

# Bangladesh: Empowering and protecting the rights of garment, leather and tannery workers

Final Project Report: 1<sup>st</sup> January 2016 – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2019



Women leaders take part in a mentoring session to continue strengthening their leadership skills  
PHOTO: ActionAid

Thanks to the generous support of CIPS Foundation and the European Commission, this project has supported 27,589 workers (91% women) to understand their rights and entitlements, through 25 Workers' Cafés. Through developing the skills of leaders in trade unions and other civil society organisations, we have been able to train over 1,500 leaders to continue supporting the workers that they represent, as well as supporting over 550 women leaders who will continue running and strengthening the abilities of the Workers' Cafés.

## Key Successes



workers  
benefitted from  
the project



of trade unions now  
have women in their  
executive committees



increase in public  
awareness of  
workers' rights



leaders have started  
taking collective  
bargaining actions

## Progress against objectives

Objective One<sup>1</sup>: Empower local organisations - representing over 10,000 workers - to effectively represent workers to uphold their rights

- 100 trade union leaders, from 28 organisations, took part in a three-day training on governance, accountability and how to lead democratic and inclusive organisations. The leaders were also equipped with the skills to pass on the training to 1,559 other trade union leaders, participation committees and women's leaders. To enable this a specially designed training pack was developed.
- 100 trade union leaders received training on financial management, HR management and fundraising, which was passed on to an additional 1,579 leaders.
- Across Dhaka and Chattogram, 20 Workers' Cafés were set up and equipped with white boards, flipcharts and training materials. The cafés offer a space for workers to learn about their rights and receive support to raise issues with their employers. They have been placed in strategic locations, close to the factories and homes of workers to make them accessible. Five existing Cafés were also upgraded into Master Cafés and are now providing legal, health and counselling services, as well as delivering trainings and support.
- 576 women trained to become peer leaders in each of the 25 Workers' Cafés. To support their ongoing learning, they were provided with a resource pack and mentors.
- 900 governance training sessions were delivered in the Workers' Cafés to 19,526 workers (88% women) including topics such as; participation in decision making, the role and function of workers' associations and the importance of women's participation. The sessions were largely delivered at the weekends, to help workers to attend alongside their work and home responsibilities.
- We supported members from 298 Participation Committees, made up of business management and workers in individual factories, to understand the benefits of well-functioning committees. Through these trainings, eight new Committees have been established and 242 have reestablished and are now running regular meetings.

Throughout this project, we worked to improve internal governance in trade unions and other local organisations, including improving the representation of women. In total, we worked with 140 trade unions, of these, 73% now have women representatives in their executive committees.



Workers' Café training session

PHOTO: ActionAid



Health services at one of the Master Cafés

<sup>1</sup> Please note Objectives One and Two have been switched in this report to add clarity to the project write up. The target number of trained leaders has also been altered throughout, this was a decision taken at country-level during the project, which has ultimately enabled us to reach more workers.

Objective Two<sup>2</sup>: Empower local Civil Society Organisations - representing 10,000 workers - with the knowledge and skills to monitor, advocate and hold the government and businesses to account

- 113 leaders were trained on; labour rights, entitlements and the legal framework and were supported to train 1,561 other leaders in trade unions and other civil society organisations.
- The 113 leaders were also trained on; how to become an effective negotiator, dispute resolution and the power of collective bargaining. They went on to deliver this training to 1,576 other leaders.
- To support the trainings, we produced training manuals on 'Labour Rights and Entitlements' and 'Negotiation, facilitation, dispute resolution, advocacy, collective bargaining and campaigning'
- Following on from the leaders' trainings, 933 meetings and training sessions were delivered on labour rights, entitlements and the legal framework to workers in the Workers' Cafés, reaching 20,242 people (80% women).

Of the 1,567 leaders trained on collective bargaining skills, 1,033 (66%) have already started taking action in their respective factories, including raising issues around workers' rights to receive timely wages, maternity benefits, and flexible working hours during Ramadan.

Objective Three: Foster a more worker-friendly environment where there will be greater public awareness of workers' rights

- We have worked with the Worker Safety Forum, a group of local organisations representing workers from different sectors, to support them in discussing and addressing workers' safety issues at a national level. Two workshops were delivered for the Forum, focusing on good governance, gender and advocacy skills. Since then the Forum are now working towards a new national level strategy to improve workers' rights.
- In collaboration with the Department of Labour, we produced learning and campaigns materials such as posters and leaflets to support national advocacy and campaigns, promoting messages on safe and gender friendly workplaces.
- Five mass campaigning events took place including rallies and a quiz on gender rights.
- A documentary on workers' rights was broadcast through two national TV channels, focusing on safe and gender friendly workplaces.
- 24 text and voice SMS messages were sent to 7,000 workers to reinforce key messages on labour rights and entitlements.
- Meetings with 60 business owners also took place to discuss labour laws and social compliance.

At the end of the project, it was found that of the general public surveyed in the target communities, there had been an increase of 31% in the understanding of labour rights compared to the start of the project. Community members were able to share knowledge of their entitlement to contracts, regular wages, holiday pay, safe working conditions and how to join social security schemes.

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<sup>2</sup> As above

Objective Four: Gather evidence across different industries to make recommendations on best practices and advocate for a better Labour Law and Policy

- An Advocacy Working Group was established to monitor workers' rights at national level and advocate for changes to labour policies. The 15 members were selected for their ability to provide strategic leadership at both local and national level and work together to monitor advocacy initiatives and track changes in the decisions taken by policy makers.
- 25 Young Leader Forums, consisting of 15 members (85% women), have also been established at each Workers' Café to support the Advocacy Working Group. Throughout the project they played a vital role in the campaign activities and will continue to lead key advocacy actions.



Young Leaders Forum training has been delivered to support leaders to take national level advocacy actions. PHOTO: ActionAid

### Success story

Natural Denim Ltd is a unionised factory in Ashulia, Dhaka, with 6,000 employees. Many of the employees benefited from awareness-raising sessions which took place in the factory and activities in the local Workers' Café. After taking part in sessions on workplace conditions and safety, some participants realised that their rights were not being adequately addressed, due to poor safety standards and a lack of access to breast-feeding areas, canteens and toilets. They decided to mobilise other workers and collectively raise the issues at the Participation Committee, who had also received training as part of the project. The issues were then raised at a Participation Committee meeting and escalated to the factory authorities. Shortly afterwards, the workers met with the factory's management and labour organisations to discuss the problems. After submitting a charter of requested improvements, the factory management agreed to improve safety measures and establish a workers' rewards scheme. The award scheme started in August, by awarding 15 workers for high performance. This has greatly improved the motivation of the workers, whose performance was not adequately rewarded prior to this.

### Key site visits and observations

The project has had a really wide reach, with over 27,589 workers directly accessing the project activities and many more indirectly benefitting from information about rights in the workplace. Our team have observed a noticeable difference between women who have attended the cafés and other workers, with café participants significantly more aware of their rights and confident in raising issues, sharing the difficulties they face with other women and helping each other to resolve them.

## Project Managers notes

Project manager, Nuzhat commented, “I am really proud that the Workers’ Café approach has proven to be an effective method of reaching female garment workers, and of the successes that they have been able to achieve for themselves, their colleagues and wider communities. By supporting women with the knowledge, confidence and networks to demand that factory management prioritise their rights and needs, we have ensured that they can continue to make the most of opportunities to get their voices heard for years to come. So far, at least four factories have made changes to facilities based on the requests of female workers, including establishing separate toilets for women and creating a canteen.

“The Young Leader Forums are another key success. The young people involved in this activity are very engaged and are working effectively together to claim their rights and entitlements. Ensuring that younger workers are involved in the project and aware of their rights improves long-term sustainability, as they will retain this knowledge and throughout their careers and share with others.”

## Unexpected successes and challenges

Overall, the project has met or exceeded our expectations, so we would not make any significant changes. However, if we were running a similar project in future, we would ensure greater alignment between the topics covered through our training and the campaigning activities. During this project we worked with all partner NGOs to organise a campaign on safe and gender friendly workplaces; a timely initiative which covered labour rights, workplace harassment and safety issues and raised awareness at the community level. If these topics had been factored into the trainings, the overall impact on the workers’ communities would have been greater.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Throughout this project, ActionAid took a collaborative approach to monitor and evaluate the project alongside the partners, local organisations and the workers. Regular reviews were carried out to collectively analyse progress and make any necessary changes. Through this approach, we worked with communities to identify areas of learning and improvement for this and future projects. The project accountability team, consisting of the Project Manager, Finance Officer, Director and Deputy Directors worked to review the project on a quarterly basis and an external consultant conducted an end line evaluation to analyse the impact of the project, capture learnings and develop future actions for consideration.

## Ways forward

Although this project is now completed, some additional activities have continued at the Workers’ Cafés, to help strengthen the long-term sustainability. Through developing a web-based platform, we will provide a ‘Virtual Café’ with key information such legal entitlements and advocacy materials. We will also connect workers to share learnings and facilitate advocacy discussions. To support the rollout of the Virtual Café, we will train 50 Master Trainers from the Workers’ Cafés who are well placed to deliver this training to other members of the cafés.

In addition, members of the Master Café Committees have been trained on fundraising, human resource management and financial management and are now considering options for raising adequate funds to keep the cafés running sustainability, including income generation activities. One committee has already created a small grocery shop for workers. The partner organisations involved in this project are also considering the possibility of incorporating the cafés into other existing projects, now that we have piloted this model and proved its effectiveness.

## Procurement and supply best practise

ActionAid follows a detailed procurement policy; including use of a Procurement Committee and collecting three quotes for any purchase over 20,000 BDT (approximately 200 GBP). For example, during the procurement of the resource packs and other learning materials, a Material Requisition Form had to be completed with details of the quantity, paper quality and colour. This form was then signed by the project team, budget holder and finance team, before a quote was secured from three vendors. A comparative statement was then made, based on the proposals received, before the procurement committee, admin staff and budget holder signed off the expense. Contracts are typically awarded to the lowest bidder but in case of exceptions, a note is kept for the record. By following a rigorous multi-step process, we are able to ensure that procurements are made in a transparent way that demonstrates value for money.

## Success Story

Ashim, Badhon, Shahriar, Sabbir, and Nafi are female garment workers at Super Knitting & Dyeing Mills. They began to visit their local Workers' Café frequently and received information and training on good governance, negotiation, facilitation, financial management and much more. This helped them to think collectively and gave them the confidence to be associated with the local Trade Union, so they could make their voices heard. The women made a checklist of rights-based issues, including the safety of their working environment and pay for overtime hours and met with the management of their factory to discuss them. As per their requests, they secured changes to their contracts, working environment and overtime rights, in line with labour laws. They also received an 8% pay increase, although the factory management had only intended to give them a 5% increase. This is an excellent example of the impact that the project has had at an individual and community level. All these improvements were made possible because of the workers' increased awareness of their rights, which came from the sessions they attended at the Café and their collective belief that they could achieve their goals by working together.

## Conclusion

Thanks to the support of the CIPS Foundation and the European Commission over 1,500 leaders from trade unions and other civil society organisations were able support over 27,589 workers to understand and claim their rights. As a result of the leadership training that has been delivered during the project, women will continue to play a more prominent role in trade unions, factories and their communities, which will not only support the sustainability of the project but also contribute to improvements in the way women are perceived, the roles they can have in their communities and gender equality.



## Budget<sup>3</sup>

Overall, the majority of activities were carried out as expected in the original budget. Cost savings were largely due to efficiencies and exchange rate gains. We also did not need to use the funds budgeted for contingency measures.

ACTIVITIES	Budget - EURO	Actual - EURO
<b>Baseline and inception activities</b>		
Baseline, studies and research	18,975	15,785
Inception workshops	3,514	14,323
<b>Total Inception costs</b>	<b>22,489</b>	<b>30,108</b>
<b>Project objectives</b>		
Objective 1: Empower local Civil Society Organisations - representing 10,000 workers - with the knowledge and skills to monitor, advocate and hold the government and businesses to account	178,016	145,906
Objective 2: Empower local organisations - representing over 10,000 workers - to effectively represent workers to uphold their rights	705,906	609,525
Objective 3: Foster a more worker-friendly environment where there will be greater public awareness of workers' rights	106,615	70,652
Objective 4: Gather evidence across different industries to make recommendations on best practices and advocate for a better Labour Law and Policy	109,174	74,745
<b>Total Project Activity costs</b>	<b>1,099,709</b>	<b>900,827</b>
<b>Salary costs</b>		
AA Bangladesh Salary costs (including NI and tax and any other applicable charges)	186,560	177,765
Partner staff costs (including NI and tax and any other applicable charges)	325,250	275,039
<b>Total salary cost</b>	<b>511,810</b>	<b>452,803</b>
<b>Project support costs</b>		
Vehicle and travel costs	26,516	6,624
Office rent, equipment and supplies	105,627	92,118
ActionAid Bangladesh support costs	126,675	109,992
<b>Total project support cost</b>	<b>258,818</b>	<b>208,734</b>
<b>Monitoring, evaluation, reporting and grant management costs</b>		
Monitoring and evaluation costs	77,180	71,092
Audit, final evaluation and endline survey	16,222	14,533
Visibility	5,000	3,215
<b>Total monitoring, evaluation, reporting and grant management costs</b>	<b>98,402</b>	<b>88,839</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1,991,229</b>	<b>1,681,313</b>

Thank you for supporting thousands of workers to claim their rights in Bangladesh.

<sup>3</sup> Please note that the budget is currently being audited and is subject to final amends.