

Organizing RMG Workers in Bangladesh

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Mapping Study Report

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This mapping study report on organizing RMG project is the result of a co-operative and mutually supportive working relationship among the study team, IBC affiliates and key policy level persons of IndustriAll and FNV. The commitment of federations in organizing workers is exemplary and the credit goes to IBC for creating such an enabling environment. Such a commitment from the Trade Union leaders was very much needed towards realizing the rights of workers in the RMG sector.

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Finally, while acknowledging the valuable inputs of all the above, the CBSG stands by the conclusions reached during the mapping exercise and believes these to be a sound response to the information and evidences available. However, the consultants of CBSG also recognize that the findings and recommendations, including any errors and omissions contained in the report, are its own.

- **Joyanta Roy**
Study Team Leader

List of Abbreviation and Acronyms

BAWF	Bangladesh Apparels Workers Federation
BFWS	Bangladesh Federation of Workers Solidarity
BGIWF	Bangladesh Garments and Industrial Workers Federation
BGMEA	Bangladesh Garment Manufactures & Exporters Association
BGTLWF	Bangladesh Garments Textile & Leather Workers Federation
BIGUF	Bangladesh Independent Garment Workers Union Federation
BSKP	Bangladesh Jatiyo Sramik Karmachari Parishad
BKMEA	Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association
BRGWF	Bangladesh Revolutionary Garments Workers Federation
BTGWL	Bangladesh Textile & Garments Workers League
CBSG	Capacity Building Service Group
DoL	Department of Labour
EC	Executive Committee
FGW	Federation of Garment Workers
FNV	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GTWL	Garments Tailors Workers League
GUF	Global Union of Federations
IBC	Industrial Bangladesh Council
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation
JDL	Joint Directorate of Labor
KII	Key Informant Interview
NGWF	National Garments Sramik Federation
RMG	Ready Made Garment
SBGSKF	Shadhin Bangla Garments Sramik Karmachari Federation
SGSF	Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation
SKOP	Sramik Kormochari Okya Parishad
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
UFGW	United Federation of Garment Workers

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Executive Summary

This mapping exercise was undertaken in four 'garment zones' within the greater Dhaka to assess the current bench mark situation of unionization in the RMG sector. This exercise covered RMG factories extending from Savar to Ashulia, Gazipur to Tongi, Mirpur to Rampura and Fatullah to Narayangonj. The methodology included collection of primary and secondary information through key informant's interviews and discussions with a variety of stakeholders, questionnaire based survey with workers, review of reports, journals, and literature from secondary sources, and observations both at factory and unions levels.

The mapping exercise have estimated a total 3,102 garment factories exist in the study areas with highest concentration (1608-52%) in Gazipur-Tongi area, followed by 710 (23%) in Fatullah-Narayangonj, 405 (13%) in Mirpur-Rampura and 379 (12%) in Savar-Ashulia. The total number of garment workers in these 3,102 factories is estimated at 2.46million, on an average 800 workers per factory. The ratio of female workers is estimated at 69: 31. The number of 'large' factories with 1000-plus workers in Gazipur-Tongi is 321(20%). This figure is 128 (18%) in Fatullah-Narayangonj, 102 (27%) in Savar-Ashulia and only 40 (10%) in Mirpur-Rampura.

The situation of trade union in the RMG sector is not very commendable in Bangladesh. Few years back, trade-union activities were almost non-existent in the RMG factories. Until 2009, there were few factories where workers have trade union in their factories. However, the situation is gradually changing with amendment of Labor Laws in July 2013. There have been very many factories where unionization was being allowed. The mapping could identify a total of 181 registered unions exist in the study area, of which 139 are federated with IBC affiliates. This indicates a strong presence of IBC affiliates (77% of union) in the study area. Interestingly, 45% of the total unions have been registered in 2014 alone. This means Government is looking the unionization more positively in these days.

The IBC affiliates have been a major factor in organizing the garment workers into unions and have a plan to extend their coverage of unions in coming days. The affiliates' plan includes further coverage through organizing another 386 unions in 2014, provided supports from the government and the factory owners are forthcoming. On an average, each of the 14 affiliates has a plan of organizing 27 unions, while most of the affiliates plan for less than 20 in remaining period of 2014. The future union coverage would target large factories, especially in the areas of Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur and Tongi.

Out of registered 139 unions, 90 (65%) are organized in the factories of Mirpur and Rampura area. This part is located within the metropolitan Dhaka city and has smaller number of garment workers per factory. On the contrary, only 2% factories of Savar- Ashulia area, concentration of large factories, have unions. Therefore, unionization is seemingly found easier in the smaller factories.

Again, the highest proportion of these affiliated unions (65%) is in Mirpur-Rampura area, where presence of IBC affiliates is the highest (11). The number of unionized female garment workers is 98,871 which represent 6% of the total female workers and 4% of the total RMG workforce. On the contrary, the number of unionized male workers is estimated at 90,011 -12% of the total male workers.

Although there are more female workers than the male in the RMG sector, however, involvement of female workers in the unionization process has not been found noteworthy. Only about 6% of the female workers have so far been covered by the unions compared to 12% of male. Their representation in the Executive Committees of the affiliates is only 39% and the proportions of female workers as fulltime and part-time organizers are 43% and 47% respectively. Similarly, the female representation in the union Executive Committees is only 42%, although the proportion of the female workers paying regular union subscription is 52%.

Many of the unions have not been active in respect to holding of regular meetings, interactions with the workers, negotiation with factory management for realizing workers' rights and regular payment of union fees. The study team also has similar opinion in respect to functioning of the unions. In fact, reflected against such criteria, only 27% of the unions could be termed as 'active'. There are of course reasons behind such inactiveness. The workers not so literate and aware as they are, they lack the capacity to realize the importance of responsible unionism. But the main factor which discourages the workers away from the union activities is their feeling of job insecurity in face of stiff resistance, and even threats, from the owners and their management. Even the government, BGMEA/BKMEA, buying houses, civil society and other 'power blocks', in spite of their rhetorical pretensions, appear to be not sincere and purposeful in ensuring the rightful rights of the teeming millions of poor garment workers.

Growth of trade unionism in the RMG sector requires a change of heart and approach from the owners as well as the workers, with the government and other stakeholders playing a pro-active facilitating role. The garment workers, particularly the female workers, need to be trained and made aware of the benefits of responsible trade unionism. And herein, the in-country NGO community as well as the international labor rights related organizations can play a useful role.

Existence strong effective trade unions aimed at protecting the rights and privileges of the garment workers is a pre-requisite for healthy growth of the RMG sector and all the stakeholders have a role to play in achieving this. Success of the RMG sector – the backbone of Bangladesh economy as the major foreign exchange earner – is dependent on creating an enabling environment where realization of the rightful interests of the enterprising owners on the one hand, and the toiling workers on the other, coexist and thrive ahead.

CHAPTER-1: BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the Mapping Study

IndustriALL with its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland is a global union representing 50 million workers in 140 countries in the mining, energy and manufacturing sectors and has been a force in global solidarity taking up the fight for better working conditions and trade union rights around the world. The organization has its presence in Bangladesh with 22 affiliates in the Ready Made Garment, Textile, Chemical and Metal sectors. Of them, 14 affiliates are working in the RMG Sector. With a view to organizing the RMG workers, the IndustriALL through its affiliates intends to and is in the process of undertaking a pilot project in Bangladesh aiming at organizing more unions, and developing negotiation and bargaining capacities of unions and federations. The pilot phase spanning over a year is expected to lay the foundation for strengthening organizing initiatives and developing relevant strategies towards organizing the RMG workers.

The mapping exercise in selected ‘garment zones’ within Dhaka is seen as a stepping stone to the proposed pilot project. The outcome of the mapping study will be used for field based planning of the project as well as developing the organizing strategy.

1.2 Importance of RMG Sector in Bangladesh Economy

The RMG sector occupies a pivotal position in the emerging economy of Bangladesh. It is the biggest formal sector employer in the country and is considered the backbone of the economy. Within a span of 25 years, the sector experienced a phenomenal growth (from initial 180 factories in 1978 to more than 4,500 in 2014) and has attained a high profile in terms of foreign exchange earnings, exports, industrialization and contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP). As of now, this garment sector has assumed the position of largest foreign exchange earner, accounting for about 80% of the country’s total exports with a total outlay of about US \$ 21,769 million during FY 2012-13 (Source: EPB Export Data). As far as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is concerned, the share of the sector was 10% in the 2012-2013 fiscal year, and if contributions of the supplementary industries are added, this percentage goes up to about 15%. At the same time, this RMG sector has created employment opportunities for about two-third of the country’s labor force – approximately 4 million—directly and another twelve million inhabitants are indirectly associated with the industry. The vast majority of the garment laborers are women (about 85%). The gainful engagement of such a large number of otherwise illiterate and semi-skilled female laborers with rural origin has a very positive socio-economic implication, leading to their economic emancipation and empowerment.

1.3 Keys Issues of RMG sector

Notwithstanding the potential and de-facto success of the RMG sector in transforming the country’s economy, such a success does not reflect the overall scenario prevailing in the sector. Numerous financial and policy incentives from the government have failed to ensure the rights and safety of the workers, who are in fact the driving force of this sector. Unsafe and unhealthy working conditions and social compliance gaps have been hindering the progress of the Sector. The abuse of political and economic power in the expansion and operation of business and interplay of government and private sector irregularities and corruption have created a

tendency to make excessive profit and barriers to ensuring workers' rights. Above all, this has been working as a catalyst to create a long-term trap for creating conditions recurring fatal accidents killing workers en masse. Unrest in this sector should not be treated as accident rather it is the outcome of irregularities and corruption of relevant institutions and stakeholders, their lack of transparency, accountability and responsiveness. Overall it is the outcome of governance failure of this sector.

During the recent years, and particularly following the Rana Plaza and Tazreen garment tragedies, anxious attention has been focused on the state of condition of Bangladesh garment sector both from home and abroad. There have been a number of studies and investigations into a variety of issues such as factory workers' rights and privileges, unionization process, stakeholders' involvement and other associated problems. The most notable among the studies has been a comprehensive investigation by Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) in October 2013. The study, entitled "The Readymade Garment Sector: Governance Problems and Way Forward" extensively dealt with a host of critical issues as related to the overall governance, and particularly to the stakeholders' role, of the Garment sector. The relevant findings are presented below:

1. Buyers are mostly interested to procure garments at lower price, compromising workers' rights and working environment. For this reason, factory owners are forced to get export orders by showing that their factory is compliant;
2. To meet urgency of production, factory owners often produce garments at non-compliant factories, in those cases buyers do not raise any question or evade this malpractice;
3. By a collusion of buyer representative, compliance auditor and factory owner, sometimes real scenario of factories are concealed to satisfy the conditions of importing countries;
4. Sometime artificial compliant conditions are created with the consent of buyer representative to satisfy compliance auditor;
5. Instead of giving orders to factory buyer agreed at a specified price, sometimes orders are given to non-compliant factory through commission or illegal transaction of money;
6. Different buyers apply different code of conducts to a same factory that creates a sort of compliance indiscipline;
7. In certain cases, during giving order some buyers or their representative illegally fix additional price with the real price and exert that additional amount in cash from factory owners. Moreover, during production resorting to threat of canceling the order some buyer representatives extract money from factory owners; and
8. Sometimes, some buyers resort to dilly-dally in making payment through some pretext or do not make payment properly.

In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza tragedy back in 2013, the RMG sector also drew international attention in respect to establishing workers' rights and entitlements. Researchers opined that the best way to avoid future Rana Plaza-type disasters is to encourage the establishment of independent trade unions to monitor and protect workers' rights. The government has belatedly begun to register unions, which is an important first step, but it now needs to ensure that factory owners stop persecuting their leaders and actually allow them to function.

1.4 Workers' Rights and Working Conditions

Little or semi-educated, ignorant and not fully conscious about their rights and entitlements, the garment workers in Bangladesh have historically been on the receiving end of the bargain counter when the question of payment of their due benefits and emoluments arises. During the early stage of expansion of RMG industries, the garment workers – the vast majority of whom are women of rural origin – used to be employed in an informal manner with no appointment letters with set rules and regulations. So being the case, the workers' wage rates were set unilaterally by the factory owners and the rates were essentially low and so were the attendant benefits. The workers remained vulnerable to losing their jobs at any time. They were to work for long hours or consecutive double shifts, personally unsafe work environment and poor working condition. Compulsory overtime has been a common problem and workers could be fired for refusing overtime. The comparatively low level of wages has also been the most significant source of dissatisfaction.

Over the years, such practices continued in case of vast majority of the factories, although in recent years, the amounts of financial compensations for the workers have been increased. In face of continued workers' demand and pressure from US, European countries as well as international organizations such as Human Rights Watch, the Bangladesh Government in 2013 declared a Wage Rate for the garment workers of minimum Tk. 3,000/-. However, the labor unrest has continued with clamor for still higher wages as well as better and safer working conditions. For the vast majority of the garment manufacturing units, with exception of an increasing number of well-known and reputed concerns, the working conditions in the factories are still poor and substandard, appropriately termed as the 'Sweatshops' conditions.

1.4.1 Relevance of Unionization in the RMG Sector

The RMG sector as the biggest foreign exchange earner for the country does require an enabling environment where all the stakeholders, particularly the owners and the factory workers, can work shoulder to shoulder and contribute positively towards its fruitful development. However the current situation points out to a dismal scenario characterized by mutual distrust and antagonism between the enterprising owners and the factory workers. While the owners' interest and their quest for maximizing profits are protected by their platforms, namely BGMEA and BKMEA, there has not been any such united platform to protect and enhance the rights and interests of the working class.

There are of course reasons behind absence of any united and strong forum for the workers. First of all, the overwhelming majority of workers are ignorant of their own rights and entitlements. Being not so literate, they can hardly be motivated to realize the relevance and importance of having a united voice to seek justice and fair play from their employers. They are often afraid of losing their jobs arbitrarily by the factory management on little or no pretext in case they raise their voice.

In spite of the prevailing negative attitude of the factory owners on the one side and a feeling of job insecurity by the workers on the other, the urgent need for uniting the garment workers has been increasingly recognized by all, including the importing foreign governments, NGOs and the country's own civil society. Such a sense of urgency has been rejuvenated in the aftermath of the Rana Plaza tragedy when more than 1000 garment workers were perished and thousands more maimed. There was in fact an international outcry to protect the life and

livelihoods of the garment workers. A united but restrained voice of the workers vis-à-vis an understanding approach from the owners is the need of the hour in the greater interest of the garment sector itself which has by now become the backbone of the economy. The workers' rights have to be established within the broad framework of smooth industrial relations where the trade union is supposed to play the role of a positive catalyst. It must be based on professionalism, not primarily thriving on linkages to political party. Nobody should be allowed to use the workers as pawns in the trade union game that serves neither the industries, nor the workers themselves.

CHAPTER-2: PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Mapping objective

IndustriAll has been active and operating in Bangladesh since 2011. It has already formed its Bangladesh Council (IBC) with 22 affiliates representing RMG, Textile, Chemical and Metal sectors. Of the 22 affiliates, 14 are associated with the RMG sector. IndustriAll envisages piloting of a project aiming at organizing workers as a result of improved strategy for organizing and union building (structures & unity) through their affiliates. In this backdrop, the objective of the mapping is to provide insight into current status of RMG workers and their unionization in Bangladesh in general, but in particular, to assess:

- concentration of RMG factories within greater Dhaka;
- workforce in the RMG factories and their sex ratio;
- extent of unionization in the study area;
- benchmark status of IBC affiliates in terms of their union coverage and organizing capacity
- characteristics of RMG workers; and
- situation of workers: both union and non-union members;

2.2 Methodology

The mapping study adopted a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data and information as well as in analyzing the problems and issues as related to the garment sector. The methodology and key variables were developed through a series of discussions between IndustriALL, FNV and the study team. It approached multiple tools and techniques to gather mapping data. These included:

- Desk review of secondary information and reports: It included collection of secondary information, review of study /reports documents, particularly generated by different civil society and research institutions;
- Structured and semi-structured interview with all IBC affiliates and their union on sample basis;
- Profiling of IBC federations and sample unions at factory level;
- Key Informants Interview with RMG stakeholders and civil society members;
- Rapid survey of both unionized and non-unionized workers; and
- Case studies

2.3 Mapping and coverage and extent

Determination of overall sample size was based on statistical techniques and purposive to the Study objectives. The mapping exercise geographically covers four broad clusters/areas within greater Dhaka, namely

- a. Savar to Ashulia,
- b. Gazipur to Tongi
- c. Mirpur – Mohakhali- Rampura (city area)
- d. Fatullah to Narayangonj

The extent mapping exercise included:

- All 14 IBC affiliates;
- Randomly selected 42 unions (34 registered and 7 under registration process) with special attention to cover factories making supply to brands and cross-section of foreign buyers, unions of all IBC affiliated federations and all geographical clusters of the mapping area;
- Key Informants Interview with 69 RMG stakeholders; in particular the IBC affiliated federation and union leaders, and other trade union leaders, civil society members, buyer association leaders, RGM owners and management staff, apex body (BGMEA/BKMEA) representatives, and officials of Labor Directorate;
- Rapid survey of 242 workers (62% unionized and 65% female); and
- In-depth case study of one union.

Data Triangulation: The mapping exercise adopted several yet interrelated methods to derive information and data required to create a benchmark situation that prevails in organizing RMG workers and their unionization. The study team had the opportunity to triangulate data gathered from different sources and assess their convergence. The consultant team assembled results of key informant interviews, mapping of federations and unions, workers survey and made comparative analysis and triangulated among the data sources to draw synergy.

Field Operation and Quality Control: The field data collection began in early May and continued till 25th of May 2014. During this period, training for the research team at real life field situation, field operation planning, mapping of federations and unions, key informants interviews, workers survey and case studies were conducted. A total of 22 field research investigators, divided into four groups, collected the mapping data.

The data collection team was aided with internet technology (Google map) to map and physically count the RMG factories in four clusters and a number of sub-clusters. Each data collection team (5-6 members' team) consisted of one quality controller, who was responsible for allocating responsibility and specifying sub-clusters for each of investigators. As part of quality control activity, the quality controller on sample basis recounted the factories of sub-clusters and re-interviewed the workers besides guiding the research investigators at the factory level. It is to be mentioned that the senior consultants of the study team visited a number of federation offices and unions at factory level. They also conducted a number of interviews with key informants. The mapping data was electronically processed using MS Access and SPSS.

2.4 Limitation of the Study

- Mapping data collection had to be hurried up to comply with the project management's need of the sponsors. Given the vast area of RMG concentrations, time constraint has been a challenge for the study team. CBSG had to increase number field investigators to meet the deadline.
- Access to RMG workers and union leaders at the factory level has always been a challenge in Bangladesh context. The study team, however, with support of

federations and union leaders and after repeated attempts, has been able get permission from the factory management to discuss with union leaders and workers.

- Last but not the least, the mapping gathered a huge quantity of secondary information; however, the study team found it difficult to verify the information collected and as such, took precaution in using these.

2.5 Organization of the Report

The report starts with an executive summary and is followed by four Chapters which are:

Chapter-1 includes context of the mapping exercise, importance of the RMG sectors and key issues, worker's rights and relevance of unionization.

Chapter-2 describes the objective and methodology of the mapping study, limitation and challenges encountered by the study team.

Chapter-3 presents the detail findings and analyses

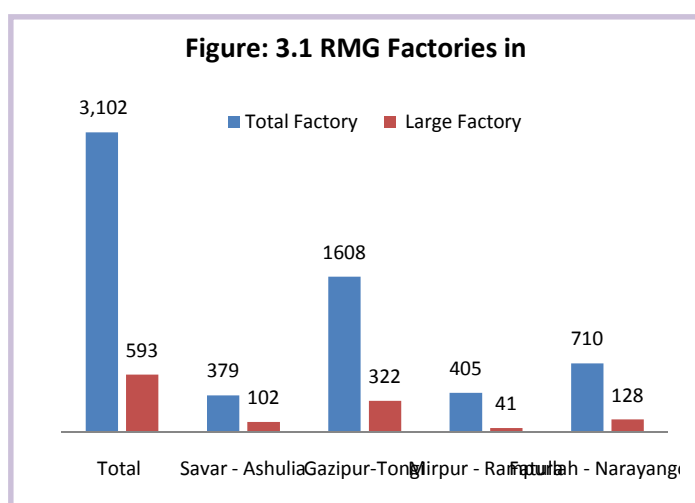
Chapter-4 depicts the summary findings, conclusions and recommendations

In addition to the above, there are a number of annexes (ToR, mapping tools, and list of unions by IBC affiliates, federation and union mapping tables, workers survey tables).

CHAPTER-3: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Concentration of RMG factories

The mapping exercise was concentrated on the four ‘garment zones’ within greater Dhaka, namely Savar-Ashulia, Gazipur-Tongi, Mirpur-Rampura and Fatullah-Narayangonj. In order to estimate the number of garments factories in the study area the study team took a dual approach. One was the analysis of existing database of BGMEA and BKMEA, and the other one was physical enumeration by the mapping team. The analysis of BGMEA-BKMEA databases showed a total of 3528¹enlisted ready made garment factories in and around Dhaka Metropolitan City while the Mapping Study estimated a total of 3,102 garment factories exist in the study areas. Zone wise, Gazipur and Tongi has the highest concentration garments factories. More than half (52%: 1,608)of total factories are in this area while Savar-Ashulia has the lowest number of factories (12%: 379). Of the total number of factories,19% are considered as large² factories. Area wise distribution of factories is presented in the diagram.The mapping revealed thatmost of the large factories exist in Savar-Ashuliacluster, while in Mirpur and Rampura area have the least number (10%) of large factories.



The RMG is the largest formal employment sector in Bangladesh. There are about 4 million work forces which is about 50% of total manufacturing field. They are directly or indirectly contributing to the livelihood close to 15 million people. The mapping study estimated total number of workers in the 3,102 factories is 2.46 million. The concentration of workers is most in Gazipur-Tongi with 1.41 million workers in 1,608 factories. This is followed by Fatullah-Narayangonj with

.46 million workers in 710 factories, Savar-Ashulia with .35 million in 379 factories and Mirpur-Rampura with .24 million in 405 factories. The overall male female workers ratio is calculated at 31:69. The number of female workers is found highest (.97 million) in Gazipur-Tongi area while lowest (.16 million) is found in Mirpur-Rampura area.

As far as the size of the factory is concerned, Savar – Ashulia has the

Table: 3.1 Area-wise factory and workers

Area	Total Factory	Workers			Average Per Factory
		Total	Female	Male	
Savar - Ashulia	379	349,997	241,894	108,103	923
Gazipur-Tongi	1608	1,415,040	976,378	438,662	880
Mirpur - Rampura	405	234,900	162,081	72,819	580
Fatullah - Narayangonj	710	468,606	323,334	145,272	660
Total	3,102	2,468,543	1,703,687	764,856	796

¹BGMEA/BKMEA statistics 2012, the total number of garment factories in all the four zones is 3,528, details is presented in the annex.

²Factory with more than 1000 workers is considered as large factory.

highest number of workers per factory followed by Gazipur-Tongi, Fatullah-Narayangonj and Mirpur-Rampura. In other words, relatively smaller factories are situated in Mirpur-Rampura, area within Dhaka Metropolitan city, where 90% factories have less than 1000 workers.

3.2 Unionization in factories

Working conditions and workers’ rights issues are receiving high priority in the recent days in Bangladesh. The responses by the Government, the RMG industry, and workers’ organizations to recent tragedies in Bangladesh RMG sector are causes for measured optimism. A significant progress is being made to improve workplace conditions and strengthen workers’ rights as a result of changes made to labor laws in Bangladesh bolstered by a sharp rise in the number of unions registering in 2013 within the ready-made garment (RMG) sector.

Since amendments to the Bangladesh Labour Act were made in July 2013, there has been a

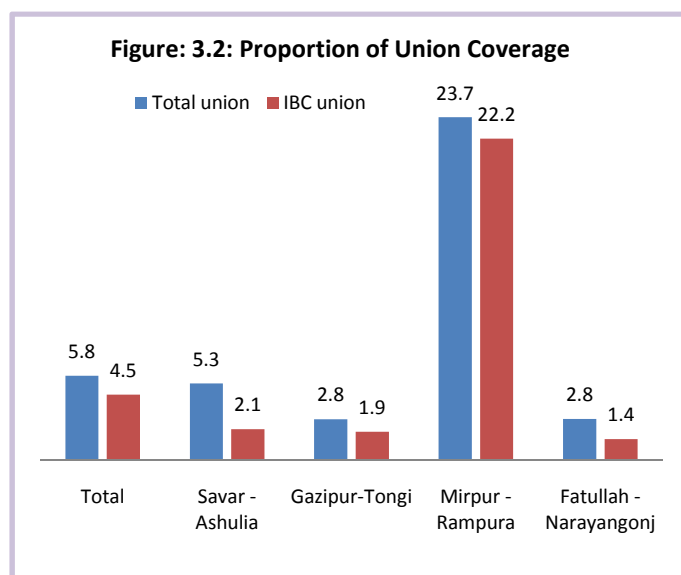
Table 3.2: Factory and Union

SL.	Area	Total Factory	Total Union	IBC Affiliates Union
1	Savar - Ashulia	379	20	8
2	Gazipur-Tongi	1608	45	31
3	Mirpur - Rampura	405	96	90
4	Fatullah-Narayangonj	710	20	10
Total		3,102	181	139

dramatic increase in new unions registering within the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. In 2013, as many as 96 new trade unions in the RMG sector were registered with the Bangladesh Department of Labour (DoL). Interestingly, the mapping exercise also recorded that 72 new trade unions have been registered as of 30 May in 2014. Presently, 222³ unions in the RMG sector are registered with

DoL in Bangladesh. The mappings found a total of 181 unions have so far been organized in the four areas. Out of these 181 unions, 53% (96) have been organized in Mirpur – Rampura area, followed by Gazipur-Tongi 25% (45), and 20 (11%) each in Savar- Ashulia and Fatullah-Narayangonj.

An analysis of (Figure -3.2)of unionization coverage in the factory revealed that about 24% of the factories (96) have organized unions in Mirpur-Rampura Area. Of them, 94% (90) were organized by the IBC affiliates. This part is located within the metropolitan Dhaka city and has smaller number of garment workers per factory. Therefore, organizing unions seem relatively easy in the factories having smaller number of workers. The factory level unionization is very poor in others areas. The poorest unionization rate is observed in Fatullah– Narayangonj and Gazipur-Tongi areas.

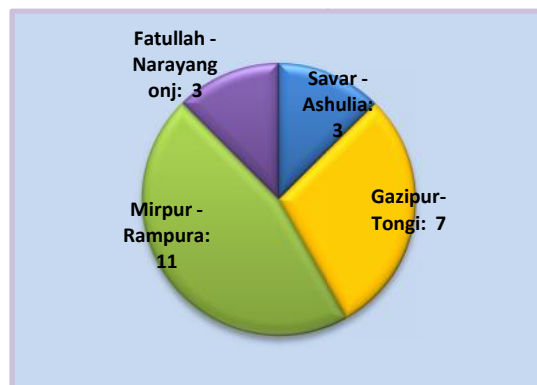


³ILO Dhaka (web-site)

The mapping also gathered information about the proportion of workers brought into the unionization process. Overall 8% workers have been organized in unions while this rate of 6% for female workers. The following section analyzed the unionization in the study area in details.

3.3 IBC affiliates and unionization

In context of overall unionization in the study area, the situation of IBC affiliates is very prominent. Out of 181 registered unions, IBC affiliates have organized 77% (139) of them. Furthermore they together have organized 42 more unions, which were submitted to DoL for registration. All 14 IBC affiliates have presence in organizing RMG workers in the study area varying in degrees. Interestingly 11 of IBC affiliates have union in Mirpur-Rampura area. It is thus obvious that a maximum number of affiliates – 79% -- have presence in Mirpur-Rampura area and covering as many as 90 out of 139 affiliated unions (65%).



In contrast, in Fatullah-Narayangonj and in Savar-Ashulia areas only 3 IBC affiliates are found active. The mapping team collected information on each of the unions of IBC affiliates. Except one, all 14 have registered unions in the study area. The table below presents the summary information while detail listing of unions is presented in the annex-3.

Table 3.3: Unions by IBC Affiliates – registered and applied for registration

SL	Name of the Federation	Total Union		Savar-Ashulia		Gazipur-Tongi		Mirpur-Rampura		Fatullah - Narayangonj	
		Regtd.	Applied for regtd.	Regtd.	Applied for regtd.	Regtd.	Applied for regtd.	Regtd.	Applied for regtd.	Regtd.	Applied for regtd.
01	SGSF	26	0	1	0	4	0	21	0	0	0
02	NGWF	23	6	5	1	4	0	11	5	3	0
03	BGIWF	22	0	0	0	1	0	21	0	0	0
04	BIGUF	19	0	0	0	13	0	6	0	0	0
05	UFGW	18	0	0	0	2	0	10	0	6	0
06	BFWS	9	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0
07	BRGWF	7	0	2	0	0	0	4	0	1	0
08	BGTLWF	6	10	0	6	6	4	0	0	0	0
09	SBGSKF	4	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	0	0
10	FGW	2	4	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	3
11	BTGWL	1	5	0	4	1	0	0	1	0	0
12	BJSKP	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
13	BAWF	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
14	GTWL	0	17	0	3	0	8	0	4	0	2
Total		139	42	8	14	31	12	90	11	10	5

As indicated earlier, IBC affiliates have done well in Mirpur-Rampura area in the unionization process compared to other study areas. However, the study also revealed that the vast majority (90%) of the garment units in the area is small in size and operation. Having a relatively smaller number of workers, it is rather easy to organize unions with 30% of the total workers, which is a requirement for registration. As most of the factories are located within the Dhaka city with the workers living nearby, it is also convenient for the organizers to communicate and engage the members at a short notice or at any time. Interestingly, 11 out of 42 unions applied for registration are from Mirpur-Rampura area.

The mapping study also attempted to know from the IBC affiliates about their plan to organize unions in 2014. It is reported that IBC affiliates together

Table: 3.3.1: Union organizing plan of IBC affiliates

No. of Federation	No. of unions planned
1	>50
7	20-50
6	20<

have a plan to organize another 386 unions in 2014 provided support from GoB and RMG factories owners remain positive towards current trend of unionization. On an average each affiliates have a plan of organizing 27 unions, while most of the affiliates plan for less than 20 in remaining period of 2014. It is found from the discussion with

federation leaders that they are now targeting large factories especially in the areas of Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur and Tongi area. A table with details of the affiliates is presented in the Table 4 of annex-4 for reference.

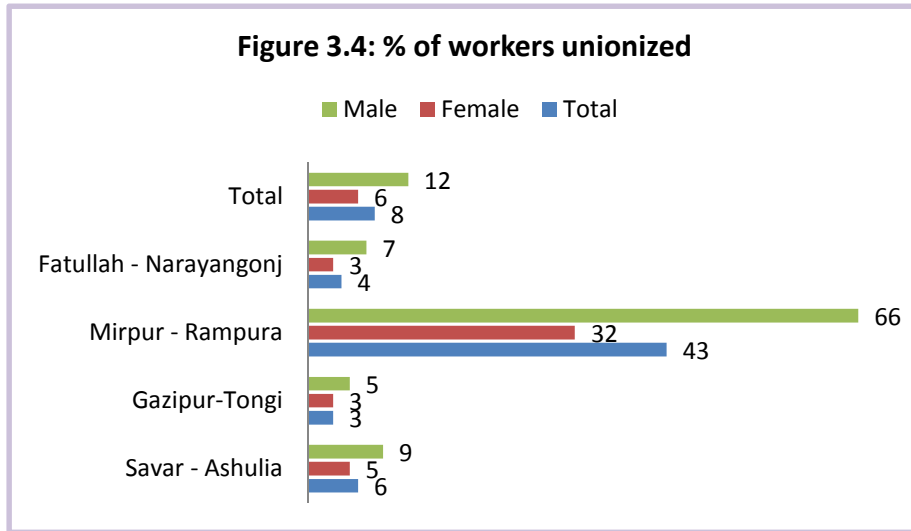
3.4 Unionized workers

The garment is the largest formal sector employment in Bangladesh. It has created employment opportunities to women from the rural areas that previously did not have any opportunity to be part of the formal workforce. The mapping has attempted to estimate the RMG workforce along with unionized workers in the study area. The table below provides an estimate of workforce and unionized workers.

Table: 3.4: Number of unionized workers by sex

Area	Workers			Unionized Workers		
	Total	Female	Male	Total	Female	Male
Savar - Ashulia	349,997	241,894	108,103	20,882	10,936	9,946
Gazipur-Tongi	1,415,040	976,378	438,662	46,985	24,606	22,379
Mirpur - Rampura	234,900	162,081	72,819	100,234	52,493	47,741
Fatullah - Narayangonj	468,606	323,334	145,272	20,882	10,936	9,946
Total	2,468,543	1,703,687	764,856	188,983	98,971	90,012

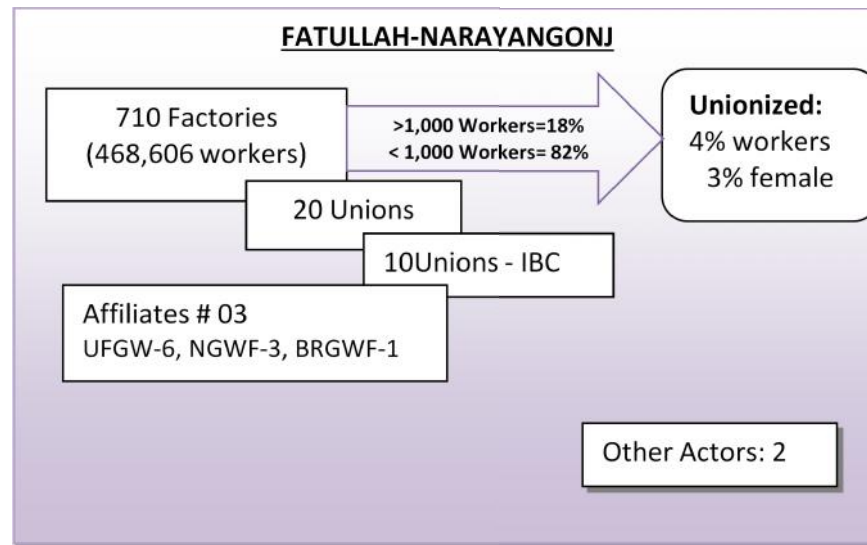
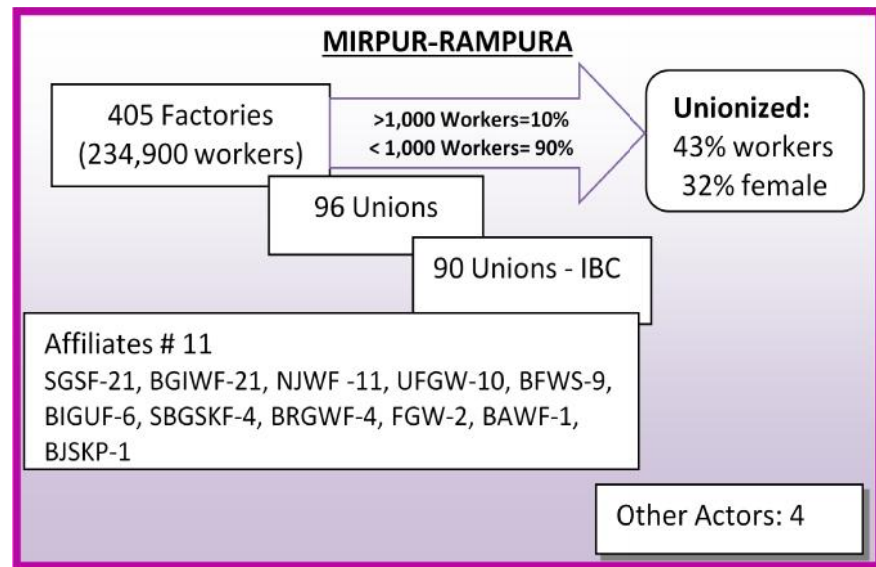
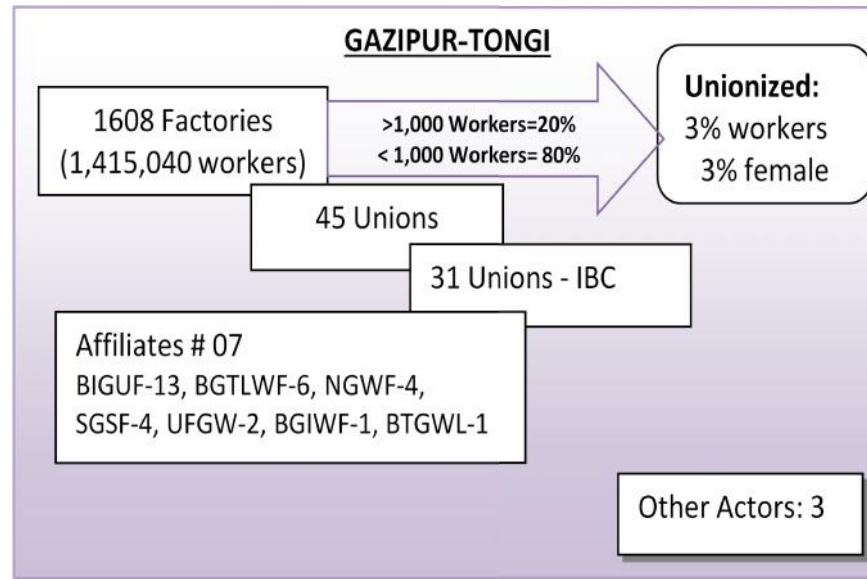
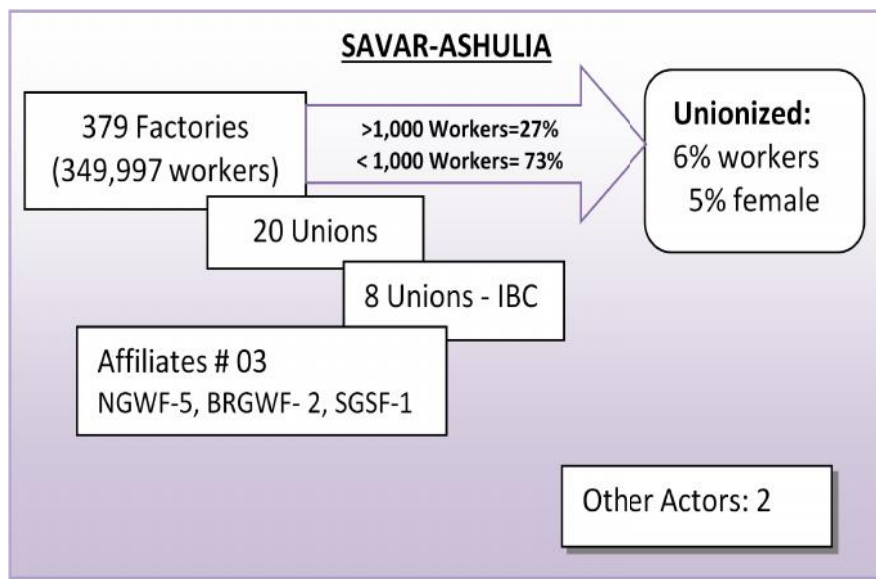
During the field operation, it was also very evident to the investigators that many of the workers' unions in Mirpur-Rampura are less active in reality with little or limited functions. The



reasons behind such inactivity on the part of the unions include non-cooperation and often punitive actions against the union members by the factory managements, inter-factory workers' migration, outright factory lay off, etc. Having said so, it is not to suggest that the situations in the other

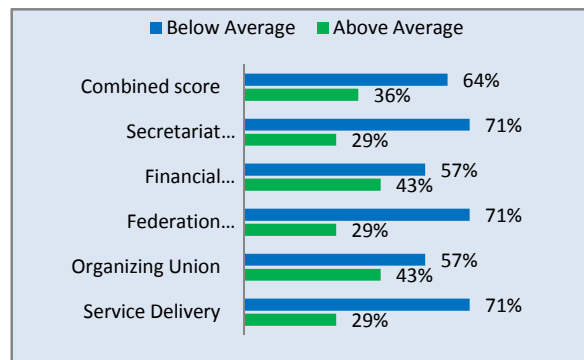
three study areas are better. The fact that only about 12% of the total workers and 6% of the total female workers have so far been brought under the umbrella of workers' unions in all these study zones is indicative of the fact that the unionism in the garment sector is not progressing as expected.

A pen-picture of Unionization in the RMG sector of the Study Area



The mapping exercise also looked into the existing capacity of the IBC affiliates in respect to Secretariat Management, Financial Management, Federation Management, Organizing Unions and Service Delivery. All the 14 Federations carried out self-assessment of their activities and performance in respect to the above five capacity areas and ranked themselves with scores ranging from 1 to 5. According to the combined score, 36% of the 14 Federations are above average.

Figure 3.5: Capacity Ranking of IBC Affiliates



An effort was made to investigate into extent of functioning of the 139 IBC affiliated unions throughout the study areas. The unions were grouped into the categories of 'active' and 'less active' unions. The features that were looked into were whether all the stipulated meetings are regularly held or not, timely collection of members' subscription, instances of bargaining with management about their rights, promptness in responding to workers' complains and such other issues related to welfare of the workers. Examined with these criteria, only 27 out of 139 IBC unions (19%) were found to be active and the remaining ones were less active. The proportion of less active unions is highest (83%) in Mirpur-Rampura area. It is to be noted here that the workers' unions have only recently been formed or affiliated. Most of the unions are in the formative stage and with proper training and motivation along with concurrent enabling attitude of the factory management, it is expected that the unions would be in a position to perform more effectively in the coming days.

Major Union Activities at Factory level

- Provided support to on an average 6 workers per day on various rights issues
- Initiated implementation of the government approved wage structure in some of the garment factories
- Facilitated introduction of medical allowances and other leave benefits in those garments factories
- Conducted awareness and capacity building training for the union members
- Facilitated filing of law suits for the workers of some factories (e.g.Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashion tragedy victims)
- Initiated dialogue with some factory owners and management for their support to trade union activities

Table 3.4.1: Active and Less Active Unions

Area	IBC Affiliates Union	Active Union	Less Active
Savar-Ashulia	8	2	6
Gazipur-Tongi	31	7	24
Mirpur-Rampura	90	15	75
Fatullah-Narayangonj	10	3	7

The Executive Members of the Affiliates as well as the Union leaders were asked to identify as to what needs to be done in respect to their organizations' capacity and skills building. The needs as identified by them are listed below:

Federation:

- Regular and paid organizers
- Office set up and equipment
- Training for the workers and their leaders
- Pool of Master Trainers
- Legal services through panel lawyers
- Training on Policy level advocacy & presentation skills
- Development of Union database
- Website and communication materials

Union:

- Training on relevant laws, conventions and code of conducts
- Training on bargaining skill
- Leadership training
- Access to information
- Exposure to best practices

3.5 Situation of RMG workers and gender perspectives:

As the majority of the garment workers are female, it is expected that they would be participating in the unionization process proportionately for realizing their rights and entitlements. The working environment in the garment factories has also important bearing on their personal safety, job satisfaction as well as their wellbeing as a whole. In view of the above, an investigation has been made to measure the extent of their involvement in the unionization process so far undertaken. The working environment has also been examined.

A total of 14 Federations were under the purview of the Mapping exercise and these Federations have an average of 23 Executive Committee (EC) members, falling within a range of 4 to 30 members. Average female EC membership was 9 per union, again ranging from 4 to 20 members. The percentage of female membership is 39% in the Executive Committees. There are 135 fulltime organizers in these 14 Federations and of them, 77 (57%) are male and 58 (43%) female. As for the part-time organizers, the number of male is 62 (53%) and of female is 54 (47%) in a total of 116. It is evident from above that the female representation in all the 14 ECs is only about one-third of the total members, reflecting under-representation of the female workers in running the affairs of the Federations. Similarly female representations have been found to be comparatively less than those of their male counter-parts in respect to number of the fulltime and part-time organizers.

As for the unions randomly selected for study purpose, the average membership in the Unions was 309. The average female membership per union was 206, which is 67% of the total union membership. As for the Executive Committee membership, the average EC member per union was 12 within a range of 10 to 30 members. Average female representation in these 34 ECs was 5 and the range of membership is 2 to 12. Thus the female membership in the ECs is 42%. The proportion of the female members who have been paying Union subscriptions on a regular basis is 52%.

The working environment in the garment factories that has an important bearing on the psychological and physical conditions of the female workers has also been investigated. A total of 242 garment workers in the study areas were interviewed and 65% of the interviewed workers were females. No substantial gender difference was observed in respect to following variables related to awareness about fundamental rights: possession of ID cards, Appointment

letters, knowledge about office hours, salary payment dates, calculation of overtime, health services and security and participation committees. However the male workers have an edge over the females in respect to awareness about trade unions, names of the trade unions, membership of trade unions and payment of union membership fees. On the other hand, the female workers demonstrated relatively better knowledge on female rights, maternal facilities and elected participation committees.

Similarly, no substantial difference was found in the knowledge level of the male and female workers about the working environment and security facilities existing in their garment factories. The proportion female workers is slightly more in variables such as safe & pure drinking water, separate toilet facilities, first-aid facilities, heat control facilities, fire drill, knowledge on machine guard, emergency exit facilities, etc. The male workers on the other hand have had better knowledge on rest room & canteen, daycare centers for children; breast-feed centers and safety net programs.

As for a few other important variables, it was found that while the average monthly salary for female workers (Tk. 6,200) is less than that of the male workers (Tk. 8,185). A greater proportion of female workers (41%) mentioned about discriminations of salary and benefits compared to the male workers (28%).

In addition to the above, the study team while visiting the 34 union offices observed the prevailing condition and facilities in the garment factories. The findings are tabulated below:

Type of Facilities	Availability in factory premises in %
Safe Water	56
Separate Female-Male Toilets	97
Day Care Centre	29
Fire protection facilities	88
Fire Drill	74
Machine Safety Guard	59
Alert Alarm	88
Emergency Exit	82
Social Safety net	21
Participatory Committee	12

As is obvious from the above table, the garment factories have been observed to have all the work-related facilities for the workers, but in varying degrees. In respect to separate toilets, fire protection facilities, fire drill, alert alarm and emergency exits, about 4/5th of the factories have all of these within the factory premises. A little more than half of the factories have safe water and machine safety guard facilities. However only in 1/4th, daycare centers are available and so also the case with social safety net. Only 12% factories have participatory committees.

3.6 Opinions of key stakeholders:

The mapping exercise has discussed with 74 individuals representing different categories of stakeholders of RMG sector. They included Federation and Union leaders, Factory Management, GoB officials, BGMEA/BKMEA officials, buying house association leaders and civil society members. A standardized format was used to elicit their views and opinions as related to unionization in the garment industries. The following section provides the summary findings of the discussions.

As for the garment workers' participation in the unionization process, the KII participants mentioned about a number of obstacles. Little literate and ignorant as most of the workers are, there is lack of awareness among them about their rights and entitlements as well as about the importance and relevance of workers' unions. Not trained and motivated, the workers are often disunited. Above all, they are also fearful of being victimized by the Factory Management and are haunted by a sense of job insecurity. Such factors keep the workers and their leaders away from any efforts to unite and organize themselves into unions.

On the other hand, quite a number of KII participants believe that the factory owners and their managements are a major impediment in the unionization process. Pitted against any idea of workers forming any union in their garment factories, they feel threatened if the workers are united. In the absence of modern management practices in most of the garment factories, the owners have a tendency to behave arbitrarily against the interests of the workers, not realizing that a peaceful and enabling factory environment could lead to greater and sustainable benefits for themselves and the workers, as well. Not realizing the importance of responsible trade unionism, the owners and their managements, as reported by many a labor leaders, often resorted to repressive measures such as instant termination of workers from their jobs,

“When the question of labor rights and privileges comes up, the policy-makers and implementers mostly representing businessmen including garment owners only pay lip services to the cause of the workers.”

Nazrul Islam Khan,
President
IndustriAll Bangladesh Council.

“BGMEA or BKMEA representing the interest of the owners and having syndicated links with the policymakers more often than not tries to resist any positive development aiming at protecting or enhancing the legitimate interest of the workers.”

Roy Ramesh Chandra
Secretary General
IndustriAll Bangladesh Council.

shutting down the factories, using outside tugs/musclemen to threaten the workers and using even the government machinery to cow down them. Taking advantage of disunity among the workers, the owners even create groupings among them. As one KII participant puts it: “Their (owners) main concern is how to maximize their profits, no matter what happens to the workers”.

The KII participants including the buyers' representatives also deliberated on the possible role of the buyers in the unionization process. The buyers also underscored the importance of having responsible trade unions. They talked about the workers' ignorance and inability to realize the importance of having a united platform for them on the one hand, and the negative attitude of the owners on the other. Few KII participants however opined that the buyers, like the owners, are not much interested in ensuring the rights of the workers, as their main focus is to maximize their profit margins through procuring the garment products at a cheaper price. A

group of KII participants opined that international brand buyers who have been active in recent years to ensure compliances by the factory owners in respect to having a safe working environment for the workers and providing the accruable benefits as per laws. They are also pressing for unionization in the factories so as to enable the workers to bargain for their rights.

As for the government's role in the context of unionization, the GoB officials participating in KII mentioned lack of competent manpower as one major reason for not being able to enforce laws and regulations properly. BGMEA and BKMEA are the apex platforms for looking after the smooth functioning of the garment industries as a whole. However, as these bodies are represented by the owner groups, the protecting interest of the factory owners has become their main concern. No matter how much they talk about safeguarding the workers' rights, in reality they do little to espouse their cause.

3.7 Unionization: Problems and Prospects

Although unionization of garment workers in the RMG sector was initiated in the early 90's, there had been no meaningful headway due to complexity in the then laws and regulations as -well as resistance from the garment owners. Following the earth-shaking Tazreen and Rana Plaza tragedies resulting in hundreds of loss of lives, indignation and concerns were raised both at national and international levels for safety of the factory workers. Being pressurized from all corners, the GoB in 2013 amended the existing labor laws that eased the process of union formation in the RMG sector. It also declared a minimum wage rate for the workers. Following such amendments, there has been a sharp increase in the number of unions and by May 2014, a total of 181 unions were formed.

In spite of such proliferation in the number of unions in a short span of time, the unionization process is still plagued with a number of problems and bottlenecks, namely:

- A feeling of job insecurity among the workers still persists, as they are often threatened by the Owners with terminations of their jobs in case they associate themselves with union activities;
- Interested workers and their leaderships are often threatened by the owner-hired tugs and musclemen to stay away from union activities;

Workers now bargain for their rights

Apex Holdings Ltd, perhaps, has the largest concentration of unionized workers in the RMG sector in Dhaka, where overwhelming majority workers are unionized (14,000 out of 17,000). Unlike the current trend, 86% of the unionized workers are female, however, their role in leadership positions is not observed that strong, where male workers still play dominant role.

Until mid-1993, the situation was quite different. Factory management had been successful to avert repeated attempt of workers to be unionized. Finally, workers managed to convince the management saying conventions of ILO and international laws. The story of the Workers' Union has been an example of how a union can evolve into a successful one to serve the cause of the fellow garment workers. The owner initially refused to listen to them, but the garment leaders continued their efforts to change his mind. Ultimately the owner could understand the importance of having a satisfied and dedicated cadre of workers in his garment factory and never opposed to meet any lawful demand of the workers. The working environment has been progressively improving since then.

- The willing workers are harassed by the management in a variety of way such as deliberately burdening them with huge tasks so as to have a pretext to fire them in case of non-accomplishment;
- Although the new labor laws allowed formation of trade unions, the ‘mind-sets’ of the garment owners and their managements have not been changed in favor of union formation;
- The owners often try to create divisions among the workers so that the status quo is maintained;
- The policy makers and implementers are not so sincere in ensuring the workers’ rights and privileges;
- Not only there is lack of sincerity on the part of the Establishment, even the Civil Society members are seen to be merely paying lip services to workers’ cause;
- At the workers’ level, there are problems of awareness and motivation about the importance of united platforms for them owing to their low level of education and understanding;
- Although the number of unions has increased, these unions are mostly confined to small garment units, as is the case in the Mirpur-Rampura study area; and
- Although the buyers have a scope to encourage the owners to allow responsible trade unionism, most of the buyers are silent on the issue of workers’ rights as they are simply interested in maximizing their profit margins.

The above factors, rather the combination of these, have been working as a spanner in the wheels of the unionization process in the RMG sector, leaving the workers at the mercy of the owners’ power blocs to stagnate in their world of misery and deprivations.

On the other hand, a healthy growth of trade unions aimed at ensuring the rightful entitlements could have been in the best interest of the RMG sector as a whole. The long term interest of the enterprising owners would be served in the absence of labor unrests in their manufacturing units and this could be ensured when there are motivated and trained union leaders dedicated to protect the interest of the workers in a responsible manner. A change of heart is needed for both the owners and the workers to realize the fact that smooth running of the garment factories can serve their interest most, and at the same time, the interest of the country as a whole.

3.8 National and International Labor Organizations and Networks

Trade union has very long past history in this country, and always been linked with the socialistic movements around the globe. After liberation, the workers had been enjoying a great deal of freedom and trade union rights. It has further been reinforced in the recent amendments of Labor Laws. Currently, there are about 42 trade union federations in Bangladesh. Despite of political shades, they all are seemingly united under a common agenda of realizing workers’ rights. They one way or other are linked with a number of international networks and global unions. Among others, ITUC and GUF have network relations with Trade Union movements of Bangladesh. They also are financially supported by international federations for program activities. In Bangladesh, among others, 3f, FNV, Workers’ Rights Consortium, Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair wage and such other organizations are extending support to trade union movements. The IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC) is one of the

labor federations that are active in Bangladesh with presence in Metal, Chemical, Textile and RMG sectors. IBC currently has 22 affiliates of which 14 are related to RMG sectors, and reaching out workers of 139 RMG factories in Dhaka. Besides, there are said to be 20 more federations existed in the RMG sector who are not affiliated with Industriall. However, about 50% of them are existing only in papers.

CHAPTER-4: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Summary of the Findings

The Mapping Exercise was aimed at measuring the extent of unionization, coverage and activeness of the unions, situation of the workers and capacity-building needs of the unions and the affiliates. The findings of the study suggest that out of 4 'garment areas' under investigation, most of the garment factories (1608) are located in the Gazipur-Tongi zone, followed by Fatullah-Narayangonj (710), Mirpur-Rampura (405) and Savar-Ashulia (379). A maximum proportion of 'large' factories with more than 1,000 workers is in Savar-Ashulia (27%), followed by Gazipur-Tongi (20%), Fatullah-Narayangonj (18%) and Mirpur-Rampura (10%). In absolute term, the four regions have 102, 321, 128 and 40 large factories respectively.

As for unionization of the garment factories, a total of 181 unions have been formed as of May 2014. The Mirpur-Rampura area, located within the metropolitan area and with a very small proportion of large manufacturing units, has a maximum number of 96 unions, which is 53% of the total. While 45 unions are there in Gazipur-Tongi, the Savar-Ashulia and Fatullah-Narayangonj have 20 unions each. The reason behind concentration of majority of unions in Mirpur-Rampura area may be that mobilizing and organizing unions in factories with relatively smaller number of workers is easier and less time consuming.

Towards wider coverage of unions, the IBC affiliates plan to organize another 386 unions in 2014 under the assumption that they would get positive support from both the factory owners and the government.

On an average, each of the 14 affiliates has a plan of organizing 27 unions, while most of the affiliates plan for less than 20 in remaining period of 2014. The federation leaders indicated that they would from now on target large factories especially in the areas of Savar, Ashulia, Gazipur and Tongi.

The current level of coverage of workers under unions has so far been less. Only 8% of all the workers in the 4 study areas have been covered by union membership. Of these, 12% are male workers and 6% female workers. As for female workers, their union membership in the Gazipur-Tongi, Savar-Ashulia and Fatullah-Narayangonj ranges between 3% to 6% and 3% to 5% respectively. Only in Mirpur-Rampura area, 43% of the workers and 32% of the female workers are unionized. As far as female representation is concerned, 67% of the average union members are female; however their membership in the Executive Committees is only 42%.

Whatever the number of unions and coverage of the workers, the field experiences during the mapping exercise point to an unsatisfactory state of affairs surrounding the union activities. The union meetings are not held regularly, neither the members are aware of the regulatory functions of the unions. Being afraid of the repressive measures from the factory managements, the union leaders are not engaging with them towards realization of workers' rights. Basing on some specific criteria, the mapping exercise found only 27 out of 139 (19%) unions are active.

Of the total 181 unions, 139 have so far been affiliated with IBC and again, majority of these IBC affiliated unions (65%) are in Mirpur-Rampura area. The proportions of area-wise IBC affiliated vis-a-vis total unions are 94% in Mirpur-Rampura, 69% in Gazipur-Tongi, 50% in Fatullah-

Narayangonj and 40% in Savar-Ashulia. The numbers of affiliates working in the four regions are 11, 7, 3 and 3 in the respective regions. The number of other actors working side by side with IBC is 2 on an average. The representation of female workers in the Affiliates is also low compared to the male members, only 39%. Similarly the proportions of female fulltime and part-time organizers are 43% and 47% respectively. In spite of being an overwhelming majority of the garment workers, the female representations in leadership of both Affiliates and Unions are comparatively less than their male counterparts.

A self-assessment by the 14 affiliate leaders in respect to Secretariat Management, Financial Management, Federation Management, Organizing Unions and Service Delivery. The leaders ranked themselves with scores ranging from 1 to 5. According to the combined score, 36% of the 14 Federations are above average in terms of their performance.

The opinion of a wide range of stakeholders such as federation leaders, owners, Civil Society, GoB officials, BGMEA/BKMEA and buyers' representatives was also solicited. Most of the respondents identified lack of workers' awareness, lack of training & motivation, job insecurity, owners' negative attitudes, absence of a sense of GoB commitment to workers' cause, apathy of the buying community and such other factors as obstacles to smooth unionization in the garment sectors.

As for the working environment in the garment factories, no significant gender differences were found between the female and male workers in respect to a number of variables investigated during the mapping exercise. Only in case of monthly salary, while the average salary for female workers was estimated to be Tk. 6,200/-, for the male workers, this figure was Tk. 8,185/-. A total of 41% females mentioned about discriminations in matters of salary and benefits, compared to 28% male workers.

4.2 Conclusion and Recommendations

Unionization of the RMG sector is the need of the hour and a look at the findings of studies undertaken by organizations and individuals as narrated in one earlier section as well as the views and opinions as expressed by the KII participants and other respondents of the Mapping Exercise points out to such an essentiality. In the recent years, the country's RMG sector has been beset with unruly and disorganized labor agitations resulting in destruction of valuable properties, halt in the production process and ultimate loss of earning of precious foreign exchange. Bangladesh whose export earning is overwhelmingly dependent of RMG exports can ill afford such a scenario.

A possible way out from this *impasse* could be to strive for creating an enabling environment in the garment sector in general, and garment factories in particular, where all the stakeholders are allowed to play complementary but responsible roles in the overall context of running of the manufacturing units. The government and policymakers have the responsibility to see the due rights and privileges of the millions of workers are protected, and even enhanced. As the RMG sector is export-oriented, the buying community particularly the foreign buying houses can push the owners and their managements to ensure a risk-free and congenial working environment. The enterprising factory owners should realize the relevance and importance of the workers who through their toil and hard works have been ensuring profits for them. At the same time, the workers and their leadership need also to understand that the owners by

investing their capital are creating their employment opportunities to sustain their life and living.

This brings forth the question of responsible trade unionism, and that requires infusion of knowledge and awareness among the workers about the role and responsibilities of trade unions. A responsible trade union never agitates and indulges in violence and destruction to realize their demands; rather it negotiates with the management to bring home the justifiability of their demands. The union leadership interacts with the fellow workers through holding of meetings on a regular basis and takes their grievances to the management for redressing these grievances. The leadership educates the workers about their responsibilities; and this is all the more necessary when most of the workers are not so literate.

The mapping exercise has come out with the conclusion that the process of unionization in the RMG sector has so far been unable to be a useful bargaining platform for majority of workers; in fact a small percentage of workers (12%) as a whole and the female workers (6%) in particular, have so far been covered by the unions. The leadership of the female workers in the union and affiliates' activities has also been not so pronounced. The workers' unions and their affiliates need to be strengthened and towards this goal, the following recommendations are made:

- In view of the importance to RMG sector in the context of Bangladesh economy, the government as the supreme regulatory authority should be sincere and purposeful in facilitating an enabling environment for the owners and the workers. In particular, it should ensure the implementation of the 2013 Wage scales in all the garment units;
- The government regulations should incorporate appropriate measures to protect the workers from being terminated from their jobs in the event of their involvement with union activities. The persistent fear of job insecurity need to be removed from their minds;
- Through regulatory measures, formation of trade unions should be made mandatory for each of the garment factories within a specified timeframe and rules relating to operations of trade union and federation need to be framed by the government;
- Through supervision and monitoring with competent manpower, GoB Establishment needs to ensure implementation of compliance-related activities by the factory management. With a view to ensuring workers' rights, a uniform code of conduct needs to be formulated with government initiatives;
- The owners should be made to understand the relevance and importance of responsible trade unionism and end their resistance to growth of unions. The owners' current 'mind-sets' of regarding the workers' unions as enemies need to be changed;
- The BGMEA/BKMEA as the apex bodies should not necessarily espouse the cause and interest of the factory owners only, but also use their platforms to bridge and reconcile the existing misunderstanding between the owners and the factory workers;
- The buyers, particularly the foreign buying houses, need to meaningfully initiate a process of reconciliation between the owners and the working class;
- At the workers' level, attempts should be initiated to train and motivate the workers about the role and responsibilities of trade unions and convince them about the benefits of responsible trade unionism;

- The Affiliates and the unions should ensure proportionate representation of the female workers in their Executive Committees and other implementing bodies;
- The Affiliates and the unions should concentrate on upholding the rights and welfare of the workers, and not to be pawns in the hands of any political parties; and
- The international labor related organizations such as ILO, IndustriALL, FNV, etc. should come forward with workers' capacity-building plans and programs.

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