

# OHS Initiative Trains Second Group of Worker Educators



Participants in the Initiative's 20-day "Training of Trainers" course for the second group of worker educators, June-October 2018.

**In late September, Garrett Brown carried out this email interview with Masud Parvez, previously the Training Manager and now the Project Coordinator of the Bangladesh OHS Initiative for Workers and Community.**

## **What have the participants in the 2017 training course done with their new skills and information?**

At the end of the 20-day training course, the first group of participants carried out several training programs for their own organizations, part of the general effort of the participating organizations to make occupational health and safety a part of their regular project activities. Our records show that 20 of the program graduates from the five organizations participating last year carried out a total of 106 training sessions, each lasting from two hours to all day long, for 2,400 participants. Each organization tends to focus on specific topics. For example, some focused on labor law and the role of safety committees, others on hygiene in the workplace, and still others on gender and domestic and workplace violence.

According to our follow-up training plan based on discussions with the member organizations, they will conduct another 108 trainings reaching 2,160 participants by November. These trainings will be conducted by graduates of both groups, with the new graduates leading two sessions each.

## **Have the 1st class graduates continued to stay in touch with the OHS Initiative?**

Of the 29 graduates of the first class, 25 have attended refresher courses. (The other four participants left their organizations for different reasons, mostly because they moved back to their homes in the countryside. The lives of garment workers are very unstable.) Of the refresher courses, the favorite topics included Hazard Mapping, Chemical Safety, Building and Fire Safety, the Functions of Safety Committees, Leadership, and Collective Bargaining & Conflict Management. They also appreciated the class organized as a group effort to develop a 2-hour workshop on basic OHS for RMG workers.

## **How far along is the 2018 class in their 20-day course?**

The course is scheduled to be completed by 7 October 2018. We held the 5-day intensive training in the first days of July at the GK campus in Savar. An additional 14 one-day sessions were held through the end of September at various locations, including a very exciting factory visit in Mirpur, where participants got to walk-through a real garment factory and use checklists to note conditions that were in or out of compliance. For this second course, we have 29 participants from all six of the Initiative organizations. So far, not a single member has dropped out!

Continued on page 3

## Member organizations of the OHS Initiative

The OHS Initiative for Workers and Community consists of six Bangladeshi non-governmental organizations. These organizations each have one representative on the Initiative's Governing Board and the California Collaborative has a seventh seat on the Board. The Initiative's member organizations are:

**Bangladesh Center for Worker Solidarity (BCWS)** is one of the country's most prominent labor rights groups. Former garment workers founded BCWS in 2001 to improve working conditions and promote workers' rights by building the capacity of workers to advocate for themselves, and providing services such as labor rights education, leadership training and legal aid.

**Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS)** provides research and information on labor laws and economic issues to unions and worker organizations in a variety of industrial sectors. BILS is widely respected among labor groups and works in an ecumenical fashion with all sectors of the fractured labor movement in Bangladesh.

**Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE)** is a leading OHS non-governmental organization that conducts training, research, policy advocacy and support services for workers in the garment and shipbreaking industries, among other economic sectors.

**Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK)** is a public health organization with clinics and hospitals serving Bangladesh's poor, including workers in many industries. GK's health facilities in Dhaka and Savar have also treated Rana Plaza collapse survivors and their families, as well as injured workers in numerous other industries.

**IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC)** is made up of more than 20 trade unions in the garment, chemical and metalworking industries, including a dozen unions in the garment industry. The IBC is the national council of unions affiliated with the Geneva-based IndustriALL Global Union.

**Naripokkho** is a women's organization that provides information, training and support on gender issues for women workers on topics such as domestic violence and social discrimination. Naripokkho works with garment workers and their families in the Savar industrial area of Dhaka, including survivors of the Rana Plaza building collapse.



## Role of the California Collaborative

The California Collaborative, formed in 2015 to support the creation of the OHS Initiative, consists of four OHS organizations in the state of California: Hesperian Health Guides in Berkeley; Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at the University of California at Berkeley; Labor Occupational Safety and Health (LOSH) program at the University of California at Los Angeles; and the Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network (MHSSN) in Berkeley.

The California Collaborative raised \$54,000 for the first year of operations, and \$82,000 for the current year of activities. The Collaborative is committed to raising the funds needed for the third year of operations, after which the project will transition to becoming self-sustaining.

The Collaborative has worked with the staff and Governing Board of the Initiative, as requested, to provide technical assistance on both OHS and pedagogical issues, and to provide appropriate curriculum and teaching materials. The Collaborative has also collected and posted a web page of Bangla-language materials on occupational health and safety.

In addition, the MHSSN hosts periodic conference calls for OHS professionals in North America to report on OHS issues in Bangladesh, covering activities of the OHS Initiative as well as other national and international efforts to improve workplace safety and health in Bangladesh.

### What have been the biggest challenges for the OHS Initiative over the past 2 years?

Successfully carrying out the 20-day training course is our biggest challenge. It takes a lot of effort to identify and enroll the participants from the six member organizations, and assess the varying levels of their skills and needs. Developing and adapting the curriculum so that it is accessible to all, and finding the specific resource persons for each topic is difficult. And resolving time management and logistics problems for the participants, who as low-wage workers may have little control over their time, is hard.

Arranging the follow-up or refresher trainings is likewise difficult. Workers are busy with their work from dawn to dusk, they have one off day – Friday – and we take that day from them and they hardly have the three hours to devote to it. This has led us to develop a shorter refresher module of two hours.

And as you know, keeping a successful partnership and collaboration going among six partner organizations, all with their own work and priorities, is not easy.

Despite these challenges, we have successfully (almost) completed two intensive 20-day training efforts for 58 worker educators. These workers have carried out more than 100 workshops reaching another 2,400 workers. We humbly believe that the project is a smashing success!

### What have been the most satisfying aspects so far for you personally?

This project will develop 75 people from the grassroots as OHS experts. They will work directly with the workers so the workers will benefit. They will improve the lives of so many. This was the dream to start with, and I feel proud that in the first and second group of graduates, the participants' eagerness to learn and ability to achieve have met very high marks.

The OHS Initiative governing board members and donors have been very positive. Whenever I seek suggestions or feedback, or if I raise any issues regarding the project, they respond promptly and helpfully. Though ensuring workers safety is always challenging, I am confident that as six well-known and respected organizations working together, we will overcome the barriers much more effectively than if it was any one organization working alone. ♦

## OHS Initiative takes to social media!



**A YouTube video makes available to all a session on trade unions led by BILS as part of the 2018 Training-of-Trainers course.**

**YouTube** The OHS Initiative has produced and posted 13 short documentary videos on YouTube, now available online worldwide. The Initiative launched the YouTube page in May 2018 and more than 575 people visited the on-line site in the first four months. The videos contain sections of the trainers' presentations and recommendations, as well as the participants' activities and feedback. Watch the videos by typing "OHS Initiative for Workers and Community" in the YouTube search engine.

**f** A closed Facebook group for participants in the Initiative's two 20-day Training-of-Trainers courses was established to connect and support the ToT participants' efforts to prepare and conduct their own grassroots-level OHS workshops. Initiative staff post information, materials, and encouragement for the course graduates' follow-up trainings, and all participants are able to learn from the experiences of their fellow worker educators.

## The major activities of the OHS Initiative in 2018 have included:

- **March 17** – Governing Board meeting
- **March 31** – Trainers' Networking meeting
- **April 7** – Trainers' Networking meeting
- **April 25 to 29** – Five-day refresher training for the 2017 graduates
- **June 23** – Governing Board meeting
- **June 30 to July 4** – Five-day session inaugurates the second Training-of-Trainers course
- **July 26** – first of 14 one-day modules to complete the second ToT course in October
- **September 8** – Technical Committee meeting to prepare follow-up trainings
- **September 14** – field trip to a working factory to practice inspection skills
- **September 23** – Training module on gender OHS issues and reproductive health



Graduates of the first Training-of-Trainers program (2017) work together in a 5-day "refresher" training in April 2018 to support them in leading their own OHS workshops with workers and community members.

## Initiative Staff and Instructors

Since its beginning in early 2017, the OHS Initiative has been staffed by dedicated and experienced staff. These include Md. Masud Parvez, who started as the project's Training Manager in 2017 and then became the Project Coordinator in May 2018. Md. Rahimul Haque has been the Financial Officer since July 2017, and Md. Hafizur Rahman has been the Administration and Human Resources Officer since November 2017. A new hire in May 2018, Md. Abdur Rashid joined as the Communication Officer and Trainer. The project is currently looking to hire a Training Manager for the growing numbers of worker educators passing through the intensive Training-of-Trainers program and on to conducting their own OHS workshops at the grassroots level.

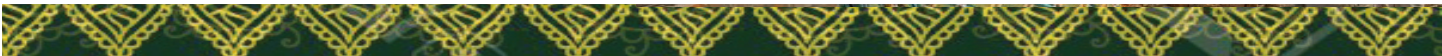
In addition to the staff of the OHS Initiative, the instructors for both the 20-day Training-of-Trainers courses and the 5-day refresher course have included highly qualified and experienced professionals from government agencies, universities and non-governmental organizations.

### These instructors include:

- **Dr. Rajib Chandra Das**, Assistant Inspector General, Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) in the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE)
- **Brigadier General Nayeem Md. Shahidullah** (Rtd), National Industrial Health and Safety Council
- **Professor Mahmud A. Shareef, PhD.**, North South University
- OHS expert **A.K.M. Masum-ul Alam**
- Initiative member organization leaders **Shakil Akter Chowdhury** (BILS) and **Dr. Mahjabeen Chowdhury** (GK)
- Other DIFE and MoLE personnel including **Sheikh Mostafizur Rahman, Mahzuzur Rahman Bhuiya, Manzurul Kader Khan, and Md. Kabir Ahmed Chowdhury**



**These workers in Bangladesh need the OHS Initiative for Workers and Community!**





Graduates of the 2017 training program receive certificates for successfully completing the April 2018 refresher course.

## Finances for Year Three

The first two years of the Initiative were funded by donations by OHS professional associations, individual occupational health professionals and human rights organizations. The first year budget was \$54,000 while the second year of operations with an expanded Dhaka staff and activities had a budget of \$82,000. The contributors have included:

- **Institution of Occupational Safety and Health (UK)**  
– grants both years
- **World Solidarity Movement (Belgium)** – grants both years
- **LUSH Charity Pot (Canada)** – grants both years
- **San Francisco Donors Group (US)** – grants both years
- **Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network (US)**  
– grants both years
- **American Industrial Hygiene Association (US)**
- **Global Work Foundation (US)**
- **Individual OHS professionals**

The budget for the third year of the OHS Initiative – January to December 2019 – is \$90,000. This will fund a larger staff, expanded activities to support the first two groups of trainers, and the recruitment and training of a third group of 30. The Initiative is currently developing a plan to become self-sustaining by the end of 2019.

“ This is an important project as it’s designed to help build capacity within Bangladeshi communities. Once trainers are trained, they will be able to provide training to many, thereby raising awareness of health and safety more widely. IOSH is very pleased to be involved and we’re delighted that the project has made such a positive start. ”

– *Richard Jones*

*Head of Policy and Public Affairs,  
Institution of Occupational Safety and Health,  
United Kingdom*

## Contact Information

### OHS Initiative for Workers and Community

Secretariat at OSHE Foundation, House # 19 (1st Floor), Lane # A,  
Road # 1, Sector # 6, Mirpur, Dhaka-1216, Bangladesh  
Telephone: +880-2-9032947-8  
Email: parvez.oshacademy@gmail.com

### California Collaborative:

Secretariat at the MHSSN, P.O. Box 124  
Berkeley, CA 94701-0124  
Telephone: 510-558-1014  
Email: garrettdbrown@comcast.net