

Newsletter

ISSUE 1, 2020 | STORIES FROM THE SUPPLY CHAIN & BEYOND

BetterWork
Bangladesh

GEAR: 79 female workers promoted to supervisors

Helping female workers climb the career ladder through Gender Equality and Returns (GEAR) initiative

Stories behind the clothes we wear

We asked 10 questions to a garment worker to discover her stories

Towards new frontiers of compliance

A closer look at the growth and triumph of a BWB partner factory over the past few years

BETTER WORK BUSINESS FORUM

Industry stakeholders met at BWB's annual event in October to discuss issues critical for the sustainability of the RMG industry

INDUSTRY SEMINAR ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT PREVENTION

BWB partnered with H&M to offer a better understanding of sexual harassment and the prevention mechanisms in light of the High Court Verdict

STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS WITH TRADE UNIONS

The promotion of sound Industrial Relations practices is a key dimension of our work in the industry

PARTNERING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

BWB partnered with the Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF) 2019 held in Dhaka on 5 November

PROMOTING BOILER SAFETY

BWB organised an Industry Seminar on Boiler Safety on 10 October

INTEGRATED ADVISORY WORKSHOPS

BWB's Integrated Advisory Workshops continue to build industry capacity

MESSAGE FROM THE PROGRAMME MANAGER



Dear friends and colleagues,

We hope 2019 has been a good year for you. Our focus on sustainability has defined our activities in 2019, as it will continue to do so. BWB's sustainability strategy sees constituents and the

private sector as being in the driving seat and defining their own version of sustainability. Governments, employers and workers are all elements of the same structure that sustains and further improves compliance with the Labour Law and core labour standards through enforcement and industrial relations. The right tools, framework and mindset to ensure that good working conditions are standard in the industry are essential to this process, as are responsible business practices across the supply chain. This approach guides our consultations, knowledge sharing and capacity-building initiatives at enterprise, sector and national level.

We look forward to working with you in 2020.

Anne-Laure Henry-Greard
Programme Manager
Better Work Bangladesh



242
FACTORIES



25
INTERNATIONAL BRANDS
AND RETAILERS



552K
WORKERS



54%
FEMALE WORKERS

STORIES BEHIND OUR CLOTHES

“I hope you love this dress as much as I enjoyed making it”

There are many stories behind each piece of clothing we wear. We asked 10 questions to Ayesha Akhter Nazma, a Trimming Operator at SQ Celsius Ltd located in Gazipur, Dhaka.

1

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE ITEM OF CLOTHING? DESCRIBE IT TO US AND TELL US WHY IT IS YOUR FAVOURITE?

I love Saree, especially the red ones. I have at least five red Sarees. I love this garment because it gives you an elegant look and provides endless matching possibilities.

2

WHAT DOES A TYPICAL DAY OF WORK LOOK LIKE FOR YOU?

I arrive at work by 7:30 am. Then I look at the day's target and get to work by 8:00am. I love to walk in the lawn of the factory and hang out with colleagues during lunch break. I usually don't miss my target and finish my work in time.

3

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR THE WEEK-END/YOUR DAY OFF?

Weekends are fun! I cook special dishes every weekend. I also try to spend more time with my husband and my eight-month-old daughter. Sometimes we go for shopping, visit relatives and attend weddings!

4

WHAT IS THE BEST THING ABOUT YOUR JOB? AND THE WORST?

I get to meet new people here. As a Participation Committee (PC) member, it also feels good to be able to help others. The worst thing about my job is that I have to get up early in the morning!

5

DESCRIBE THE CLOTHES/SHOES YOU HAVE MADE OR HELP MAKE TODAY?

Currently, we are making ladies sweaters on our production line. Made from very high-quality knit fabric, this burgundy sweater looks and feels very comfortable.

6

IF YOU COULD ASK THE PERSON WHO ENDS UP WEARING THIS ITEM OF CLOTHING A QUESTION, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Do you like this dress? I hope you love this dress as much as I did making it.

7

IF YOU COULD CHANGE ONE THING ABOUT WHERE YOU WORK, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

I wish we had flexible working hours in our factory.

8

HOW DO YOU TYPICALLY SPEND YOUR WAGES?

My salary is mostly spent on housing and food. But I save some money from my salary every month. I have already bought a piece of land in my hometown. I am saving to build a house on the land.

9

WHO DO YOU ADMIRE MOST IN THE WORLD?

My parents. They are always ready to catch me when I fall.

10

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL AMBITIONS/DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE?

My dream is to give my daughter the best education possible so that she can live a happy and successful life.

More stories based on interviews from across the supply chain can be found on **Better Work website** where new interviews will be posted regularly.



SQ GROUP AND BWB: TOWARDS NEW FRONTIERS OF COMPLIANCE

The story of Better Work Bangladesh and SQ Group began in March 2015.

Back then, the fledgling local branch of the UN programme was taking its first steps across Bangladesh's garment sector, the second largest in the world, accounting for 6.5 percent share of the global apparel market. SQ Group was already a solid entrepreneurial reality in the country. Still, the company felt something was missing in its day-to-day dynamics across the factory floor.

Backed by years of international results, Better Work launched its operations in Bangladesh, confident of its core message that compliance should not be considered a mere obligation, but a business necessity that makes factories more competitive.

This was the philosophy SQ was looking for.

BWB has conducted a series of training and seminars in SQ Celsius Ltd. over the years, touching on supervisory skills enhancement, skill development, grievance mechanisms, communication in the workplace and maternity protection.



"Thanks to BWB, workplace communication among our 3,400 workers, management, middle management, associates and operators vastly improved. We have created an environment where people feel free to share their thoughts and suggestions. The factory has eventually become self-reliant in terms of compliance."

Warisul Abid
Chief People Officer
SQ Group

"The methodology and approach of BW is what attracted us," says Warisul Abid, Chief People Officer, SQ Group. "BW's training, assessment and advisory components were exactly what we needed. It was crucial for us to work with a programme that could help us reach commonly-shared standards to improve and monitor our performance, especially on social compliance and the social area of the business at large."

One of the leading apparel manufacturers in the country, SQ Group has been operating for the past 26 years, initially producing knitted sweaters for international buyers and later adding lingerie and shirts to its portfolio.

Its work has been growing in size and quality over two decades. What began with an initial workforce of 150 knitting operators has grown to encompass 18,000 employees producing clothing in the company's different facilities. All the group's facilities are currently affiliated with BWB.

"Back in 2015, each brand we worked with had specific methods to assess compliance," Abid says. "Different organizations used to carry out specific audits. But this was not helping us bring real, sustainable improvement to the way we managed our people and to social compliance."

Helping each factory develop its own capacity is the ultimate power of Better Work, Abid says, adding the programme doesn't help factories to face audits, rather it makes them aware of their own responsibilities and prepares them to be held accountable for their own actions.

One of the key manufacturing units of the group, SQ Celsius Ltd., shows the success of this factory-based Copernican Revolution.

Meanwhile, absenteeism has reduced by 1.5%, worker turnover rate has decreased by 0.5%, and the average contract length has also increased. Workers have become more committed, starting to see career prospects within our organization. These improvements have reflected on the overall company's productivity.



After three months' training, operator Md Shajahan Mia can now run 12 machines, each producing an average of 300 pieces a day, against a maximum of 10 produced manually.

Workers say their impact is palpable.

Trimming operator Ayesha Akhter Nazma has been working in SQ Celsius Ltd. for the past nine years. Her husband also works here.

"Since the launch of BWB in our factory, workers have started to increasingly engage in open discussions with the management," she says. "I've seen a transformation in the worker-management relationship over the past four years. This helped narrow the communication gap within the factory. It also helped us communicate our demands more clearly."

Nazma is also a member of the factory's Participation Committee (PC), the representative worker-management body BW helps establish inside its affiliated factories. The PC of SQ Celsius Ltd. recently suggested the management improve its drinking water appliances by ensuring the availability of warm, cold and lukewarm water in the factory.

Immediate action was taken to meet the workers' demands. Liquid soap has been added to all restrooms, while electronic hand dryers have replaced overused towels.

Employees have also been lamenting the absence of ATM machines in the factory's proximity. Following the PC's request, a new one has been set up in collaboration with a local bank.

Operator Sahanaj Akhter, 28, says she has become the vice-president of the factory's Safety Committee following BWB trainings.

Akhter proudly says the factory is now also granting "special leave" for those who have suffered a workplace injury. This type of leave doesn't affect the worker's regular leave, like sick, casual or annual vacation.

SQ Group's Abid says the cooperation with BWB has boosted workers' confidence and put the whole team on the right track.

"The factory is a very fast-paced environment. It can be very stressful and, because of this, we can miss out on certain things. But BWB helps us focus on areas that we sometimes overlook amid our hectic activity. Its support changes and adapts to the market's new demands. It is a strong ally to have to reach new and ambitious market goals."

Warisul Abid
Chief People Officer
SQ Group

"Better Work's training helped me grow both personally and professionally. I am now more confident in communicating with others. We established with the management's support grievance mechanism procedures to address workplace violence issues, among others. I feel proud to be able to contribute to the efforts to build a happy and safe workplace."

Sahanaj Akhter
Operator
SQ Celsius Limited



Still, he sees even larger opportunities the company should seize to further improve its standing. One of them is automation and the related training workers need to minimise the disruption caused by the technological progress across the industry.

The group has already carried out work in this direction. Still, more efforts are needed to transform today's and tomorrow's Bangladeshi workforce, Abid says.

BWB and its partners are currently calling on local factories to enhance trainings to prepare workers to face the automation process Bangladesh is witnessing to make the industry sustainable in the long term.

As one of the largest sweater manufacturers in the country, the knitting department of SQ Celsius Ltd. is fully computerised. In the past, one operator used to run a single machine, today the same operator runs ten.

"We guided our workforce through this production change and boosted our training centre to help workers acquire further skills for the new technological environment, eventually creating multitasking operators," Abid says.

"This, in turn, has improved their employability and earning potential. Those who are not managing to adapt have been moved to different areas of production that still require manual work."

Operator Md Shajahan Mia says he has seen his factory becoming increasingly efficient thanks to enhanced technology and automation over the years.

He is one of the around 400 workers who have been trained to operate on a fully automated production line. His section's productivity has increased up to six times following automation, he says. Higher efficiency and productivity means a higher salary, leading the operator to eventually rake in a monthly salary of USD 236 against the previous USD165.

BWB Business Forum 2019: Sustainability in Bangladesh's RMG sector

Around 350 representatives from the Government, factories, brands, development organisations, employer organisations, trade unions and development partners gathered at Better Work Bangladesh Business Forum in Dhaka on 2 October to discuss a wide range of issues critical for the growth and sustainability of the garment industry. Discussions centred on the need for a globally competitive garment industry supported by improved labour market governance, effective social dialogue and responsible sourcing practices to ensure decent work and generate long-term prosperity for the industry. [Learn more about the key highlights of the Business Forum.](#)



BWB's Integrated Advisory Workshops continue to build industry capacity

Better Work Bangladesh organised five Integrated Advisory Workshops in 2019 to strengthen its collaboration with partner factories and contribute to the establishment of a conducive institutional setting for improved compliance in affiliated factories. Around 500 participants from 100 factories attended the workshops. The daylong workshops focused on supporting factories to further improve capacity in the area of Grievance Mechanism, Disciplinary Procedures, Chemical Management, Occupational Safety and Health Management and Human Resources Management.



Strengthening partnerships with trade unions

Better Work Bangladesh continues to strengthen collaboration with Trade Unions to promote strong industrial relations in the garment sector. On 3 November, BWB organised a workshop with trade unions under the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE) to create a better understanding of Better Work and its work and discuss ways to work more closely to promote strong industrial relations in garment factories. Another daylong workshop was organised with trade unions under the IndustriALL Bangladesh Council on October 23. The objective was to build more collaboration and understanding of our shared goal of ensuring strong and effective industrial relations in the garment sector.

Partnering for sustainability



BWB partnered with the Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF) 2019 held in Dhaka on 5 November to help facilitate a meaningful exchange of knowledge to demystify issues surrounding the sustainability of Bangladesh's garment industry. Presenting the keynote speech at the event, BWB Programme Manager Anne-Laure Henry-Gréard affirmed the programme's strong focus and commitment to driving sustainable change in Bangladesh's garment industry. "Experience from the Better Work programme across nine countries shows that sustainable changes and improved working conditions benefit workers and their families, eventually driving higher profitability for manufacturers over time," she said.



Sexual harassment prevention: Industry Seminar on High Court verdict

BWB in collaboration with H&M organised an Industry Seminar on 10 October on the High Court Verdict on Sexual Harassment Prevention. Around 40 participants, including 33 mid-level officials from 23 garment factories attended the event. The seminar was designed to give participants a better understanding of different forms of sexual harassment and the prevention mechanisms in light of the High Court Verdict. The ILO's recently adopted convention to combat violence and harassment in the workplace aims to bolster efforts to prevent sexual harassment in the world of work. BWB has been helping garment factories address sexual harassment by putting into place adequate systems to manage and address complaints, training and promoting female supervisors and facilitating meaningful worker-management dialogue with fairly-elected representatives.

79 GEAR-trained female workers promoted to supervisors

A total of 79 female sewing machine operators were promoted to supervisory roles in 12 M&S suppliers factories as part of the Gender Equality And Returns (GEAR). GEAR is a special initiative of Better Work Bangladesh and the International Finance Corporation (IFC) to promote career progression opportunities for female workers in the garment sector. Rolled out in 2016, the initiative was scaled up and a total of 106 female sewing operators were trained in 2019 to improve their skill set so that they can step up to supervisory roles. Meanwhile, BWB's factory services have been helping to create a supportive and enabling environment to better support the career progression opportunity opportunities for the female workers. GEAR so far covered 54 factories (28 in the pilot phase and 26 in 2019). In 2020, GEAR is expected to enrol another 25 factories.

Promoting boiler safety

BWB organised an Industry Seminar on Boiler Safety on 10 October. Approximately 50 participants from BWB partner factories and service provider organisations attended the seminar as well as Engineer Md. Ziaul Hoque, Deputy Chief Inspector of Boilers. Boilers, if not properly maintained, are a high risk to safety in garment factories and contain explosive properties. Boiler safety is one of the key areas of our focus on Workplace Safety and Health (OSH) in garment factories.



For regular updates, case stories and latest programme updates, visit our website and follow us on social media.

 betterwork.org/where-we-work/bangladesh

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Better Work is a partnership between the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). On-the-ground in eight countries across three continents, Better Work brings together all levels of the garment industry to improve working conditions and respect of labour rights for workers, and boost the competitiveness of apparel businesses.



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