

Busy spring for OHS Initiative for Workers and Community

OHS Initiative staff in Dhaka have had a busy spring conducting outreach visits to key organizations, developing occupational health and safety (OHS) curriculum and preparing for the first round of “train-the-trainer” courses this summer with participants from the six worker and community organizations which make up the Initiative.

The purpose of the Initiative is to increase the OHS capacity of Bangladeshi organizations through participatory, accessible trainings on key OHS issues, gender equality and human rights. The trainings will generate a cadre of OHS trainers in worker, women’s rights and community-based organizations. These six organizations (see description of the Initiative’s members on page 2) already have a core of effective grassroots-level trainers doing important worker education on a range of topics. The goal of this effort is to expand the repertoire of these trainers’ workshops to include OHS issues in the garment, construction, tannery and ship-breaking industries.

Outreach Meetings

Starting in February, Project Coordinator Shabiha Sultana and Training Manager Md. Masud Parvez visited Initiative member organizations and other Dhaka organizations conducting OHS trainings. The meetings had the dual purpose of conducting a needs assessment of the member groups and learning from the experience of these organizations’ ongoing worker education efforts. “This experience will be invaluable for helping us to create understandable and effective training programs for grassroots-level workers and community members,” explained Shabiha.

By reviewing the educational materials produced by others, the Initiative staff will avoid the common mistake of “reinventing the wheel” to create all-new training curriculum rather than taking advantage of already tested and effective materials. And among them, the organizations founding the Initiative have a wealth of experience:



Bruno Deceukelier, Asia Coordinator of the World Solidarity Movement (Belgium) with OHS Initiative staff and Board members in Dhaka, from left to right: **Bruno Deceukelier**, **Sadia Afrin** (Administrative Assistant, OHS Initiative), **Shabiha Sultana** (Project Coordinator, OHS Initiative), **Sitara Ferdous Shimla** (Accounts Officer, OHS Initiative) and **Ghulam Mustafa Dulal** (Executive Director, **Gonoshasthaya Kendra**).

- **The Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies (BILS)**, has for years trained workers on labor law and rights, including sessions with 13 registered national trade unions and more than 2,500 garment workers. BILS has training facilities in its Dhanmondi offices, a library of OHS materials and other training materials, and a corps of experienced labor trainers.
- **The Naripokkho women’s rights organization** has since 1983 developed and implemented a wide range of trainings on gender issues, violence against women and gender discrimination at work. Naripokkho has worked with women garment workers injured in the Rana Plaza building collapse in Savar. The Chair of the Initiative’s Governing Board, Tamanna Khan, is a member of Naripokkho.
- **The public health organization Gonoshasthaya Kendra (GK)** started in 1971 during Bangladesh’s war of liberation. GK serves poor communities throughout the country with 43 health care centers, hundreds of outreach workers and many programs. The Initiative staff met with GK’s master trainers in Savar to discuss the challenges in conducting effective training programs at the grassroots level, reviewed materials used in its two-year-old program with 3,200 garment workers and toured GK’s training center.

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 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 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 the \$53K needed to fund the first year budget in the summer of 2016, and is actively fundraising for the budget for years two and three of the Dhaka project.

The Collaborative will work with the staff and Governing Board of the Initiative to provide technical assistance as requested on both OHS and pedagogical issues, and to provide appropriate curriculum and teaching materials. It is also developing and maintaining a Bangla-language web page of OHS materials.

In addition, the MHSSN hosts a quarterly conference call 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.

- **The Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE)** houses the Initiative at its Mirpur office. OSHE conducts trainings with a wide range of workers, including those in the garment, ship-breaking, tannery and construction industries, has an extensive library of training materials and on-site training facilities. Repon Chowdhury, OSHE's Executive Director, is Secretary of the Initiative's Governing Board.

In addition to the member organizations, Initiative staff also met with staff of the Institute for Sustainable Communities (ISC) and the International Labor Organization (ILO) at their respective Dhaka offices. Rita Lohani, ISC's country director, explained the organization's OHS training program aimed primarily at factory managers and supervisors, and offered technical assistance in curriculum development for a course for workers. Alberto Cerda of the ILO, which has extensive training courses for factory owners, managers and supervisors, as well as workers and their union organizations, shared the ILO's experience and materials, and offered assistance to the Initiative's grassroots worker and community-focused effort.

Curriculum Development Committee

On April 1st, the first meeting of the committee developing the Initiative training curriculum, manual and materials met in Dhaka. In addition to representatives from each of the six member organizations, three external experts joined the meeting: Brig. General Abu Nayeem Md. Shahidullah of the National Industrial Health and Safety Council; Dr. Mahmud Sharif, professor at the North South University; and AKM Masum Ul Alam of the ILO's Dhaka office.

A draft Terms of Reference was developed to specify the expert participants' role and responsibilities; draft copies of educational materials were reviewed and distributed for further comment; and criteria for selecting the first cohort of trainers (five from each of the six organizations) were discussed. The development of a standardized Initiative training curriculum and manual incorporating the best aspects of already existing worker education materials (OHS, labor rights, gender issues and public health) is the goal of this committee.

The Curriculum Development Committee will meet again on May 25th to finalize the participants, agenda, venue and duration of the first course, tentatively scheduled for the last week of July.

Donor News

In February, Bruno Deceukelier, Asia Coordinator for the World Solidarity Movement (WSM) based in Belgium, visited Dhaka and met with members of the Initiative's Governing Board and staff.

Deceukelier gave an overview of WSM's activities in Asia in support of worker, women's and community organizations throughout the region. The WSM is a cornerstone funder of the Initiative, helping to launch the effort and pledging increased support in the next two years.

A new donor offered its support for the OHS Initiative grassroots training program in May. The GlobalWorks Foundation, associated with the Fontheim International organization in Washington, DC, is contributing \$2,500 toward the 2018 budget for the OHS Initiative.



One of the many April 2017 protests in Dhaka marking the 4th anniversary of the Rana Plaza building collapse. Fifty children orphaned by the collapse participated in this event.



Garment workers in a candlelight march on the eve of May 1st International Workers' Day demonstrations in Dhaka.

Funds needed for Years Two and Three

Planning for an expansion of Initiative staff by hiring additional trainers in both years two and three, the budgets for the Initiative increase to \$65,000 in year two and \$78,000 in year three. The fiscal years for the Initiative begin on January 1, 2018, and January 1, 2019.

Two first-year funders have generously committed to continue to contribute funds: IOSH in the UK will donate 5,000 British pounds each year and the WSM in Belgium will contribute 8,000 Euros in each of the two years. This leaves \$49,400 to be raised this year and \$62,400 during 2018.

Renewed appeals will be made to other first-year funders to continue their support as well as reaching out to new potential contributors. The start-up plan for the OHS Initiative calls for it to become increasingly self-sustaining after its first years of operation.

“ 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: shabiha.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

