

Project Report
On
Equal Employment Opportunity of Women in Bangladesh

Submitted to

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National University
Gazipur-1704

Supervised by:

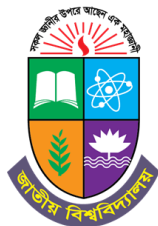
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Under National University



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Letter of Transmittal

Date: 10th April 2023

Controller of Examinations

National University

Gazipur- 1704

Subject: Submission of Project Report.

Sir,

With due respect, I would like to inform you that, it is a great pleasure for me to submit the internship report on '**Equal Employment Opportunity of Women in Bangladesh**' as it is the fulfillment of partial requirement for obtaining MBA degree from Daffodil Institute of IT (DIIT) under the curriculum of National University, Bangladesh.

To prepare this report, I have gathered what I believe to be the most complete information available on Equal Employment Opportunity of Women in Bangladesh. The experience I have gathered during this period will remain as an invaluable asset of immense useful in my life. I have worked hard preparing this report and I hope that it will fulfill my degree requirement. I will be always available for answering any query on this report.

So, I fervently requesting and hope that you would be kind enough to accept my report and oblige thereby.

Sincerely Yours,

.....
Tasnim Haque Noshin

Reg No. 18601000610

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Session: 2018-19

Program: MBA

Major in Human Resource Management

Certificate of Supervisor

This is to certify that, Tasnim Haque Noshin, Registration Number: 18601000610, Academic session: 2018-2019, Major in Human Resource Management, is a regular student 2nd semester (Final semester) of MBA program, Department of Business Administration , Daffodil Institute of IT (DIIT), under National University of Bangladesh. She has completed a project report on **‘Equal Employment Opportunity of Women in Bangladesh’** under my supervision which is a fulfillment of partial requirement for obtaining MBA degree.

I wish her success in all his future endeavors.

.....

Sanjida Islam

Lecturer

Daffodil Institute of IT (DIIT)

Student Declaration

I, Tasnim Haque Noshin, hereby declare that the presented report of internship titled “**Equal Employment Opportunity of Women in Bangladesh**” is uniquely prepared by me after completing three months work.

I also confirm that, the report is only prepared for my academic requirement not for any other purpose. It might not be used with interest of opposite party of the corporation.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my upmost gratitude to the honorable supervisor Sanjida Islam. Certainly, without her wonderful guidance and support this paper would not have been completed. In addition,.

I am very thankful to my classmates who helped me a lot throughout the whole journey. Finally, my warmest gratefulness goes to my family for being there for me all the time.

Executive Summary

Women in Bangladesh have traditionally been excluded from taking part in social, political and economical activities. However, the rise of the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh since the 1970s has provided women with opportunities to work outside the home for wages. This change coincided with changes such as a decline in the rural sector, increased emphasis on girls' education and campaigns to improve women's health and reduce fertility. As a result of these changes, the social exclusion of women has reduced considerably. This paper analyses existing literature on women's employment in the ready-made garments industry in Bangladesh using a social exclusion framework. It finds that the impact of the industry on women's exclusion is mixed. Women have greater economic independence, respect, social standing and "voice" than before. However, harassment and exploitation persists. Given the important changes that this industry is helping to bring into women's lives, stakeholders should focus attention on making the industry a more humane and sustainable option for women.

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Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, the rise of the ready-made garments (RMG) sector has opened up the door that made it possible for poor people, particularly women, to potentially lead a better life in Bangladesh. The RMG sector has created a remarkable employment scope for Bangladesh. In fact, women from the most disadvantaged sector of the society are the greatest beneficiaries of employment in the RMG sector as they have gained the power to earn and have more voice at home (Rahman, 2013, p. 9). Over the past decades, these women RMG workers have been significantly contributing to the industrialization of Bangladesh (Kibria, 2004, p. 62). It is estimated that exports by the RMG sector, the single most significant sector in the economy of Bangladesh, rose from US\$0.03 billion to US\$24.49 billion between FY(financial year) 1984 and FY2014. Over the period, the industry's contribution to the country's exports has grown from 3.89 percent to 81.20 percent (Bangladesh Bank, 2014, p. 89; ADB, 2016, p. 112; BGMEA, 2015). Further, this fastest growing manufacturing industry has made a significant contribution of foreign exchange earnings and, after remittances; the sector is the second largest source of foreign currency in Bangladesh (Muhammad, 2011, p. 23). The share of RMG exports has played a vital role in enhancing the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Bangladesh (Kabeer& Mahmud, 2004, p. 138). The Export Promotion Bureau in Bangladesh estimated that the RMG exports rose from 0.54 percent of GDP in the FY1985 to 19 percent in FY2010, while at the same time, the total exports to GDP increased from 6 percent to 20 percent. Moreover, during the last five years this export oriented industry have been contributing 30 percent of the country's industrial growth (Rahman, 2013, p. 6, 8). In 2006, the World Bank reported that roughly 10 million workers directly or indirectly maintained their livelihood on RMG, and the sector, by itself, accounts for about 40 percent of the industrial employment in Bangladesh (Kabeer, n. d, p. 31; Morshed, 2007, p. 27). The RMG industry has not only created a proficient sector, but also gradually relieved the country from the unemployment burden by creating a huge source of employment in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2013). However, these female workers of the RMG sector are the most vulnerable to its weak legal provisions and compliance enforcement (Ahmed, 2004, p. 38; IFC, 2011, p. 3). This might be because the absence of trade unions, poor working conditions, low-skill, low-wage segment of production, limited child care facilities, inadequate health services, informal recruiting and irregular payments, job insecurity and sudden termination, wage discrimination, low level of education, long working hours, overtime without

payment, violent behavior and sexual harassment worsen the vulnerability of the female workforce and that undermines their rights, benefits and opportunities in the RMG sector of Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2004, p. 40; Khan, 2004, p. 169; Rahman, 2013, p. 18). For instance, employees in the RMG sector of Bangladesh receive an average of US\$69 per month, which is US\$ 0.24 per hour. This “malnutrition” wage of RMG workers is the lowest in the world. Meanwhile, Bangladesh has grown to be the second leading global RMG exporter after China with an increase in market share from 2.6 percent in 2000 to 4.3 percent in 2009 (IFC, 2011, p. 12; Muhammad, 2011, p. 24; Ahamed, 2012, p. 7). In the study, section I discusses the theoretical construction focusing on the ‘group’ and ‘institution’ model to address the aforementioned challenges and obstacles faced by the women’s workforce. Section II explores the feminisation of the RMG labour market in light of global trade integration. Section III evaluates the current situation of Bangladeshi women workers concentrating on their grievances relating to labour rights and the sub-section of the study deals with the effects of the limited activities of trade unions on female labourers’ voice and security in RMG. Section IV offers some recommendations by providing a new policy model-process rooted in both the group and institutional models and thereby, highlighting women workers’ improved productivity and quality through supporting compliance with the laws to uphold their rights and voice and enhance empowerment in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

1.2 Scope of the Study

The scope of the study was to present the equal employment opportunity of women in Bangladesh at Bloom attires Ltd which is one of the most leading position in this Narayanganj. This study attempted to understand the equal employment opportunity of women in RMG sectors in Bangladesh.

1.3 Researched Objectives

This research was carried out with certain objectives. Some of the major objectives of the study were-

1. To show how much equal opportunity is provided to the women workers.
2. To show how much discrimination women face in RMG sectors.
3. To show how much effective the contributions of women in RMG sector.
4. To know recommended necessary steps for overcoming problems.

1.4 Methodology of the Study:

Type of Research: The exploratory research will be conducted to understanding and find out of the overall situations of women in Bangladesh in RMG sectors. I collected data for made the report. I used to the seroquel scale for equal employment opportunity in Bangladesh.

Method of Survey:

I have collected data from both of source.

- Primary Data
- Secondary Data

Primary Data

Primary data following manner face to face conversation 30women and also internal sources.
I have collected data from different garment factories.

Secondary Data:

Secondary data collected from external sources.

I have collected from various types of sources:

- Books
- Journals

1.5 Limitations

This research has certain limitations that must be acknowledged. The followings are some of the major limitations of this study-

1. **Utilizing the collected data:** Due to lack of knowledge and experience the collected data and analysis became difficult.
2. **Sample size:** This research was conducted over a very small population. Hence, the sample size could have been larger.
3. **Lack of time:** The research could be more dependable if the researcher had more time.
4. **Lack of man power:** The research could not be organized enough if the due to lack of manpower.

Chapter Two
Literature review

2.1 Literature Review

- Economic globalization has opened up opportunities for setting up new industries, harmonization of remittances and employment generation, as well as had a potential positive impact on wages to ensure productive values in the poor developing countries (Kabeer, n.d, para. 4; Roderick, 1999, p. 708; Rama 2002, p. 162; Morshed, 2007, p. 129). Thus, integration between global and local markets has been boosted. Furthermore, globalization has been beneficial, in particular, for those small countries which have given high emphasis on comparative advantage and are endowed with only a small scale domestic market. This specialization regarding technological advancement and attraction of foreign direct investment linkages has been gained through participating in globalization.
- The impact of trade openness had positively been noticed by the growing movement of foreign capital because costs of production in developed industrialized nations have been raised (Kabeer, 2004, p. 5; Morshed, 2007, p. 22). Industrialized nations' capital flows had caused delocalization of labour-intensive production to the low cost developing countries into different sectors such as food processing, textile or garment industries (Kabeer, 2004, p. 5; Rama, 2002, p. 148; Morshed, 2007, p. 11). Moreover, these capital flows in developing countries have increased their productivity at domestic level. This has also raised the demand for their labour force and thereby has created greater opportunity to; generate employment and increase the earnings of the laborers (Rama, 2002, p. 148).
- Developed nations' industrial relocation had brought benefit to Bangladesh to enjoy quota-free status in the North American market and duty free and quota-free access to the European Union market (Morshed, 2007, p. 29). Accordingly, these efforts have led to the cultivation of efficient management of industrialization and brought together a favorable atmosphere for the growth and advancement of RMG in Bangladesh (Morshed, 2007, p. 22; Rahman, 2008, p. 25). In addition, in the early 1990s, the government of Bangladesh initiated a comprehensive trade reform policy that included a substantial reduction on tariff barriers, removal of quantitative restrictions on imports and the opening of a floating exchange rate system to

encourage the external feasibility of RMG exports so as to promote this important sector of the economy (Morshed, 2007, p. 47; Ara&Rahman, 2008, p. 3; Rahman, 2008, p. 29).

- The increasing investment in RMG created an opportunity for mostly young, less educated and unskilled women who had few options for employment and were prepared to work for low wages. The increased participation of young female workers ultimately produced the feminised pattern of the labour force (Kabeer& Mahmud, 2004, p. 148; Hossain et. al., 2013, p. 198).The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in 2013 estimated that between FY1984 and FY2013 the number of RMG enterprises had been increased from 134 to 5876. The labour force survey in 2002-2003 and 2005-2006 reported that the participation of women in Bangladesh in the organisedlabour market grew sharply from 5.4 million to 12.1 million in the ten years between 1996 and 2006 (BBS, 2008, p.58). 5.The RMG sector has made a significant achievement in enhancing Bangladeshi women’s participation in the labour market from 7.9 percent to 16.8 percent in 2000-2013 (ADB, 2016, p. 112), as Kholsa (2009, p. 294) noted this growth in participation is “a pointer to the social changes taking place”. In FY2013 the sector by itself has employed four million workers compared to 0.04 million in FY1984.Of these RMG workers, 85 percent (3.40 million) are women, the highest share of employment in the formal manufacturing industry of Bangladesh (Islam &Zahid, 2012, p. 82; BGMEA, 2014). Bangladeshi women labourers’ access to the RMG sector is facilitated by their ‘soft and nimble fingers’ and their historical participation in ‘dress making and sewing’ at home (IFC, 2011, p. 11; Hossain et al., 2013, p. 202). Kabeer (1991) categorised the primary motives of women labourers on the basis of pull (positive) and push (negative) factors behind joining the RMG marketsin Bangladesh.

Chapter Three

Theoretical Frame work

3.1 Theoretical Frame work

- The study will argue that the following two theories and models are often used in policy science to explain the nature of policy making and to communicate policy outcomes. In the institutional model, both government and entrepreneurs work in a partnership in which the government provides adequate legal power, rules for decision making, financial and human resources support (Krafts& Furlong, 2010, p. 68). However, one limitation of this model is that often the government may transfer the managerial responsibilities to entrepreneurs without giving adequate financial and technical assistance (Devas, 2005, p. 5). On the other hand, in group theories, policy interventions are aimed at supporting the trade union groups, NGOs, donors, business groups and public officials that could provide countervailing powers to others (Krafts& Furlong, 2010, p. 68). This balance is important because no single interest group can influence the policy making process. However, in this model often one organised group can undermine the leadership of bureaucrats to implement policies of their own choice (Krafts& Furlong, 2010, p. 68).
- In Bangladesh, decision making in the RMG sector, following the institutional model, has been concentrated in the hands of a few policy actors who are economic elites, for instance, entrepreneurs, and are focused purely on profit (Krafts& Furlong, 2010, p. 70; Morshed, 2007, p. 156). These RMG entrepreneurs, who are vigilant to the threat of other stakeholders such as unions or employees association, advocated for policy choices from their available options which ignored the values and rights of female labourers (Afsar, 2004, p. 142).
- There is no bureaucratic institutional legislation to regulate the framework of RMG enterprises (Ahamed, 2012, p. 2-3). The rationale behind this, close alignment of politicians and the factory owners has developed 'the selfish concentration' that undermined the leadership of public officials (Manzer, 1984, p. 582; Krafts& Furlong, 2010, p. 69). This has reduced the capacity of public officials to make the factory owners accept unionisation.
- Strengthening the hand of the entrepreneurs hand is responsible for the lack of healthy management-labour relations in RMG (Khan, 2004, p. 173). Additionally, workers in RMG have been unable to cultivate a collective bargaining culture (Ahmed, 2004, p. 39). In this way, the limited activities of trade unions has restricted the potential for

women labourers' collective bargaining activities in addressing their grievances in RMG. This is why the involvement of women labourers has been less influential in making their demands heard and achieving better deals in RMG (Wagle, 2000, p. 208; Afsar, 2004, p. 142).

- Additionally, the increasing investment in RMG created an opportunity for mostly young, less educated and unskilled women who had few options for employment and were prepared to work for low wages. The increased participation of young female workers ultimately produced the feminised pattern of the labour force (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004, p. 148; Hossain et. al., 2013, p. 198).
- The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturer and Exporters Association (BGMEA) in 2013 estimated that between FY1984 and FY2013 the number of RMG enterprises had been increased from 134 to 5876. The labour force survey in 2002-2003 and 2005-2006 reported that the participation of women in Bangladesh in the organised labour market grew sharply from 5.4 million to 12.1 million in the ten years between 1996 and 2006 (BBS, 2008, p.58). In this regard, the RMG sector has made a significant achievement in enhancing Bangladeshi women's participation in the labour market from 7.9 percent to 16.8 percent in 2000-2013 (ADB, 2016, p. 112), as Kholsa (2009, p. 294) noted this growth in participation is "a pointer to the social changes taking place". In FY2013 the sector by itself has employed four million workers compared to 0.04 million in FY1984. Of these RMG workers, 85 percent (3.40 million) are women, the highest share of employment in the formal manufacturing industry of Bangladesh (Islam & Zahid, 2012, p. 82; BGMEA, 2014).
- Bangladeshi women labourers' access to the RMG sector is facilitated by their 'soft and nimble fingers' and their historical participation in 'dress making and sewing' at home (IFC, 2011, p. 11; Hossain et al., 2013, p. 202). Kabeer (1991) categorised the primary motives of women labourers on the basis of pull (positive) and push (negative) factors behind joining the RMG markets in Bangladesh. Kabeer has given emphasis on one hand to pull factors, primarily economic incentives, and on the other hand, to push factors such as the loss of a male guardian as the reason for women moving towards employment.
- Women are encouraged by better wage prospects for getting married and bearing and rearing of their children (Absar, 2001, p. 7; Khosla, 2009, p. 293; Souplet-Wilson, 2014, p. 21). A study by Khan (1993, p.116) added that in Bangladesh women have to

balance three roles: manage households, work to get wages and take responsibilities for child bearing and rearing. It is already well established that women's income contributes about 90 percent to the family's health, nutrition and children's education as against only 38 percent by men (IFC, 2011, p. 19).

3.2 Concept Of Women Empowerment

Global empowerment of women is a new concept. Since the second half of the twentieth century, the issue of women's empowerment has gained importance among scholars of universities, and in national and international platforms. But the concept was not deeply ingrained into the governments' policies and programs until the declaration of the 'Women's Decade' in 1975. Though the Indian Government endowed franchise to all its citizens irrespective of caste, creed, sex, and color immediately after Independence, it was confined mainly in papers while the majority of women were essentially powerless until the last decade of previous century. Considering their low socio-economic position, scholars, bureaucrats, and governments have begun to pay considerable attention in empowering women. Because of Bangladesh's feudal society, the pace of advancement of women remains tardy. This article addresses the challenges and realities of this situation. It calls for government, political decision makers, NGOs, and other actors to come forward to ensure women's all round development for making India a developed country.

3.3 Concept of Equal Employment Opportunity

Equal Employment Opportunity is the concept of equal opportunity in an organization to achieve or maintain fair employment. The core EEO definition (or equal opportunity for employment) is that all employees should be fairly treated when regarded in different decisions on employment, such as hiring, promotion, termination, compensation, etc.

Within the context of the EEO definition, 'same opportunities' or 'equal opportunity' refers to the fact that employers may not use certain grounds for hiring or rejecting candidate or taking any other employment decision.

3.4 Women Empowerment in Bangladesh

Successive Bangladeshi governments have formulated policies regarding women's empowerment, integrating it into their overall priorities and respecting their commitments to global development goals. Since 1995, Bangladesh has been making strides in translating lofty promises into actions, having shaped its original women's development policies and plans of action in line with the BPA. To move forward, we must take stock of the progress and shortfalls in realising the goals that Bangladesh set for women's empowerment.

Chapter Four

Analysis and Evaluation

4.1 Analysis

- Bangladesh is already a signatory to the ILO convention and has adopted a ‘code of conduct’² (Ahamed, 2012, p. 13). The Government of Bangladesh is, in principle, responsible to provide adequate support to the RMG sector in Bangladesh under the Labour Act of 2006 (IFC, 2011, p. 11). There is some legislation concerning the rights of women workers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. However, most of this legislation has not been observed in practice (Kabeer, n. d, para. 58). The reason behind this is that, there has not been any compliance certification system that could work as a ‘bargaining tool’ to the factory owners in complying with the codes of conduct (Rahman, 2013, p. 25). According to the labour law of 2006³, a woman worker is entitled to maternity leave and child care facilities.
- Factory owners approve leave without pay or pay less to female workers rather than allow women to enjoy and use the fully paid maternity leave which is their right. Therefore, female labourers often fail to benefit from their rights in the RMG sector because of the weak implementation process of this legislation (IFC, 2011, p. 12). The argument here is that, the factory owners have overlooked the rights of the women because of compliance, low levels of education, powerlessness and marginalisation of the women labourers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.
- When the RMG sector was being opened up, women labourers were favoured for their socio economic vulnerabilities and because of the perceived sincerity and law abiding nature of women and the abundant supply of female labourers (Morshed, 2007, p. 34). Furthermore, the RMG factory owners preferred women workers as trustworthy, obedient, less confrontational and susceptible to anti-management propaganda from outsiders (Khan, 2004, p. 169; Feldman, 2009, p. 284). Additionally, the reason for choosing women was their compliance to accept lower wages than men.
- Another common issue is that RMG owners frequently violate the legal requirement to pay monthly wages within the first seven working days of any month (Kabeer, 2004, p. 16; Morshed, 2007, p. 103). Moreover, the workers face restriction on their freedom of mobility. The argument here is that the worker’s leaving in the factory may mean that the owners will have to recruit a new worker with high wages, which the employers consider not reasonable on both monetary grounds and saving time in production.

4.2 Evaluation

The enforcement of the legal provisions is frequently violated by RMG owners (Ahamed, 2012, p. 9). In most cases, factory owners approve leave without pay or pay less to female workers rather than allow women to enjoy and use the fully paid maternity leave which is their right. Therefore, female labourers often fail to benefit from their rights in the RMG sector because of the weak implementation process of this legislation (IFC, 2011, p. 12). The argument here is that, the factory owners have overlooked the rights of the women because of compliance, low levels of education, powerlessness and marginalisation of the women labourers in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

A study of international finance corporations in 2007 found that female RMG labourers earned 15.9 percent less than that of their male co-workers. A recent report of the United Nations on millennium development goals (MDGs) estimates that globally women earn 24 percent below their men counterparts. These wage gaps holds women workers back from enjoying the real value of their economic participation. Lyons and Smith (2008, p. 4, 15), in a study of Australia, found that although men and women had similar education and years of working experience, a majority of women workers were receiving a lower remuneration rate compared to male counterparts, while performing the same jobs. Since 1975, international agreements on economic, social and cultural rights (ICESCR) for ensuring equal rights of wages, have been aimed at equivalent jobs to maintain a better living standard together with safety and good quality working conditions for both male and female workers (Sawer et al., 2009, p. 74). On the basis of ICESCR convention, several countries have already taken positive measures for implementing gender wage equality by overcoming the gaps in the existing pay structure.

Despite the law being passed, however, many employers ignore the principle of equal pay for equal work, and huge differences still exist in the overall earnings of males and females in RMG. In 2000, a study by Paul-Majumder and Begum concluded that compared to 15 percent of men counterparts, 73 percent of women RMG workers were receiving less than the minimum wage. This inherent gender wage differential has occurred as a result of the reproduction of traditional masculine practices that reflect the views of gender-segregated Bangladeshi society, where the male in employment is considered as the family bread winner

and the women are given the responsibilities of care giving in the family (Morshed, 2007, p. 46; Hossain et al., 2013, p. 203). For that reason, women's work is considered less valuable and therefore women are paid less, as secondary earners. Furthermore, majority of the women are used as operators, the lowest segment of the workforce in RMG, which commands the least power in negotiating at the enterprise level to establish the gender based wage equality for women workers.

Regarding the aforesaid discussions, it can be said that women workers' lack of legal rights includes job security, representation in worker committees and supervisory roles, while in addition social factors incorporating low education and lack of skill development and physical, verbal and sexual abuse and physical harassment and even death often impact on female labourers. All of this can lead to adverse effects on the productivity of the RMG (IFC, 2011, p. 12; Morshed, 2007, p. 102; Muhammad, 2011, p. 25). In most cases, the women workers feel insecure because of being taught by traditional values and religious beliefs that their good reputation could be destroyed if they disclose about sexual violence and would also reduce the marriage prospects of unmarried women (Morshed, 2007, p. 74). Accordingly, women workers are virtually treated as the 'slaves' of the RMG owners in Bangladesh.

Chapter Five

Findings, Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Findings

- Evidence from research proved that trade unions are virtually absent from the RMG sector and therefore, women workers have low levels of unionisation for addressing their grievances. It is estimated that trade union members in Bangladesh account for less than 10 percent of the entire workforce in RMG. The main reason for this is that women lack knowledge about how to be organised and express their own voice in order to engage in careful discussion and debate for advancing their conditions.
- The imposed legal restrictions mean that women do not realise the importance of their collective bargaining participation. For instance, for a union to be registered, 30 percent of the workers of an RMG enterprise need to be members, and membership below this level would dissolve the union.
- Evidence proves that only 25 registered trade unions of 200 do not face obstacles to being actively involved in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. Under these circumstances, lack of a representative voice creates an obstacle for female labourers to organise themselves as a group and ultimately they may have little power to challenge the RMG owners in order to secure their rights as workers.

5.2 Recommendations

Future policy options There is an urgent need for action to improve the condition of women workers in the ready-made garments industry of Bangladesh. Future policy initiatives should be directed not only at the root causes of women's exclusion but also towards addressing the specific problems that women workers face, in order to make the ready-made garments industry a more humane and sustainable option for women. Based on the problems being currently faced by women garments workers, further emphasis and action should be on the following:

Organize Women- First, women need to be organized and made aware of their rights (Kabeer, 2004). One study found that only about 23% of women in factories located in the relatively elite export processing zone were aware of Bangladesh's labour laws (Kabeer& Mahmud, 2004). By coming together, women can generate social capital and by cooperating instead of competing, they can gain even without being formally registered as a group (Baruah, 2004). Women's groups and NGOs are more aware of community realities and are respected more in the community than alternative forms of organizations such as trade unions (Kabeer, 2004). NGOs and women's organizations can initiate a beginning by offering safe spaces where women can share their experiences and discuss options to prevent harassment. They can help build women's confidence and resistance to harassment of various kinds. This might lead to a natural growth of women workers' advocacy bodies with time. Local and foreign aid agencies as well as factory owners can support such initiatives.13

Counter sexual harassment- Second, the sexual harassment laws need to be made more specific by correcting the dated language that is couched in terms of a "woman's modesty" (Siddiqi, 2003). The law should protect against all forms of gender-based harassment and not just sexual harassment and at all places, and not just the workplace (Siddiqi, 2003). Support for a broader definition of harassment can be drawn from the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) to which Bangladesh is a signatory (Siddiqi, 2003).

Create awareness of ground realities- Third, stakeholders advocating for a social clause need to be made aware that despite harsh working conditions, the ready-made garments industry represents genuine and better avenues to women (Kabeer, 2004). Thus the effort should be to understand the ground realities. Foreign trading partners need to help Bangladesh to enforce better labour standards such as better working conditions, transport for workers and childcare.

State action- Fourth, the State should focus on industrial diversification so as to protect workers in the event that factories close down as a result of the volatility in the demand for ready-made garment goods, or for other reasons (Kabeer& Mahmud, 2004). The State and NGOs should provide skills training for women so that women are able to receive higher paid jobs within and outside the industry (Kabeer, 2004). The State needs to ensure compliance with laws. This would require hiring more labour inspectors, instituting random inspections, curbing corruption and enforcing penalties for noncompliance with the law.

5.3 Conclusion

Economic globalisation has enhanced trade liberalisation, which led to the growth of RMG industries and more employment opportunities for women labourers in Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2004, p. 43; Morshed, 2007, p. 148; Rahman, 2009, p. 23; Hossain et al., 2013, p. 198). However, according to the United Nations' MDG report in 2014, 5 percent of people live below US\$ 1. 25 a day in Bangladesh. For that reason, jobs in the RMG sector are indispensable to enhance women worker's family income and their living standards. Jobs in the RMG sector have brought benefits to millions of poor women. Being productive economically has not only reshaped the traditional gender roles assigned to women from the patriarchal attitudes of the country, but involved broader social reform in Bangladesh (Morshed, 2007, p. 178). Nevertheless, these benefits have been accompanied by severe exploitation of women as virtual 'slaves' of the RMG industry. Labour rights are human rights as acknowledged in articles 23(1), 23 (2), 23 (3), 23(4), 24, 25 (1) and 25 (2) of universal declaration of human rights (UDHR).⁵ Nonetheless, inadequate legislation has been associated with a lack of integration between the government and the RMG owners for ensuring labour rights as well as codes of conduct. This not only challenges articles 15 (a), 15 (b), 15 (c), 34(1) and 38 of the constitution of Bangladesh 1972⁶ regarding women RMG workers' voice and security to protect their rights but is a violation of fundamental human rights under the abovementioned articles of UDHR. Indeed, the majority of female labourers are ignorant about their rights (Kabeer& Mahmud, 2004, p. 155). As a consequence of this, the women RMG workers in Bangladesh neglect the issue of their fundamental rights. Under these circumstances, based on a combination of the institutional and group theoretical structures, the study connects different stakeholders such as trade unions, donors, civil society, NGOs, public officials and RMG entrepreneurs in reforming the RMG sector. As a coalition group, these stakeholders all have a significant role in the new policy model process in representing knowledge and responsiveness to put into practice effective policy measures to ensure fundamental rights and voice to enhance the empowerment of women workers, and at the same time strengthen the productivity of the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

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