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Let's **end**
gender-based
violence
in the garments sector



AN INITIATIVE
TO END
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE
IN THE GARMENTS INDUSTRY

Shojag (Awaken), a coalition consisting of Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust (BLAST), BRAC, Christian Aid, Naripokkho, and SNV with support from Global Fund for Women, is implementing a project named An Initiative to End Gender-Based Violence in the Garments Industry.

Why our work matters

- In 2016, garment exports accounted for more than 80% of total exports and surpassed \$25 billion in sales.
- There are 4,825 garment factories in Bangladesh employing over four million people. It is estimated that 85% of these workers are women.
- 70% of women garment workers who take public buses face various forms of gender-based violence during their commutes.
- More than one quarter (27.8%) of women report experiencing physical violence from someone other than their husband.

Despite the fact that women form an overwhelming majority of the RMG workforce in Bangladesh, efforts to protect their rights in the workplace are relatively few. Women accept jobs under harsh and challenging conditions, and are subjected to discrimination on many fronts, including sexual harassment, denial of maternity leave and/or benefits.¹ Following a writ petition (WP No. 5916, 2008), the Supreme Court formulated guidelines to ensure prevention and protection against sexual harassment in the workplace, which are binding on all authorities and private bodies (Constitution Article 112). However, in the absence of specific directives to the Ministry of Labour and Employment, and with the failure to incorporate the judgement provisions into any statute, compliance with the guidelines has been low. Despite various efforts, various forms of gender-based violence, including physical violence, sexual assault, psychological abuse, and economic abuse are still widespread at the workplace and during commutes, particularly in public buses and streets.

Root causes of GBV in the RMG sector:

- Power imbalances due to gender inequality and discrimination resulting from patriarchal societal attitudes, practices and norms.
- The majority of women are young rural migrants from economically and socially marginalized communities. Their marginalization increases their vulnerability and reduces access to, and knowledge of, their basic rights.

What we do:

Prevention

- Identify, select and develop capacity of 60 Human Rights Defenders (Shojag Shathis) in the workplace and dormitories to support the rights of women garment workers.
- Train mid-management of factories to implement and replicate measures to prevent sexual harassment within their HR and administration.
- Conduct an analysis of existing policies and redressal procedures for workplace GBV, and offer suggestions for enhanced compliance.
- Conduct awareness-raising activities.
- Provide psycho-social counselling for women workers.

Protection

- Introduce, improve and strengthen mechanisms to protect workers from GBV.
- Ensure garment factories and surrounding residential areas have functioning referral systems and the capacity to combat and support victims of GBV.
- Advocacy and awareness within national institutions and trade bodies.
- Provide referral services to survivors of GBV.

Prosecution

- Provide legal services to survivors including advice, mediation and litigation.
- Conduct mobile legal camps to provide advice, support for fact-finding as well as awareness building.

Partnership

- Develop partnerships cutting across prevention, protection and prosecution.
- Increase private sector engagement and opportunities for national and regional level learning and sharing through research and dissemination events.

The aim of the project is to reduce GBV in the garment industry by raising awareness, strengthening the capacity of private and public bodies, protecting the rights and legal entitlements of female workers and engaging factories towards promoting systemic changes across the garment sector. The project will deliver sustainable results through **protection, prevention, prosecution and partnership**, and will work at three levels: factories, commute to and from work, and in dormitories/hostels. The project will address the root causes of GBV including unequal power relations in the garments sector.