



**BetterWork**  
Bangladesh

FACT SHEET

# Gender Equality And Returns – GEAR

Career progression opportunities for female sewing operators



International  
Labour  
Organization





GEAR- Gender Equality and Returns- aims at easing the path for women working in readymade garment (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 level

## GEAR Training

GEAR offers career-progression opportunities for female sewing operators in RMG factories by training (i) female sewing operators in the soft and technical skills necessary to take on supervisory roles; and (ii) factory managers on how to select, promote and support female talent.

GEAR provides approximately 15 days of face-to-face training to participating factories. Each cohort comprises 8-12 trainees for each participating factory.

GEAR is designed to redress the gender imbalance on sewing lines in Bangladesh's readymade garment (RMG) factories, where more than nineteen of every 20 line-supervisors are men despite 80% of line workers being women.

### TRAINING WOMEN REDUCES SUPERVISOR HIRING COSTS

Factories report that they prefer to promote workers within the factory rather than hire from outside. However, in practice most supervisor positions are filled by external hires. Factories take risks by hiring workers whose skills and personality are not known and miss out on the opportunity to build the capacity of internal staff. In addition, the culture of migrating to secure promotions is further entrenched, as workers observe the practice of hiring supervisors from outside.

To increase the proportion of internal hires, factories can train existing workers so they fill the knowledge gap before taking on their new role; they can also widen the pool of internal candidates by including women. Since the majority of sewing operators are female, factories that train their managers to overcome gender-bias selection are more likely to increase the number of suitable internal candidates for promotion and reduce costs associated with external hires.



### TECHNICAL SKILLS

- Production process
- Solving bottlenecks
- Line-balancing
- Up-skilling workers
- Pre- and post-cutting activities
- Method study and work study
- Types of needles, machines, and motors
- Types of pressure foots, guides, and folders



## INVESTING IN WOMEN BENEFITS FACTORIES

GEAR builds on a successful pilot in Bangladesh that trained 144 female sewing operators, 160 managers, and 341 lower-level managers in 28 factories. Findings from an impact assessment of the pilot measuring female operators' promotion rates and impact on line productivity show that 60% of trainees received an offer of promotion by their managers within weeks of completing the training, and efficiency gains of five percentage points (from 46 to 51%) on average were observed on the lines led by GEAR-trained supervisors.

## TRAINING FEMALE OPERATORS

GEAR offers a 10-day training program for female operators which combines:

- 4-day soft skills training: leadership, communications, confidence building, how to be an effective supervisor
- 6-day technical skills training to supervise a production line: production process, solving bottlenecks, line-balancing, pre- and post-cutting activities, method study, work-study, types of needles, machines and motor types, types of pressure foot, guides and folders.

Trainees then spend 6-8 weeks working on a production line as a trainee supervisor alongside an experienced supervisor.

## ENGAGEMENT WITH FACTORY MANAGERS

The program works very closely with factory management to ensure successful outcomes for the trainees and the factory. This includes:

- Presentation seminars with senior management
- Full-day kick-off workshop with factory middle managers
- 1-day manager training: how to successfully onboard new supervisors; how to give constructive feedback and show respect
- 1-day selection training: how to identify and select operators
- Full-day feedback meeting with factory managers upon all trainees' completion of the program

A half-day team building session brings together the newly-trained supervisors, existing supervisors, line chiefs, industrial engineers, and other middle managers.

### SOFT SKILLS

- Confidence-building
- Effective communications
- Leadership skills
- Management styles
- Team work
- Breaking barriers

### MANAGERS TRAINING

- Kick-off workshops
- On-boarding workers
- Selection training
- Giving feedback

### TEAM BUILDING

- Creating networks
- Engaging with other colleagues involved on the trainee's line



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## PHOTO HIGHLIGHTS FROM PILOT: WORK-PROGRESSION AND PRODUCTIVITY TOOLKIT-WPT

