



Scholarly Revisit the Role of Worker Participation Committee: Evidence from the Ready-Made Garment Industry of Bangladesh

Md. Shawan Uddin, PhD^{1*}, Shaikh Shamsul Arafin² and Md. Sohel Rana³

ARTICLE INFO

Article History:

Received: 29th June, 2022

Accepted: 11th October 2022

Keywords:

Worker Participation Committee
Readymade Garment Industry
Workers Rights
Bangladesh Labor Act 2006

JEL Classification:

L6
L67
L78

ABSTRACT

Purpose– The prime objective of this article is to revisit the role of Workers Participation Committee (WPC) and discover how and where WPC has been playing an active role in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Industry in Bangladesh.

Design/methodology/approach– This study has extensively reviewed the journal articles, documents prepared by international organizations and thesis works of researchers that have been published in the reputed journals and online sources.

Findings– This study finds that WPC has active roles to play in the issues related to labor standards and the issues related to labor rights. Moreover, WPC has the ability to establish mutual trust and harmonious relationship between the workers and employers by resolving industrial dispute.

Research limitations– This is a conceptual paper which suffers to observe the reality from the ground. This study will invoke many scholars to conduct empirical studies in the future to evaluate the reality of the functions that WPC can play independently at the organizational level in Bangladesh.

Practical implications– This study contributes significantly to the existing literature of WPC, especially in the RMG industry. This study also has implication as the future reference to conduct empirical assessment in terms of WPC's roles and legislative reformation.

Originality/value– As far as originality is concerned, very few research effort has been made before to revisit the role of WPC in the RMG industry in Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

The RMG industry began its modest journey in the late 1970s and quickly rose to prominence in the economy, experiencing a boom in the 1990s (Rahman, 2021). After China, Bangladesh is the second-largest producer of RMG (Zaman, 2012). The economy of Bangladesh is based on the RMG sector, which also accounts for the majority of its Gross Domestic Product

*Corresponding Author

¹ Associate Professor, Department of Management Studies, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, e-mail: shawanmgt@ru.ac.bd

² Professor, Department of Management Studies, University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, e-mail: s_arafin@yahoo.com

³ Ph.D. Candidate and Researcher, Dept of Business Policies and Strategies, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, Email: sohelnaim@gmail.com

Copyright © 2022 Faculty of Business Studies, Pabna University of Science and Technology, Pabna, Bangladesh

(GDP) growth (Islam, 2021). A large “cheap” labor pool, low wages, hazardous working conditions, and a low level of unionization are some of the key characteristics of the RMG industry. Additionally, clientelism and cronyism to some extent govern the relationships between the State and industry (Khan, & Wichterich, 2015). The sector has had phenomenal expansion during the past fifteen years. Currently, Bangladesh is home to more than 6,000 factories that manufacture RMG. Bangladesh’s RMG industry employs more than 4.5 million direct human resources, with 80% of those employed being women (Adnan, 2020). Workers in the RMG industry are largely young women who are relocated from Bangladesh’s rural areas to escape abject poverty and social marginalization, remained vulnerable to certain accidents and job insecurity (Ahmed, 2021). Workers’ demands for revising legislation and boosting capacity building to safeguard them from such uncertainties and adversities have rarely been heeded by major parties. A healthy, happy, collaborative, and creative work environment is crucial because it fosters positive employee relations, lowers employee turnover and labor unrest, promotes worker productivity, attracts outsiders, and establishes a positive brand image (Sarkar et al., 2020).

Companies have developed and made public corporate codes of conduct (CoC) more frequently since the 1980s and 1990s, when globalization advanced and different interest groups started to highlight “bad actors” regarding circumstances for workers’ rights in factories (Bolle, 2014). Bangladesh sustains its competitiveness as a supplier of low-cost, fast fashion garments to global brands and retailers by imposing structural vulnerabilities on employees such as job insecurity, long working hours, forced and harsh overtime, and low salaries (Hasan et al., 2020). Due to the repression of union organizing, Bangladesh has few factory-based unions; at the same time, national union federations can be heavily affiliated with political parties and face widespread allegations of corruption and self-seeking (Ashraf & Prentice, 2019). However, Bangladesh has been a testing ground for new initiatives to increase factory conditions without jeopardizing the industry’s basic structure. This initiative had actually begun before the Rana Plaza tragedy (Trebilcock, 2020). However, over the years, these initiatives for improving factory condition have been intensified in every now and then. These initiatives, led by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), multinational corporations (MNCs), the International Labor Organization (ILO), local employers, and the state, include organized labor at various levels, ranging from locally based informal workers' groups (often referred to as committees or non-registered unions because they do not meet legal requirements for formal recognition) to factory-based trade unions (TUs), national union federations, and global union federations. Participation in these activities has developed into a new sort of activity for Bangladeshi TU, different from addressing the demands and difficulties of union members at work (Zajak 2017; Khan & Wichterich 2015).

While the RMG industry was struggling vigorously to avoid extinction due to several deadly incidents, the Bangladesh government announced that it would review the law in order to safeguard workers’ safety and rights at work, and that the law would be revised accordingly (Arman et al., 2021). As a result, as per Bangladesh Labor Act (BLA) 2006 and amendment 2013, enterprises and factories shall form active Worker Participation Committee

(WPC) (Islam, 2019). According to section 205-208 of the BLA, 2006, an employer in an establishment with fifty or more employees must form a participation committee (PC) in the appropriate manner. This committee will be made up of representatives from both the employer and the workers in order to promote mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation between the employer and the workers; to ensure that labor laws are followed; to foster a sense of discipline and to improve and maintain safety, occupational health, and working conditions; to encourage vocational training, workers' education, and family welfare training; and to adopt measures to improve worker welfare services (BLA, 2006).

The overall objective of this research is to revisit the role of PC in the RMG industries in Bangladesh. The present status of the practices of PC in the RMG sector of Bangladesh is obscure and requires an extensive review of the existing literature on WPC.

2. Literature Review

RMG factory compliance is a crucial criterion for most respectable global garment customers (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019). According to the buyers' CoC, it ensures labor rights and amenities (Alam et al., 2018). Every RMG factory should strive for compliance not just for profit, but also for the sake of human rights protection. Health, security, the right to organize and collective bargaining, appointment letters and a minimum pay for garment employees, as well as structural/building rules in the entire sector, are all requirements of the purchasers (Williamson & Lutz, 2020). Several major retail brands have cautioned Bangladesh to ensure basic labor rights, such as social compliance, as well as a gradual implementation of all compliance standards in the industries (Rahim, 2020).

2.1 The Bangladesh RMG Sector: A Failure of Labor Governance

After the Spectrum Sweater factory collapse in 2005 that resulted in the deaths of 64 workers mass casualty incidents in Bangladesh's RMG industry gained attention on a global scale (Miller 2014). Although there was a demonstrable crisis in worker safety before Rana Plaza, neither public nor private actors organized a coherent response. The majority of significant United States (US) and European companies that source from Bangladesh performed audits to look into basic occupational health and safety issues (such as checking for blocked aisles, the presence of fire extinguishers, and so forth), but they typically did not (and still do not) address other aspects of factory safety, like whether stairwells are enclosed, and the building is structurally sound (Ansary & Barua, 2015).

A coalition of labor advocacy groups from the US and Europe, as well as the Brussels-based federation IndustriAll Global Union (hereinafter IndustriALL), started meeting with a number of Western companies in 2010 as a result of a garment factory fire that claimed the lives of 29 workers (Bair et al., 2020). The labor organizations pushed companies to ratify a proposed memorandum of understanding (MoU) that required them to create and carry out a program addressing worker safety (Reinecke & Donaghey, 2015). On the public regulation front, the problem in worker safety received its first significant response in November 2012.

The government formed a tripartite panel including officials from the Ministry of Labour, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association, and trade unions to discuss a fire safety strategy in the wake of a fire at Tazreen Fashions that claimed the lives of 117 garment workers (Anner & Bair, 2022).

2.2 Firm-level Unionism and Participation

In terms of labor rights, there has been limited research on the factors that influence firm-level participation in these initiatives. In terms of environmental governance, researchers have investigated how country-level variables such as public sector regulatory quality and levels of engagement among trade and investment partners influence national participation rates in voluntary environmental schemes (Berliner & Prakash, 2014; Prakash & Potoski 2006; Prakash & Potoski, 2007). Rather from viewing selection as a direct theoretical interest, other studies that incorporate business selection into voluntary programs (such as Berliner & Prakash, 2015; Potoski & Prakash, 2005) address firm selection to avoid bias in their assessment of program effects.

TUs in Bangladesh have a long history extending back to the days of British colonialism, when leftist unions were prominent in anti-colonial and nationalist movements (Schuler et al., 2013). According to Rahman and Langford (2012), unions did not have a significant presence in workplaces before or after the country gained independence in 1971 and instead looked to political parties for favors and support. In the rapidly expanding export garment industry, an opposing labor movement did not emerge until the 1980s, along with the more “collaborationist” labor organizations associated with the two major political parties, particularly after the 1990 fire at Saraka Garments that killed 27 workers (Rahman & Langford, 2012). This type of autonomous labor action has been stifled due to legal constraints, violence, and intimidation against employees trying to organize, and the state’s financial interest in a successful garment industry (Siddiqi, 2017; Hurley, 2005). RMG industries in the global South hardly ever have unions. This is attributable in part to the fact that global supply networks seek out and perpetuate specific job niches for insecure, low-wage workers who are not union members (Muhammad, 2015; Tsing, 2009). Legal constraints, hostility toward organizers, and the threat of corporate departure make it more difficult for workers to organize, but local unions also find it difficult to fulfill the many demands of RMG industry employees, such as migrant workers and women (De Neve, 2008; Ruwanpura, 2015). Corruption, illegitimacy, and debt to political elites are just a few of the adverse views about labor unions that range from the notion that they are extremely rigid, rule-bound, and geographically set (Zajak, 2017).

Transnational governance methods, which sidestep and sideline state institutions in order to prevent harms to worker as defined by strong and image-conscious global brands, remain unpopular in Bangladesh (Sumon, 2016). Estimates of union membership among Bangladeshi RMG workers range from 5 to 10%, and in the few export processing zones, unionization is completely prohibited (Ahmed et al., 2014; Bair et al., 2017, Khan & Wichterich, 2015). However, according to recent studies (Khan & Wichterich, 2015; Zajak, 2017), there are

many barriers to union registration and worker organizing, but there are also more avenues for sharing information and filing complaints.

2.3 WPC at the Organizational Setup

According to BLA, 2006, the WPC is a committee that must be constituted in every factory with more than 50 workers, where there is no presence of TU. Half of the members of this committee should be workers' representatives, either chosen by the factory's union leaders or elected directly by the workers if there is no TU (Khan & Wichterich, 2015). According to one set of researchers (Anner, 2020; Reinecke et al., 2017), a WPC will strengthen worker-management relations. It might provide excellent two-way communication and even cooperation between workers and management because it is an internal organization made up of both workers and management. Instead of being each other's enemy like TUs and factory owners, they might create a shared understanding and resolve issues together on the job. Workers and management can communicate to improve worker participation in decision-making. As a result, employees will be more loyal and committed, which will benefit the factory owner. WPCs, according to Reinecke et al. (2017), are a step toward the adoption and development of TUs, giving employees a stronger voice. The application of best practices and legal provisions enhances not only the working environment but also the product quality. Although some issues, such as TUs, are impossible to overcome because of the overall demographic business environment, an alternative approach, such as the establishment of WPC, can help (Ashadujjaman, 2019).

The government has altered the laws governing employment and given workers the option to join an existing union or start a new one. In order to improve connections between employees and management or employers rather than local political parties, which are thought to have an unfavorable influence on the Industrial Relations (IR) system, the companies developed WPCs. The majority of the time, there is no WPC or TU at the tiny, local businesses. This is due to the close relationships between business and government, and in some cases, business involvement with major political parties (Cox, 2015). The IR system in these employers' own businesses is also under their control.

2.4 Positive look on WPC

According to one group of researchers (Anner, 2018; Reinecke et al., 2017), a WPC will strengthen worker-management interactions. It might provide excellent two-way communication and creates a shared understanding and resolve issues together on the job. Workers and management can communicate to improve worker participation in decision-making. As a result, employees will be more loyal and committed, which will benefit the factory owner. WPCs, according to Reinecke, Donaghey, and Hoggarth (2017), are a step toward the recognition and development of TUs, giving workers a stronger voice.

Another set of reasons can be found in the criticism of TUs. In the absence of (successful) factory-based unions, WPCs could serve as TUs. Unions are frequently

splintered along political or ethnic lines, and some unions are not autonomous, democratic, or trusted by their members. Furthermore, some factories discriminate against union members, and members are obvious targets for abuse, therefore an alternative form may be more effective (Shamsher & Kerblom, 2018).

2.5 Nature of WPC

According to the BLA, 2006, Secetion-205 the natures of

“WPC are as follows:

- 1) The employer of every establishment, in which at least 50 (fifty) workers are ordinarily employed, shall [through direct involvement of the workers working in that establishment] constitute a participatory committee in his establishment in the manner prescribed by rules.*
- 2) Such committee shall consist of the representatives of the employer and the workers.*
- 3) The number of representatives of workers in such committee shall not be less than the number of representatives of the employer.*
- 4) The representatives of the workers shall be appointed on the basis of nomination given by the trade unions in the establishment.*
- 5) Each trade union, other than the collective bargaining agent for the concerned establishment, shall nominate equal number of representatives and the collective bargaining agent shall nominate such number of representatives which shall exceed the total number of representatives nominated by the other trade unions by one.*
- 6) In the case of an establishment where there is no trade union, the representatives of the workers in the participation committee shall be 2[elected] in the manner prescribed by rules from amongst the workers working in that establishment.*
 - 6a) In an establishment where no trade union exists, the worker representatives of the participatory committee may carry out the activities related to the interests of the workers until a trade union is formed in that establishment.]*
- 7) Where in an establishment there is a unit in which at least 50 (fifty) workers are employed, a unit participation committee may, on the recommendation of the participation committee, be constituted there in the manner prescribed by rules.*
- 8) Such unit participation committee shall consist of the representatives of the employers and of the workers employed in or under that unit.*
- 9) An employer shall not transfer an elected or nominated officer or a member of the participatory committee belonging to the workers side during the tenure of the committee without his consent.*
- 10) An employer shall not raise any objection or take any retaliatory measure against the workers' representatives for anything done in good faith while carrying out the activities related to the duties of the committee.*
- 11) The provisions of this section applicable to the participatory committee shall, as far as possible, also apply to the unit participatory committee.” (Sec.205, p. 95)*

2.6 Functions or Role of Participation Committee

According to the BLA, 2006, functions of

“WPC are as follows:

- 1) The main function of the participation committee shall be to inculcate and develop sense of belonging to the establishment among the workers and employers and to aware the workers of their commitments and responsibilities to the establishment, and, in particular- (a) to endeavor to promote mutual trust and faith, understanding and co-operation between the employers and the workers. (b) To ensure the application of labor laws. (c) To foster a sense of discipline and to improve and maintain safety, occupational health and working condition. (d) To encourage vocational training, workers’ education and family welfare training. (e) To adopt measures for improvement of welfare services for the workers and their families; and (f) To fulfill production target, increase productivity, reduce production cost, prevent wastage and raise quality of products (Sec.206, p. 95).*
- 2) “A unit participation committee shall, under the supervision of the principal participation committee, discharge, as far as practicable, the functions mentioned in subsection (1).” (Sec. 206, p. 96).*

2.7 Critiques on WPC

Scholars, on the other hand, argue that such committees are ineffective at representing employees, undermining the work of TUs or preventing the development of new ones (Anner, 2018; Egels-Zanden & Merk, 2014). The legal barrier is the fundamental reason for the disparity in power between trade unions and WPCs. WPCs frequently lack the right to collective bargaining or the ability to strike, as well as legal protection from discrimination based on union actions or membership (Moazzem, 2018). As a result, labor laws cannot be used to enforce agreements, demonstrators may have difficulties, and members are not easily protected from discrimination (Kim & Kim, 2004). Furthermore, WPCs may lack independence from factory management, democratic representation, financial resources, or the ability to effectively communicate with management (Kerckhoffs, 2019).

WPCs, detractors contend, are a weaker form of worker representation, and cannot replace trade unions for these reasons. Furthermore, unions believe that WPCs are adopted by employers to undermine their work in regions where factory based TUs or autonomous local unions exist. As a result of this competition for management attention, dedication, and resources, WPCs are frequently employed as a substitute for TUs (Sultana, 2022).

2.8 WPC as Substitution of Factory Trade Union

If WPCs function similarly to TUs on the job, they could be a viable alternative to unions. They could be considered as preferable alternatives for both workers and factory owners if they improve worker-management relations. In this situation, policy and NGO programs may focus on implementing and improving WPCs in factories rather than attempting to establish

trade unions, which would take more time and effort (Kim & Kim, 2004). WPCs should not be utilized as a substitute for trade unions if they are unable to operate successfully as a worker representation and do not result in a better worker-management relationship. Unionization should be encouraged through policies that make unionization easier, faster, or both (Poole, 2017).

The functionality of the two platforms should be evaluated to determine substitutability. To far, only a few academic studies have conducted such research in Bangladesh. The functioning of worker participation committees or industrial trade unions is dependent on the specific setting in which they operate, according to the ideas and research outlined previously. The weak power position of factory employees and their representatives was defined by power relations in the global garment value chain (Gereffi, 2014). Weak worker power in the chain is frequently accompanied by weak bargaining power, which is a crucial function of worker representation (Tapia et al., 2015). There are also international labor norms and governance measures aimed at mitigating the harmful effects of power imbalances (Anner, 2017). Because national labor regulation influences Freedom of Association (FoA) and dictates the functions and laws of both platforms of worker representation, the platforms' operation is influenced by government pressure to strengthen strong worker representation and by social movements. As a result, power dynamics and the legal environment should be included as part of the substitute evaluation.

3. Methodology

This study applies extensive review of existing literature. To find out relevant research articles and document related to this study, the researchers resort to some of the research related database on the internet. Among these domains, google, google scholar, Research Gate, Springer dataset, Elsevier dataset, Emerald dataset, Routledge dataset, International Labour Review, Wiley Online Library, Academia Edu etc. were prominent to search for pertinent data on the role of WPC in the garments industry in Bangladesh. Some keywords like roles; workers participation committee; readymade garments industry; Bangladesh were used to retrieve relevant research articles and documents on WPC's role in the readymade garments industry in Bangladesh. After having extensive review of more than 50 research articles, the researchers could grasp some of the significant elements that influence the role of WPC in the garments industries in Bangladesh.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 The Role of WPC and the Issues for RMG Industries in Bangladesh

Understanding Bangladeshi RMG industries' labor laws and labor standards benefits from a quick examination of the specific role of the WPC. The aforementioned responsibilities of WPC include monitoring the supply chain management, developing human resource

management strategies, and, most importantly, maximizing profits and generating money for a firm (Langley & Mellor, 2002).

4.2 WPC's Roles Related to Labor Standard Issues

The BLA, 2006 and the most recent Bangladesh Labor Act Regulations 2015 (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2015) require existing factories to establish safety committees within six months of the rules' effective date, and factories built after the rules were created must do so within nine months of the beginning of production. The administration will set up the workers' personal protection equipment and make sure it is positioned where it belongs.

In the event that there is no regular doctor or nurse, the WPC may urge for setting up medical facilities, such as a first aid kit, a separate medical room for employees, and trained personnel. The factory employees must get training on occupational health and safety, workers' rights, and fire issues in accordance with Bangladeshi legislation. For effective worker management, the WPC should recommend for a childcare center, meals, separate and sufficient restrooms for male and female employees, clean drinking water, etc. A sufficient number of firefighting tools and an emergency exit will be set up in the factory building to ensure a secure working environment. Inside the factory, there should be acceptable lighting and ventilation and all these can be recommended by WPC.

4.3 WPC's Roles Related to Labor Rights Issues

The employee or worker has the right to obtain a formal appointment letter in accordance with the ILO and BLA, 2006 regulations. So that employees can easily keep track of the number of working days they put in for the company, they should have an employee ID card with a photo and an attendance card. The plant management should keep track of the employee roster. Regular payments must be made. Depending on their employment situation, they will be eligible for a variety of leave options. The WPC has the ability to negotiate with these worker related rights.

The right to associational freedom or voice representation is one frequently cited worker's right. Through the creation of a WPC or a TU, workers should have the ability to speak out WPC. At accordance with labor law regulations, if there is no registered trade union in a factory, the workers participation committee will nominate the employees' representatives. In the absence of both the TU and WPC, the workers' representatives shall be chosen in front of the chief inspector. However, many factory workers who attempt to organize unions to address violations of workers' rights are confronted with intimidation, dismissal, threats, and occasionally physical assault by the workplace management or hired outside parties in many factories (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Additionally, they set up group insurance so that it would cover any emergency situations. The factory must have a group insurance plan via Bangladesh Garments

Manufacturing and Exporting Association (BGMEA) to be responsible for arranging insurance payments for the workers after incidents. In order to keep skilled workers connected to the firm by offering service incentives, the factory management may additionally keep track of the workers' service books.

4.4 Establishing Mutual Trust by Resolving Industrial Dispute

According to Section 2(62) of The Bangladesh Act, 2006, 'the industrial dispute' refers to any disagreement between employers and employers, employers and workers, or workers and workers that has to do with a person's employment or lack thereof, terms of employment, or working conditions. A dispute or difference of opinion between management and employees on the terms of employment may be referred to as an industrial dispute. It is a conflict over salary and other working conditions between an employer and employees' representative, who is typically a trade union, and it may lead to industrial activities. When there is an industrial disagreement, the management and the employees put pressure on one another.

The workers may use strikes, picketing, or gherao, while the management may use lockouts. Economic and non-economic factors can be used as broad categories to separate the causes of industrial disputes. Economic causes will involve problems with pay, such as earnings, bonuses, allowances, and working conditions, such as working hours, leave, and paid holidays, as well as unfair layoffs and retrenchments. Worker victimization, poor treatment by coworkers, sympathy strikes, political factors, indiscipline, etc. are examples of non-economic issues.

The process for resolving industrial disputes can be broken down into three steps: negotiation, conciliation, and arbitration. Anytime an employer or a collective bargaining agent; in absence WPC will take initiatives to determine that a labor dispute between them and their employees, or between a specific employee and the employer, is likely to develop, the agent must express this opinion in writing to the other side. Within fifteen days of the date it was received, the party receiving the communication must set up a meeting with the collective bargaining representative to discuss the problem stated in the communication. If a settlement is reached, it must be put in writing, signed by all parties, and sent by the employer to the government, the director of labor, and the conciliator.

The employer and the establishment's trade union are required to take the appropriate actions to implement the precise suggestions given by the Participation Committee within the time frame specified by it, per section 208(1) of the BLA, 2006. According to Section 208(2), the PC must be informed of any difficulties the employer or TUs encounters in carrying out the committee's recommendations within the allotted time frame, and every effort must be made to do so. But in practice, RMG sectors barely have any involvement committees at all. Some companies have formed participation committees without abiding by the rules

governing the establishment of the committee, and in other cases, they have done so without paying attention to the duties of the committee (Siddiqua, et al., 2014).

4.5 Reinforcement of Labor Law Strengthen WPC

The BLA, 2006 was revised on July 15, 2013, in response to the Rana Plaza building collapse, with a focus on the requirements of the right to freedom of association and, most significantly, occupational health and safety. Thus, the modifications placed a strong emphasis on training and the provision of safety equipment, required fire drills, the reporting of incidents to the appropriate authorities, funding for the treatment of ill employees, compensation for worker deaths, labor inspection programs, etc. Additionally, labor inspectorates were created in collaboration with a number of organizations to improve working conditions and worker safety.

The National Occupational Safety and Health Policy 2013 was created by the government of Bangladesh in recognition of the duty and opportunities. The Bangladeshi government officially adopted 87 revisions to the original Labor Act of 2006 after the Rana Plaza accident; however some minor changes had already been made following the passage of the Labor Act of 2006 due to international scrutiny and the USA's suspension of trade privileges. These adjustments are important because they provide a better understanding of the safety precautions that must be taken in the workplace and the intended actions to resolve the problems. The most important ones were those relating to the need for changes in areas like worker safety, unions, and collective bargaining. All these supporting labor laws will in turn strengthen WPC in the garments factories in Bangladesh.

4.6 WPC Promotes Capacity Building of Workers and Employees

The National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) on Fire Safety for the RMG sector in Bangladesh provided the framework under which the operations of industrial building safety and fire prevention were mostly conducted. In reality, the Bangladeshi government and ILO worked together to create this in the wake of the tragic fire at Tazreen Fashions. The strategy was developed with the intention of taking all necessary steps to stop such fatal fire-related tragedies. It lists three types of activities: legislative and policy, administrative, and practical. An active role of WPC will ultimately help implement these policies and enhance capacity of the workers and employees.

4.7 Worker Participation Committee as Substitution of Factory Trade Union

WPCs may be a good trade union alternative if they operate on the shop floor in a similar manner. They might be viewed as superior options by both factory owners and employees if they are also enhancing worker-management relations. Instead of attempting to establish trade unions in this situation, policymakers and NGO programs may concentrate on establishing and improving WPCs at factories because doing so would be more difficult and time-consuming (Kim & Kim, 2004). However, WPCs shouldn't be utilized as a replacement

for trade unions if they can't properly represent workers and don't improve relations between employees and management. Policies should promote unionization, for instance by facilitating speedier or easier unionization procedures (Kim & Kim, 2004).

5. Conclusion

The prime objective of this article was to revisit the role of WPC and discover how and where WPC has been playing an active role. However, it is another debate whether WPC has the ability to play an active role in the readymade garments factories in Bangladesh and it requires further empirical investigation to observe the reality from the ground. In this extensive literature review study, it is apparent from the existing literature that WPC has the legal obligations prescribed in the BLA, 2006 and the establishments which have more than fifty workers are legally obliged to form WPC. Nevertheless, this study finds that WPC has active roles to play in the issues related to labor standards and the issues related to labor rights. Moreover, WPC has the ability to establish mutual trust and harmonious relationship between the workers and employers by resolving industrial dispute. WPC also potentially contribute to capacity building among the workers and employees. Besides, the comparison between WPC and factory-based TU requires concentrated extensive empirical evaluation which can be a future scope of study for academics and researchers.

Funding: This research paper is the outcome of a project funded by the University of Rajshahi

References

- Adnan, A. S. M. (2020). Made in Bangladesh garments industry creating shared value in response to social issues related to work.
- Ahmed, A. (2021). From Impoverished Beneficiaries to Empowered Stakeholders—a case study of H&M Foundation Multi-Sectoral Sustainable Initiative for female Bangladeshi RMG workers.
- Ahmed, F. Z., Greenleaf, A., & Sacks, A. (2014). The paradox of export growth in areas of weak governance: The case of the readymade garment sector in Bangladesh. *World Development*, 56, 258-271.
- Akbar, S., & Ahsan, K. (2019). Workplace safety compliance implementation challenges in apparel supplier firms. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 232, 462-473.
- Alam, M. N., Alias, R. B., & Azim, M. T. (2018). Social Compliance Factors (SCF) Affecting Employee Productivity (EP): An Empirical Study on RMG Industry in Bangladesh. *Pacific Business Review International*, 10(8), 87-96.
- Anner, M. (2012). Corporate social responsibility and freedom of association rights: The precarious quest for legitimacy and control in global supply chains. *Politics & Society*, 40(4), 609-644.
- Anner, M., & Bair, J. (2022). The Bangladesh Accord and Alliance: addressing building safety through global supply chain co-governance. In *Handbook on Globalisation and Labour Standards*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Ansary, M. A., & Barua, U. (2015). Workplace safety compliance of RMG industry in Bangladesh: Structural assessment of RMG factory buildings. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 14, 424-437.
- Arman, S. S., Bari, M. A., & Khan, M. M. (2021, December). Development of Security System for Ready Made Garments (RMG) Industry in Bangladesh. In 2021 IEEE 12th Annual Ubiquitous Computing, *Electronics & Mobile Communication Conference (UEMCON)* (pp. 0810-0816). IEEE.
- Ashadujjaman, M. (2019). International Sustainability Self-Regulatory CSR Certification Standards and the Challenges of Embedding Them in the RMG Production Processes in Bangladesh. *Yuridika*, 34(3), 483-492.
- Ashraf, H., & Prentice, R. (2019). Beyond factory safety: Labor unions, militant protest, and the accelerated ambitions of Bangladesh's export garment industry. *Dialectical Anthropology*, 43(1), 93-107.
- Bair, J., Anner, M., & Blasi, J. (2017). Sweatshops and the search for solutions, yesterday and today. Unmaking the global sweatshop: Health and safety of the world's garment workers, 29-56.
- Bair, J., Anner, M., & Blasi, J. (2020). The political economy of private and public regulation in post-Rana Plaza Bangladesh. *ILR Review*, 73(4), 969-994.
- Berliner, D., & Prakash, A. (2014). The United Nations global compact: An institutionalist perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 122(2), 217-223.
- Bolle, M. J. (2014, January). Bangladesh apparel factory collapse: Background in brief. Congressional Research Service, the Library of Congress.
- Cox, A. (2015). The pressure of wildcat strikes on the transformation of industrial relations in a developing country: The case of the garment and textile industry in Vietnam. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 57(2), 271-290.
- De Neve, G. (2008). Global garment chains, local labour activism: New challenges to trade union and NGO activism in the Tiruppur garment cluster, South India. In *Hidden hands in the market: Ethnographies of fair trade, ethical consumption, and corporate social responsibility* (Vol. 28, pp. 213-240). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Egels-Zandén, N., & Merk, J. (2014). Private regulation and trade union rights: Why codes of conduct have limited impact on trade union rights. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 123(3), 461-473.
- Gereffi, G., & Luo, X. (2014). Risks and opportunities of participation in global value chains.
- Hasan, R., Moore, M., & Handfield, R. (2020). Addressing social issues in commodity markets: Using cost modeling as an enabler of public policy in the Bangladeshi apparel industry. *Journal of Supply Chain Management*, 56(4), 25-44.
- Hurley, J. (2005). Unravelling the web: Supply chains and workers' lives in the garment industry. *Threads of labour: Garment industry supply chains from the workers' perspective*, 95-132.
- Islam, M. (2019). Assessment of Safety Measures in RMG Sector of Bangladesh (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, Islamic University of Technology, Gazipur, Bangladesh).

- Islam, M. (2021). Ready-made garments exports earning and its contribution to economic growth in Bangladesh. *GeoJournal*, 86(3), 1301-1309.
- Kerckhoffs, V. (2019). Freedom of Association in Practice. A comparison between factory-based trade unions and worker participation committees in apparel factories in Dhaka, Bangladesh (Master's thesis).
- Khan, M. R. I., & Wichterich, C. (2015). Safety and labour conditions: the accord and the national tripartite plan of action for the garment industry of Bangladesh (No. 38). Global Labour University Working Paper.
- Kim, D. O., & Kim, H. K. (2004). A comparison of the effectiveness of unions and non-union works councils in Korea: can non-union employee representation substitute for trade unionism?. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 15(6), 1069-1093.
- Langley, P., & Mellor, M. (2002). 'Economy', sustainability and sites of transformative space. *New Political Economy*, 7(1), 49-65.
- Millar, Kathleen. 2014. The precarious present: Wageless labor and disrupted life in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. *Cult.*
- Ministry of Labor and Employment. (2015). Acts and Rules, viewed on 28 Sunday 2015. Retrieved from [http://www.mole.gov.bd/site/view/legislative information/Acts-&-Rules](http://www.mole.gov.bd/site/view/legislative%20information/Acts-&-Rules)
- Moazzem, K. G., & Azim, S. S. (2018). Workers' Organisations in RMG Enterprises: How to Address Institutional Challenges?.
- Muhammad, A. (2015). Workers' Lives, Walmart's Pocket: Garments' Global Chain, from Savar to New York. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 143-150.
- Poole, M. (2017). Towards a new industrial democracy: Workers' participation in industry. Routledge.
- Prakash, A., & Potoski, M. (2006). Racing to the bottom? Trade, environmental governance, and ISO 14001. *American Journal of Political Science*, 50(2), 350-364.
- Prakash, A., & Potoski, M. (2007). Collective action through voluntary environmental programs: A club theory perspective. *Policy Studies Journal*, 35(4), 773-792.
- Rahim, M. M. (2020). Humanising the global supply chain: building a decent work environment in the readymade garments supply industry in Bangladesh. In *Research Handbook on Human Rights and Business*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Rahman, S. (2021). The Bangladesh garment industry and the global supply chain: choices and constraints of management. Routledge.
- Rahman, Z., & Langford, T. (2012). Why labour unions have failed Bangladesh's garment workers. *Labour in the Global South*, 87-106.
- Reinecke, J., & Donaghey, J. (2015). After Rana Plaza: Building coalitional power for labour rights between unions and (consumption-based) social movement organisations. *Organization*, 22(5), 720-740.
- Reinecke, J., Donaghey, J., & Hogarth, D. (2017). From Social Auditing to Social Dialogue: Implementing Workplace Social Dialogue in the Bangladesh Garment Industry.

- Ruwanpura, K. N. (2015). The weakest link? Unions, freedom of association and ethical codes: A case study from a factory setting in Sri Lanka. *Ethnography*, 16(1), 118-141.
- Sarkar, A., Qian, L., & Peau, A. K. (2020). Structural equation modeling for three aspects of green business practices: a case study of Bangladeshi RMG's industry. *Environmental Science and Pollution Research*, 27(28), 35750-35768.
- Shamsher, S. & Åkerblom, A. (2018). Power of the voice: Perspectives from workers and buyers on social dialogue within the Bangladeshi garment sector (Report # 90). Retrieved from Swedwatch:
http://www.swedwatch.org/wpcontent/uploads/2018/05/90_Bangaldesh_180531.pdf
- Schuler, S. R., Lenzi, R., Nazneen, S., & Bates, L. M. (2013). Perceived decline in intimate partner violence against women in Bangladesh: qualitative evidence. *Studies in Family Planning*, 44(3), 243-257.
- Siddiqi, D. M. (2017). Afterword: politics after Rana plaza. Unmaking the Global Sweatshop: Health and Safety of the World's Garment Workers, 275-282.
- Siddiqua, S., Chowdhury, M. A. M., & Islam, M. R. (2014). Industrial Relation and Dispute Settlement Procedure in RMG Sector of Bangladesh: A Critical Review. *International Journal of Innovation and Applied Studies*, 9(3), 1233.
- Sultana, M. (2022). Challenges Facing Women Ready-made Garment Workers in Bangladesh (Doctoral dissertation).
- Sumon MH. 2016. The Accord and Alliance: Beyond state governance? The Daily Star, April 24. Online:
- Tapia, M., Ibsen, C. L., & Kochan, T. A. (2015). Mapping the frontier of theory in industrial relations: the contested role of worker representation. *Socio-Economic Review*, 13(1), 157-184.
- Trebilcock, A. (2020). The Rana Plaza disaster seven years on: Transnational experiments and perhaps a new treaty?. *International Labour Review*, 159(4), 545-568.
- Tsing, A. (2009). Supply chains and the human condition. *Rethinking Marxism*, 21(2), 148-176.
- Williamson, S. H., & Lutz, J. (2020). Sewing responsibility: media discourse, corporate deviance, and the Rana Plaza collapse. *Sociological Inquiry*, 90(1), 76-100.
- Zajak, S. (2017). International allies, institutional layering and power in the making of labour in Bangladesh. *Development and Change*, 48(5), 1007-1030.
- Zaman, S. (2021). Researching the garment sector in Bangladesh: fieldwork challenges and responses. In *Field Guide for Research in Community Settings* (pp. 75-84). Edward Elgar Publishing.