

Hidden Supply Chains in Bangladesh



COVID-19 relief distribution, Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Building Bangladeshi apparel workers' livelihoods and addressing the hidden nature of informal work through modern day slavery identification and remediation. The project will map the full extent of garment supply chains – leveraging support from four local factories – and identify examples of child, forced and bonded labour; provide remediation/referral services to these individuals; share COVID-19 prevention and legal rights information; provide immediate food and other aid to informal workers; and share best practices with brand retailers.

Countries: Bangladesh
Sector: Garments
Lead Partner: GoodWeave International
Partners: Awaj Foundation; Monsoon Accessorize; VF Corporation, Humanity United
Total budget incl. partner contribution: £310,626
Donor: FCDO, Facility Manager: Mott MacDonald



"Bangladesh's apparel sector and workers have been devastated by the ripple effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on global supply chains, and we hope this initiative brings short-term relief from hunger and other life-threatening scenarios to workers, as well as long-term improvements in supply chain transparency and due diligence to provide enhanced protections for informal workers in the post-pandemic world."

Nazma Akter, Founder and Executive Director, Awaj Foundation

"Recognizing we can only address problems we can see, VF continues expanding our traceability and transparency efforts to dig deeper into our extended supply chain. The information gathered in this program will help VF enhance its policies and processes to advance the systemic change needed to address issues hidden deep within the apparel industry's global supply chains."

Peter Higgins, Vice President, Global Responsible Sourcing, VF Corporation



Challenge

- ILO estimates 87% of the Bangladesh labour force is informal – few companies realise their source factories may produce only a portion of the goods that fill their orders.
- FCDO's 2019 Bangladesh modern slavery study cited that exploitation is largely eradicated in Tier One factories, but frequently found in the informal sector.
- ILO's COVID-19 briefing on the informal economy stresses its extreme vulnerability.
- The South Asian Network on Economic Modelling estimates Bangladesh's poverty rate may double as a result of the pandemic.
- While the Bangladesh government has created a limited number of aid programmes, distribution to decentralised, unregistered workers is also a significant challenge.

Initiative

- Increase transparency in apparel supply chains.
- Provide relief and remediation for informal apparel workers through grassroots labour rights organisation Awaj Foundation, and international brands Monsoon Accessorize and VF Corporation.
- Remediate and track cases of child, forced and bonded labour and build Awaj's capacity, through training and ongoing mentoring, on GoodWeave's holistic system for the prevention of child, forced and bonded labour in supply chains.
- Map supply chains all the way through outsourced production sites, with access to suppliers facilitated by brand partners, as well as from the bottom of the chain up, in areas known to be home-based outsourcing hubs.
- Conduct rapid assessment on the impact of COVID-19 on ready-to-hire informal workers; distribute COVID-19 relief to those most in need.
- Final report to include actionable guidelines for ethical supply chain due diligence, including subcontracting and home work in Bangladesh; recommendations developed in coordination with partner companies, and shared broadly with international buyers, multi-stakeholder initiatives, and governments; and assessment of the feasibility of transitioning project interventions into a long-term programme with additional brand partners.

Expected Results

Worker resilience and transparent supply chains:

- Up to 10,000 workers supported through supply chain mapping, rights awareness and COVID-19 safety protocols.
- 6,250 beneficiaries provided COVID-19 relief.
- Traceability and visibility of selected apparel supply chains through subcontractors and homeworkers.

Gender, social inclusion and human rights:

- Remediation of identified child, forced and bonded labour cases.
- Information sharing and recommendations on solutions to root causes of child labour and worker exploitation, as well as proposed longer-term programme interventions.

Mott MacDonald Limited is the Facility Manager for the Vulnerable Supply Chain Facility. We have partnered with 16 UK retailers supporting 84 small and medium sized businesses across Africa and Asia, which supply to the UK. The Facility will lead to economic, social, and health benefits for around 1 million women and men directly and indirectly.

