

FEBRUARY 2021

Newsletter



ISSUE 1, 2021 | STORIES FROM THE SUPPLY CHAIN & BEYOND

A close-up photograph of a dandelion seed head, showing the intricate, feathery structure of the seeds against a dark background.

Supporting a sustainable recovery from COVID-19

Better Work's Factory Services and a set of coordinated capacity-building initiatives set out a concrete path for a sustainable recovery from the crisis.

Bangladesh Gender Strategy (2020- 22)

Better Work Bangladesh has renewed its strategic focus on gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

PPE manufacturing Factories pivot during COVID-19

Working with the Vision Zero Fund Strengthening OSH support during COVID-19

Partnership with the EU Joint efforts to improve working conditions in the RMG supply chains



Dear friends,

The year 2020 has been difficult for everyone. The months since the COVID-19 started to spread have been devastating for the garment industry around the world including Bangladesh. Though the pandemic has exposed many vulnerabilities in the garment sector in Bangladesh, we must not overlook the resilience the industry has shown and the possibilities it has been subject to while navigating the crisis. At Better Work Bangladesh, supporting the industry during this difficult time has been at the heart of our factory services and capacity-building initiatives. As factories are now operating in full scale, we are constantly reinforcing our continuous improvement methodology to help the industry make a full and sustainable recovery from COVID-19.

It is only through your support that we can help the industry fully recover from this crisis, and we want to thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Thank you and enjoy the read!

Anne-Laure Henry-Greard
Programme Manager
Better Work Bangladesh

 **277**
FACTORIES

 **692K**
WORKERS

 **27**
INTERNATIONAL
BRANDS AND RETAILERS

 **56%**
FEMALE WORKERS

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Female RMG workers need

- to be empowered [Remove](#)
- to get more opportunities [Remove](#)
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- to get their voice heard [Remove](#)
- to take part in decision making in the factory floor [Remove](#)

Bangladesh Gender Strategy (2020- 2022)

Gender Equality.

Better Work Bangladesh has renewed its strategic focus on gender equality and women's economic empowerment.

[Learn more](#)



Supporting a Sustainable Recovery from COVID-19

“ Better Work’s guidance and support continue to be a great help to operate efficiently as we try to overcome the COVID-19 crisis. ”

Md. Aslam Hossain Rony
AGM-HR, Admin & Compliance
Saturn Textiles Ltd

Better Work's Factory Services and coordinated capacity-building initiatives set out a concrete path for a sustainable recovery from the crisis.

As garment factories resumed operating in full scale, Better Work Bangladesh has shifted its focus to helping the industry maintain its path to recovery from the disruption caused by COVID-19. Better Work’s comprehensive virtual services and capacity-building initiatives are designed to support factories in becoming resilient to future shocks.

With workplace health and safety remaining the highest priority in our support to the industry, Better Work’s approach to COVID-19 recovery is based on the application of international labour standards, improvement in working conditions, industrial safety and social dialogue.

Virtual interventions at a glance (since March 2020)

1,047
VIRTUAL ADVISORY
SESSIONS

72
VIRTUAL ASSESSMENTS

55
VIRTUAL TRAINING
SESSIONS

1,373
TRAINING PARTICIPANTS

Better Work developed a policy applicable until February 2021, contingent on the evolution of the pandemic to support the industry in the best possible ways.

[Learn more](#)



Before the onset of the crisis, Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) started preparing short and long-term plans to support affiliated factories. Interventions particularly focused on COVID-19 response and the continuity of our factory services remotely to help factories cope with this entirely changed reality.

Better Work has been looking into both the immediate and long-term challenges and opportunities in the garment industry during the COVID-19 crisis.

Talking into account the national regulations and realities, our approach prioritises mitigating the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 on productivity, factories and workers.

Launched in July 2020, the **RMG Learning Hub** continues to harmonise the ILO’s response to COVID-19 in the RMG industry, supported by the national stakeholders including the BGMEA, BKMEA and the Workers Resource Centre (WRC).

To support the industry make a full and sustainable recovery, Advisory, Assessment and Training services continue to be the cornerstone of Better Work’s continuous improvement methodology, including a wide range of capacity-building specific to COVID-19.

BWB has partnered with the German Government-supported Vision Zero Fund (VZF) to strengthen OSH support in the RMG industry.



PPE manufacturing Factories pivot during COVID-19

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) manufacturing breathed new life into the sector as the demand for such items skyrocketed during this time of crisis.

Bangladesh's garment sector faced order cancellations and delays worth about \$3.18 billion between March-April 2020, according to the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA). Production had to halt due to the country's lockdown, with the exception of those factories with a sufficient amount of work orders from international buyers or manufacturing PPE.

Shawn Islam, managing director of Better Work-affiliated Sparrow Apparel Bangladesh, told that following the implementation of the country's lockdown, operations in his three facilities had come to a halt.

But the forced closure didn't last long. As demands for PPE kept coming in, Islam said around 20 line supervisors had started producing surgical masks and protective clothing.

These companies already know the business and could swiftly switch back to PPE production.

“ We have been making surgical masks and waterproof PPEs for Level 1 protection. We also distributed those for free among people working in the factories. ”

Shawn Islam
Managing Director
Sparrow Apparel Ltd

PPE production helped factories retain jobs amid such a crucial time of crisis for the apparel industry.

Capacity Building Training for Welfare Officers

Launched in August 2020, this comprehensive initiative trained a total of 20 Welfare Officers from Better work's partner factories in Bangladesh. The training programme helped further strengthen the capacity of welfare officers and equip them with useful skills to help create a culture of social dialogue and promote a harmonious and productive working environment. The industry recognises the important role of the Welfare Officers more than ever during the pandemic, especially in ensuring sound industrial relations through social dialogue. BWB will continue to guide, coach, and support the Welfare Officers, while also ensuring to continue to learn and track the impact of the programme over the coming months and years.



Lucky khatun
Welfare Officer
Saturn Textiles Ltd

“ Thanks to this training, now I am more confident in the interpretation of Bangladesh Labour Law while dealing with the workers and workplace issues. ”

As the next step, each of the Welfare Officers who participated in the training will develop a six-month individual action plan, followed by the implementation of the action plan in their respective workplace.

Measuring working conditions through SLCP

Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) is in the process of rolling out the Social & Labor Convergence Program (SLCP) in its affiliated factories. SLCP offers the tools and systems to measure working conditions in global supply chains. This multi-stakeholder initiative includes data sharing and replaces the need for repetitive social audits. As part of the efforts, BWB already conducted the first piloting of SLCP in one of its partner factories. BWB continues to discuss and collect inputs from the brands, employers, trade unions and the Government to roll out a comprehensive SLCP in Bangladesh.

BWB partners with Vision Zero Fund (VZF) to strengthen OSH support during COVID-19

Better Work Bangladesh (BWB) has partnered with the German Government-supported Vision Zero Fund (VZF) to support occupational safety and health (OSH)-oriented actions in the RMG industry to strengthen the national efforts for facilitating a safe continuation of work during the COVID-19. Under this initiative, BWB will implement a series of initiatives to strengthen the capacity of the in-house clinics and raise awareness of COVID-19 among workers and factory management.

PPE will be provided to healthcare workers, pregnant and lactating mothers. Awareness raising campaign will target clinics staff, workers and management of RMG factories.



European Union and Better Work partner to improve working conditions in RMG industry

The EU funding contributes to engagement at the factory, national and sectoral levels to address current challenges in Better Work countries, with a focus on Vietnam and Bangladesh.

A virtual event was held on 5 February 2021 to mark the official announcement of the EU-Better Work strategic partnership to promote decent work and sustainable garment value chains.

BWB Business Forum focuses on building back better

Representatives from the world's largest retail brands met with leading figures from the country's RMG sector at a Bangladesh Virtual Business Forum on 28-29 October 2020.

Event report

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

 betterwork.org/where-we-work/bangladesh

 facebook.com/betterworkbangladesh

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 instagram.com/betterwork4all

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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Labour
Organization



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Better Work Bangladesh is supported by the following donor partners:

