Progress in Protecting Workers in Bangladesh’s Garment Industry

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Rana Plaza: April 24, 2013
Rana Plaza
Aftermath – Forward Motion in OHS

- International Labor Organization
- Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety
- Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety
- National Tripartite Action Plan
- International clothing brands
- National factory owners and associations
Continuing “boom” in exports

→ July 2015 to March 2016:
  – 9% increase year-over-year

→ October 2015 – January 2016:
  – 14% increase year-over-year

→ December 2015:
  – 16% increase year-over-year in exports to US
  – 2015 calendar year total = $26 billion
Positive Results

Factory inspections completed:
- 3,768 factories altogether
- 1,552 factories by the Accord
- 677 factories by the Alliance
- 1,549 factories by BGD govt/ILO

Buildings closed:
- 39 closed completely
- 42 partially closed
Positive Results

➔ Hazards identified:
  – 103,800 in Accord factories
  – 48,500 in Alliance factories

➔ Hazards corrected:
  – 60% of Accord identified hazards
    • 75% of electrical – 36% of fire – 15% of structural
  – 49.5% of Alliance identified hazards
  – BGD govt/ILO: only 50 CAPs underway
Positive Results

→ **Factories completed all corrections:**
  - Accord: 7 factories
  - Alliance: 24 factories

→ **Factories “suspended” for non-action**
  - Alliance: 77 factories
  - Accord: 100s of “warning letters” sent

→ **Factories “terminated” for non-action**
  - Accord: 23 factories
  - Alliance: 60 factories
Positive Results

→ Health & Safety Committees:
  – Accord: 52 unionized factories in pilot program
  – Alliance: 14 factories in pilot program

→ Worker training:
  – Alliance: 1.2 million initial; 420,000 refresher
  – Accord: rights training; H&S Committee trng

→ Complaint hotlines:
  – Alliance: 643 factories; 55,000 calls, 2,800/month
Positive Results

→ ILO programs – govt, employer, worker

– Inspectors
  • June 2013 = 92 DIFE inspectors (10% women)
  • April 2016 = 284 inspectors (20% women)
  • Fire Service inspectors grew from 50 to 268

– Budget allocation
  • From $900,000 to $4.1 million (2013-2016)

– Training
  • 40-day ILO course for DIFE inspectors (160 inspectors)
Positive Results

→ ILO programs – govt, employer, worker
  – Developing National OSH Program
  – Training programs with employers and managers
  – Training programs with unions and workers
  – “Better Work” program
    • Assessment, tech assistance, training
    • 101 garment factories supplying 18 international clothing brands
    • 196,000 workers (54% women)
Positive Results

→ National government
  – H&S committees, health clinics required
  – National OHS Profile under development

→ Factory Owners
  – Recognize priority for effective OHS programs

→ International brands
  – Now include fire and building safety in audits
Unprecedented Attention

→ Unprecedented for Bangladesh
→ Unprecedented for any garment supply chain
→ Unprecedented for any global supply chain, anywhere in the world

→ Key lessons:
  – Competent, public inspections
  – Mandatory hazard correction paid by brands
  – Requires meaningful worker participation
Continuing Challenges

→ Hazard correction “way behind” schedule
  – Accord’s 1,660 factories in April 2016:
    • 1,388 factories behind schedule (84%)
    • 522 factories with less than 40% corrections done
    • Only 7 factories complete and 57 “on track” (4%)
    • 186 factories with incomplete CAPs (11%)

→ Financing not available
  – Brands failing to provide funds, long term orders
  – Loan guarantee programs not working
Continuing Challenges

→ **Status of “terminated” factories**
  - Still operating in unsafe conditions
  - BGD govt unable to provide oversight

→ **Viability of H&S Committees**
  - Key to maintaining gains, expanding OHS scope
  - “Democratic selection” in real-world context
  - Need for training and release time
  - Need for authority to act
Obstacles to Progress

→ “Sweatshop business model”
  – “Iron triangle” of sourcing trumps CSR
  – “Race to bottom” in annual price cuts
    • Brand payments lower today than at Rana Plaza
  – Deliberate overloading suppliers leads to “unauthorized sub-contractors”
  – Uncertainty in orders to suppliers
  – Unfunded CSR mandates
Obstacles to Progress

→ Failed CSR monitoring system
  – Ineffective and incompetent
  – Subcontracted factory inspections
  – Corrupt at all levels

→ Govt inability to play critical role
  – Lack of political will
  – Lack of resources – human, technical and financial
Obstacles to Progress

→ Workers not able to play key role
  - Only 2-4% of factories unionized
  - Employer hostility widespread
  - Vulnerable workforce
  - Low levels of formal education
  - Lack of knowledge and experience in OHS
  - Plenty of interest – but difficult circumstances
Role for IHs and OHS Professionals

→ Sharing experience and expertise
   - Government: ILO projects
   - Employers: OHS center programs
   - Workers: OHS Initiative for Workers and Communities
   - Professional: university programs

→ Donating time and money
   - Join roster of OHS Professionals
Contact Information

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