



Research Report

General Assembly 3rd Committee: Social, Humanitarian and Cultural

AGENDA ITEM

Measurements to improve the working conditions in Bangladesh

Chairing Panel

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Table of Contents

Welcome..... - 1 -

Introduction - 2 -

Definition of key terms..... - 2 -

General Overview..... - 3 -

Major Parties involved..... - 5 -

Previous attempts to solve the issue - 5 -

Possible solutions - 5 -

Bibliography - 6 -

Appendix - 6 -



Welcome

Dear Delegates,

A warm welcome to all of you! I hope that all of you show honest interest in this topic, since it is an issue concerning us all. As you will be informed further in the guide, many people have been in the past, are right now and will in the future suffer due to how they must work. In Bangladesh, number one producer of clothes, people gain only a few euros per day while working eight whole hours. What does your country think about that? How does or does not it want to change that? What has it done in the past? Questions like this you should be able to answer, before going to the conference. You can write this in form of a political statement, which you are able to present in the beginning of the session.

I am proud of you that you are reading this study guide, additionally: I hope this guide will help you to write your political statements and that it will help you to improve your knowledge in this topic. Nevertheless, I want to stress that this is just to help you to study, so it should not be the only source you have to gain knowledge. You will find in the appendix more material and websites you can use to get a better understanding of both, the issue and your countries policy. The countries are purposely chosen to have a great variety of opinion and approaches to solve it!

I hope you will be engaged in a great debate and in finding a solution. If you have any questions concerning the committee, your research or formalities, you can always approach me.

*Luna Warzawa,
Chair*



Introduction

After Bangladesh became independent from India and Pakistan, the ready-made garment industry evolves into its largest manufacturing sector. This boom is caused by the so-called fast fashion which has every week or every two weeks a new trend. Since those clothes need to be sold with the lowest price as possible (caused by a high demand and a lot of competition in this market), the wage and the working conditions of the producer need to be lowered. 2013, the world was shocked: The Savar building in Dhaka collapsed. Every shop closed since cracks in the building were seen, garment workers were forced to work anyways. More than 700 garment workers died.

The management forced them to work due to the pressure to complete orders for buyers on time. Leather-goods manufacturing is another important part of Bangladesh's economy. Although it is so important, most tannery workers do not have a written contract. Human rights watch has never done a study whether the chemicals used cause cancer, a lot of workers complained to Human Rights watch about health problems they have since they work in that sector.

Definition of key terms

Working conditions:

Working conditions are at the core of paid work and employment relationships. Generally speaking, working conditions cover a broad range of topics and issues, from working time (hours of work, rest periods, and work schedules) to remuneration, as well as the physical conditions and mental demands that exist in the workplace.

Minimum wage:

The minimum amount of remuneration that an employer is required to pay wage earners for the work performed during a given period, which cannot be reduced by collective agreement or an individual contract.

RMG:

RMG stands for ready-made garment which is mass-produced finished textile products of the clothing industry. They are not custom tailored according to measurements, but rather generalized according to anthropometric studies.

Pesticides:

Pesticides are substances that are meant to control pests (including weeds).



Leather manufacturing process:

Leather manufacturing process is divided into three stages: preparation stage, tanning and crusting. The preparation stage prepares the leather for the tanning through removing bigger particles by chemicals. Tanning is the process that converts the protein of the raw hide or skin into a stable material which will not putrefy and is suitable for a wide variety of end applications. Afterwards, the skin is thinned, retained and lubricated. Those for those steps the industry uses a lot of chemicals like chromium.

Fast Fashion:

Fast fashion is a contemporary term used by fashion retailers to express that designs move from catwalk quickly to capture current fashion trends. Fast fashion clothing collections are based on the most recent fashion trends presented at Fashion Weeks in both the spring and the autumn of every year.

General Overview

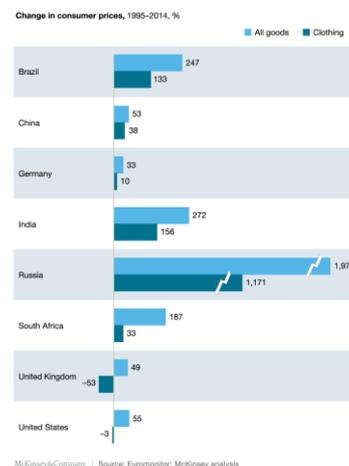
What is the issue?

In Bangladesh, most people living in cities work in the garment industry which is hired by independent companies from more developed countries such as the US or Great Britain. Those companies demand a certain amount of clothes by day, which has, due to Fast Fashion strongly increased over the last years. This trend demands the companies to sell their products in a low price, but a good quality. All in all, it would not be a problem, if there

AVERAGE MONTHLY MINIMUM WAGE	
Country	Minimum Wage
Ethiopia	\$23
Kenya	\$133
Tanzania	\$44
Uganda	\$2
Bangladesh	\$38
Sri Lanka	\$60
Indonesia	\$80-\$213
Myanmar	\$32
Cambodia	\$80
Laos	\$79
Philippines	\$118-\$262
Vietnam	\$67-\$95
Dominican Republic	\$162
Mexico	\$130
Nicaragua	\$135
Peru	\$294
China	\$162-\$260

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The slow rise in clothing prices, compared with other consumer goods, has made clothing more affordable.

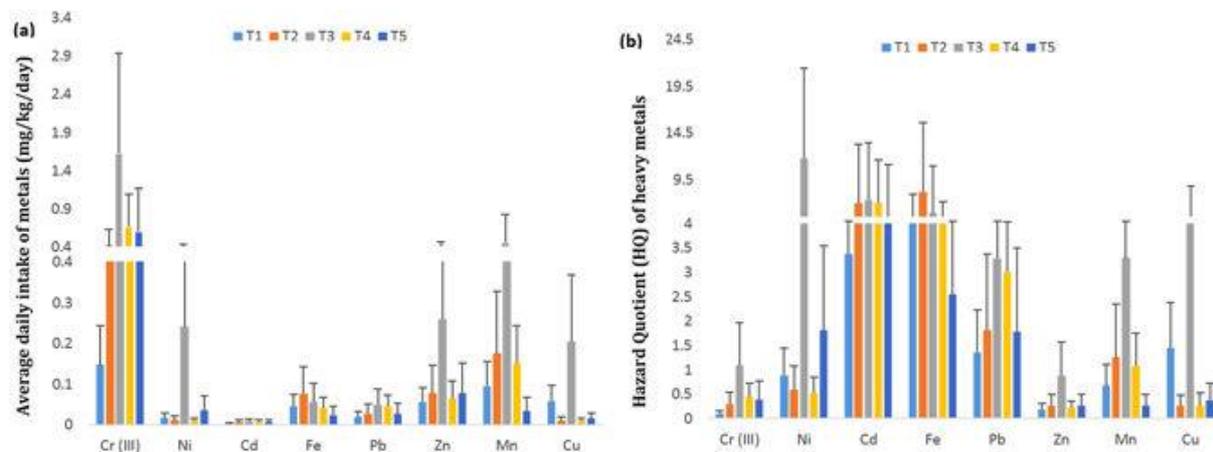


McKinsey & Company | Source: Euromonitor; McKinsey analysis

weren't certain safety regulations which cost a high amount of money, increasing over the years, furthermore, through a strong economic growth in Bangladesh the cost of living has increased too. According to that, the wage should have increased over the years, thus the price for clothes should increase strongly too. Nevertheless, we can see the opposite in some countries. This causes poverty within the garment workers and the local garment industry not being able to meet the safety standards in their factories. If we have a look into other sectors such as the leather industry



we can find various reports of skin diseases, cancer, especially diseases connected to respiratory passages. This is caused by chemicals used in the tanning and crusting process.



All this kind of problems result into a violation of their health, thus a violation of the human rights.

Origin of the issue

After the independence of Bangladesh from Pakistan, Bangladesh was not strong economically and was then like now one of the poorest nations in the world. Thus, the average wage of workers in Bangladesh was lower than in other, more developed nations. In the same time, fast fashion (fast fashion is strongly connected to ready-made garment which is 80% of the country's export) and other trends have started to develop together with stronger advertisement and globalization in the western world. Western companies have seen cheap labor in Asian states like China and Bangladesh, so they started to build their fabrics there. Since then Bangladesh has little to no laws concerning working conditions, but the demand for those goods have eventually strongly increased. Thus, companies from other nations than Bangladesh pushing Bangladeshi workers into a position in which they either work under bad conditions or do not work at all.

How is the current situation?

Since the Savar building has collapsed the situation has not gotten better significantly. In 2013 alone was one of the biggest strikes about working conditions in Dhaka: 50000 garment workers run onto the street and demonstrated for their rights. It lasted for 4 hours. Documentaries like the True Cost which further explores working conditions, wage and the cotton industry has shocked many nations. Since then the issue slowly has progressed and starts to better. Together with the International Labor Organization ILO, the government wants to start a plan to better the working conditions in the ready-made garment sector.



Major Parties involved

Bangladesh: A small country south of India and west of Myanmar/Burma, which used to be part of the British Empire in the 20th century, after the independence it was a part of Pakistan called East Pakistan till its independence.

ILO: International Labor Organization, the only tripartite U.N. agency, since 1919 the ILO wants to bring together governments, employers and workers of more than 187 member states, to set labor standards, develop policies and devise programs promoting decent work for all women and men.

Fast Fashion Companies: "Fast fashion" is a term used by fashion retailers to describe inexpensive designs that move quickly from the catwalk to stores to meet new trends. As a result of this trend, the tradition of introducing new fashion lines on a seasonal basis is being challenged. Today, it is not uncommon for fast-fashion retailers to introduce new products multiple times in a single week to stay on-trend. Thus, companies like H&M, Zara, Mango or Gucci are fast fashion companies.

Previous attempts to solve the issue

Little has been done from the international community, since firstly through outsourcing the companies and having this cheap price in the end the economy is growing and profits and secondly since the Savar building collapse in 2013 there was no big public awareness of the issue. The ILO responded quickly to the Rana Plaza tragedy with a high-level mission to Dhaka at the start of May 2013, which agreed immediate and medium-term actions with the Government of Bangladesh and employers' and workers' organizations. These were integrated into the National Tripartite Plan of Action on fire safety and structural integrity (NTPA), which was developed following the Tazreen factory fire in November 2012. The ILO since launched a US\$31.4 million, three-and-a-half-year program funded by Canada, the Netherlands and UK to support implementation of the NTPA and improve working conditions in the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. Key elements are already being implemented, including building and fire safety assessments; labor inspection reforms; occupational safety and health; rehabilitation and skills training as well as the launch of Better Work Bangladesh

Possible solutions

Further solutions are often connected to encourage companies through new trends (buying fair trade clothes, vegan leather), public awareness and demonstrations to themselves better the situations in the companies they buy from.



Other solutions like putting Bangladesh into pressure to enforce laws concerning the working conditions from an environmental point of view (which causes harm to humans such as e.g. chemicals used for the tanning process harm the environment too). This is again hard for the Bangladeshi government concerning the financially situation the country is in.

Bibliography

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/08/toxic-tanneries/health-repercussions-bangladeshs-hazaribagh-leather>

<http://www.ilo.org>

<http://www.hrw.org>

Appendix

Good source to find more about your country, ILO and HRW are good sources to read more about the topic. Furthermore, there are a lot of newspapers like the NYT writing articles concerning the topic.

- <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook>
- http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/country_profiles/default.stm
- <http://www.worldbank.org/countries>
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