

Women's Cafés – Promotion of Social Dialogue in the Industry

About Women's Café

If the world is a global village, then workers serve the entire mankind through the clothes they produce. There are –

- Around 5 million workers in Bangladesh textile, garments and leather sectors
- Mostly women (65 per cent in RMG, 45 per cent in leather) that have transformed Bangladesh into the second largest Ready-Made Garments (RMG) exporter on the planet with the leather sector growing in importance.

Women's Cafés are the place from where factory workers return home with more confidence than yesterday. Workers drive the country's economic growth. They also have a voice to be heard, points to put across. A paradigm shift in this regard is brought in by 20 Women's Cafés, **community-based platforms for workers, especially females, from the textile, garments and leather sectors.**

Women's Cafés are facilitated by the Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry (PSES) project.

Project Title	Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry (PSES)
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Co-operation Partners	Agrajatra, Awaj Foundation, Karmojibi Nari, Organization for Women's Development in Bangladesh (OWDEB)
Overall term	July 2010 – June 2020

Here Workers

- Learn about their **rights** as well as **responsibilities** in the work place
- Engage in **social dialogue** with their management for improvement of working conditions in their factories

- Unwind and relax at the end of a hard day's work
- Learning while chitchatting (adda), having puffed rice, sharing joy
- Learning through infotainment, such as Ludo, a traditional board game

What Do They Learn?

Some of the workers cannot even read and write, but they know the labour laws concerning them. Women Cafés provide them knowledge on their rights as well as responsibilities on

- Labour laws, occupational health and safety and gender
- Legal advice and support on labour and family disputes

Apart from building awareness in workers, Women's Cafés also support factories in **capacity building** for workers and management representatives of factory committees i.e. **Participation Committees, Safety Committees**, etc. about their roles and responsibilities.

Transformation Through Women's Cafés

As revealed by Population Research and Development Associates in their survey of 200 workers from Women's Cafés,

- On average, **75 per cent of workers have good knowledge** about key elements of the labour law.
- **52.8 per cent of workers communicated** directly with **top management**, while **41.7 per cent** talked with **mid-level management** to claim their rights.





Women’s Cafés also Feature Social Enterprises

- 2 day-cares for RMG parents
- 2 computer centres
- 8 fair price shops for workers

Benefits for Owners

During the Ashulia labour unrest in December 2016, owners estimated that they had incurred losses worth Taka 1 billion per day. Social dialogue is an approach that offers a win-win situation for both owners and workers to prevent strikes or untoward situations. It helps to:

- Improve workers’ satisfaction
- Decrease absenteeism and migration rates through improvement of working conditions, thus improving productivity
- Provide an environment that makes it easier to negotiate with workers who know about their rights and responsibilities, and make logical deductions
- Decrease chances of labour unrest and strikes

Milestones Achieved by Women’s Cafés

- Since 2010, around 20,000 female Peer Educator Group leaders have been developed
- Around 270,000 workers, especially females, from the garment and leather sectors have been made aware about their workplace rights and responsibilities
- More than 10,000 disputes between workers and management have been amicably resolved through the interventions of trained workers and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) facilitators

“Thanks to Women’s Cafés which support our workers to be more aware of their roles and responsibilities. They are not prone to rumours. They don’t jump into action without figuring out the situation. Women’s Café affiliated workers played a significant role in avoiding conflict during an Eid dispute in our factory.”

- Md. Abul Kalam
Assistant General Manager
Fakruddin Textile Mills Ltd.

“It was my dream to talk to my factory owner someday, but now my factory owner often calls me to resolve disputes in my factory.”

Ruma, Peer Educator Group Leader

There are many more women workers like Ruma who narrate the transformations they have helped bring about in their work places as well as in the communities.

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Registered offices
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Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry (PSES)
GIZ Bangladesh
PO Box 6091, Gulshan 1
Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh
T +880 2 5506 8744-52, +880 9 666 701 000
F +880 2 5506 8753
E giz-bangladesh@giz.de
I www.giz.de/bangladesh

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Text Subir Das, Md Mizanur Rahman Himadri and Mehzabin Ahmed

Editor Farah Rahman

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