



BetterWork

Strategy

Better Work Bangladesh Gender Strategy 2020- 2022



International
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List of Acronyms

BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
BSR	Business for Social Responsibility
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
GEAR	Gender Equality And Returns
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
IFC	International Finance Corporation
ILO	International Labour Organization
RMG	Ready-Made Garment
UNICEF	United Nations Children’s Fund
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UN WOMEN	United Nations Equity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and opportunities associated with women, men, girls and boys. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are “socially constructed” (as opposed to being biologically determined), learned through social norms, are context/time-specific and changeable. Gender identity and gender expression are part of a person’s understanding and perception of their gender and their external expression of this through appearance and behaviours. Gender is part of the broader socio-cultural context. Other important criteria that affect our understanding and experiences of gender include age, class, disability, ethnicity, race and religion.

Gender-based violence and harassment is violence and harassment directed at persons because of their sex or gender, or affecting persons of a particular sex or gender disproportionately, and it includes sexual harassment. Violence and harassment refers to unacceptable behaviours and practices, or threats thereof, whether a single occurrence or repeated, that aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm.

Gender equality is defined as equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities regardless of gender and implies that the interests, priorities and needs of persons of all genders are taken into consideration equally. Gender equality means that everyone should have equal opportunities and live in a society in which they are able to live equally fulfilling lives regardless of their gender identity. The achievement of gender equality requires gender-based norms and power relations to be challenged and changed.

Gender equity addresses the imbalances stemming from the different needs and power of women and men, through which, measures are taken to target these imbalances to create an equal playing field.

Gender mainstreaming is defined as the process of assessing the gendered implications of any planned action. It seeks to guarantee that the concerns and experiences of individuals of both sexes are taken into consideration in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions, policies, and programmes with the aim of achieving gender equality. The degree of integration of a gender perspective in any given initiative can be conceptualized as a continuum.

Gender neutral interventions or policies do not target women or men, as they assume that they will be affected equally. Gender neutral interventions may have unintended gendered impact for failing to account for the existing gender inequality and gender relations.

Gender sensitivity is the ability to acknowledge and highlight existing gender differences, issues and inequalities and incorporate these into strategies and actions. Gender sensitive initiatives address gender norms, roles and access to resources in so far as they are needed to reach project goals.

Gender responsiveness is the ability to be proactive and to consistently integrate gender perspectives. In addition, it aims to include gender equality, women’s empowerment and men and the masculinity lens. Gender responsiveness changes gender norms, roles and access to resources as a key component of initiatives.

Gender transformative initiatives challenge existing power dynamics, transforming the existing distribution of resources and responsibilities in order to create a more equal relationship between women and men. Women and men may be targeted or one group alone may be targeted by the intervention to address the root causes of inequality.

Sex is the biological characteristics, genes and hormones that define humans as female, male or intersex.

1 Introduction

Why a gender strategy?

Better Work Bangladesh works to support the development of a competitive garment industry that provides decent jobs for workers, including women workers, good business for factories and brands, and economic growth for the country. In a sector that is driven by women workers – who comprise approximately 61.2 per cent of Bangladesh’s apparel industry workforce – gender equality is vital in assuring the success of Better Work Bangladesh. As such, promoting gender quality, the empowerment of women and inclusiveness in Bangladesh’s garment sector is a key part of our strategy.

Addressing gender issues has always been a component of Better Work Bangladesh and is identified as one of the three objectives of Better Work Bangladesh’s Strategy for Phase II (2018–2021). When all workers, men and women, are treated fairly and have decent work, everyone benefits: the workers themselves, their employers, the industry, and the local and national economies. As a result, Better Work Bangladesh is renewing its strategic focus on gender equality and women’s economic empowerment by integrating principles of gender equality and inclusion in all aspects of its work. The development of this Gender Strategy captures this renewed strategic focus and is informed by the approach of the Better Work Global Gender Strategy (2018–2022) and the adoption of the International Labour Organization’s (ILO) Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

As well as pooling the valuable experience of other Better Work Country Programmes (in particular the longer-standing Better Work Country Programmes in Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia, Haiti and Nicaragua), Better Work Bangladesh’s Gender Strategy is the outcome of an ongoing engagement with key actors contributing to the improvement of working conditions and the competitiveness of the ready-made garment (RMG) sector.

Partners engaged with the garment industry have worked tirelessly in recent years to improve the industry in terms of labour rights. Better Work Bangladesh has worked with partners across the sector, investing in partnerships in the public and private sector to empower women, increase productivity and improve the lives of workers and their family members, while offering leeway to open up to new opportunities to promote gender equality.

As a significant employer of women, the RMG sector can be linked to the increase in women’s economic participation in Bangladesh in the past fifteen years. Despite such improvements, however, industry stakeholders can do more to improve the working conditions for women and their opportunities for empowerment. While women still make up more than half of all workers in the sector, they continue to be overrepresented in lower-paid positions, with men holding the majority of supervisory roles. Adverse gender norms found in wider society also play out in factories, manifesting as discrimination and harassment. With women poorly represented in leadership positions, and the absence of their voice and representation in social dialogue mechanisms at factory, sector and national levels, they have little opportunity to advocate for change of the status quo. In an industry that is quickly becoming increasingly automated, there is a risk that unless this changes, women will not only struggle to thrive in the industry, but they will be slowly excluded from it entirely. Better Work Bangladesh is well placed within the industry to increasingly focus on the promotion of gender equality in its factory level work, while supporting tripartite constituents to also make this a priority.

This strategy looks at the current context of gender equality in Bangladesh and outlines Better Work Bangladesh’s approach, while laying out a future framework for promoting gender equality in the Bangladeshi garment sector.

2 Gender dynamics in Bangladesh

Country background

Bangladesh is one of the most populated countries in the world, with a population of over 161 million in 2018.¹ Women make up just under 50 per cent of the population.² Recent decades have seen significant development in Bangladesh. Economic development has put Bangladesh on the path to achieving middle-income country status by 2024.³ In addition, a multi-dimensional policy approach to poverty reduction (including policies on the provision of free education, improvement of government-provided health services, and the provision of a social safety net) has seen the number of people in multidimensional poverty falling from 93.7 million in 2004, to 74.4 million in 2014.⁴

Gender equality indicators have generally also been on the rise, with Bangladesh ranking 50 out of the 153 countries included in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index. Gender indicators have improved between 2006 and 2020 across all main developmental areas. The most significant improvements are recorded against the indicators related to political empowerment (see Table 1). However, economic participation and opportunity remains relatively unchanged, reflecting differences in men and women's labour force participation, the gender wage gap and the difference in advancement, as set out further below.

TABLE 1: GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX: BANGLADESH COUNTRY SCORE CARD 2006-2020⁵

INDICATORS	2006 SCORE	2020 SCORE
Global Gender Gap Index	0.627	0.726 (▲)
Economic participation and opportunity	0.423	0.438 (▲)
Educational attainment	0.868	0.951 (▲)
Health and survival	0.950	0.969 (▲)
Political empowerment	0.267	0.545 (▲)

1 World Bank. 2020. Data: population, total – Bangladesh. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?locations=BD>

2 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. 2019. Women and Men in Bangladesh: Facts and Figures 2018. Available at: http://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/b343a8b4_956b_45ca_872f_4cf9b2f1a6e0/Women%20and%20men%20in%20Bangladesh-Facts%20and%20figures%202018.pdf.

3 Better Work. 2019. Better Work Bangladesh Strategy Report: Phase II (2018-2021) (ILO: Geneva). Available at: <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BW-AplifyingImpact-Bangladesh.pdf>

4 UN. 2019. Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI).

5 World Economic Forum. 2020. Global Gender Gap Report (WEF: Geneva). Available at: www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf.

WOMEN AND MEN IN THE LABOUR MARKET

Between 2010 and 2020, women's labour force participation increased from 29.9 to 36.4 per cent. However, women's participation rate is significantly lower than the rate for men (81.3 per cent).⁶ The majority of jobs held by women are in informal work.⁷ In addition, the underemployment rate is much higher among women compared to men, with 30 per cent of women being underemployed (compared with 13 per cent of men).⁸ Women are also much less likely to work in professional or technical roles than men.⁹ The gender-related wage differential in Bangladesh is in the range of 10 to 15 per cent.¹⁰

Women also spend more time than men on unpaid work. A time-use survey from 2012 found that, on average, women spend around 3.6 hours more a day on household work compared to the 1.4 hours spent by men.¹¹

EDUCATION AND LITERACY

The Government of Bangladesh placed significant priority on increasing educational attainment. This policy has seen enrolment rates in both primary and secondary schools, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, meet and then exceed gender parity, with girls' enrolment rates exceeding the rates for boys.¹² Rates of enrolment in tertiary education remain,

however, lower for women than for men. Literacy rates are also higher for men than women, at 76.7 per cent and 71.2 per cent respectively (as reported in 2020 Global Gender Gap).¹³

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Women make up one fifth of the total of parliamentarians in Bangladesh.¹⁴ Bangladesh elected its first female Prime Minister in 1991.¹⁵

Though Bangladesh has a system of reserving seats for women in parliament, it has previously reported that this has not brought about a change in the perception around gender equality and political roles. According to a study on women's political participation, women tend to contest for reserved seats over general seats due to a multitude of factors. Women party members feel they may not win in seats if they compete with men because of financial resources and the perception that male candidates are preferred. Women parliamentarians may not seek re-election because they feel they did not deliver on their commitments and lost voter confidence, lack of influence in their party, and family responsibilities.¹⁶ Consequently, politics remains a field dominated by men.¹⁷

A lack of women in political and decision-making roles will be reflected in policies that fail to recognize

6 World Bank. 2020. World Bank Open Data. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org>

7 UN Women. Undated. UN Women Bangladesh Overview. Available at: <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/countries/bangladesh>; ILO. 2017. Decent Work Country Programme 2017-2020. Available

8 ILO and ADB. 2016. Bangladesh Looking Beyond Garments Employment Diagnostic Study. Available at: <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/190589/ban-beyond-garments-eds.pdf>.

9 World Economic Forum. 2020.

10 ILO and ADB. 2016. ILO. 2017.

11 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS). 2019.

12 ILO. 2017; World Economic Forum. 2020.

13 World Economic Forum. 2020.

14 IPU. 2020. Global data on national parliaments – Bangladesh. Available at: https://data.ipu.org/content/bangladesh?chamber_id=13332.

15 Borgen Project. 2020. Six Facts About Women's Rights in Bangladesh. Available at: <https://borgenproject.org/womens-rights-in-bangladesh/>.

16 Sultan, M. et al. 2016 Women's Representation in the Union Parishad. BRAC University Research Brief. Available at: <https://bigd.bracu.ac.bd/study/womens-representation-in-the-union-parishad/>.

17 Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. 2014. Bangladesh Report: The implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (1995) and the outcomes of the Twenty-Third Special Session of the General Assembly (2000).

the diverse needs of the population and will struggle to respond to gender in a way that addresses inequalities. Where women's decision-making power is reduced, this also reinforces the power dynamics that result in discrimination and violence against women.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

In their 2016 Concluding Observations, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reiterated previous recommendations to Bangladesh to give priority attention to combating violence against women and girls.¹⁸ Violence against women continues to be a prevalent issue in Bangladesh, with almost two thirds (72.6 per cent) of ever-married women having experienced one or more such forms of violence by their husband at least once in their lifetime. In terms of lifetime experiences, controlling behaviour is reported by more than half of ever-married women (55.4 per cent). This is followed by

physical violence (49.6 per cent), emotional violence (28.7 per cent of women), sexual violence (27.3 per cent) and economic violence (11.4 per cent).¹⁹

INTERNATIONAL INSTRUMENTS

The Government of Bangladesh has ratified seven out of the eight Fundamental ILO Conventions including the Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100) and the Discrimination Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). Bangladesh has also ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women, where state parties take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the field of employment under Article 11.

The UN's Sustainable Development Goals were adopted by Bangladesh, along with all UN Member States in 2015, and include a number of goals related to gender equality and the provision of decent work for all.

Bangladeshi policy and law

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (Act No. 76 of 1972), provides that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of sex and that women shall have equal rights with men in all spheres or the State and of public life.

The rights of women workers are recognized across the Government of Bangladesh's policy framework. The Bangladesh Vision 2021 seeks to achieve a more inclusive and equitable society, identifying the need to counter negative social attitudes and cultural practices

that hinder women's participation in the labour market (see text box below). The 7th Five-Year Plan includes gender equality indicators around increasing training and reducing income inequality. In addition, the 2011 National Women's Development Policy and its associated Action Plan (2013) provided a clear road map to achieving gender equality in Bangladesh, including introducing quotas for women at all levels, and creating the necessary environment to promote the access of women to employment and ensure their advancement.

18 UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. 2016. Concluding observations on the eight periodic report of Bangladesh (CEDAW/C/BGD/CO/8).

19 Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. 2016. Report on Violence Against Women Survey 2015. Available at: https://asiapacific.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/pub-pdf/Bangladesh_VAW_survey_report_2015_compressed.pdf.

BANGLADESH VISION 2021

Goal 8: To be a more inclusive and equitable society [excerpt]

8.4 In order to substantially reduce gender injustice by 2021 we will ensure significantly enhanced ownership and/or access for women to the means of production (land, capital, finance, equipment), as well as equality of access to opportunities for education and skill development. To ensure that women are able to take advantage of the opportunities that are made available to them, it will also be important to counter the negative social attitudes and cultural practices that hinder their participation in the education system as well as in the labour market. This will involve educating both men and women to change their mindsets regarding traditional gender roles and to recognize the importance of supporting and equipping women to more fully participate in the political and economic life of our society.

The key legislative instruments governing labour laws in Bangladesh are the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006), Bangladesh Labour (Amendment) Act (2013), and the Bangladesh Labour Rules (2015). The rules are designed to ensure better implementation of the Act. The Labour Act of 2006 contains several gender-responsive articles. Article 91 stipulates that separate and adequately screened washing facilities shall be provided for the use of male and female workers. Similarly, Article 93 states that separate shelter rooms, or adequate spaces with screens, shall be provided for female workers. Article 345 the provision that equal wages will be paid for equal work. This provision directs that in determining wages, the principle of equal wages for male and female workers for work of equal value, shall be followed.

Under the 2013 amendment of the Labour Law, Bangladesh increased maternity leave to sixteen weeks. In the case of maternal death, maternity pay would be passed to the child or the child's carer.

However, Bangladesh's labour laws do not extend to workers in the informal sector, where many women work. In practical terms, this means that the majority of women workers are not protected by labour legislation.

Whilst Bangladesh has criminalized domestic violence and developed the Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010, this does not cover acts of violence against women outside of the family.

THE HIGH COURT VERDICT

In May 2009, in response to a petition filed by the Bangladesh National Women Lawyers' Association, the Bangladesh High Court issued an order for educational institutes and workplaces to adopt guidelines to prevent and address sexual harassment. This was a historical moment for Bangladesh, recognizing the right to be free from sexual harassment in public spaces.

Sexual harassment is defined as, "unwelcome sexually-determined behaviour—whether direct or implied—such as: physical contact and advances; attempts to establish a physical or sexual relationship through abuse of administrative, authoritative or professional powers; demands or requests for sexual favours; sexually-coloured remarks or indecent gestures; stalking; taking photos or video for the purpose of blackmail; attempting to establish a sexual relationship by intimidation, deception or false assurances; among others."

The guidelines provide that workplaces should establish complaint committees to deal with cases of sexual harassment. Committees should comprise a minimum of five members, the majority of whom should be women. The head of the committee should also be a woman and the committee should have two members from outside the organization concerned.

While this set a legal precedent, this ruling is still not widely implemented.

3 Gender dynamics in the Bangladesh garment sector

Bangladesh's RMG sector accounts for over 83 percent of the country's exports (worth around US\$ 32 billion in 2018) and is the world's second largest garment producer after China. The sector employs over four million workers, and indirectly supports as many as 40 million Bangladeshis (about 25 per cent of the population).²⁰

Workforce and workers' profile

According to a survey conducted by the ILO in 2018, women make up 61.2 per cent of the garment workforce. While women make up the majority of the garment workforce, there are signs that the number of women workers are declining.²¹ The majority (80 per cent) of workers are aged between 16 and 30 years.²² According to the data collected from the Bangladesh's Labour Force Survey in 2016, the mean ages of workers are 26.6 for women and 26.7 for men.²³

The common profile of a woman working in the sector is an early twenties internal migrant from a rural area. Women workers will have the average number of years of schooling (seven years).²⁴ While the majority of women and men workers have completed primary education (58.6 and 56.7 per cent respectively), approximately 29.1 per cent of women workers have had no formal education or did not complete their primary education, compared to 17.9 per cent of men workers.²⁵

Before joining the RMG sector, women workers were largely engaged in household activities (42.1 per cent), while some were unemployed (29.8 per cent) or were students (23.2 per cent). Before joining the sector, men workers were predominantly students (37.6 per cent),

unemployed (25.4 per cent), or day labourers (14.6 per cent). Comparing women and men workers, working in the RMG sector is more likely to be the first formal and paid employment opportunity for women compared to men (95 and 64 per cent respectively).²⁶

The majority of women workers are married (73.3 per cent), while about half of men workers are married (55.6 per cent).²⁷ About half of spouses of married workers work in RMG factories.²⁸ A study undertaken in the RMG sector found that, among married women living with their families, 34 per cent had to care for families with four or more members; among unmarried women living with their families, 71.2 per cent had to care for families with four or more members. The majority of women are living with their families. For those women not living with their families, and in any case, many will additionally send remittances to their home villages to support others.²⁹

On average, men workers spend more hours working in the factory (11.2 per day) compared to women (10.9 per day), but factoring in household responsibilities, on average, a woman worker's working day is 14.1 hours compared to 12.9 for men.³⁰

20 ILO and UN Women. 2020. Understanding the Gender Composition and Experience of Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Workers in Bangladesh. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_754669.pdf.

21 ILO. 2019. Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector: Bangladesh Baseline Study (January - May 2017). Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/---ilo-dhaka/documents/publication/wcms_735614.pdf.

22 Ibid.

23 ILO and UN Women. 2020.

24 ILO. 2017. Gender mainstreaming strategy: Improving working conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector - Phase 2.

25 ILO and UN Women. 2020.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.

28 ILO and UN Women. 2020.

29 ILO. 2019.

30 ILO and UN Women. 2020.

A CHANGING GENDER DYNAMIC IN THE SECTOR

Although women workers have been at the forefront of the RMG workforce in Bangladesh, in recent years, there has been a decrease in the proportion of women workers. While the amount or ratio of women working in the sector is still proportionally high when compared with women's labour force participation nationally, this nonetheless indicates that jobs that were previously held by women are shifting to men.

The sector may anticipate a further decline in the proportion of women workers employed due to technological upgrades based on recent trends. A Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) study shows that there are clear gender-based differences in the ability to operate different machines, where more men workers are able to operate multiple machines due to their access to education and technical training. This is likely to have an impact on workers' employment opportunities as the sector upgrades technologically through the introduction of more efficient and upgraded machines, where increased automation and upgradation are likely to lead to higher job losses for women than men.

Read more: ILO and UN Women. 2020. Understanding the Gender Composition and Experience of Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Workers in Bangladesh; ILO. 2019. Improving Working Conditions in the Ready-Made Garment Sector: Bangladesh Baseline Study (January – May 2017); and Moazzem et al. 2019. New Dynamics in Bangladesh's Apparels Enterprises: Perspectives on Upgradation, Restructuring and Compliance Assurance.

Recruitment and career advancement

ADVERSE GENDER NORMS AND STEREOTYPES AND THEIR IMPACT ON WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Adverse gender norms and stereotypes are root causes of women's under-representation in supervisory and leadership positions in the sector. According to a 2018 ILO and UN Women enterprise level survey, 89 per cent of women and 87 per cent of men surveyed feel that men can work fast, while 80 per cent of women and men feel that men's output is greater than that of women. 73.3 per cent of women and 63.6 per cent of men say that men can work better than women at night. Regarding the reasons why women may not want to take on managerial roles, the majority of survey participants pointed to the intense workload (67.7 per cent of women and 51.4 per cent of men). 38.8 per cent of the respondents shared that women are not qualified to take on managerial roles, with more women sharing this opinion than men (39.4 and 37.1 per cent respectively).

The findings from Better Work and IFC's Gender Equality and Returns (GEAR) initiative highlight how these perceptions impact women's career advancement in factories. There is a perception, held by both women and men, that women do not have the same capacity as men to operate new, more advanced machinery, and thus they are not being given the opportunity to show case or build these skills. Whilst less strongly, this perception of women is also held by women who may have less confidence in their own or their peers' abilities to hold different job roles.¹

Read more: ILO and UN Women. 2020. Understanding the Gender Composition and Experience of Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Workers in Bangladesh, Rocco Macchiavello, Andreas Menzel, Atonu Rabbani and Christopher Woodruff (2015) Challenges of Change: An Experiment Training Women to Manage in the Bangladeshi Garment Sector: Working Paper Series, The University of Warwick; and, IFC. 2018. Cutting Through the Cloth Ceiling: Assessing how IFC's Work-Progression & Productivity Toolkit helps female workers achieve promotion and boost productivity in Bangladesh's readymade garment factories.

Although women make up the majority of the workforce in the sector, they are mainly occupied in lower-paid and lower-skilled jobs. This is illustrated by the percentage of women in each job grade. Jobs are graded from 1 to 7, with grade 1 being the most skilled and highest paid positions and grade 7 the lowest.³¹ The majority of women workers (83.8 per cent) are employed in grades 4 to 7 compared to 67.7 per cent of men workers. Meanwhile, women are more prominent in grade 3 positions compared to men (11.3 per cent versus 9.5 per cent). By contrast, only 0.8 per cent of women are in grade 1 and 1.0 per cent in grade 2 compared to 1.6 and 2.0 per cent for men respectively.³²

Men occupy the majority of the supervisory and management positions, whereas opportunities for women to advance their careers are limited. There is seldom equal opportunity for female garment workers with respect to promotion within factories. And although the sewing line is dominated by women, accounting for four out of every five production line workers, less than one in 20 line supervisors are women. This means 95 per cent of the supervisory talent on the sewing lines comes from just 20 per

cent of the workforce.³³ As highlighted in a CARE Bangladesh study, few factories invest in formal training for supervisory roles for women. The study shows that females get less time for training than men; that there is no concrete factory management plan to upgrade women collectively; and that men get priority over women to learn new machine operations.³⁴ The study says that training institutions have very few courses available (and convenient) for promoting women from operator to supervisor.

In addition to lack of training opportunities, women face further barriers to entering leadership positions, in particular connected to entrenched ideas about gender roles. The manifestation of embedded gender norms, is that it is not customary for women to manage men, in an employment situation or otherwise (see section above on women in politics). The result of few women in supervisory or management roles, in turn reaffirms the notion that women are not suitable for such roles.³⁵ This creates the need to simultaneously address the systems and the attitudes that prevent women from advancing in their employment.

31 Grade 1 includes jobs such as Chief Mechanic, Chief Cutting Master, Chief Quality Controller, and Pattern Master. Grades 3 to 7 consists of positions as Operators, Cutters, Quality Auditor, Marker, Drawing Person, Exposer, Iron Person, and Sample Persons. Grade 3 represents the senior positions, grade 4 as middle (i.e. Operator, Marker), grade 5 as junior, grade 6 as general, and grade 7 as assistant. This is based on the Bangladesh Gazette updated on November 25, 2018 under section 139 and 140 of the Bangladesh Labour Act, 2006.

32 ILO and UN Women. 2020.

33 Woodruff, C. and Williams, A. 2018. Cutting Through the Cloth Ceiling: Assessing how IFC's Work-Progression & Productivity Toolkit helps female workers achieve promotion and boost productivity in Bangladesh's readymade garment factories. Available at: https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/39d37244-86d3-4b41-891a-e74340aefe32/WPT+Report_Final_low+res.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=mfpvbHX.

34 CARE. ND. A Qualitative Enquiry to Gender Specific Constraints towards Career Mobility in RMG Sector Bangladesh

35 Woodruff and Williams. 2018.

GENDER EQUALITY AND RETURNS (GEAR)

GEAR aims at easing the career pathways for women working in RMG factories to progress into supervisory roles, thereby improving access to better jobs for women, contributing to increased line-level productivity, and reducing gender imbalances at management levels.

There are two key components to the GEAR programme: technical and soft-skills training for women sewing operators and capacity-building for factory managers on selecting, promoting, and supporting women's talent.

Over a span of 10 training days, women operators receive soft skills training on communications, confidence-building, and leadership and technical skills related to production processes, line-balancing, and an understanding of production machinery. GEAR also tackles the adverse gender norms and stereotypes by raising the confidence of women trainees.

To ensure success for trainees upon the completion of their training, GEAR builds the capacity of factory management through seminars with senior management and management training on how to onboard new supervisors, how to give constructive feedback, and how to identify and select operators. In addition, GEAR facilitates a team-building session for newly trained supervisors, existing supervisors, line chiefs, industrial engineers, and other middle managers to foster an inclusive and supportive work culture and systems for women leaders.

Maternity protection

Inadequate policies supporting pregnant workers and working mothers contribute to the continued employment of women in low-level jobs and their lack of opportunity for career advancement. The 2017 ILO study on the RMG sector found that, despite 66 per cent of the 1,336 women workers in the sample survey being married, only 86 women (9 per cent) had given birth to a child during their time of work at their respective factories. It was suggested in the study that there is a strong possibility that these factories might discourage pregnancy during contracts, might not have recruited women workers who were planning to conceive, or might have made workers in the early

stages of pregnancy to leave their job on the grounds of an “assurance” that these workers could return to their job after childbirth.³⁶ It is also considered that women returning to work after maternity, return to work at the entry level and/or do not get the benefit gained from any previous seniority or work experience. Additionally, it was observed during Better Work Bangladesh assessments that there appeared to be a lack of workers' understanding around their legal maternity rights and benefits, including maternity leave, worker often under the impression that they were expected to resign in the later stages of pregnancy.³⁷

36 ILO. 2019.

37 Better Work. 2019. An Industry and Compliance Review: Bangladesh (ILO: Geneva). Available at: https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Bangladesh-Annual-Report_2.pdf

MATERNITY RIGHTS AND BREASTFEEDING SUPPORT IN THE WORKPLACE

Mothers@Work is a national programme aimed at strengthening maternity rights and breastfeeding support in the workplace. It was initiated by United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Bangladesh in responding to the programme and priorities of the National Nutrition Services – Institute of Public Health Nutrition, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare to promote, protect and support breastfeeding among working mothers and to ensure women's equal participation in the workforce. The programme was designed through a national consultation with the key stakeholders including the key Ministries and development partners. It is being implemented in collaboration with Better Work Bangladesh and their respective RMG factories, Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) and Phulki. The Mothers@Work programme was developed with generous financial support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and UNICEF, with contributions from BRAC and Phulki. Mothers@Work was launched jointly by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare jointly with the Ministry of Labour and Employment in August 2017.

Maternity protection in the workplace is an integral part of the advancement of women's rights, particularly in terms of optimal mother and child health. It is an essential part of guaranteeing a woman's access to decent work and for promoting gender equality. Such protection enable women to continue their productive work without compromising their reproductive and child care needs. Companies that support maternity rights protection facilitate international trade that is more sustainable, and leverage growth while contributing to a stronger generation of young children.

Pregnancy and motherhood remains a challenge for working mothers – often women will leave their jobs not understanding their maternity rights and believe that they must choose between working and leaving their infant in the village to be taken care of by a relative or quitting their job and staying home.

Mothers@Work has changed and continues to change how Better Work Bangladesh works in factories and how factories are supporting working women. This is accomplished through engaging senior management on the importance of maternity protection and breastfeeding support in the workplace as well as building the capacity of human resources officers, health workers, and Mothers@Work focal points. Establishing mothers support groups further encourage best practices to improve maternal and child health.

See more: UNICEF. 2015. The ready-made garment sector and children in Bangladesh, and Better Work. 2019. Mothers@Work: supporting breastfeeding mothers in the workplace. <https://betterwork.org/2019/08/07/motherswork-supporting-breastfeeding-mothers-in-the-workplace/>

Wage discrimination

Bangladesh still accounts for some of the lowest wages among RMG producer countries, despite increases to the minimum wage introduced in 2013 and 2018.³⁸ Wage data shows that women and men workers are not paid equally for the same work. On average, women workers receive a mean wage of 8,434.53 BDT compared to 9,447.02 BDT for men. Comparing the mean wages of women and men across each grade, men workers have a

higher mean wage. Data on workers receiving less than the minimum wage shows that gender-based discrimination is more significant among lower grades. While a similar percentage of women and men workers are paid under minimum wage for grades 3, the percentage of women workers receiving less than minimum wage is significantly higher than for men workers.³⁹ The gender wage gap is largely attributed to occupational segregation.⁴⁰

38 Better Work. 2019. Better World Bangladesh Strategy Report: Phase II (2018-2021). Available at: <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/BW-AplifyingImpact-Bangladesh.pdf>.

39 For grade 4, 36.7 percent of men workers and 63.3 per cent of women workers receive less than minimum wage. For grade 5, the share is 36.1 and 63.9 per cent respectively for men and women workers. The biggest disparities are found in the lowest grades 6 and 7, where 24.1 and 25 per cent of men workers are paid under minimum wage compared to 75.9 and 75 per cent of women workers.

40 ILO. 2019.

Occupational safety and health

Workers in the sector face multitudes of occupational safety and health risks due to the significant pressure of long working hours. For women workers, health issues are further compounded by time spent on domestic and care responsibilities at home.

A higher proportion of women than men suffer from physical and mental illness, including physical health problems, respiratory diseases, psychological problems and musculoskeletal diseases.⁴¹ This is in a context in which access to health care is very limited, despite the obligation of factories to offer basic healthcare for workers.

The working conditions of women should be considered in the context of their sexual and reproductive health and rights, as well as access to good nutrition. Inadequate toilet facilities can be a significant challenge, specifically regarding menstrual hygiene. For nursing mothers, few employers provide the correct breaks and conditions for breastfeeding. There is evidence that workplace capacity building to improve women's health-related knowledge and behaviours, specifically in relation to menstrual hygiene, sexually transmitted infections, HIV and AIDS, nutrition, family planning, early detection of breast and cervical cancer, and occupational safety and health, can have positive impacts on women's work and health.⁴²

Violence and harassment in the world of work

Violence and harassment, particularly against women, is a prevalent issue in the RMG sector. The ILO and UN Women findings show that 60 per cent of workers experience repeated insults and shouting from their supervisors or line managers. Workers shared that they were insulted or shouted at for making errors at work (72.5 per cent), arriving late to work (28.3 per cent), and taking leave (14.2 per cent). The pervasiveness of verbal harassment reflects the acceptance and normalization of the use of harsh language to meet production targets.⁴³

Sexual harassment is another common form of violence and harassment in factories, which disproportionately affects women workers. An ActionAid research study indicates that 80 per cent of workers in Bangladesh experienced or witnessed sexual violence and harassment at work.⁴⁴ A Manusher Jonno Foundation study on 22 factories found that 22.4 per cent of women workers had been sexually harassed at, or on their way to, their workplaces. 28 per cent of sexual harassment incidents were of women workers being touched inappropriately by their supervisors.⁴⁵

41 Ibid.

42 Md. Irfan Hossain et al. 2017. Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the HERhealth Model for Improving Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights Knowledge and Access of Female Garment Factory Workers in Bangladesh. Available at: evidenceproject.popcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Bangladesh-HERhealth_Research-Report.pdf.

43 ILO and UN Women. 2020.

44 Action Aid. 2019. Briefing paper: Sexual harassment and violence against garment workers in Bangladesh.

45 Manusher Jonno Foundation. 2018. Study on sexual harassment against female workers at Workplace: Strategy to Combat and Way Forward.

Because of the dynamics of gender in the RMG sector generally, women have little power or voice to complain about sexual harassment without fear of losing their jobs. Acts of verbal and physical sexual harassment are highly normalized; which in itself has a significant impact on what is broadly considered acceptable behaviours and practices. This results in the behaviours and practices that are deemed “unacceptable” being limited to those that are extreme.⁴⁶ The environment in which women can complaint of sexual harassment is therefore very limiting, with women risking being shunned in

work and outside for highlighting acts of harassment against them.⁴⁷ This is compounded by the lack of implementation of the High Court Order on sexual harassment complaints committees and a culture of impunity and inaction on the part of authorities.⁴⁸ In 2019, the ILO introduced a new Convention on Violence and Harassment, 2019 (No. 190), which articulates the right of everyone to a world of work free from violence and harassment. This convention provides a clear framework for action, and directly informs this gender strategy.

Voice and representation

Currently in Better Work factories, women make up 42 per cent of worker representatives and 17 per cent of management representatives on worker-management committees. In safety committees, women make up 50 per cent of the representatives.⁴⁹ In the committees, women worker representatives may face barriers in fully engaging and participating in discussions due to adverse gender norms.

Freedom of association still faces challenges in Bangladesh, and only a small proportion of factories have trade unions. For women, this issue is further

compounded by the low proportion of women in representative roles in the unions. Women’s representation in the unions is key to ensuring that the issues facing women in the RMG are considered in collective bargaining. However, in a scenario where women are working long hours in addition to the time spent on unpaid care and domestic duties, a leadership role in the union can present a triple burden. Because women make up less than 10 per cent of managerial positions, there is also a lack of women’s representation in the development of factory policy and practice.

46 “Unacceptable behaviours and practices”, is the language of the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)

47 Fair Wear Foundation. 2018. Breaking the Silence: The FWF Violence and Harassment Prevention Programme

48 Manusher Jonno Foundation. 2018. Study on sexual harassment against female workers at Workplace: Strategy to Combat and Way Forward.

49 ILO. 2019.

THE GENDERED IMPACT OF COVID-19

The COVID-19 crisis has significantly impacted the Bangladeshi RMG sector, which contributes to 80 per cent of the country's exports. By June 2020, 1,150 factories have lost orders valuing at US \$3.18 billion, with 2.28 million workers directly affected. As the crisis unfolds, uncertainty in a global recovery means that decent work and the livelihoods of workers will continue to be impacted.

The RMG sector has offered women access to formal employment and paved the way toward their social and economic empowerment. Representing the majority of the workforce, women workers are adversely impacted by this crisis, which is further compounded by existing gender inequalities.

Retrenchment, furlough, and the return-to-work policies and practices may disproportionately affect women workers due to gender-biased selection criteria, particularly for pregnant workers and workers with family responsibilities. For workers who remain out of work, with the disparity in financial inclusion, women workers encounter more difficulties in accessing financial assistance and social protection schemes. The impact on workers' livelihoods may negatively affect women's access to essential services such as sexual and reproductive health services.

With the added pressure of the coronavirus crisis, there may be increased risks of violence and harassment for women and men workers, with higher risks of domestic violence and sexual harassment for women workers. There are also risks of community-based violence for workers who are selected to return to work.

As factories reopen, men and women workers are exposing themselves to risks of infection, which is an added concern for migrant workers who are returning from their communities in the rural areas.

Better Work Bangladesh's gender strategy needs to account for the emerging needs and concerns from COVID-19 to ensure that businesses recover and return to a new normal that is gender equal and inclusive.



4 Our vision

ALIGNING OUR GENDER STRATEGY WITH KEY POLICIES

The Gender Strategy is designed to align with key national policies and programmes, in particular:

BANGLADESH VISION 2021

Vision 2021 seeks to achieve a more inclusive and equitable society, identifying the need to counter negative social attitudes and cultural practices that hinder women's participation in the labour market.

ILO'S DECENT WORK COUNTRY PROGRAMME

Decent Work Country Programme Outcome 1.2: Promoting the accessibility of Technical and Vocational Training aligned with the National Skill Development Policy for women, disadvantaged groups, people with disabilities and ethnic groups, in addition to introducing skills in emerging technology for climate resilient green growth.

BETTER WORK BANGLADESH PHASE II STRATEGY PRIORITIES: EMPOWERING WOMEN WORKERS

Informed by a consultative process, the Better Work Bangladesh Phase II strategy identified empowering women workers as one of its three key strategic priorities. In particular, the Strategy seeks to improve the working environment for women: empowering women, who make up the majority of garment workers, ensuring that their voices are heard and combating violence and harassment, including sexual harassment in the workplace, are key elements of the Better Work global strategy.

Better Work Bangladesh aims to scale up interventions to tackle discrimination, and to bring partners together to establish a benchmark for equal opportunities and social justice for all in the apparel industry.

To address the challenges set out above, and reflecting the themes identified in the Better Work Global Gender Strategy, Better Work Bangladesh's Gender Strategy will be focused around four key gender equality themes:



Discrimination

Preventing sexual harassment; tackling contractual discrimination (e.g. recruitment and occupational segregation); bridging the gender wage gap



Paid Work & Care

Sexual and reproductive health and rights (including pregnancy related healthcare and nutrition); maternity protection; breastfeeding; childcare



Voice & Representation

Representation of women workers in factories' committees (including Better Work's worker - management committees) and trade unions, union federations, and employer organizations; voice in collective bargaining processes



Leadership & Skill Development

Career opportunities in factories (e.g. line supervisors and management positions); leadership positions in governments, trade unions and employers organizations; financial literacy and household budget planning

Through these four themes, Better Work Bangladesh will achieve the following impacts:

- ♦ **More workplaces that are gender equal, inclusive and free from discrimination** through the reduction in gender discrimination, including a decrease in the gender wage gap, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence and harassment in the world of work;
- ♦ **Improved health and well-being for workers in the garment sector** by increasing women and men's access to their sexual and reproductive health and labour rights through gender-responsive policies and practices adopted in Bangladeshi garment factories;
- ♦ **Stronger women's voice and gender-equal representation in social dialogue mechanisms at factory, sector and national levels** through an increase in their effective representation in participation committees, trade unions, employer organizations, and in the collective bargaining processes; and,
- ♦ **Increased opportunities and agency for women workers to fulfil their potential** by fostering an enabling environment for women's participation and advancement in the workplace.

CROSS-CUTTING:

Four cross-cutting themes will inform the implementation of Better Work Bangladesh's gender strategy:

1. **The improvement model:** Recognizing that discrimination and barriers to gender equality are deeply embedded in adverse gender and social norms, Better Work Bangladesh supports partners on a journey to continuously promote gender equality and encourage partners to be proactive, as opposed to reactive.
2. **Working with men:** The engagement of men and boys is crucial to sustainably addressing gender equality. Better Work Bangladesh will continue to find new ways to engage men and facilitating their role in breaking barriers and stereotypes. This can be accomplished by encouraging them to reflect on how gender norms affect them and embracing their roles in creating an enabling environment for women's leadership, voice and representation.
3. **Disability inclusion:** Guided by the ILO's policy on disability inclusion, Better Work Bangladesh seeks to incorporate a disability-inclusive approach to ensure that persons with disabilities are fully and meaningfully incorporated in the RMG sector.
4. **Intersectionality:** Better Work Bangladesh recognizes that women and men face layers of discrimination, which can be based on their age, disability, ethnicity, family responsibility, gender identity, migrant status, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Better Work Bangladesh will maximize the benefit of the, often unique access obtained to tripartite constituents and factories, to highlight and support work to address discrimination along any lines, working together with other ILO initiatives to ensure rights of all workers.

5 Our approach to change

INTERNAL CAPACITY IS KEY TO DELIVERING THE STRATEGY

Better Work Bangladesh believes that change should start from within. Better Work Bangladesh will continuously work to ensure that its own staff have the capacity, resources and support to deliver this gender strategy. This will include investing in training and learning opportunities for staff so that they are able to reflect a gender responsive approach in all activities and engagement and that they have the technical capacity to respond appropriately. Staff capacity will be reviewed and their needs assessed, with training and support provided to address any areas of improvement. Internal awareness raising campaigns will reaffirm messaging around gender equality, both in the RMG sector and in society more broadly. A team of gender ambassadors has been formed, and is being continuously coached and supported, to motivate staff to build their understanding of gender issues; ambassadors are sources of information and support to staff. Performance indicators also address gender awareness, ensuring that the importance of gender is not underestimated.

Areas of intervention

FACTORY ENGAGEMENT

The heart of Better Work Bangladesh lies in its interactions with garment workers, employers, manufacturers and brands. Better Work Bangladesh will advance gender equality and women's economic empowerment by addressing gender norms through all its core factory-level services (assessment, advisory, and training). Better Work will promote gender equality in its in-factory services through gender mainstreaming and strengthening and scaling our existing interventions on gender equality and women's empowerment.

(1) Gender mainstreaming

Better Work Bangladesh seeks to mainstream gender and inclusion across its factory-level services. By strengthening the gender focus of the assessments, in particular through improving the gender responsiveness of the Compliance Assessment Tool, Better Work Bangladesh will improve its ability to identify and deal with the wide range of gender issues in factories, including particularly sensitive topics such as gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment.

In its advisory services, Better Work Bangladesh will continue to ensure that women and men have equal visibility and fair representation in addressing non-compliances through social dialogue. It is important to note that some issues covered in Better Work Bangladesh's assessment can be difficult to verify

independently. This includes sexual harassment, gender-based discrimination, and freedom of association. Getting enough evidence to determine violations can be challenging due to a range of reasons, including the sensitive nature of the issues and the reluctance of workers to report such incidents. Complementing the assessment findings, advisory services and training programmes will proactively promote gender equality and decent work by addressing the root causes of inequality.

Better Work Bangladesh will integrate a gender lens in its training services to ensure that all capacity-building interventions take into account of the different needs of women and men workers as well as addressing adverse social and gender norms.

(2) Strengthening and scaling existing interventions

Better Work Bangladesh will scale up the successful GEAR initiative, launched with IFC, to train more women to become supervisors. It will also expand the Mothers@Work programme, in cooperation with UNICEF, to ensure adequate maternity and day care services in garment factories. Better Work Bangladesh will also continue to provide training on sexual harassment protection, as well as violence in the workplace, guided by ILO Convention 190 concerning the Elimination of Harassment and Violence in the World of Work.

VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT CONVENTION, 2019 (NO. 190)

In 2019, the ILO introduced a new Convention, the first international labour standard of its kind addressing violence and harassment in the world of work. In doing so, the Convention uses a definition that covers not just the physical workplace, but commuting to and from work.

Recommendation No. 206 and Convention No. 190 provide a clear framework for action and an opportunity to shape a future of work based on dignity and respect, free from violence and harassment. It also recognizes that such behaviours can constitute a human rights violation or abuse and makes direct reference to the impact that domestic violence can have on employment, productivity health and safety.

Under the Convention, violence and harassment are defined as, “a range of unacceptable behaviours and practices” that “aim at, result in, or are likely to result in physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm”.

(3) Promoting gender equality and inclusion in a holistic way

Gender equality and inclusion cannot be accomplished through a single, one-off intervention. Whether we are tackling the issues of sexual harassment or promoting equal participation and voice in social dialogue processes, Better Work Bangladesh seeks to address root causes of inequality. The root causes are addressed by creating more respectful and inclusive working environments through awareness raising and training, strengthening management systems and human resources systems in factories (i.e. institutionalizing gender equality and inclusion), and fostering a commitment to continuous learning and improvement. Better Work Bangladesh aims to adopt the following approach to advance gender equality and women’s empowerment in a holistic way:

- ♦ **Identify and anticipate needs and gaps:** Through assessments and the needs identified through bipartite committees, Better Work Bangladesh will identify the areas of improvement on gender equality and inclusion.
- ♦ **Capacity-building and awareness raising:** Through both advisory and training services, Better Work Bangladesh will build the capacity of factory worker and management representatives and other relevant stakeholders based on the needs identified.

- ♦ **Strengthening management and human resources systems:** Awareness raising and capacity-building will be accompanied by improvements in factory management and human resources systems to ensure that the learnings are put into practice.
- ♦ **Creating ownership among worker and management representatives:** Better Work Bangladesh will follow-up on the improvements through the bipartite committees and ensuring that workers and management representatives own the process of promoting a gender and inclusive workplace.
- ♦ **Capture and share best practices:** Factory commitment and improvements on gender equality and inclusion will be captured in improvement plans and progress reports.

PARTNERING FOR IMPACT

The Better Work Bangladesh Strategy Phase II identified that the programme has the opportunity to leverage its unique position to bring together government, employers’ associations, trade unions, factories and their workers and managers, brands and retailers, donors, international organizations, and non-profit organizations to discuss key industry issues and devise solutions. Data and insight from factory visits can be used to support these interactions and to build capacity, knowledge, and share best practices across the sector. This unique position will also be key to maximising the impact of Better Work Bangladesh’s work on gender.

A PARTNERSHIP ON TACKLING GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE AND OTHER FORMS OF VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT IN THE WORKPLACE

Leveraging its unique position in the industry, Better Work Bangladesh brought together the leading organizations working on the prevention and remediation of workplace violence and harassment in Bangladesh to work cooperatively in creating sustainable and scalable training resources. Together with Business for Social Responsibility (BSR), CARE, Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI), Fairwear Foundation, Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), Oxfam International, SNV, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and United Nations Equity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), this 'platform' will align training and communication approach.

Under this collaborative, the alignment will consist of the following actions:

- ◆ Guidance on the High Court Verdict and C190 and R206: The partners will align on a process guideline to develop anti-harassment committees in factories.
- ◆ Online knowledge hub: A platform to share training materials, case studies, and other relevant tools and resources.
- ◆ Develop a trainer pool: Organizing a pool of internal and external trainers across partner organizations to deliver gender-based violence trainings through a training of trainers on the aligned approach.
- ◆ Avoiding duplication: Where possible, partners will share supplier lists to avoid duplicating efforts and instead, building on existing interventions.
- ◆ Mapping of referral systems: Develop referral systems to link workers with support services such as counselling, legal, medical, shelter, and/or other services for victims, survivors, and witnesses of violence and harassment.

Over time, Better Work Bangladesh envisions that this platform would nurture the mutual and complementary strengths, expertise, credibility, and programming experience of the partners to drive a gender equal and harassment free sector.

Partnering with constituents

Continued collaboration with the Government of Bangladesh, along with unions and employers, will ensure that Better Work Bangladesh, along with other ILO colleagues within the capacity building and learning hub, is able to engage and advise on the integration of gender concerns into policy and practice related to the sector.

Partnership with the Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments will be strengthened to continue work to build the capacity of the inspectorate across the sector, in particular in relation to gender-responsive labour inspections that are able to proactively identify and make recommendations on how to address gender discrimination and barriers to gender equal and inclusive workplaces.

With social partners including Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exports Association (BKMEA), and trade unions, Better Work Bangladesh will increase awareness-raising activities to draw attention to the root causes of gender inequality in the sector. Better Work Bangladesh will continue the capacity development of unions and employers' organizations on gender responsiveness, to improve working conditions for women and men, promote transparency on gender-related compliance issues, as well as gender equitable freedom of association, collective bargaining and worker-management dialogue across the sector.

Partnering with brands and retailers

Increasingly, brands and retailers are putting women's economic empowerment and gender equality in their sustainability strategies and creating more space for conversations and efforts to address the systematic challenges faced by women and men in factories. In strengthening its partnerships with brands, Better Work Bangladesh will have increased leverage to resolve issues and advocate for systemic and preventative change in practice. Better Work Bangladesh's partnerships with brands, including through the Academy, can have a positive impact in several ways: on a case-by-case basis leading to a shift in practice in factories; on training brands on gender sensitization and sexual harassment prevention and the implications of the High Court Verdict; on working with brands to encourage factories to take part in training; and, partnering with brands in working with the government to advocate for policy change.

Partnering with development partners

Better Work Bangladesh will continue to strengthen its partnership work with development partners including international organizations and non-profit organizations. In particular, we will focus on leading coordination mechanisms to improve consistency in the strategic approach and interventions applied across the sector (both Better Work and non-Better Work factories). In the first instance, this work will focus on improving the consistency and effectiveness of interventions focused on sexual harassment prevention.

Research and communication

Ensuring that Better Work Bangladesh's research and communication on gender equality and inclusion is strengthened is pertinent due to the anticipated shifts in the RMG sector. Better Work Bangladesh will

endeavour to consider and incorporate these issues, particularly from a gender equality and inclusion lens, into research and communications where possible. Better Work Bangladesh aims to continue leveraging its research findings and data to inform the programme's approach to its Phase II strategy to respond to a changing sector.

Taking into account the lessons learned from other international organizations, Better Work Bangladesh will further develop its gender responsive monitoring and evaluation framework and tools, for instance, through the development of gender-responsive targets and indicators.

Better Work Bangladesh will continue leveraging its research findings and data to advancing its communication and dissemination of best practices and Better Work's impact to promote gender equality and inclusion at the factory, industry, and national-levels. The outcomes from Better Work Bangladesh's programming and research will be effectively communicated through a wide range of materials highlighting through progress reports, traditional media channels, social media, public campaigns, and outreach activities with stakeholders including but not limited to ILO constituents, UN agencies, buyers and factories. In particular, Better Work Bangladesh aims to use the findings and data collected to strengthen its communication materials to showcase the business cases, good practices, and success stories on promoting gender equality and inclusion from Better Work factories.

Better Work Bangladesh will further improve its communication protocols when reporting on gender related issues such as sexual harassment and women's empowerment. This includes using more sensitive and inclusive language as well as ensuring gender equal and inclusive representation.

A GENDER SENSITIVE RESPONSE TO COVID-19

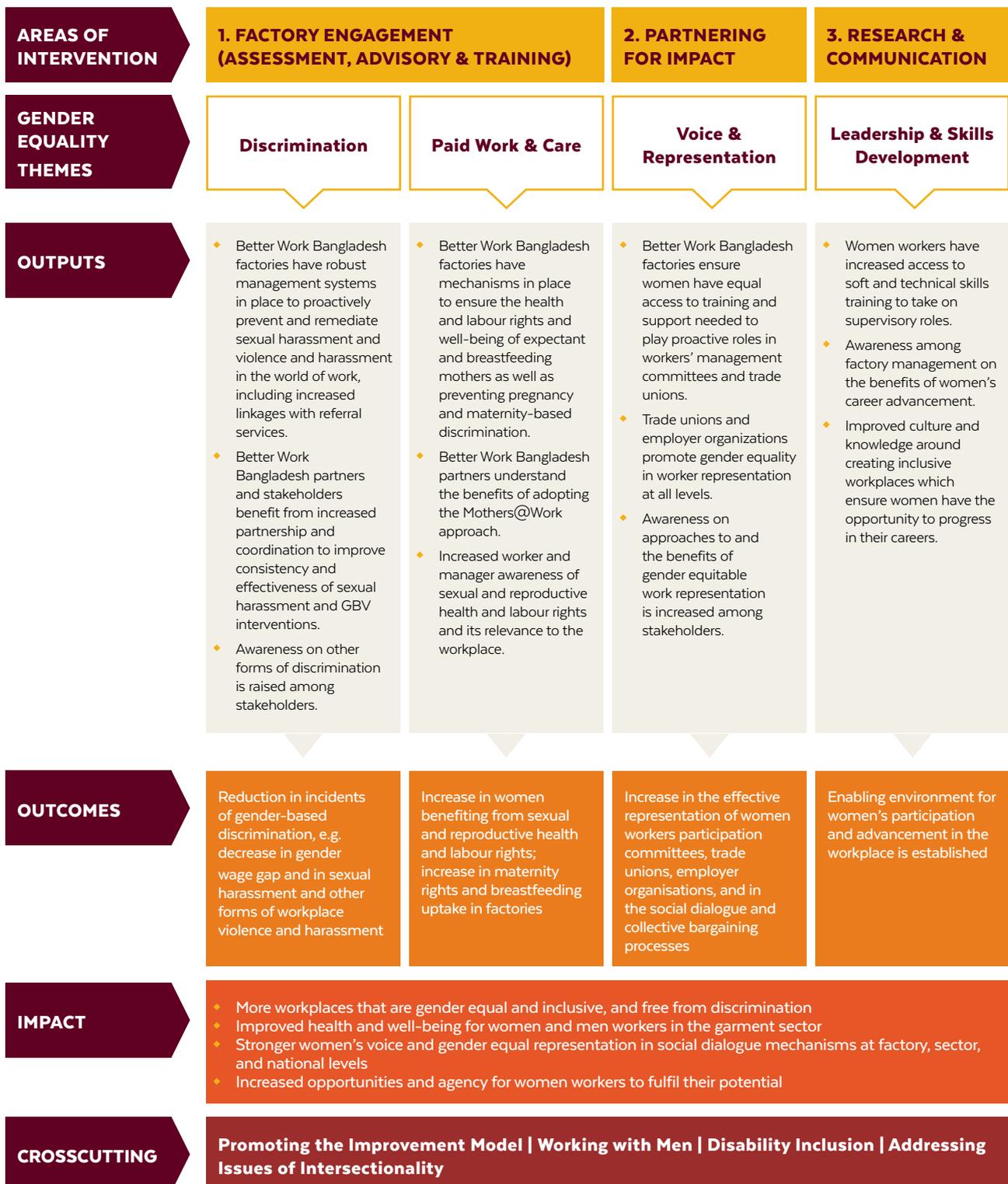
Better Work Bangladesh recognizes the gendered impact of COVID-19 and that the majority of the RMG workforce are comprised of women who otherwise would not have access to formal employment. As such, Better Work needs to respond to both the crisis and its recovery with a gender sensitive lens and addressing the needs of women and men workers. Better Work Bangladesh embarks on a gender responsive approach to COVID-19 by:

- ♦ **Mainstreaming gender and inclusion:** The development of all tools, materials, and interventions related to the COVID-19 response will take into consideration gender-based differences, particularly in how the response has affected women and men workers and managers differently.
- ♦ **Responding to the emerging needs of women and men workers:** Better Work Bangladesh has and will continue to respond to the needs of women and men worker as a result of COVID-19. Better Work provided financial literacy and nutrition trainings taking into account of gender dynamics (for instance, supporting women workers in negotiating family finances during a crisis). For Mothers@Work, Better Work is adapting the content to provide up-to-date information on keeping pregnant workers, mothers, and their children safe both at home and at work.
- ♦ **Continuing and adapting our services:** Better Work Bangladesh is committed to delivering assessment, advisory, and training services to promote gender equality and inclusion virtually. Some of our interventions have been adapted to be delivered virtually and will continue to do so as the situation evolves.



6 How do we get there?

Better Work Bangladesh's gender strategy until 2022 will be delivered through mainstreaming and targeted intervention across our four areas of intervention:



Commitment 1: By 2022, Better Work Bangladesh factories will have promoted practices and policies to address gender-based discrimination, including gender wage gaps and violence and harassment, including sexual harassment.

Better Work Bangladesh will work to upscale the training and advisory services on prevention of sexual harassment and workplace violence, rolling this out in all Better Work Bangladesh factories. Training and advisory services on sexual harassment prevention will be linked to advice on how to implement the High Court Verdict, in particular, with the focus on improving grievance mechanisms and preventing sexual harassment. The programme will work to build the understanding of factory management and supervisors, supporting factories in strengthening their sexual harassment policies. Through the advisory sessions and training, Better Work Bangladesh factories will have mechanisms in place to address and prevent sexual harassment.

Better Work Bangladesh will lead the coordination of development partners, international organizations and non-profit organizations in establishing a cohesive approach to sexual harassment and gender-based violence interventions. This work will include regular meetings, mapping of the work being done, sharing of training tools, and working towards a shared strategic approach and an agreed framework for training.

In addition to the focus on preventing and addressing sexual harassment, Better Work Bangladesh will continue to build the capacity of partners and stakeholders on workplace violence guided by ILO Convention 190 concerning the Elimination of Harassment and Violence in the World of Work. Better Work Bangladesh will also continue to develop the capacity of stakeholders, within the factories and more broadly, on other forms of discrimination against women, in particular in relation to wages. This work will be integrated into the training and advisory services, in order to build the understanding of management and supervisors on gender discrimination and how to

identify it. Better Work Bangladesh will also continue to collect evidence of discriminatory practices, raising awareness of prevalence and best practices with all stakeholders.

Commitment 2: By 2022, Better Work Bangladesh factories will have enhanced awareness on and integration of minimum standards for breastfeeding support and maternity protection in the workplace.

Better Work Bangladesh continues to work with partners to scale up the Mothers@Work programme, to bring the interventions into all Better Work Bangladesh factories. Activities will include integration into core services, including addressing the issues at assessment stage and integration of minimum standards into the advisory and training services. Training and capacity building will focus on understanding the minimum standards for breastfeeding and maternity protection in the workplace and the benefits of breastfeeding. It will also integrate orientation of mothers' support groups. The output will be that Better Work Bangladesh factories have mechanisms in place to ensure the health and labour rights and welfare of expectant and nursing mothers are protected from discrimination.

Better Work Bangladesh will also increase worker and manager awareness of sexual and reproductive health and labour rights by building in more capacity development opportunities through the advisory and training services on these issues.

The work of Better Work Bangladesh on strengthening maternity rights and breastfeeding support through the Mothers@Work approach will be communicated proactively with partners and stakeholders. The intention will be to increase partners' understanding of the benefit of the approach with a view to replication of the approach across the sector. Communication of best practice and the tools used to improve workers and manager awareness of reproductive health and labour rights will also be shared.

Commitment 3: By 2022, Better Work Bangladesh will have strengthened mechanisms to ensure **effective representation of and by women workers.**

Better Work Bangladesh will ensure women and men have the training and support needed to ensure women can play proactive roles in workers' management committees and trade unions in a gender equal and conducive environment for equal voice.

Better Work Bangladesh will work to build the capacity of trade unions and employer organizations to understand the benefit of women's representation and actively promote gender equity in worker representation at all levels.

Through communicating programme interventions, results and knowledge, Better Work Bangladesh will increase awareness on approaches to, and benefits of, gender equitable work representation is increased among all Better Work Bangladesh stakeholders.

Commitment 4: By 2022, Better Work Bangladesh will have enhanced awareness of and supported the implementation of mechanisms that increase the number of women who are able to **develop their skills (technical and/or leadership) and advance their career.**

Better Work Bangladesh will continue to roll out and scale the GEAR initiative, and ensure all

trainings delivered by Better Work Bangladesh are gender responsive. Additionally, putting particular emphasis on delivering skills building training for women's empowerment, as well as specific trainings which address gender equality and building workplace cultures which promote this. By working to build the understanding and capacity of factory management to understand the benefit of women's career advancement and how to implement skills development and progress, factories will put in place mechanisms to ensure women have skills training and options for career advancement.

Recognizing the changing economic and industrial environment in Bangladesh, Better Work Bangladesh will undertake research and develop knowledge products on the likely impact of the changing environment on women workers. Dissemination of the knowledge and key messages to Better Work Bangladesh stakeholders will increase awareness on the real and potential threats and opportunities for employment and career advancement for women working in factories.

By working with stakeholders, factories and workers, Better Work Bangladesh will improve the culture and knowledge around creating inclusive workplaces which ensure women have the opportunity to progress in their careers.

Implementing the Strategy

INTERNAL PROCESSES	FACTORY ENGAGEMENT	PARTNERING FOR IMPACT (ILO'S TRIPARTITE CONSTITUENTS)	PARTNERING FOR IMPACT (BRANDS AND RETAILERS, DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS)	RESEARCH & COMMUNICATIONS
Staff training	Mainstream gender into Better Work Bangladesh core services	Engage with government where opportunities arise, to promote gender responsive policies	Leverage brands' priorities and access to drive change for gender equality in their supply chains	Research on gender equality impacts
Internal awareness-raising campaign	Scale up sexual harassment and workplace violence prevention training, and grievance mechanisms	Capacity development for unions and employers' organisations on gender responsiveness	Development partner engagement to cover Better Work and Non-Better Work factories	Advocating best practices to promote gender equality
Review understanding and needs assessment	Integrate GEAR career enhancement principles into Better Work Bangladesh factories	Partnership with social partners to build capacity in the RMG sector	Partnership with development and UN partners and NGOs for greater coordination of interventions in the RMG sector	Incorporate messaging on gender equality in a changing environment where possible (including skills and automation)
Build motivation (gender ambassadors)	Scale up maternity rights and breastfeeding protection in all Better Work Bangladesh factories via the principles of Mothers@Work.		Training and capacity building partnership with DIFE	Informing ILO and IFC/ World Bank policies
Performance indicators	Increase awareness in factories of the approaches to and benefits of gender equitable worker representation			Strengthen communication protocols, especially when reporting sexual harassment

A more equitable workplace is within our grasp

While serious challenges remain in achieving full gender equality in the world's garment factories, the industry has made significant progress. Third party research has validated the success of our model for improving working conditions through women's empowerment. Now we are leveraging this success, and our learnings from the research, to scale up positive impact on gender equality and achieve lasting change. We will report back to all stakeholders on our progress as we continue to refine our vision and implement this strategy.

For regular updates, case studies and new research findings, visit our website and follow us on social media.

 betterwork.org

 [@Better_Work](https://twitter.com/Better_Work)

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