



The Impact of Social Compliance Practices on the Ready-Made Garment Industry in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study aims to investigate the impact of social compliance in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh.

Methodology: Using a qualitative methodological approach, the research employed convenient sampling to gather data from various RMG factories situated in Chandra, Gazipur, Joydebpur, Ashulia, Dhaka, and Narayanganj. Researchers conducted in-depth face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) using semi-structured questionnaires to explore social compliance issues and their implications for the RMG sector. A total of 24 in-depth interviews were conducted with representatives from multiple RMG industries, government agencies, and buyers, complemented by two focus group discussions. Analysis of the interview and FGD data identified four key themes that illuminate social compliance practices in Bangladesh's RMG industry.

Findings: The study reveals that RMG factory owners feel compelled to adhere to regulatory frameworks and social compliance standards to ensure sustainability and maintain international orders. Compliance efforts are largely motivated by stakeholder pressures, contributing to improved global reputation and brand image.

Implication: This research fills a significant gap in existing literature by examining the impact of social compliance on industry and society specifically from the perspective of Bangladesh's RMG sector. Notably, it represents the first comprehensive evaluation of social compliance practices in Bangladesh's RMG industry. The study was conducted in RMG factories located in Dhaka and nearby areas like Gazipur, Ashulia, and Baipail.

Limitation: It acknowledges limitations such as a small sample size and the use of non-probability sampling methods.

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1. Introduction

Bangladesh has experienced remarkable economic growth in recent years, largely driven by its Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. RMG stands as the largest industry in Bangladesh, contributing 83% to the country's total export earnings (BGMEA, 2023). In the fiscal year 2021-2022, the RMG sector contributed 9.25% to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), with total RMG export earnings reaching USD 42,613.15 million, marking a 35.47% increase from the previous fiscal year (Bangladesh Bank, 2022). During the same period, the RMG industry earned USD 11,184.76 million, surpassing quarterly targets by 26.99%, buoyed by improved conditions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic (BB, 2022). Woven and knitwear segments each accounted for 37.77% and 45.22% of total export revenue for the quarter, respectively (BB, 2022). Moreover, the RMG sector plays a pivotal role in job creation across Bangladesh, particularly providing entry-level positions for young men and women. Directly employing 4.2 million people, of whom 60% are women, the RMG industry significantly contributes to economic development and employment generation (ILO, 2023). Despite these achievements, the sector has faced substantial challenges (Haider, 2007).

The history of Bangladesh's RMG sector dates back to 1960 with the establishment of the Reaz store in Dhaka, later renamed Reaz Garments Ltd. In 1978, this company made significant strides by selling 10,000 shirts in Paris for 13 million francs, marking a pivotal moment. At that time, Bangladesh operated only nine garment manufacturing facilities, yielding limited export revenue. Before 1980, Bangladesh's leading export industry was jute and jute products, generating over half of the country's export earnings. However, from the 1980s onwards, RMG exports began to surpass those of jute, experiencing rapid growth. The government's decision in the early 1980s to allow duty-free importation of garment machinery spurred the expansion of garment factories. The number of factories surged from 632 in 1984-1985 to over 2,900 by 1999. By fiscal year 2010-2011, RMG exports had nearly quadrupled to approximately USD 18 billion, with an annual growth rate nearing 14%. In 2019, Bangladesh introduced incentives for foreign investors in Export Processing Zones (EPZs), including a 10-year tax holiday and duty-free imports, bolstering the growth of export-oriented textile factories. The RMG industry faced significant setbacks in 2012 with tragic incidents: a fire at the Tazreen factory claimed at least 112 lives, and the collapse of the Rana Plaza building resulted in over 1,100 fatalities (Manik, 2013; Ansary & Barua, 2015). These disasters prompted international scrutiny and led to suspensions of preferential trade benefits by the United States. In response, Bangladesh invested heavily in remediation efforts, resulting in significant improvements in occupational safety and achieving 84.1% remediation by 2018. These efforts facilitated continued growth, with RMG export revenues rising from USD 19.08 billion in fiscal year 2011-2012 to USD 31.45 billion in 2020-2021 (Khatun, 2023). Today, Bangladesh leads globally in the number of environmentally sustainable clothing manufacturers.

The success stories of Bangladesh's garment industry have been achieved through overcoming numerous hurdles and challenges. These challenges include establishing workers'

rights, improving workplace environments, and effectively implementing compliance standards. Garment owners have taken compliance issues seriously, elevating the sector from its beginnings to its current prominence. Simultaneously, stakeholders in garment factories have demonstrated a keen awareness of social compliance issues, including Bangladesh's labor laws, ILO conventions, buyers' codes of conduct, worker employment conditions, occupational health and safety, and facility standards. Social compliance has become a business necessity, encompassing various dimensions crucial for Bangladesh's RMG suppliers amidst fierce competition among exporting countries and consumer preferences for products meeting international social standards (Baral, 2010). All stakeholders in the value chain benefit from adherence to ethical business practices, ensuring business continuity, fostering brand loyalty, and enhancing worker development. Social compliance delivers three core outcomes: worker satisfaction, corporate growth and sustainability, and brand reputation and customer satisfaction (Hasan, 2019). Worker satisfaction is ensured through upholding employees' rights, safety, and security. However, despite these benefits, social compliance issues continue to affect workers, employees, and the overall expansion of garment factories in Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2017; Hasan, 2019). Therefore, social compliance remains a pivotal topic in the RMG industry, guaranteeing labor rights, safety, and security, along with other necessary facilities for the well-being of RMG workers. Nonetheless, challenges persist in some RMG industries regarding social compliance. Despite the positive factors contributing to Bangladesh's RMG industry growth, there is anticipation that major global clothing businesses may shift away from China in the coming years due to geopolitical tensions and polarization. Bangladesh is poised to become a preferred destination for garment purchases, necessitating strict adherence to global labor standards and social compliance issues (Chowdhury, 2017). This research endeavors to explore the impacts of social compliance in Bangladesh's RMG sector. The remainder of the article discusses the literature review, methodology and data analysis, discussion of themes, and conclusion.

2. Literature Review

Compliance refers to the actual activity of carrying out a request or direction (Ahmed, Shishank & Hossain, 2020). It is either a condition of being in conformity with established standards or specifications, or it is a process of getting so. It describes the capacity to carry out a directive, set of guidelines, or request. The term "social compliance" also refers to moral and legal behavior that supports the right to free association, the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of all forms of forced and mandatory labor, the effective prohibition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (Hasan, 2019). The main areas of concern for compliance are the environment, ethical standards, and working conditions (Moon et al., 2023). The majority of RMG's foreign customers come from wealthy nations. They must make sure that every production facility in their supply chain complies with labor laws, norms, and regulations that are recognized both locally and internationally. The manufacturer's code of conduct serves as a manual for what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior with regard to employees, working

conditions, and the production process (Uddin, Alam, & Uddin, 2022). Compliance began with social issues that were directly tied to the rights and safety of workers. Different kinds of compliance audits have evolved over time in areas like security, quality, and the environment. Legal and ethical, technological, security, environment, fire safety, and building safety are the key categories of social compliance (Umeokafor, Evangelinos, & Windapo, 2020).

The RMG sector is Bangladesh's largest manufacturing industry and serves as a cornerstone of its economy, driving exports, job creation, poverty reduction efforts, and other economic benefits (Rahman & Chowdhury, 2020). Two major industrial disasters in consecutive years starkly highlighted the harsh working conditions faced by garment workers in Bangladesh. The collapse of Rana Plaza in 2013 and the fire at Tazreen Fashion in 2012, which resulted in nearly 1200 fatalities combined, vividly underscored the realities within the country's RMG sector (Ahmed & Uddin, 2022).

The common practice of ignoring workplace standards results in poor branding and a crisis in the country's reputation as a supplier to the world (Uddin et al., 2022). Additionally, the Clean Cloth Campaign and other non-profit groups work tirelessly to promote improved working conditions and safety in the global apparel industry. Global customers are hence extremely worried about compliance-related issues (Saylon, 2022). Despite the fact that Bangladesh is the top destination for garment sourcing and that its exports of garments have been rising over time, the country's popularity is mostly due to its affordable labor costs. It is demonstrated by numerous instances of retailers canceling purchases and then placing smaller orders as a result of noncompliance (Alam, Azim, & Alias, 2017).

In general, social compliance practices did not emerge within the industry; instead, the sector was pushed to comply with legal and ethical requirements in order to maintain its viability (Saha, Akhter & Hassan, 2021). Social compliances are a necessary non-product criterion for the entire supply chain of business. Since it is a labor-intensive sector of the economy, RMG manufacturing always focuses on low-wage production countries where getting a good job is difficult. The satisfaction of the worker, expansion of business, and brand goodwill are among the goals of social compliance. International buyers' and agencies' passive involvement, the availability of labor, and the sector's high push factor all contributed to its unanticipated growth (Sultana, Endut & Hussain, 2021). As a result, there was no establishment of a compliance structure, and the RMG sector became unregulated and unevenly distributed. In the RMG industry, social conformity is heavily influenced by both internal and external forces. There may be factors outside of the manufacturer's control; therefore, factory may not be solely accountable for non-compliance (Rahman, 2019). The likelihood of having to be non-compliant increases when more problems arise that is beyond the control of the factory. Compliance should not be viewed as a singular industrial problem; rather, it is a very multifaceted phenomenon. Legal frameworks, buyer codes of conduct, stakeholder pressure, the internal and external environment, and stakeholders' input all play significant roles in social compliance (Mohibullah et al., 2018).

In addition to a lack of adequate governmental support and weak regulatory framework, this industry has been dealing with a number of problems that are interconnected and dependent on one another. However, these interconnected concerns are not addressed; instead, social compliance in the sector is viewed as a singular requirement imposed by the purchasers, with which one must comply. The foundation for social compliance lies in the labor laws of Bangladesh, the ILO convention, global best practices, and buyer codes of conduct (Crisis, 2019). No matter how effectively they are established or formulated, policies, guidelines, laws, or codes of conduct are ineffective if they are not applied correctly and efficiently. Given the significance of the issue, further research is required. A comprehensive study of social compliance is required to determine the effectiveness of its precedence in affecting its results as well as to identify any gaps in its application. Laws, public policies, responsibilities, and powers of governmental and regulatory entities are all included in the legal framework. The company is required by law to comply with social norms. All garment companies have developed their own codes of conduct for use throughout their supply chains that are in accordance with the ILO agreements, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and corporate social responsibility guidelines (Rahman & Moazzem, 2017). To abide by their codes, the factory must sign a contract with each buyer. Manufacturers are required to meet a requirement called social compliance. However, the industry did not adopt a practice of social compliance; rather, under pressure from customers, it was forced to engage in legal and ethical practices in order to maintain its business (Rahim, Kuruppu & Islam, 2022).

Organizations operate in a certain context, and the environment has a significant impact on and influence over organizational operations. Workplace social compliance is influenced by both internal and external factors. While the external environment consists of infrastructure, political stability, socioeconomic situation, competition, and demand, the internal environment includes management system, employee conduct, owner attitude, corporate culture, norms, and value (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019). The cycle of social compliance cannot be completed without knowledge of the feedback. The most popular methods of gathering feedback include worker interviews, government regulatory agency inspections, buyer audits, and third-party audits. It is important to understand the current state of compliance feedback from the employees, owners, and customers. To the best of the researchers' knowledge, Bangladesh's RMG industry does not specifically measure the antecedents that contribute to composite social compliance. The literature offers guidance for creating the structure below to carry out this study.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research utilizes a qualitative methodological approach to achieve its objectives. In order to comprehend phenomena in context-specific issues, such as “real world situations [where] the researcher does not attempt to modify the phenomenon of interest,” qualitative research

employs a naturalistic method (Patton, 2001, p. 39). According to Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 17), qualitative research is “any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification” but rather, “any kind of research that produces findings arrived from real-world settings where the [interesting phenomenon] unfold naturally” (Patton, 2001, p. 39). Unlike quantitative researchers, who focus on establishing causation, making predictions, and generalizing their findings, qualitative researchers aim to provide insight, understanding, and extrapolation to similar situations (Hoepfl, 1997). Qualitative analysis generates a different kind of knowledge compared to quantitative research due to the underlying philosophical differences of each paradigm. While qualitative researchers favor in-depth interviewing, quantitative researchers “enjoy the rewards of both numbers and words” by focusing on the apparent compatibility of various research methods (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 8). In the positivist paradigm, surveys are commonly used, whereas interviews and observations are predominant in the naturalist (interpretive) paradigm and supplemental in the positivist paradigm. It has been argued (Winter, 2000) that quantitative researchers strive to maintain distance from the research process, whereas qualitative researchers embrace their involvement and actively participate in the research. This study employed convenient sampling to gather data from multiple RMG factories situated in Chandra, Gazipur, Joydebpur, Ashulia, Dhaka, and Narayanganj.

3.2 Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedure

The social compliance issues in the RMG are a subject to understand its nature and application. The evaluation and exploration of its nature and effectiveness in the industrial set up require an in-depth understanding through qualitative approach. As noted earlier, this study, following the interpretative paradigm, employed face-to-face in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with semi-structured questionnaires to explore social compliance issues and their effects on Bangladesh's RMG industry. The research conducted 24 in-depth interviews involving stakeholders from diverse RMG sectors, government entities, and buyers, alongside two focus group discussions, each involving 7 participants. The focus groups included representatives from workers, compliance managers, and buyers. To be specific, this study took 13 in-depth interviews of the workers' representatives, 5 compliance officers/managers, 3 government agents and 3 buyers' representatives. The following table-1 shows the profile of the respondents.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Sl. No.	Respondents Code	Gender	Age	Profession	Experience	Education
1	WKRI	F	30	Sewing Section	4 Years	Under SSC
2	WKR2	F	38	Floor Supervisor	6 Years	SSC
3	WKR3	M	21	Swing Section	3 Years	Graduation

4	WKR4	F	35	Swing Section	6 Years	HSC
5	WKR5	F	25	Swing Section	6 Years	Under SSC
6	WKR6	F	23	Dying Section	4 Years	HSC
7	WKR7	M	26	Floor Supervisor	10 Years	Under SSC
8	WKR8	F	35	Cutting Section	6 Years	Under SSC
9	WKR9	F	22	QC Section	4 Years	Under HSC
10	WKR10	F	31	Floor Supervisor	11 Years	Under SSC
11	WKR11	M	35	Helper	1 Year	Under SSC
12	WKR12	F	37	Floor Supervisor	10 Years	Degree Pass
13	WKR13	M	34	Admin	9 Years	Graduation
14	CM1	M	39	Compliance Section	12 Years	Graduation
15	CM2	M	37	Compliance Section	17 Years	Graduation
16	CM3	M	38	Compliance Section	8 Years	Post Graduation
17	CM4	F	33	Compliance Section	5 Years	Graduation
18	CM5	M	45	Compliance Section	15 Years	Post Graduation
19	GA1	F	42	Assistant Director, DoL	18 Years	Post Graduation
20	GA2	M	33	Inspector, DIFE	8 Years	Post Graduation
21	GA3	M	37	Inspector, DIFE	10 Years	Post Graduation
22	BR1	M	38	Buying House	15 Years	Post Graduation
23	BR2	M	41	Buying House	14 Years	Post Graduation
24	BR3	F	45	Buying House	11 Years	Graduation

Source: Authors

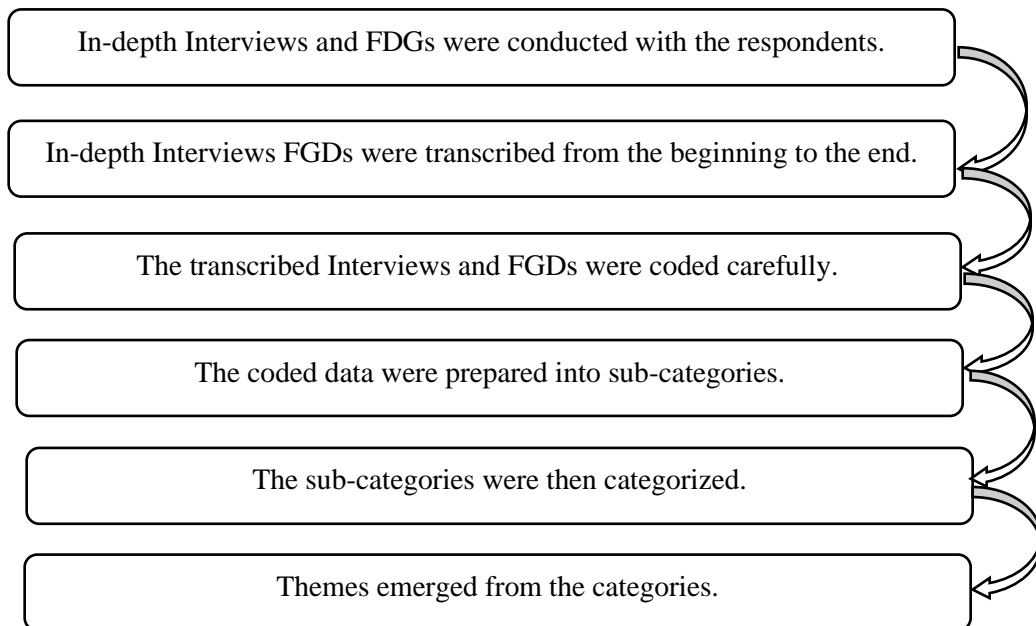
Note: WRK: Worker; CM: Compliance Manager; GA: Government Agent; BR: Buyers' Representative, DoL: Department of Labor; DIFE: Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments

The interview protocols were described to the respondents before any interview to take place and upon the consent of the respondents, the researchers started to record the entire

interview session using mobile phone's voice recorder (Rana et al., 2022). However, note taking was also adopted where voice recording was not allowed. Each face-to-face interview took 35 to 45 minutes to complete a session. However, each FGD took more than one hour.

Once the interviews are done, the researchers immediately started to listen to the voice recording and transcribe the recorded raw data. The transcription is a cumbersome and tiring process to finish all the interviews. The raw interview data were then carefully codified into separate words or phrases. The coded information is then classified according to their characteristics and grouped into subcategories. Later the subcategories are grouped into different categories. The themes of the study are obtained from all the categories. The following figure 1 shows the chronological sequence of data analysis process of the interviews and FGDs.

Figure 1: Chronology of Interview data analysis/ thematic data analysis



Source: Authors

After following the process of data analysis rigorously, this study obtained four unique themes that reflect the objective of the study. The emerged themes are presented in the table 2.

Table 2: The Emerged Themes

Number	Emerged Themes
Theme: 1	Regulatory Framework Facilitates Social Compliance and Affects RMG Industry Significantly

Theme: 2	Proper Employment Condition Ensures Social Compliance that Influences RMGs Industries
Theme: 3	Improvement of Occupational Health and Safety Brings Benefit to RMG Industries in Bangladesh
Theme: 4	Establishment of Physical Facilities as Part of Social Compliance boost RMG Industries in Bangladesh

Source: Authors

4. Discussion of the Themes

The themes of this research reflect the objective of this study. Moreover, the themes mentioned in the table 2 are the findings of this research. The social compliance issues in RMG industries are now hotcake since several agencies are involved in order to develop the compliances in the RMG sector. This study focused specifically on examining the effects of social compliance on the RMG industries in Bangladesh. By analyzing data from interviews and focus group discussions, the research identified four unique themes illustrating social compliance within the Bangladeshi RMG sector. The obtained themes are discussed underneath. With the beginning of industrialization, particularly in the west, it became a very significant concern to ensure worker welfare and industrial human rights without damaging the interests and expectations of stakeholders, including the producers and users.

Theme 1: Regulatory Framework Facilitates Social Compliance and Affects RMG Industry Significantly

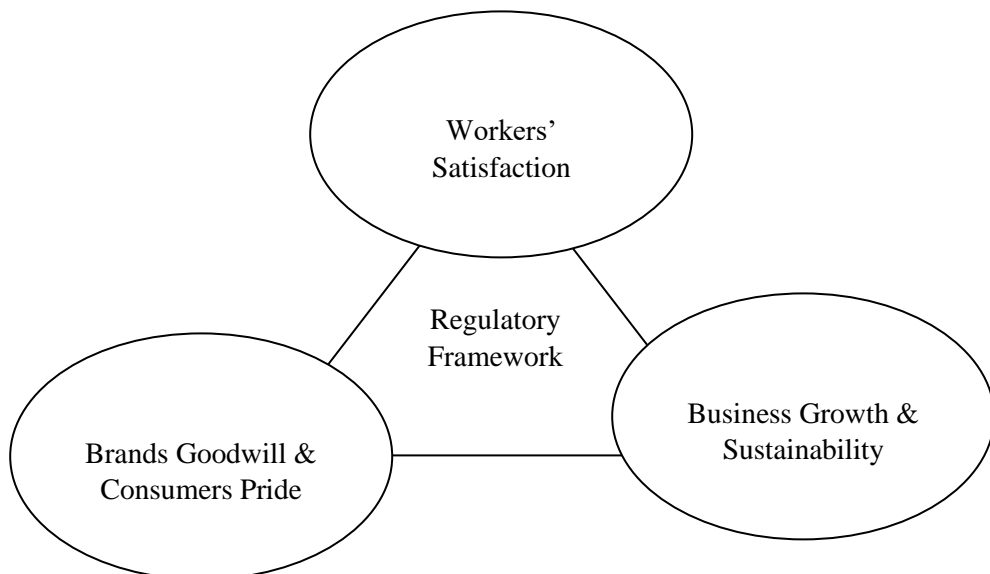
Social compliance is a particular type of compliance activity pertaining to the commercial and industrial sectors. It is the outcome of the extended organization's adherence to the standards of social accountability, including not only its own policies and procedures but also those of its supply and distribution chains. The process is continuous, and the parties involved are constantly seeking for new and improved approaches to safeguard the health, safety, and fundamental rights of their workers as well as to preserve and improve the neighborhood and environment in which they conduct business. All stakeholders in the value chain make profit equally from social compliance. The use of ethical business practices guarantees suppliers' company continuation, builds goodwill for brands, and educates employees. Although social compliance is not directly related to the product but rather adds value to it, it is an essential component of the manufacturing industry and is primarily tied to the supply chain, particularly with the global market. Both regulatory and voluntary contexts are present. The phrase "social compliance" also refers to moral and legal behavior that supports the right to free association, the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the abolition of child labor, all forms of forced and compulsory labor, and the abolition of discrimination in employment and occupation (ILO, 2002). The main areas of concern for compliance include the environment, ethical standards, and workers. The majority of purchasers of RMG clothing come from developed countries. They must make sure that each manufacturing facility in

their supply chain complies with all applicable local, national, and international labor norms, laws, and regulations. The manufacturer's code of conduct serves as a guideline for what is acceptable and unacceptable behavior with regard to employees, working conditions, and the production process.

The legal framework consists of laws, public policies, the authorities and powers of governmental organizations and regulatory bodies, etc. Its legal requirement is where Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Social Compliance vary most. Contrary to CSR, which is a company-led voluntary program, social compliance is a legal requirement for corporations. Constitutional protection, international commitment, statutory compulsion, and other elements make up the legal basis for social compliance. The ILO's regulatory framework consists of four core standards and fundamental principles aimed at ensuring workers' rights at work: a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining; b) the eradication of all forms of forced or compulsory labor; c) the effective abolition of child labor; and d) the elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation. All RMG companies have created their own codes of conduct for use including their supply chains that are in accordance with the ILO agreements, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and corporate social responsibility guidelines. To abide by their codes, the factory must sign a contract with each buyer. Social compliance is a requirement that manufacturers must meet. However, the industry did not adopt a practice of social compliance; instead, under pressure from customers, it was forced to engage in legal and ethical practices for the sake of the survival of its business.

The legal framework discussed above ensures the issues of social compliances in the RMG industries that ultimately bring benefits to the sector. The following figure 2 shows how social compliances benefited RMG industries in Bangladesh.

Figure 2: Impact of Regulatory Framework on RMG industries



Source: Authors

One of the respondents who has been working as a compliance manager for over 12 years in a RMG informed,

Today what you can see (the arrangements for health and safety) were not exactly the similar few years back. We were struggling to meet the compliances issues in the factory. Moreover, we had the pressure from the buyers as well to meet their shipment deadlines; we had to finish everything quickly. We were trying to implement the prescribed code of conducts and comply with the local and international labor law. The owner of this factory spent a huge amount of money to make all compliances requirements happened. And now see, ultimately the buyer is happy and repeating their orders with us.

Respondent Code: CM 1; Gender: M; Age: 39; Education: Graduation; Experience: 12 Years; Date and Time: 5 December 2022 & 11.00 AM

It is clear from the above assertion that the social compliances issues were implemented by the factory owners in Bangladesh when they were put pressures by the buyers and other agencies to ensure the workers' rights, health and safety issues. The big companies who were financially solvent were able to prepare their factories as far the regulatory framework and buyers codes of conducts. However, the poor factory found it rather difficult to implement social compliances in the factory premises as it incurs huge expenditure. However, one of the workers from a fully compliant factory informed,

We are very happy to work in this industry as we get our wages on time. Moreover, we also receive overtime payments. The working environment is very conducive, and I feel safe working in this factory. See, I have been working in this organization for last 6 years and I feel proud working here.

Respondent Code: WKR 2; Gender: F; Age: 38; Education: SSC; Experience: 6 Years; Date and Time: 5 December 2022 & 1.30 PM

In the meantime, another respondent expressed that his factory has huge reputation and goodwill among their buyers.

I must tell you that our buyers are very happy to work with us. They like to visit us every year (if possible). We invite them at our yearly picnic program, and they usually provide financial support to these programs. We really feel proud to seem them with us.

Respondent Code: WKR 9; Gender: F; Age: 22; Education: Under HSC; Experience: 4 Years; Date and Time: 5 December 2022 & 3.30 PM

The above verbatim depict that the implementation of social compliances significantly influences the RMG industries in Bangladesh.

Theme 2: Proper Employment Condition Ensures Social Compliance that Influences RMGs Industries

Employment conditions of the workers and employees in the RMG industries should include the issues of social compliances so that the workers and employees in the RMG companies can gain full benefits of compliant factories. Moreover, it is imperative for the RMG to conceive the regulatory and legal frameworks and prescriptions of the buyers in the employment conditions of the workers and employees. When a RMG factory will try to implement compliance issues in the factory must comply with the existing labor laws, ILO conventions, and welfare issues of the workers and employees. Improved employment circumstances can be attained with the help of international customers and other stakeholders, who have valid expectations and varying degrees of clout. Additionally, it was emphasized that in Vietnam, Cambodia, and El Salvador, threats and pressure from the global marketplace and consumers led to successful outcomes.

The employment condition in Bangladesh is getting updated day by day. For example, Bangladesh ratified six of the eight core conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) as of the year 2000. The conventions that were ratified dealt with forced labor, freedom of association, the right to organize and engage in collective bargaining, equal pay, and discrimination. Bangladesh accepted the worst kind of child labor convention in the year 2001, which is another basic convention. The employment condition must ensure the elimination of all forms of force or compulsory labor. The employment condition of the RGM factories will also ensure the working hours and festival holidays, various incentives offered to keep the workers present, excessive overtime work, extra allowances on overtime work etc.

A good employment condition will ensure workers satisfaction, business growth with buyers repeated orders and companies' goodwill among the workers, employees, stakeholders. One of the compliance managers stated,

Since we have been fully focused to social compliance being a listed compliant garment, we have to follow all the rules and regulations while preparing employment condition in the factory. The employment conditions are clearly written at their service book.

Respondent Code: CM 5; Gender: M; Age: 45; Education: Post Graduation; Experience: 15 Years; Date and Time: 6 December 2022 & 10.30 AM

Meanwhile, some workers in the FGD informed,

We are now aware of our working condition in this factory. I can now negotiate with the administration department regarding my leave and pays and they cannot deny my rightful demands.

Respondent Code: WKR 7; Gender: M; Age: 36; Education: Under SSC; Experience: 10 Years; Date and Time: 6 December 2022 & 1.00 PM

Respondent Code: WKR 4; Gender: F; Age: 35; Education: HSC; Experience: 6 Years; Date and Time: 6 December 2022 & 1.00 PM

Respondent Code: WKR 1; Gender: F; Age: 30; Education: Under SSC; Experience: 4 Years; Date and Time: 6 December 2022 & 1.00 PM

Respondent Code: WKR 10; Gender: F; Age: 31; Education: Under SSC; Experience: 11 Years; Date and Time: 6 December 2022 & 1.00 PM

Respondent Code: WKR 11; Gender: M; Age: 35; Education: Under SSC; Experience: 1 Years; Date and Time: 6 December 2022 & 1.00 PM

Theme 3: Improvement of Occupational Health and Safety Brings Benefit to RMG Industries in Bangladesh

There are various difficulties based on the product and the production process in addition to the rights of the workers. There are several rules that must be followed in order to receive the appropriate goods at the right time, and these rules change based on the demands and requirements of the buyers. In essence, buyers are the ones who are concerned about technical compliance. Compliance considerations include a safe workplace, maintaining the factory's license and registration, and ensuring the welfare and health of the workers (Rahman et al., 2010). All factories must have alternative stairs, required fire apparatus, and other requirements set forth by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA). To ensure safe building construction, workers group insurance, hygienic sanitation, first aid equipment, and minimum standard salaries for the workers, factory layout should be certified by authorized organizations (Uddin, Moniruzzaman & Alam, 2022).

Every 150 employees must have access to a first aid kit, one-trained personnel per kit, and an equipped dispensary with a patient room, doctor, and nursing staff. Employers must take reasonable action to safeguard workers from harm and fire-related damage. Every place of business must be kept tidy. The workers' health should not be compromised by an overcrowded workspace. According to information, the majority of garment industries are located in buildings that were not built with such a specific purpose, are typically ill structured, and congested. Although occupational health and safety and the working environment are given special consideration in the Labor Law (78 of the law's 354 sections are devoted solely to these topics), the safety and security measures for RMG employees are insufficient (Afrin, 2014). However, we are steadily noticing improvements in the RMG sector's safety conditions. According to a 2016 ILO report, the Ministry of Labor and Employment quickly implemented a number of measures to increase the safety of clothing manufacturers in the wake of the Rana Plaza catastrophe. The biggest obstacle is raising factory owners' and employees' levels of awareness.

Occupational health and safety issues are very important for the RMG factories. No RMG factory can be a compliant factory without ensuring the occupational health and safety issues. Few buyers' representatives expressed,

Occupational health and safety issues are given the best priorities when it comes to social compliance for any RMG factory. We have taken this issue seriously because we cannot trade anything with cost of lives of the poor people working in the garments. However, Rana Plaza catastrophe was a big agony for us.

Respondent Code: BR 1; Gender: M; Age: 38; Education: Post Graduation; Experience: 15 Years; Date and Time: 7 December 2022 & 12.00 PM

Respondent Code: BR 2; Gender: M; Age: 41; Education: Post Graduation; Experience: 14 Years; Date and Time: 7 December 2022 & 2.00 PM

One worker on the other hand uttered,

The working environment is now very nice; the toilets are neat and clean. The stairs are wide and spacious; fire alarm is set in every main location. I think we are safe working in this factory.

Respondent Code: WKR3; Gender: M; Age: 21; Education: HSC; Experience: 3Years; Date and Time: 8 December 2022 & 1.00 PM

Regarding this issue, the government agents opined that,

Occupational health and safety issues ensure social compliances that ultimately help RMG retain goodwill among the stakeholders.

Respondent Code: GA 1; Gender: F; Age: 42; Education: Post Graduation; Experience: 18 Years; Date and Time: 4 December 2022 & 10.00 AM

Respondent Code: GA 2; Gender: M; Age: 33; Education: Post Graduation; Experience: 8 Years; Date and Time: 4 December 2022 & 12.30 PM

Theme 4: Establishment of Physical Facilities as Part of Social Compliance boost RMG Industries in Bangladesh

The RMG sector's physical welfare in Bangladesh consists of housing amenities, childcare facilities, transportation facilities, children's educational facilities, children's medical facilities, recreation facilities, hygienic urinal and toilet facilities, canteen facilities, etc. The establishments of these physical facilities are now a days essential for RMG industries to implement social compliances. These physical facilities are directly related to the workers' health and safety issues. The workers and employees of RMG become satisfied when they are provided the above-mentioned facilities. Moreover, these physical facilities also lie under the workers right in RMG industries.

The physical facilities are considered as a demand of the workers as it can be understood by the expression of some workers in the FGD of a factory.

The physical set up like medical center, childcare center, toilets at every floor, canteen or dining hall, prayer room etc. are now our basic needs. I am happy that my factory has all these facilities available.

Respondent Code: WKR5; Gender: F; Age: 25; Education: Under SSC; Experience: 6 Years; Date and Time: 9 December 2022 & 1.30 PM

Respondent Code: WKR6; Gender: F; Age: 23; Education: HSC; Experience: 4Years; Date and Time: 9 December 2022 & 1.30 PM

Respondent Code: WKR 11; Gender: M; Age: 35; Education: Under SSC; Experience: 1 Year; Date and Time: 9 December 2022 & 1.30 PM

However, some compliance managers told,

The owner has to spend a lot of money to manage these physical facilities. We were compelled to do so as we had external pressures to implement these.

Respondent Code: CM 2; Gender: M; Age: 37; Education: Graduation; Experience: 17 Years; Date and Time: 10 December 2022 & 10.30 AM

Respondent Code: CM 3; Gender: M; Age: 38; Education: Post Graduation; Experience: 8 Years; Date and Time: 10 December 2022 & 10.30 AM

Respondent Code: CM 4; Gender: F; Age: 33; Education: Graduation; Experience: 5 Years; Date and Time: 10 December 2022 & 10.30 AM

This study identified these above discussed themes from the interviews and focus group discussions of the respondents in the RMG factories. The compliance issues were widely neglected before the Tazrin and Rana Plaza catastrophe. The concern for the workers' rights and social compliance issues opened a new chapter in the RMG industries in Bangladesh. Garment factory owners were obligated to follow regulatory frameworks and social compliance measures to ensure sustainability and preserve foreign orders in Bangladesh. The adoption of social compliance in these factories was mainly motivated by stakeholder pressures, leading to improved reputation and global brand recognition.

5. Conclusion, Implication, Limitations and Future Research Agenda of the Study

Currently, there is a need to review the legislative provisions of the BLA, 2006, specifically regarding labor rights for workers in the RMG industries. Additionally, implementing compliance measures in the RMG sector is crucial. This study is significant because compliance in Bangladeshi RMG establishments also involves labor rights agreements through buyers' codes of conduct. Furthermore, this study will make a substantial contribution to current literature, as there has been limited academic exploration of the impact of social compliance on both industry and society from the industrial perspective in Bangladesh. The outcomes of this research are expected to have a significant influence on the RMG sector in Bangladesh, particularly concerning policy development. Given the

involvement of various stakeholders who influence industrial relations in the RMG sector, this study may help foster better connections among them by promoting a positive image.

The study's findings will encourage sector stakeholders to place greater trust in the industry. This research focused on RMG factories in Dhaka City and the surrounding areas of Gazipur, Ashulia, and Baipail, chosen for their accessibility. The study did not include RMG industries in other parts of the country, such as Chittagong and Narayanganj. Despite maintaining rigorous methodological standards, incorporating probability sampling and more survey data could yield more robust results. Future studies should consider larger sample sizes and random sampling techniques. The results of this study might not explain the same issues from different perspectives even within the same industry in another economy. Thus, future research should consider different industries and economies for a comprehensive view. Finally, future studies could conduct cross-cultural analyses of compliance issues.

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