
The Issues Of Sweatshops In Bangladesh And Ways To Solve Them

Bangladeshi Government's lack of responsibility

Indeed, it is the Bangladeshi government that must endure all the accusations, criticisms and spotlight for its lack of responsibility regarding sweatshops and its prominent garment manufactures. Numerous voices argue that the government are very well aware of the decaying infrastructure and worsening conditions but failed to address the dilemma publicly. Supposedly, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association hampered employees from publicizing their problems, opinions, and voices and the workers received appalling poor safety working concerns and neglected as a consequence of disobedience to the government. Added, more commentators say one reason behind the incompetent government's responsibility is because the famous garment exports in Bangladesh have amounted to about 80 percent of the country's exports, as reports revealed in 2013, by massively boosting up its economy and financial system.

The garment industry in Bangladesh is also widely known to hire about four million people, playing a significant part in its country's export income. Nevertheless, as Bangladesh's economic growth has been increasing, especially after its entrance to the 21st century, workers' rights remain stagnant. While its economy could grow at a faster pace, the failure in workers' rights is keeping a tight rein over it, as stated by the founder of the Awaj union for women garment makers. Supposedly, years ago, exasperations exploded among many workers who had been voicing out to raise the minimum wage bar to 5,300 taka (\$63.16). Accordingly, those workers grouped themselves to attack the Windy Apparels Limited factory in the Ashulia industrial area which housed about 350 factories. Another 25 factories immediately joined the demonstration after hearing the news followed by 150,000 workers leaving the workplace as well. The workers also drafted a list of 16 new demands, preeminent of which was an addition to their minimum wages to 16,000 taka (\$190.68) per month.

In contrast, the Bangladeshi government reacted to these demonstrations by dispatching a group of policemen using purpose-built powers act to arrest the protesters, leaders of the protests and even guiltless workers who engaged in such acts. As a result, more than 1,500 innocent laborers were sacked as a consequence from a variety of garment manufacturers only after a myriad of complaints took place. These powerful actions against the government triggered by workers' bravery, over the long haul, led to a week-long closedown at several garment places which were known to supply top European and American brands such as Zara, Gap, and H&M. What is more is that thousands of workers gradually departed from apparel factories in 2016 of December, especially around the mass-production core of Ashulia, which prompted concerns regarding clothing stocks within foreign brands during the holiday period.

Clearly, there are rooms for improvement concerning labor laws, the tug-of-war between the government with the minimum wage, and tackle the below-par treatment of garment factory workers by imposing strict regulations aimed at international retailers and big multinational corporations. However, one problem at this stage is that both the government and foreign businesses must execute them, then the will to impose them. If regulations regarding workers

were not taken into account, the Bangladeshi government is also primarily in charge of keeping an eye on the sweatshops in its country. Even if it is the factory managers determine to oversee their workers, it is still up to the government's tendency to be the absolute foreman.

Therefore, the traces of corrupted acts performed by the Bangladeshi government exposed how the government themselves are instead contributing to circumstances that should not be occurring in a wretchedly developing country that heavily depends on their cheap labor force.

Internal problem: Inside Bangladesh

As briefly mentioned, Bangladesh greatly depends on outsourced garment mass-production for its citizens' well-being and its economy although there are specific problems regarding sweatshops in Bangladesh internally. Still, apparel factories continue to recruit over more than three million Bangladeshi residents, and the country acquires almost 80 percent of its export net from the garment section. Its exports of hundreds and billions of dollars' worth of clothes annually makes Bangladesh the world's second-biggest exporter of ready-to-wear attires chasing after China, categorized as the most favorable place to do business in the world with its cheap labor cost and massive productiveness.

However, in this narrative, an instant veto on the garment industry sector due to internal problems going on in today's Bangladesh would most likely leave behind many of the people jobless and poverty-stricken, contributing to an increase in deaths and complaints. Such below par operations in the garment division may not appear to be attractive from the outlook of an industrialized country, in many developing countries, surprisingly, clothing factories often give more money than the average wage. Hence, it is still a debatable topic of how the money earned in sweatshops is higher than the regular average wage among developing countries while the workers obtain much lower than the regular local living payment. As of 2019 January, the official minimum wage for garment factory workers in Bangladesh added up to 8,000 taka (\$93.54) per month.

After the disastrous collapse that happened on April 21st of 2013 in Rana Plaza factory, a sizable factory famous for making clothing for well-known international brands, many workers were still spotted working long hours in overheated factories without having any adequate fire exits, according to the reports from the working conditions within the supply chain at Walmart, H&M, Gap and other. On top of that, compacted factory buildings, carelessness mistakes caused by managers have historically oppressed many workers' attempts to coordinate several labor unions for sweatshop workers and battle for better working environments and standards.

In the initial stage, better workplace circumstances and genuine respect for employees' integrities, especially involving their right to make trade unions, are necessary both for workers' rights and because such improvements can help hinder misfortunes just like what happened at Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions. The reason behind the sudden crackdown of the garment factory was because it was not properly established to be a plant well-suited for employees in the first place. Rather, the factory was built to accommodate different shops and offices which shows how the workers' safety problems turned out not to be the country's priority. This incident also illustrates how within apparel factories in Bangladesh, mistreatments, and abuse of workers frequently occur and some are either forced or threatened to work even during and after the occurrence of severe disasters. Hence, such susceptible matter once again clarifies that

domestic problems are mainly due to the local government's insouciance about local regulations because many of the laws are poor in quality, out of date or neglected by the local government, which many are unaware of.

Only if workers at Rana Plaza had more courage backed up to advocate for better workplace conditions, hundreds of deaths and harms could stay away from catastrophes at first. Then, the calamity would not have wiped out 1,138 workers. However, not a single factory that operated in Rana Plaza had a proper trade union where countless of workers turned out to be impotent to stand against their supervisors who commanded and drew attention to absurd claims. Moreover, there is still a common practice of workers stuck in building exits during emergencies only one day after massive fractures had appeared in it and pressuring workers to get their work done even when there is a fire or a collapse in the factory building.

Likewise, the workers at Tazreen Fashion factories had a hard time from exiting their workplaces by managing directors, although the ground floor caught on fire and alarms detonated. On the conditions that the workers at Tazreen had been associates of a valid operative labor union, there would have been possibilities that the staffs would have had better fire safety education. Also, the unions could have brought up security infringements like shortage of fire escapes, blocked stairways, and blocked windows, all of which contributed to death and hazardous injuries of staff members.

In many cases, the majority of the workers strongly insisted on the need for unions to speak up for end practice mistreatments and to engage in broader security problems. One female sewing worker currently employed at a factory in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, claimed in an interview that colleague workers at her workplace were going through severe physical agony to finish demands from the top. Despite that, those aiming to arrange associations encounter potential severe retaliation from the government and superior which is fundamentally why domestic problems Bangladesh encounters are barely going through progress.

While many awareness has been given to post-Rana Plaza advancements in government feedbacks in a few cases, and a modification to a couple of labor laws, covering stipulations alleviating the union registration procedure and enabling registration of unions, even after the changes made recently below 10 percent of garment industries in Bangladesh have unions. Besides, front runners of unions tend to be the primary prey. There is also a famous adage regarding Bangladesh's sweatshop affair that 'whoever amplifies their head is affected the most,' where a misuse in violation mostly includes physical and sexual assaults on the head of union by both directors and gangsters called 'mastans.'

External problem: Multinational Corporations

For a developing country like Bangladesh, it is nearly impossible to support its economy without engaging in foreign direct investment (FDI) for capital and being alert of globalization. Almost all named multinational corporations (MNCs) are familiar with the term 'sweatshop,' but it has turned out to be a blind eye. Here, the question of 'Why well-known international brands and companies settle on the foreign territory to do work?' would arise. The answer to this problem is somewhat straightforward: Bangladesh's inexpensive labor.

The notion of the sweatshop is new and has been vulnerable to the media for many years, but

turned out to be unsuccessful in penetrating the whole issue in micro level detail. In this context, Bangladesh has come across the very-many demands and manipulations executed by global brands and businesses, like Nike for example, and has been severely exploited by them.

On the other side of the globe, nearly all worldwide corporations in developed countries instantly espoused Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) instructions to further foster both their public perception and global image. Similarly, ready-made apparel manufacturing was no different. Nonetheless, during the mid-1990s, numerous international garment retailers were heavily denounced for not being able to carry out their social commitments and responsibilities they vowed because it turned out that those businesses dealt with inappropriate exercises like shoddy working conditions, feeble wages and other. Hence, Corporate Social Responsibility started to obtain an extensive amount of attention as a consequence. Accordingly, many garment retailers were tacitly coerced to consider CSR guidelines and matters particularly concerning employees' wages, their well-being and working conditions.

Nevertheless, the clothing industry today confronts an internal struggle between CSR regulations and their companies' profitability. The rationale here is that the apparel segment is categorized by its capability to manufacture and create unique patterns that seize many audiences on a global level that are mostly inexpensive, or manufacture mass, low-standard commodities like uniforms and shirts. For this reason, workers' stipends remain very low in Bangladesh, and the living and working conditions of employees continue to be a continual root of worry. In particular, one problem that emerges in the field of sweatshops is that the nature of mass-production tends to contain fiber dirt, dangerous chemical elements that are deemed as tedious amongst many people in Bangladesh, contributing to worsening workers' health and operating conditions. Adding on, the constant concern regarding low-technology sweatshop-type manufactures, industries, and factories persist on menacing reputations of many clothing brands and retailers with the cheapest working environments and wages that do not even amount to the smallest requirements of workers, occasionally with unpaid wages.

Moreover, adding on to the concerns mentioned above like globalization and the market power each multinational clothing companies and retailers, foreign businesses have allocated their manufacturing to operate in Bangladesh instead of their homes due to its extremely cheap labor force. For example, if a multinational business lands in a foreign country to do business, there is a high possibility that the Bangladeshi government would appoint inexperienced or semi-skilled female workers in exchange for foreign capital mainly due to the on-going call for a more cheaper channel of production as the fashion industry is becoming more and more ruthless these days.

Hence, due to the interruption among foreign multinational corporations and developing countries' garment factories, the companies inadvertently seem to put more emphasis on generating mass profit and export their social and environmental problems abroad, and selling their sense of conscience currently developing countries, and one of the victim being Bangladesh. Thus, foreign corporations taking advantage of cheap labor and disregarding ethical morals are becoming one major external nuisance in Bangladesh today. Further on, this problem is becoming more vulnerable by the insufficient labor enactments in many developing states that do not consist of sufficient legitimate methods to handle these burgeoning difficulties in one's own country abused by foreign multinational corporations.

No international mechanisms

Ever since the collapses and damages in Bangladesh's garment industries, this tragedy resulted in the deaths of many workers where some important steps from international corporations and governments have slowly emerged. On the one hand, Australia, one of Bangladesh's most prominent retailers – Coles (Wesfarmers), Woolworths, David Jones, and Myer – started to separate themselves from producing apparel lines in Bangladesh gradually. On the other hand, other EU-based retailers – H&M, Zara, and Primark – have assented to come up with improvements and newly developed conditions in terms of the workers' safety at their garment factories, though Australian retailers have withheld to agree with the terms and conditions.

However, even though both Bangladesh and international corporations are looking for a front-line with certain provisions, the main problem is that there is still no proper international mechanisms firmly laid that can halt poor labor conditions and sweatshops abused by multinational corporations. The sort of harm those companies can face is having a lousy brand reputation, though consumers and customers who are careless will purchase those products. Still, low priced workers are widespread and the most favorable among foreign businesses. Nevertheless, this irony further indicates that even though anti-sweatshop advocates are continuously forcing multinational corporations to develop different mechanisms regarding problems that can occur within the garment industry, barely any businesses have adopted the agreements.

As an illustration, several Australian firms referred above are known to favor apparel factories in Bangladesh to do their businesses as it is a desired place for reasonable operating expense while bringing out more enormous profits. Nonetheless, in the midst of the fear of so many injuries and deaths, those amiable Australian retailers are gradually putting more distance as they are not applicable for international sanctions because there are no precise international mechanisms to regulate or restrict those businesses and retailers.

On the other hand, there is plenty of international commentators and human rights organizations who question the norms, duplicity and the many reasons behind leaving more gap between firms and the country. Despite that, there is no progress beyond this issue because those unions mostly urge for better conditions and qualities for workers and their workplace, not forcing for authorized international mechanisms that can be applied promptly to countless businesses exploiting sweatshops.

Thus, in order to ease sweatshop issues, it is ultimately crucial that major global brands – Zara, Gap, and H&M – are ratifying to the legally binding Bangladesh's safety standards agreements. Naturally, the question of 'who' should be in charge of monitoring these firms would rise as this matter is as much as necessary as applying the rules. Presuming that codes are to have any teeth, it is a must to have monitoring. On the condition that the signed contract would be applied, it is crucial that the Bangladesh government would grant authorization upon apparel associations to arrange and protect employees. Accordingly, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights identified the specific duties of the state to look after its citizens from any malevolence.

Clearly, the labor and human rights abuses currently happening in Bangladesh depict an absence of state response the rights and issues regarding unwarrantable sweatshops at the

international level and shows a great deal of impotence to control business practices along with the lack of international mechanisms.

To conclude, one possible solution for Bangladesh could be referring to Australia's labor rights and conditions. Up to today's date, Australia is famous for its world-leading policies to make adjustments to the supply chain and avoid mistreating workers in the garment sector. As it took Australia years to become a developed country, these labor norms and guidelines did not appear overnight; these regulations are the outcome of full reviews, trial and error, and analysis into exploitations of workers who belonged in the attire industry.

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