ASDA: poverty guaranteed. Why Asda should pay women clothing workers a living wage. Action Aid, 2010.
- Akhter. S, Salahuddin. AFM, Iqbal. M , ABMA Malek, Jahan.N. Health and Occupational Safety for female Workforce if Garment Industries in Bangladesh. Journal of Mechanical Engineering. Vol. ME 41, No.1, June 2010.
- Alam. K. Blanch. L. Smith. A. Stitched up. Women workers in the Bangladeshi garment sector. War on Want, 2011.
- Amnesty International, Annual Report 2011. 2011.
- Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies for ILO, Women’s participation in trade unions in Bangladesh: Status, barriers and overcoming strategies, August 2009.
- Barrientos. S, Smith. S. Report on the ETI Ipact Assessment 2006: The ETI Code of Labour Practice – Do Workers Really Benefit? Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex, 2007.
- Berg. A, Hedrich. S, Kempf. S, Tochtermann. T. Bangladesh’s ready-made garments landscape: The challenge of growth 2011, McKinsey & Company. Inc.
- Better Factories Cambodia (BFC) programme of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Nutrition and Workers’ Health. Fact sheet. 8 Dec 2011.
- BSR/HERproject. Female Factory Workers’ Health Needs Assessment: Bangladesh. HER-Project July 2010.
- Chowdhury. S. Wofford. D, Dupont. V. Effects of a Workplace Health Program on Absenteeism, Turnover, and Worker Attitudes in a Bangladesh Garment Factory. Extending Service Delivery (ESD)/United States Agency forInternational Development (USAID)/BSR 2007.
- D. Vaughan-Whitehead. ”How ’fair’ are wage practices along the supply chain? Global assessment in 2010-11. Conference paper, Better Work 2011.
- European Commission. “A renewed EU strategy 2011-14 for Corporate Social Responsibility”. COM(2011) 681. 2011.
- Faiz Rashid.S. Strategies to Reduce Exclusion among Populations Living in Urban Slum Settlements in Bangladesh. Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition”, 2009 nr 27 (page 574–586.)
- General Economics Division Planning Commission Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh . The Millennium Development Goals, Bangladesh Progress Report 2009, Dhaka 2009.
- H&M. H&M joins the Fair Wage Network Initiative to promote better wage practices in global supply chains. Press Release. 1 September 2011.
- Hovland Steindal E, Mye arbeid sma marginer - en undersøkelse om tekstilarbeideres kjøpekraft. The Future in our hands 2010.
- Human Rights Watch, World Report 2012.2012.
- International Trade Union Confederation, Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights 2011.
- International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions, Bangladesh Garment Workers Protest Low Wage Increases, Continued Repression. 21 February 2012.
- ISO (International Organization for Standardization) ISO 26000:2010, Guidance for social responsibility. 2010.
- James Heitzman. J, Worden. R. Bangladesh: A Country Study. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1989. Online version: <http://countrystudies.us/bangladesh/24.htm> (4 April 2012).
- Kabeer, N, ‘Resources, Agency, Achievements: Reflections on the Measurement of Women’s Empowerment’, in Discussing Women’s Empowerment - Theory and Practice, ed. A. Sisask, SIDA Studies No. 3, Swedish International Development Agency, Stockholm, pp. 17-59. 2001.
- Kabeer. N, Mahmud. S, Rags, Riches and Women Workers: Export-oriented Garment Manufacturing in Bangladesh, in Linking Women Producers and Workers with Global Markets. Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004.
- Kabeer. N, Mahmud. S, Tasneem. S. Does Paid Work Provide a Pathway to Women’s Empowerment? Empirical Findings from Bangladesh. IDS Working Paper 375. Institute of Development Studies 2011.
- Kapsos, S. The Gender Wage Gap in Bangladesh, ILO Asia-Pacific Working Paper Series,2008.
- Lewis, D. Bangladesh – Politics, Economy and Civil Society. 2011.
- Makin. J. Cambodia: Women and Work in the Garment Industry. ILO Better Factories Cambodia, the World Bank Justice for the Poor Program, CARE International and UNIFEM. 2007.
- Locke. R, Qin F, Brause. A. Does monitoring improve labor standards? Lessons from Nike, Industrial and Labor Relations Review, Vol.61, No 1. 2007.
- Locke Richard and Romis Monica, Improving Work Conditions in a Global Supply Chain, Vol. 48 No.2, MIT Sloan Management Review (2007), p. 55.
- Locke Richard, The Promise and Perils of Globalization: The Case of Nike, Inc., in Management: Inventing and Delivering Its Future, ed. T.A. Kochan and R.Schmalensee (Cambridge,
- M. A Julfikar. A. M, Vikas. B.”Killing of Bangladeshi Labor Organizer Signals an Escalation in Violence”. The New York Times, 9 April 2012. http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/10/world/asia/bangladeshi-labor-organizer-is-found-killed.html?_r=1
- Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003), p.39-70.
- Mares. R. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Foundations and Implementation. p 134-135 The Raoul Wallenberg Institute Human Rights Library. Volume 39. 2012.

- Miller, D. Towards Sustainable Labour Costing in the Global Apparel Industry: Some evidence from UK Fashion Retail. Action Aid 2010.
- National Institute of Population Research and Training. Bangladesh maternal mortality and health care survey 2010. 2011.
- Nehraz Mahmud, A.T.M. Shaifullah Mehedi Baseline Study on the Menstrual Hygiene Situation in Three Slums of Mirpur. Submitted by Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS). Water Aid 2011.
- OECD. OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. 2011.
- Phulki. Identifying the difficulties of the female garments workers during their menstruation period and an effective solution. Survey conducted at Dada Ltd. 2007.
- Rahman. M, Bhattacharya. D, Moazzem. K, Shahrin.A. “Gender and Trade Liberalization in Bangladesh: The Case of the Ready Made Garments”. USAID Bangladesh. 2007. P 42.
- Rahman. M, DaVanzo. J, Razzaque, A. The Role of Pregnancy Outcomes in the Maternal Mortality Rates of Two Areas in Matlab, Bangladesh. International Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health. Volume 36, Number 4 (p 170-177) 2010 .
- Raworth. K, Dhanarajan. S, Wren-Lewis. L. The Private Sector and Poverty Reduction, 2008.
- Regeringskansliet, Utrikesdepartementet, Mänskliga Rättigheter i Bangladesh 2010, 2010.
- Riddselius. C. Har modet modet att höja lönerna? [Do the fashion industry have the courage to raise the wages?]Fair Trade Center/ Clean Clothes Campaign 2011.
- Ruggie. J. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations “Protect, Respect and Remedy” Framework. Advanced edited edition. A/HRC/17/31. March 2011.
- Ruggie. J. Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on the issue of human rights and transnational corporations and other business enterprises. A/HRC/8/5. April 2008.
- The International Finance Corporation (IFC) of World. Bank Group. Performance Standards on Environmental and Social Sustainability. 2012.
- The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights 2011. p 123 -126.
- The World Bank. Bangladesh - Reproductive health at a glance. Report no 62965 Vol No: 1. 2011.
- U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. 2010 Human Rights Report: Bangladesh. 8 April 2011.
- UN-HABITAT, Sustainable Urbanization: local action for urban poverty reduction, emphasis on finance and planning, What are slums and why do they exist? UN-HABITAT Feature/Backgrounder, 2007.
- UNICEF. Tackling menstrual hygiene taboos. Case study 10/Water aid Baseline Study on the Menstrual Hygiene Situation in Three Slums of Mirpur. 2011.
- UNICEF. World Water Day 2011: Call for concerted efforts to ensure the rights of safe water. UNICEF, Bangladesh, Press release 22 March 2011.
- United Nations Human Rights, office of the commissioner for Human Rights. The Corporate Responsibility to Respect Human Rights. An Interpretive Guide. November 2011.
- United Nations Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on Global Sustainability, Resilient People, Resilient Planet: A Future Worth Choosing, 2012.
- USAID, Thematic Brief, Gender and the garment and Textile Industry – evidence from Bangladesh and the Dominican Republic . p. 5, 2008.
- War on Want. UK clothes stores exploit women. Press Release. 16 July 2011.
- Westhof. D. A perspective on gender equality in Bangladesh. From young girl to adolescent: What is lost in Transition? UNICEF Bangladesh, 2011.
- World Bank. Dhaka: Improving Living Conditions for the Urban Poor. Bangladesh Development Series Paper No. 17. The World Bank Office, Dhaka 2007.
- Yeager. R. Investing in Women in a Better World. BSR. 2010.
- Yeager. R.HER project: Health Enables Returns. The Business Returns from Women’s health Programs. BSR 2011.

Articles

- International Labor Organization, Asia-Pacific Industrial Relations Network, Garment women still struggle with payscale and life in Bangladesh, n.d.
- <http://ap-irnet.ilobkk.or.th/news/garment-women-still-struggle-with-payscale-and-life-in-bangladesh> (9 August 2011).
- Irene Khan. Eve teasing or Adam terrorising? The Daily Star, 19 June 2010.
- <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=143182>
- Salim Mia. Bangladesh ‘Eve teasing’ takes a terrible toll. BBC News, Dhaka, 11 June 2010 <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10220920> (2 April 2012).
- Skirble.R. Fight for Water Hits Crisis Levels World-Wide. Voice of America, 22 March 2011. <http://www.voanews.com> (4 April 2012).

- Sultana. M. Dhaka city’s traffic jam and planned solutions. The Financial Express Tuesday December 14 2010. http://www.thefinancialexpress-bd.com/more.php?news_id=119912 (3 April 2012).
- The Sunday Morning Herald, Crunch time for Bangladesh garment firms, 25 July 2010.
- <http://news.smh.com.au/breaking-news-world/crunch-time-for-bangladesh-garment-firms-20100725-10q6x.html> (6 March 2012).

Information from websites

- A Celebration of Women. Sexual harassment in Bangladesh. <http://acelebrationofwomen.org/?p=49511> (4 April 2012).
- Ain o Salish Kendra (ASK) human rights organization <http://www.askbd.org/web/> (1 April 2012).
- Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) at a glance. Table 1: Growth of the industry and Employment. <http://www.bgmea.com.bd/home/pages/aboutus> (4 April 2012).
- Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association (BKMEA). Facts & Figures of Knitwear Sector. Statistics for the fiscal year, 2010-2011. Data from state-owned Export Promotion Bureau/EPB.http://www.bkmea.com/facts_figures.php (4 April 2012).
- Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST) <http://www.blast.org.bd/index>
- Bangladesh National Woman Lawyers’ Association (BNWLA)<http://www.bnwlabd.org/>
- BSR’s HERproject <http://herproject.org/>
- Embassy of Sweden, Dhaka. The health sector. http://www.swedenabroad.com/Page_____116428.aspx
- Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) www.cleanclothes.org
- Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), www.ethicaltrade.org
- Fair Labor Association(FLA), <http://www.fairlabor.org/>
- Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN (FAO). Nutrition Country Profile Bangladesh. www.fao.org
- Gapminder. Bangladesh Miracle. <http://www.gapminder.org/videos/gapcasts/gapcast-5-bangladesh-miracle/> (4 April 2012).
- Government of Bangladesh. Ministry of Labour and Employment. Labour Law 2006. <http://www.mole.gov.bd>
- H&M. Sustainability update. Sustainability -A Message from Helena Helmersson. Projects in Bangladesh. www.hm.com 2012-02-20.
- ILO. Bangladesh Labour Law, 2006. ILO:s database Natlex. http://www.ilo.org/dyn/natlex/natlex_browse.details?p_lang=en&p_country=BGD&p_classification=01.02&p_origin=COUNTRY&p_sortby=SORTBY_COUNTRY (4 April 2012).
- ILO’s Better Works and Fair Wear Foundation (FWF). <http://www.fairwear.org/>
- International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh, From research to legislation: ICDDR, B celebrates the passing of the Domestic Violence Act in Bangladesh, n.d. <http://www.supportforlife.org/media-centre/news/2183-from-research-to-legislation-icddr-b-celebrates-the-passing-of-the-domestic-violence-act-in-bangladesh> (30 March 2012).
- International Federation of Chemical, Energy , Mine and General Workers’ Unions, Bangladesh Garment Workers Protest Low Wage Increases, Continued Repression, n.d.<http://www.icem.org/en/78-ICEM-InBrief/3953-Bangladesh-Garment-Workers-Protest-Low-Wage-Increases-Continued-Repression> (21 February 2012).
- Karmojibi Nari <http://karmojibinari.org.bd/>
- Labour Behind the Labour. Company Profiles. Company profile Arcadia group. <http://www.labourbehindthelabel.org/news/item/893-lcuf-arcadia> (3 April 2010).
- LO-TCO Secretariat – International Trade Union Development Cooperation. Trade unions in the world – The political, social and trade union situation in 135 countries, Bangladesh, n.d. <http://www.lotcobistand.org/bangladesh> (8 February 2012).
- Oanda. Currency Converter. <http://www.oanda.com/currency/converter/>
- Phulki. <http://www.phulki.org/>
- RFSU. The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education <http://www.rfsu.se>
- The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) www.ethicaltrade.org.
- The Fair Labor Association Wage Fairness: It’s not just about the money. 9 March 2011. <http://www.fairlabor.org/blog/entry/wage-fairness-it%E2%80%99s-not-just-about-money>
- The International Textile, Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF). Bangladesh Unions Demand Measures to Supplement the Newly-Increased Minimum Wage. Press Release. 5 August 2010. <http://www.itglwf.org/lang/en/Bangladesh.html>
- The World Bank. Bangladesh Economic Update, April 2011. Permanent URL: <http://go.worldbank.org/RE2CP032X0>
- UN News center. General Assembly declares access to clean water and sanitation is a human right. 28 July 2010<http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=35456&Cr=SANITATION> (2 April 2012)
- UNICEF. Bangladesh Statistics. http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/bangladesh_bangladesh_statistics.html#92 (4 April 2012).
- United Nations Development Programme, Bangladesh: MDGs and Bangladesh, n.d.<http://www.undp.org.bd/mdgs.php> (28 February 2012).

- United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). UN united o make the right to water and sanitation legally binding. News 1 October 2010. <http://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/Display-News.aspx?NewsID=10403&LangID=E> (4 April 2012).
- United Nations, The Millennium Development Goals work! Brief examples of country progress, n.d.<http://www.un.org/en/mdg/summit2010/successstories.shtml> (28 February 2012).
- Wateraid UK Site. Tubewells and boreholes. http://www.wateraid.org/uk/what_we_do/sustainable_technologies/technology_notes/243.asp (4 April 2012).

Interviews

- Abidur Rahman, director of Babylon (Mirpur) 18 April 2011.
- Anna-Karin Wårfors, CSR-manager , Gina Tricot, October 2011.
- Anna Rosendahl, Programme Manager , Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) Business for Development (B4D). 30 March 2012.
- Ingrid Porss, Social Compliance Manager, Lindex, September 2011.
- Caroline Gunterberg, Coordinator Sustainability, Axstores, September 2011.
- Eva Kindgren, CSR & Quality Manager, Kappahl, September 2011.
- Helen Johansson, Social Compliance Manager MQ, October 2011.
- Mimmi Brodin, Manager CSR/Environment, RNB, September 2011.
- Johan Stellansson, Regional Coordinator Asia, RFSU, The Swedish Association for Sexuality Education, April 2011.
- Khairul Islam, Country Representative for Water Aid, Bangladesh. Bangladesh 18April 2011.
- Maritha Lorentzon, Social Sustainability Coordinator at H&M, September 2011.
- Milon Bikash Paul, Executive Director Population services and Training Center, PSTC. Bangladesh 19 April 2011.
- Ineke Zeldenrust, Clean Clothes Campaign. 2012-03-15 (e-mail).
- Ms. Nargis Parveen, Welfare officer at Tiffany's in Bangladesh, Bangladesh March 2011.
- Nahid Hassan, director BGMEA/Managing director of Shomahar Sweaters Ltd. 2011-12-15 (e-mail).
- Nahid Parveen, Medical Officer, MBM Factory in Bangladesh, Bangladesh March 2011.
- Naila Kabeer, professor of Development studies, School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, 9 March 2010.
- Naureen Chowdhury, Operations Analyst, SEDF, International Finance Corporation (IFC), April 2012.
- Nazira Begum, Senior Medicial Office, Tiffany's Wear Limited in Bangladesh, Bangladesh, March 2011.
- Nazma Akter, General Secretary at Awaj Foundation, Bangladesh 29 December 2011.
- Nazneen C. Huq HER project, country manager Bangladesh. Bangladesh 17 April 2011.
- Romman Chowdhury, Medical Officer. Babylon Medical Center, Bangladesh, April 2011.
- Rokeya Akter, Karmojibi Nari Bangladesh 19 April 2011.
- Md. Shaiful Islam (Mohiuddin), President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers & Export Association (BGMEA), April 2012.
- Shafiqul Islam. Program Director at The Population Services and training center (PSTC). Bangladesh 19 April 2011.
- Shirin Akter, Karmojibi Nari Bangladesh 19 April 2011.
- Suraiya Akhter, Compliance officer, Tiffany's Wear Limited in Bangladesh, Bangladesh March 2011.
- Suraiya Haque, Executive Director, Phulki. 3 January 2011.
- Locke. R, Amengual. M, Mangla. A. Virtue out of Necessity? Compliance, Commitment, and the Improvement of Labor Conditions in Global Supply Chains Politics & Society September 2009 37: 319-351, 2009.

Other

- Radu Mares, Ph.d. Raoul Wallenberg institute. 10 March 2012 (Seminar).
- Anna af Ugglas. Technical Officer - Midwifery at UNFPA. 19 March 2012 (e-mail).
- Maritha Lorentzon, Social Sustainability Coordinator at H&M, 12 January & 29 March 2012 (e-mail).
- Anna Walker. Worldwide Government Affairs and Public Policy. Levi Strauss & Co. 6 Febrary 2012 (e-mail).
- Paul Dearman. Ethical Trading Manager. Tesco Stores Ltd. 19 March 2012 (e-mail).
- Lulu Li. Group Manager, Social & Environmental Responsibility. New Wave Group. 17 Febrary 2012 (e-mail).
- Webinar with BSCI, 8 March 2012.

Reports published by Swedwatch

46. Vet du vad din middag åt till frukost? En rapport om fiskmjöl (2012)
45. Allt är inte guld som glimmar - den sanna historien om den smutsiga guldkedjan (2011)
44. Out of Focus - Labour rights in Vietnam's digital famera factories (2011)
43. Mors lilla Olle II (2011)
42. Rena guldgruvan - AP-fondernas investeringar har en smutsig baksida (2011)
41. Mors lilla Olle - så exploateras asiatiska bärplockare i de svenska skogarna (2011)
40. Dyrare kaffe är bra (2011)
39. Leksaksföretagen har agerat efter kritiken (2011)
38. Passive observers or active defenders of human rights? (2010)
37. Konfliktmineraler i våra mobiler (Voices from the inside) (2010)
36. Namibias uran bakom svensk kärnkraft (2010)
35. Etik för dyrt för svenska kaffebolag (2010)
34. Mer kött och soja - mindre regnskog (2010)
33. Olaglig övertid i mobilfabriker (2009)
32. Skoföretag har dålig kontroll på miljön (2009)
31. Hårt arbete bakom barnens julklappar (2009)
30. Vägar till ett bättre arbetsliv (2009)
29. Oädel handel: En rapport om import av tropiskt trä (2009)
28. Out of Control: E-waste trade flows from the EU to developing countries (2009)
27. En brännande fråga: Hur hållbar är den etanol som importeras till Sverige? (2009)
26. En exkluderande resa: En granskning av turismens effekter i Thailand och Brasilien (2008)
25. Ett kaffe som märks: Vilka effekter har certifieringar för kaffeodlare? (2008)
24. Illegal Ground: Assa Abloy's business in occupied Palestinian territory (2008)
23. Den blinda klädimporten: Miljöeffekter från produktionen av kläder (2008)
22. Silenced to Deliver: Mobile phone manufacturing in China and the Philippines (2008)
21. Utveckling på vems villkor? Skanskas verksamhet i ecuadorianska Amazonas (2008)
20. Risky Business. Lundin Group's involvement in the Tenke Fungurume Mining project in the DRC (2008)
19. Improving Working Conditions at Chinese Natural Stone Companies (2008)
18. Powering the Mobile World. Cobalt production for batteries in the DR Congo and Zambia (2007)
17. Svenska textilier – ren vinst, smutsig produktion (2007)
16. Vita rockar och vassa saxar. En rapport om landstingens brist på etiska inköp (2007)
15. Bristande miljö – och etikkontroll. En rapport om Clas Ohlsons och Biltemas inköp (2006)
14. Arbetarnas situation på varven i Kina (2006)
13. Sandvik och Freeport – Två företag i konflikten om Papua (2006)
12. Chokladens mörka hemlighet. En rapport om arbetsvillkoren på kakaoodlingarna i Västafrika (2006)
11. The Price of Oil. Nordic participation in violations in oil and gas development on Sakhalin in Russia (2006)
10. Kaffe från Brasilien — en bitter smak av orättvisa (2005)
9. Expansion i låglöneländer med etiska risker – Assa Abloy i Rumänien och Mexiko (2005)
8. Lång väg till rättigheter – Trelleborgs försök att hindra en fackförening på Sri Lanka (2005)
7. En vara bland andra? – migrantarbetarnas situation och svenska företag i Saudiarabien (2005)
6. Handelskung med bristande etik – en rapport om Clas Ohlsons inköp i Kina (2005)
5. Swedish pulp in Brazil – The case of Veracel (2005)
4. Människor och miljö i fruktindustrin – två fallstudier från Chile och Sydafrika (2005)
3. Billig, snabb och lydig—en rapport om kinesiska leksaksarbetare och företagens ansvar (2004)
2. Svensk handel med Burma (2004)
1. Fallstudie om pappersmasseproduktion i Indonesien (2003)