



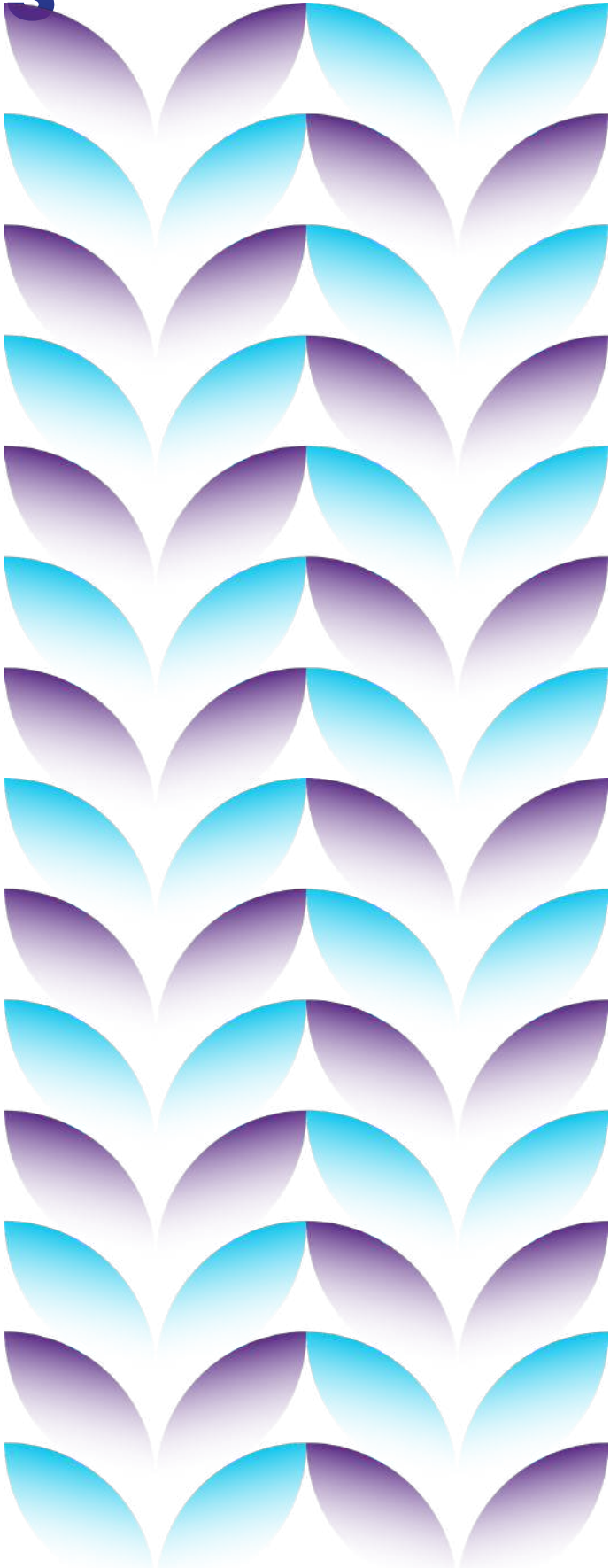
Annual Report 2020-2021

awajfoundation.org



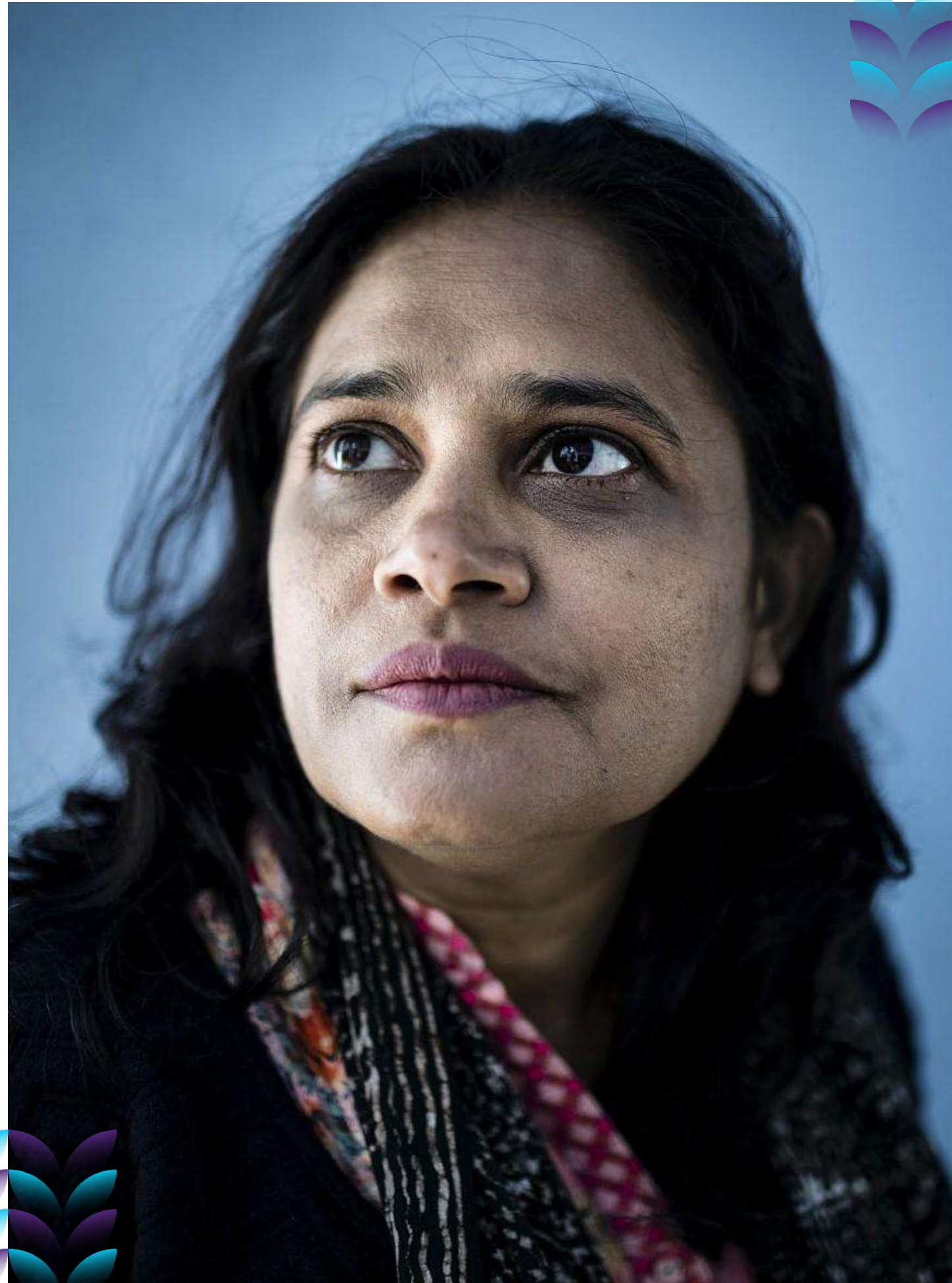
Table Content

S

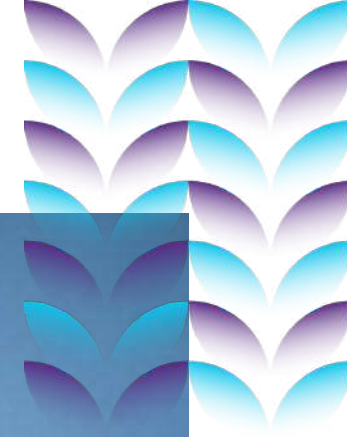
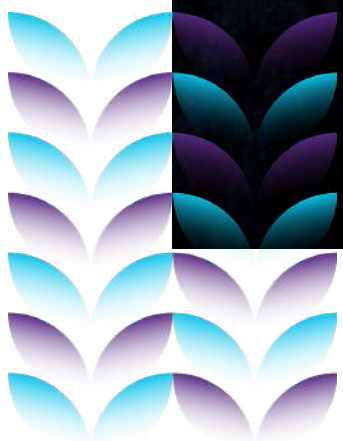


- 3 [Statement from Executive director](#)
- 4 [Awaj Foundation in the time of COVID-19](#)
 - 5 [Activities done during COVID-19](#)
- 6 [Work and impacts](#)
 - 7 [Awaj's area of work](#)
 - 8 [Services from Awaj](#)
 - 9 [Empowerment of women in preventing sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the industry](#)
 - 10 [Strengthening workers' voices and labour rights in the RMG sector](#)
 - 11 [UP!+ 2019](#)
 - 12 [Increasing awareness of worker rights](#)
 - 12 [Ensuring proper channels of communication by applying UP! skills](#)
 - 13 [USAID's Workers' Empowerment and Participation \(WEP\) Activity](#)
 - 14 [WCA Members ensured roadside garbage clean and tidy](#)
 - 15 [Supporting Migrant Workers](#)
 - 16 [Four migrant workers get new lives](#)
 - 17 [Hidden Supply Chains in Bangladesh-Bringing Agency and Resiliency to Informal Workers](#)
 - 18 [Collective Bargaining Agreements in the time of Covid](#)





Statement from Executive director



The COVID-19 pandemic has been an unprecedented disaster for the workers of the RMG sector in Bangladesh. With suppliers worldwide refusing to accept or pay for completed workers, factories have needed to let go of many workers, while others suffered from lost wages during the lockdown period. According to our studies, only 71% of workers were paid during this period, in part or in full.

Once lockdown measures were relaxed, our workers then had to choose between the risks of dying from starvation, or from COVID.

I am thankful for all the support we have from our donors, labour union partners, technical advisors, volunteers, and friends across the world. Your support for our workers as they struggle to meet the most basic needs have been vital in raising funds, awareness, and perhaps most importantly, giving a voice to the voiceless.

Awaj is delighted to report many highlights during this, in spite of these setbacks.

We started fundraising activities from March 2020, in order to provide relief to RMG workers who were affected by the pandemic. Many organisations supported our efforts to help these workers, and were able to mobilize funds very quickly. These included our partners from the Laudes Foundation who supported 2,013 workers and their babies, Foundation for a Just Society who supported 360 workers, GoodWeave international who supported 1,563 workers, Arteryx who supported 1,145 workers, and Indigo Proof LLC who supported 23 workers

We also joined many activists around the world for Remake's PayUp campaign. The campaign was incredibly successful and raised over \$22 billion

During this period, many individual donors, advisors, and supporters came forward to support RMG workers. Ms Theresa Lankes and Ms. Celia Franceschi supported 8 workers, for example

Our friends at Shimmy Technologies raised over \$20,000 for workers affected by the COVID-19 pandemic

Our migration programmes have been busy throughout the year with COVID-19 support and other forms of support and advocacy for migration workers rights. We were able to bring back 7 suffering migrant workers to Bangladesh. We resolved monetary disputes for 7 workers, fraudulent cases for 5 workers, and passport issues for 3 workers. We also managed to provide medical support to 5 workers

Awaj received grants from three new donors during the pandemic. Our new partners are the Global Fund for Women, Plan International, and GoodWeave International

The pandemic reiterated the overwhelming need for social safety nets for workers, and stronger enforcement of the provisions laid down by Bangladesh's labour laws

We successfully facilitated the signing of a Collective Bargaining Agreement between Hop Lun Apparels Ltd and Hop Lun Apparels Ltd Somnilito Sramik Union

We are confident that we will get there. Awaj is committed to reach our goals of strengthened labour laws, strengthened unions, and equal bargaining power for RMG workers in Bangladesh. We must press on, and not lose sight of an equal world for everyone.

Join us in solidarity.

Nazma Akter



Awaj Foundation in the time of COVID-19



Relief Distribution during Pandemic

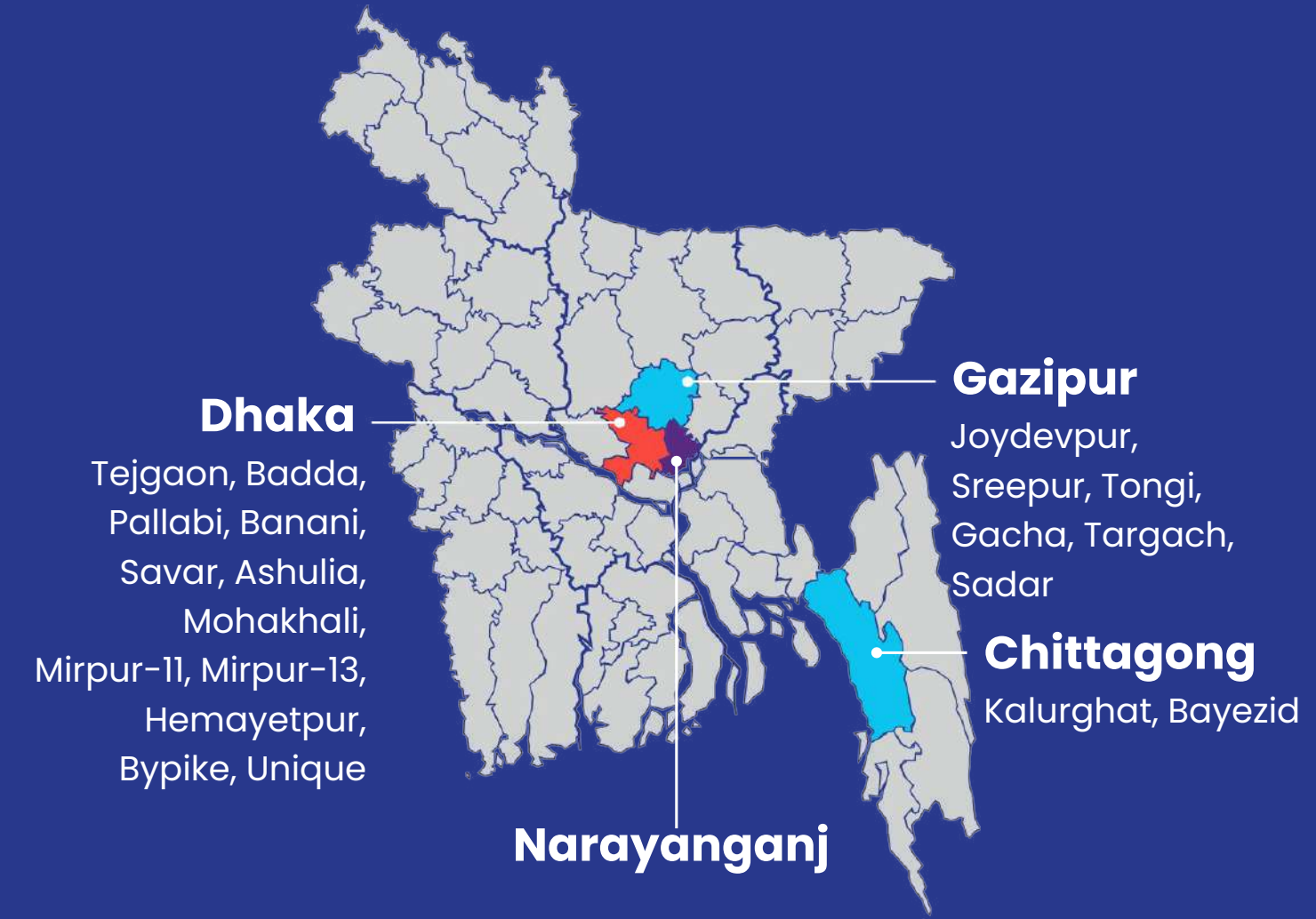
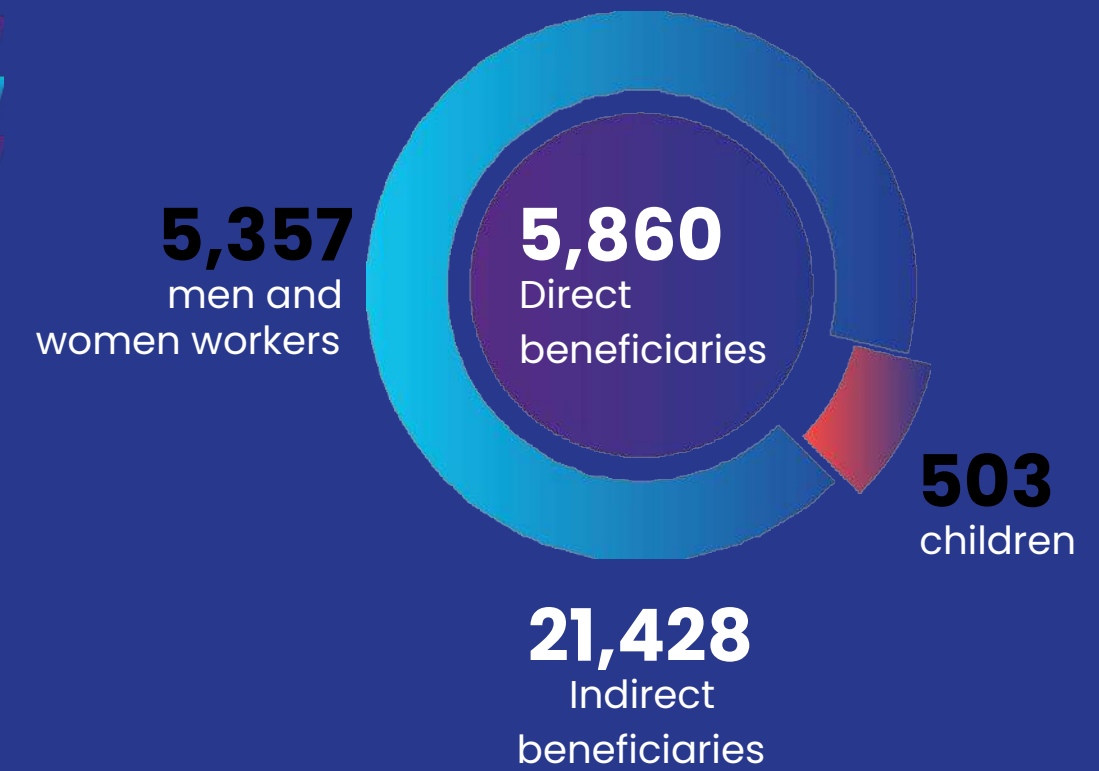


Activities done during COVID-19

- A total of 5,860 people, including 5,357 men and women workers and 503 children engaged in the garment industry, received emergency food and protective items such as rice, flour, oil, pulses, salt, onion, sugar, ginger, garlic, tea leaves, handwash, soap, etc. As a result, 5,357 workers have been able to lead safe life during the COVID pandemic.
- A total of 5,860 people have been provided with cleaning and hygiene items such as cloth soap, bath soap, detergent powder, and hand wash to ensure emergency healthcare during the COVID pandemic. As a result, they have been able to ensure that the healthcare protocol for COVID-19 is maintained, such as frequent hand washing with soap and water and cleanliness.
- During the COVID period, 503 children of workers have been provided with essential nutrition items like powdered milk, Cornflakes, Nido milk, Horlicks, and Cerelax, etc. to protect them from malnutrition. As a result, the nutrition of 503 children has been ensured.
- A total of 1,350 workers have been provided with health services, including necessary medicines, through registered doctors and nurses. A total of 900 workers out of the 1,350 workers have been provided with pathology and diagnostic tests for the diagnosis of various pregnancy- related diseases, especially women workers.
- 461 COVID tests have been done.

During the implementation of the emergency relief program during the COVID period, the following women workers were engaged on the basis of priority, in addition to the female workers mentioned above:

- Health risk women workers
- Pregnant workers
- Divorced and widowed workers
- Women workers with a large number of family members and those who are remunerated/ financed/dependent on women workers
- Unpaid and retrenched women workers
- Women workers in laid-off factories



Social Media Activities done during COVID-19

1.As part of raising awareness, we created a video message on Covid-19 Vaccine Registration posted it in Facebook and Twitter.

Link:

<https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=1390179821336618>

Awaj team created a poster, "No mask, No service" to raise awareness & also a leaflet on COVID 19 Vaccine Registration and posted it on Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Not only that, these postes and leaflets has been posted in our branch office's wall.

[illegible]

**No Mask
No Service**

**মাস্ক নেই তো
সেবাও নাই**

প্রচারেঃ আওয়াজ ফাউন্ডেশন

 **awa**
LITRANG.COM

Work and impacts



Campaign on

Rights and Fundamental Demand for

ডালিতদের মানবাধিকার এবং মৌলিক অধিকার

Date: 22 October, 2021

Venue: G. S. College, Billpara, Narayanganj

Awaj's area of work



Services from Awaj

Improved health for workers and their children

January 2015 – December 2021

Donor: KiK Textilien und Non-Food GmbH

Since 2015, KiK Textilien und Non-Food GmbH has been funding Awaj's work to improve the well-being of RMG workers and their children. With their support, Awaj has been operating seven healthcare centres, daycare centres, and preschools in the Bagherbazar, Sreepur, Gazipur, Ashulia, and Savar industrial areas in the Dhaka division.

Garment workers and their children receive free healthcare consultation, diagnostic support, and urgent surgical support in these centres. Their children have access to a safe, warm, and caring environment to learn and play in the daycare centre and preschool.

Services for Workers

Awaj provides three core services to further its mandate of improving labour conditions for garment and leather workers in Bangladesh:

- Health services
- Schools and daycare centres

Legal Aid

Awaj Foundation is one of the largest legal aid providers in Bangladesh. The foundation supports workers in workplace disputes, family law issues, and personal legal matters.

Throughout 2020 – 2021:

- Awaj provided legal support to 2,000 workers across Bangladesh
- 116 disputes were resolved through arbitration
- 534 cases were filed in the labour court
- Workers were able to recover BDT 30,20,749 in back pay, severance pay, and others

Healthcare services under the program

- 7 healthcare centres are running in Rasulbagh, Mirpur, Hemayetpur, and Ashulia in Dhaka, Malekerbari and Bagerbazaar and Gazipur, and Naryanganj.
- Services to workers are provided by full-time female doctors and nurses.
- Services include free diagnostic tests, urgent surgeries, and subsidised medications.

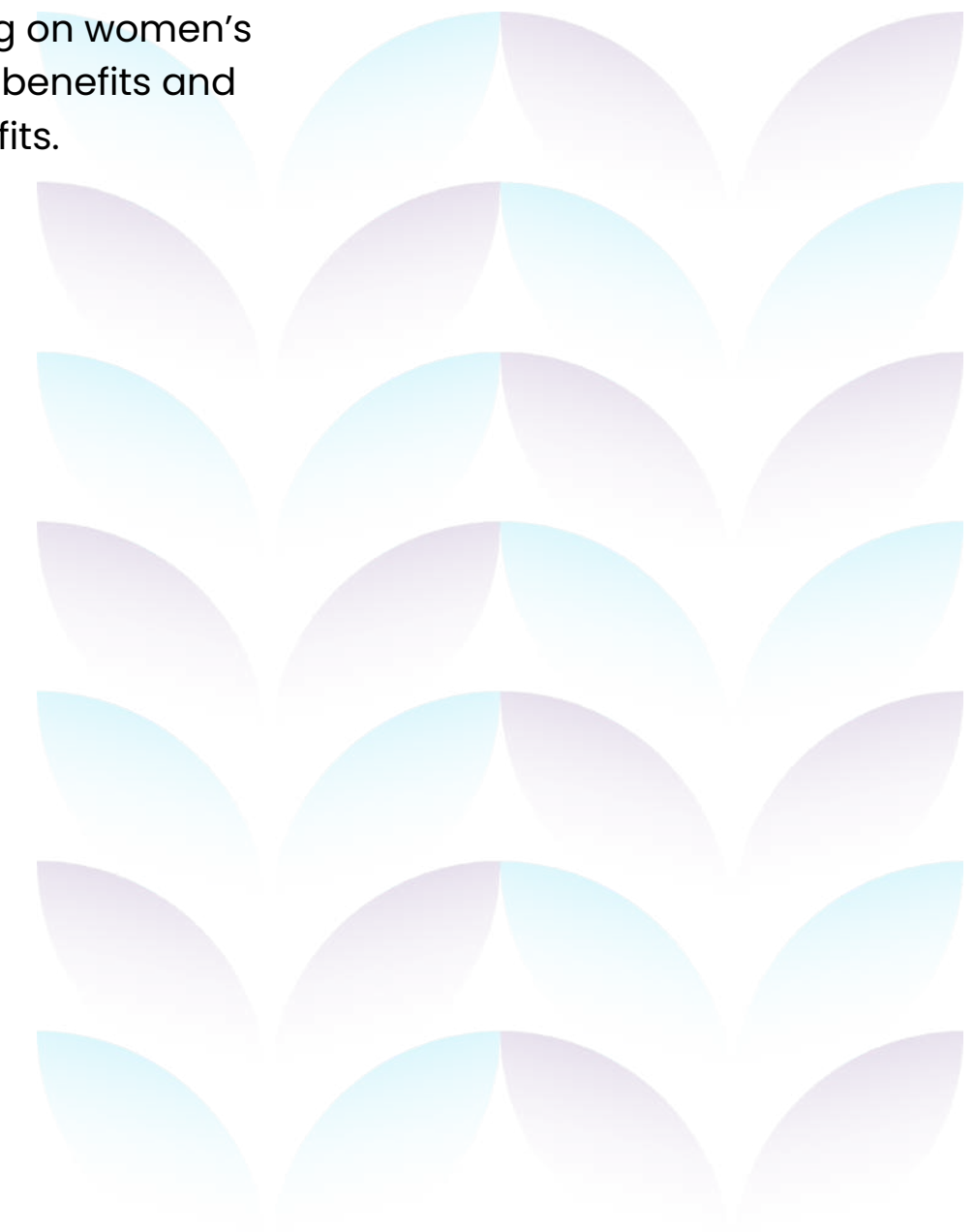
RMG workers are often deprived of access to healthcare services offered by government service providers as they are unable to visit those centres during work hours. Awaj's healthcare services are modelled around the workers' schedules, allowing them to visit doctors outside of their own work hours. Awaj's healthcare centres provide free health consultations and subsidised medicines to RMG workers.

Services from July 2020 to June 2021

- A total of 14,093 workers received healthcare services, including 10,407 women workers, 2,469 male workers, and 1,217 children
- 4,383 women workers received sanitary napkins
- 26 workers received financial aid for urgent surgery and long-term treatment

Preschool and daycare centre

Awaj's daycare centres and preschools provided quality care for children of workers in the garment sector. This allowed female workers to work without worrying about caring for their children. Though it was a pandemic, Awaj had 20 children in its daycare centres from July 2020 to June 2021. The children received healthy, nutritious meals every day and had access to a range of healthcare services. There are 47 students from Classes 1 to 4 in Awaj's schools. The respective project personnel receive ToT and awareness training on women's rights, health & hygiene, maternity benefits and rights, daycare rights, and its benefits.



Program Highlights

Empowerment of women in preventing sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the industry

The
Just



Awaj Foundation aims to increase efforts to empower female workers across the RMG sector, the ceramics and leather sector, and migrant workers and Dalits to combat gender-based violence and sexual harassment in the workplace. Building on Awaj Foundation's long-term efforts in the RMG sector, it will work to increase their rights and elevate the voices of women in these multiple sectors and end violence and sexual abuse in the workplace.

Awaj Foundation's project, FJS, is working to reduce instances of sexual and gender-based violence. This project directly targets 3,300 individuals and indirectly targets 33,000 individuals to:

- Develop the capacity of women workers against GBV in the workplace
- Reduce the prevalence of violence against women workers in the RMG sector
- Develop the capacity of management and relevant factory committees and hold social dialogue with management and duty bearers for a conducive environment to combat GBV
- Engage in sectoral and national level advocacy to combat GBV in the RMG, leather, and ceramics sectors and of migrant workers and Dalits community
- Promote a balanced work-life for women workers
- Provide education support for Dalit children
- Provide daycare support for garment workers' children
- Increase awareness among workers about their rights and accountability mechanisms and develop leadership among women workers to provide support to their peers

Activities under the program from January 2021 to July 2021

- A baseline survey successfully finished with 300 workers (RMG, Ceramic, Leather, and Dalit community)
- 1,200 readymade garment workers and worker leaders successfully trained on Gender-Based Violence
- 625 readymade garment workers and worker leaders successfully trained on High Court Verdict
- 250 ceramic workers and worker leaders successfully trained on Gender-Based Violence
- 500 leader workers and worker leaders successfully trained on Gender-Based Violence
- 250 Dalit workers successfully trained in Adolescent Marriage [prevention]
- 3 Dalit community committees successfully formed and held networking meetings with them successfully
- 250 Dalit workers successfully trained in Adolescent Marriage [prevention]
- 1 workshop on financial and internal control systems for Awaj Foundation staff was successfully done
- 4 migration caucuses formed and successfully held quarterly meetings with them
- 240 RMG worker leaders successfully trained on Labor Law (two-day-long training)
- 1 campaign for migration workers, Campaign on Zero Migration Cost, had been successfully done
- International Women's Day and International Workers Day were successfully observed
- A Dalit private tuition centre is properly conducting all its activities to educate the Dalit children
- 25 children of garment workers are kept under proper supervision in our daycare centre,

Strengthening workers' voices and labour rights in the RMG sector

In Bangladesh, the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector provides employment for 4.5 million people, around 65%–70% of whom are poor women. While this sector has played a crucial role in the economic development of the country, the benefits of it have not been adequately reflected in the lives and livelihoods of its workers. The wages earned by RMG workers are not adequate to meet the needs of their family members. At the same time, women, who are the majority of the workforce, face widespread discrimination and gender-based violence and harassment in the workplace.

An important reason behind poor wages and working conditions in the RMG sector is the lack of space and capacity for workers to unionize, raise their voices, and demand their rights. Only around 3% of RMG sector workers are unionized, and where unions exist, many of them lack the capacity to effectively negotiate with management.

Awaj Foundation, a worker-led NGO in Bangladesh, has been working for over 14 years to strengthen workers' voices and labour rights in the RMG sector. Through its capacity-building activities, Awaj has facilitated the formation of 62 trade unions and 13 Collective Bargaining Agreements (CBAs) to date through its alliance, Somnilito Garments Sramik Federation (SGSF). The particular focus of the organization's work is on women workers, and as a result, it has developed substantial expertise on issues such as Gender-based Violence (GBV) and maternity rights and benefits. Awaj also provides support to RMG sector workers on a wide range of issues including leadership development, health, education, occupational safety, and legal aid.

The objective of this project is to strengthen trade unions/federations towards better industrial relations and workplace cooperation with a long-term view to establish a living wage and tackle GBV in the RMG sector of Bangladesh. In order to achieve this goal, the project has started to help form new trade unions and improve the capacity development of existing trade unions in three industrial areas of Bangladesh. This project is already working to increase gender sensitivity in the target factories by increasing awareness of workers and management and by developing leadership among women workers. The activities of the project include training, workshops, sharing meetings, capacity development of SGSF, etc.

Achievements so far

- Submitted 2 union registrations in DL. These factories are: Bangla Japan Trading Limited (Total Workers 575, M:196 & F: 379)
- One Collective Bargaining Agreement has been signed in Hop Lun Apparels limited unit 2 (Total Workers 1800, M: 540 & F: 1260)
- Formation of AHC in 2 factories. These factories are:
 - ◊ Hop Lun Apparels Limited unit 2. Here total workers are 1800 workers, M:540, F:1260
 - ◊ Donglion Fashion BD Limited. Here total workers are 365, M:164, F:201
- Developed 150 workers who have potential future leadership qualities
- Developed the communication and leadership qualities of 25 existing TU leaders.
- Developed a profile and strategic planning of SGSF

Risks and lessons learned

- Extreme delay permission from NGO Affairs Bureau affected our ability to work
- Covid-19 was an unprecedented situation for the whole world, which had an impact on our project activities
- During our union organising times at a big group (Sharmin Group), we faced a lot of trouble. This group was one of the six H&M suppliers behind the 2016 labour unrest in Ashulia. Our EC members of the union were verbally and physically harassed, and five of them lost their jobs. After a series of meetings with brands and factory management, they offered a good package of termination benefits for these five union leaders
- Changing the mindset of factory management is a big challenge, as most of them are anti-union
- Without an established union and CBA, it is difficult to establish AHC in the factories
- It is important to have at least one refresher training to follow up on the progress
- Graphical representation attracts workers the most, and they prefer a participatory approach in training, like role-playing, case studies, etc.
- Not all workers in the area have the same level of enthusiasm for organising a union. It is our observation that, among the three areas, we faced the most challenges in Narayanganj. Workers and management are both a little more restricted than in other areas

UP!+ 2019

UP!+ 2019 is a community-based training program implemented by Awaj Foundation in partnership with Impactt Ltd. and funded by Laudes Foundation to improve the livelihood and working conditions of readymade garment workers in Dhaka and Chittagong.

UP!+ was conducted from July 2020 to June 2021, and despite disruptions caused by COVID-19, the program met its recruitment and training targets. Training activities that took place later in the year involved a smaller number of workers, which allowed for the delivery of training while maintaining social distancing measures. However, due to lockdowns and travel restrictions, collecting data from all UP! participants were challenging for the Awaj team. Additionally, maintaining data trackers and collecting and inputting data by field staff continues to be a challenge, and Impactt is looking into data software solutions as a priority.

Despite these challenges, workers continue to apply UP! learnings and skills to improve their lives, both at home and at work. Workers reported changing their lifestyle and working conditions positively, indicating that UP! training makes them more

Some of the positive outcomes reported by participants include:

- 1139 (43% of female workers save a percentage of their income each month in their bank account or DPS) To note: Some workers report using their savings during the Covid-19 pandemic, which has reduced this total, indicating that the programme has likely overperformed in this area

- 3578 of 6650 (53.8%) female workers reported having an increased role in household financial decisions (1236 female workers making financial decisions by themselves, 2342 females making decisions together with their husbands/partners)
- 384 issues solved positively in 92 factories affecting approx. 30000 workers
- 286 women from Up!+ 2 have been leading efforts to improve working conditions
 - ◊ 75 mid-management participants from selected factories have completed training on Workplace cooperation and effective communication
 - ◊ 50 mid-management participants from selected factories have completed training on grievance handling procedures

RMG Workers Forum development

Under the leadership of the new Chairperson and Secretary General of the Forum, members gathered for International Women's Day (8 March 2021) and International Labour Day (1 May 2021), and workers from the RMG workers forum spoke publicly about women's rights and workers' rights issues, highlighting that the importance of government and other stakeholder engagement to take steps to resolve. One Video on Women's Day and human chain as well as procession photos was uploaded to Awaj's official Twitter, Facebook page, Instagram, and YouTube channel.

15 RMG members have been identified to be trained in computer literacy, internet research, and spoken English. However, due to continuous lockdowns, Awaj has been unable to start the in-person courses. Awaj has finalised the organisation providers to deliver these courses to the workers.

Success identified during the reporting timeline

- Awaj maintains momentum despite the hurdles caused by COVID
- Workers show a strong attitude to overcoming difficulties and continuing various training activities
- Workers' development in negotiating skills, which supported them and their colleagues in getting back their jobs or benefits they were entitled to as well as asking for proper safety measures to be put in place due to COVID in the factories
- The separate relief programme Awaj carried out for covid-19 affected workers, new workers got interested in Awaj activities and UP! Programme

Case Study

Increasing awareness of worker rights

Prior to receiving UP!+ training, Jolly had never saved any money for her future but now she has regular savings in her bank account.

Jolly's factory had issues with mismanagement and abusive practices. For instance, workers had to double the work and if they were unable to complete their tasks, they would face verbal or even physical abuse from their line chief.

Jolly went to the production manager and the admin officer and, using the skills she obtained through UP!, informed them of the unfair practices and complained about the line chief. The admin officer investigated the case and subsequently terminated the line chief.

Jolly also used the negotiation and leadership skills she acquired through UP! to help a pregnant co-worker. The factory decided to terminate her employment so that they would not have to provide her with maternity benefits. Jolly told the management that the worker would have been employed for nine months when she went on maternity leave and as such, she was legally entitled to it. The management acknowledged this and decided not to let the pregnant worker go.

Case Study

Ensuring proper channels of communication by applying UP! skills

One of Ripa's colleagues faced psychological and verbal abuse by management. The supervisor and line chief were verbally abusive towards

the colleague, for mistakes she didn't do. In addition, they threatened the colleague to hide this information from everyone. The supervisor and line chief also hinted at the possibility of a job termination if anyone was intimidated about this abuse. However, Ripa was unafraid.

She took the colleague to the manager's office so that the colleague could be protected from further abuse. Ripa encouraged the colleague and they talked about the whole situation with the manager.

As a result, the supervisor and the line chief were suspended for a few days. Ripa developed confidence and ensured proper channels of communication through her Up! training. This helped her confront multiple supervisors who were used to harassing women workers on site.

Lessons learned**1. Need for improvement of remote working systems**

Both Awaj and Impactt teams had to move a lot of actions usually delivered in person, to an online environment. We learned that many actions can be done remotely (meetings, reporting workshops, etc.), but there is a need to further explore this area. Additionally, Awaj sees a need to train their staff on remote means of communication (MS Teams, Zoom, Skype) to increase their efficiency in remote working.

2. Continuous communication with workers

Awaj stayed in touch with UP! workers throughout the lockdown through phone calls and separate relief programmes Awaj foundation delivered. This strengthened relationships and helped build trust between Awaj staff and the workers. It is important that the Awaj foundation stays present even if UP! Activities are not taking place.

3. Importance of unionised factories

Though there are benefits of working with non-unionised factories to enhance their capability to resolve issues, Awaj has learnt that non-unionised factories face more difficulties in solving issues with management. This has highlighted the importance of working with unionised factories when considering the UP!+ programme.

4. Need for developing data tracker for Management and UP! + 3 (Upcoming module)

To enhance monitoring of the management training, a data tracker should be designed for management training moving forward. A simple baseline and endline tool like the current data trackers could be applied. The majority of training has already been completed and this should be considered for the future roll out of the programme. As a priority, the data tracker for the upcoming UP!+ 3 module should be reviewed by Impactt and Awaj. A refresher session would also be beneficial.

Program Highlights

USAID's Workers' Empowerment and Participation (WEP) Activity

Project Duration: August 2019 – July 2023

Supported by: Solidarity Center

Funded by: USAID



To strengthen the capacity of independent trade unions, TUFs, workers' organizations, and community associations in the RMG and SFP sectors to collectively advocate for their rights and interests and enhance productive interaction with management to constructively participate in improving industrial relations.

Improved organizational capacity, sustainability, and resilience of TUFs, their affiliated unions, and WCAs.

Increased skills of worker community members and their associations to collectively advocate for improved living and working conditions in their communities.

Improved understanding of constructive labor relations by workers and the organizations that represent them, employers, and other stakeholders.

Activities under the program over 2020 – 2021

- Community Based total 9 Advocacy program has successfully done by WCC representatives as well as by the WCA leaders and community people, involving government and non-government stakeholders.
- WCA Leaders Distribute Eid Gift Among Distressed Workers during covid pandemic.
- WCA Members ensured roadside garbage clean and tidy.
- WCA Members Supported a Disable Child.
- With the support of WCC Factory Trade Union Signed CBA.
- With WCC's Help community worker Got 1,00,000 TK from Wage Earners' Welfare Board (WEWB).

- Road and drain newly constructed with the support of WCA Leaders.
- Total 49 Awareness sessions has conducted in 3 WCC among RMG Community people.
- Total 826 community people, 645 female (531 RMG), 181 male (166 RMG) have attended WCC's awareness sessions.
- 3 Advocacy Capacity workshops sessions has conducted in 3 WCC.
- 7 Advocacy Strategy Development meeting sessions has conducted in 3 WCC.
- 6 Civic Education Training sessions has conducted in 3 WCC.
- 4 Family and Community Support Workshop sessions have conducted in 3 WCC.
- 7 Health & Hygienic Training sessions have conducted in 3 WCC.
- 8 OSH Trainings sessions have conducted in 3 WCC.
- 9 Board Meetings sessions have conducted in 3 WCC.
- 5 WCA Membership Townhall Meeting sessions have conducted in 3 WCC.

Case Study

WCA Members ensured roadside garbage clean and tidy

In the WCA board meeting at WCC Hemayetpur, discussion was about issues of local area. WCA members raise there the roadside garbage cleaning issue of Rishipara area in front of CP food factory Ltd. Cause of grubby roadside the place always remains stinky. Moreover, when it rains, mosquito infestation increases due to the accumulation of water on the side of the road. WCC representative suggested to WCA members to contact the cleaner committee and local Potentates of the area regarding the issue. WCA Members tried to communicate them several times but they couldn't reach them. Then, WCC representative communicated them by phone and invited them to sit on a meeting. On 22th September 2020 WCA members visited to Potentates house and Cleaner Committee Office to explain the issue. After that meeting potentates talked to CP Food management and suggested to WCA members to send a letter to Union Parishad Chairman through a reputed organization like Awaj Foundation. Awaj Foundation sent a letter regarding this issue to Chairman at 14th October 2020. WCA leaders who work in different organization, they talk to their management and requested to send a letter to Union Parishad Chairman, so that he takes the issue very seriously. After that, Al Madina Washing Ltd, Aboni Knit wears Ltd, and CP Food Ltd sent letters to Chairman. Union Parishad Chairman took the issue seriously and arranged to clean roadside in December 2020. Finally, now the place has a walking environment. No one throw dust there.

**Previous state****Present state**

Program Highlights

Supporting Migrant Workers

The remittance from migrant and garment workers is the principal source of foreign currency in Bangladesh. The country has over 12 million migrant workers in 165 countries. Despite their contribution to the Bangladesh economy, these migrant workers suffer from a series of legal and humanitarian injustices without finding a resolution.

Awaj Foundation provides a range of services to migrant workers at all stages of the migration process to ensure safe and legal migration. Awaj:

- Provides support and advocates for better conditions for migrant workers
- Provides a platform for legal support, education, and the opportunity to interact with other migrant workers
- Advocates and lobbies with national, regional, and international government organizations, NGOs, INGOs, and UN agencies to ensure the well-being of migrants
- Provides support with repatriation and reintegration
- Supports victims receive compensation through arbitration
- Empowers migrant workers and their families through awareness campaigns

During the pandemic period, Awaj supported:

- Psychosocial council of expatriates in difficult times of COVID
- Urgent repatriation
- Solving acute complications with COVID infected corpses
- Solving flight complications
- Solving the complications caused by visas during the COVID
- Counseling on Social Stigma related to COVID
- Resolving various complaints about workers'

Break down nature of complaints migrant workers

Type of case	Received	Solved
Physical tortured	16	13
Salary dispute	13	02
Repatriation dead body	08	07
Passport dispute	09	05
Financial dispute	11	06
RMG factory unrest	35	20
Medical support	11	09
Force labor	12	07
Visa problem	06	04
Sexual abuse	14	02
Bank loan	05	03
Finger print	06	02
Stuck for covid-19	20	11
Domestic violence	05	04
Social problems	06	04
Trafficked	06	03
Total	183	110

Case Study

Four migrant workers get new lives

Awaj Foundation in collaboration with Solidarity Centre and ITUC Africa contacted, rescued and aided the victims in Lome, the capital of Togo. The four Bangladeshi trafficking victims who were rescued from the West African country of Togo have returned home after more than 18 months of a harrowing journey.

Transnational traffickers tortured and extorted a huge amount of money from the Bangladeshis with opportunities to work in Italy in Europe, said the victims and their supportive organizations.

The returnees were identified as Saidur Rahman of Dhaka, Al Amin of Gopalganj, Abul Hassan of Jhenidah and Easin of Chandpur.

The victims were rescued with the help of International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the Government of Bangladesh during their mission in Morocco.

The victims arrived to Dhaka, via a scheduled flight of Turkish Airline that landed at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport on Friday morning, said an official.

Wage Earners Welfare Board's Assistant Director Fakhrul Alam, who is in charge of the welfare desk at the airport said that he was informed about the arrival of the four victims.

The returnees said that after testing negative for Covid-19 tests, they travelled from Lome International Airport and had to pass through separate transits in Ghana and Turkey.

Organized rackets, including Bangladeshis and foreign nationals, were involved in the trafficking of the four victims according to the anti-trafficking campaigners.

Awaj Foundation's Executive Director Nazma Akter, told the Business Insider Bangladesh that it was a great victory for the victims as they were able to return home safely. She said that transnational criminals trafficked the young men by offering them fake jobs in Europe and other developed countries. All stakeholders including trade unions and the government should play a more active role in preventing human traffic incidences.

"There are many more young Bangladeshis still facing the same problems in different African countries," she said, adding that a strong partnership should be in place to ensure safe migration and good governance for overseas employment for Bangladeshis. CSI Afrique in Lome. They said that they were taken to Togo by air with the promise of being sent to Italy. Instead, they ended up held captive in different houses, controlled by the traffickers, for over a year.

The four victims were finally rescued by the trade unionists in Togo in collaboration with ITUC and placed in a shelter home in Lome.

According to all four victims, they each paid about Tk17 lakh to Tk20 lakh to traffickers who guised themselves as brokers and promised to send them to Italy.

Togo was used as a temporary destination maybe due to its existing 'Visa on Arrival' facilities for the Bangladeshi citizens, said the victims.

Saidur Rahman, one of the four victims, told this correspondent on Saturday that they had returned home after facing 18 months of sufferings in Togo.



He said that the traffickers in Togo had seized over \$12,000 (equivalent to Tk10 lakh) from his possession which he had brought with him from Bangladesh. The traffickers in Togo used to take him to the local graveyards and threaten to kill him. He added that the criminals would also say that people could be killed and buried in African countries at a very small cost (as low as or equivalent to Tk10,000).

He claimed that they were physically tortured by the traffickers when they requested them to either send them to Europe or set them free.

Saidur reached Togo by air from Dhaka Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport. On his way to Togo, he had 2 transits: at Bangkok and Addis Ababa. After travelling for 27-hours by air, he landed at the Lome airport in Togo where he was granted a tourist visa. At the Lome airport, one Bangladeshi and African individual were waiting to receive him. They then took him to a house where he met three other Bangladeshis, who were also brought to the country the same way, days ago.

Above: Four Bangladeshi trafficking victims who were rescued from the West African country of Togo, along with officials of supportive organizations, pose for a photograph after their return to Bangladesh on Saturday. Photo: Ali Sampreety/Awaj

Program Highlights

Hidden Supply Chains in Bangladesh—Bringing Agency and Resiliency to Informal Workers

Funded by: FCDO

Lead Partner: GoodWeave International

Implementing Partner: Awaj Foundation

GoodWeave, Awaj, and at least two international brands propose a modern slavery intervention in the garment sector of Bangladesh. Using GoodWeave's existing digital supply chain data platform, partners will: map and perform a rapid assessment of hidden, outsourced production sites where the most extreme forms of worker exploitation occur; coordinate immediate COVID-19-related relief to marginalized workers not reached through Tier One factory programming (which others address); identify and remediate cases of child, forced and bonded labour; and, research how COVID-19 impacts these workers, focusing on increased probability of child, forced, and bonded labour, and how they are linked to production for global brands. A report will be submitted to DFID, as well as other relevant government organizations and brands, to facilitate UK Modern Slavery Act implementation. It will, for the first-time, detail the prevalence of outsourcing in the garment sector of Bangladesh, providing nuanced information on geographic clusters, wages, debt, employment terms, health, and literacy in tandem with similar GoodWeave research in India and Nepal. The overarching focus will be how the invisibility of

informal laborers (predominantly women and girls), results in extreme forms of modern slavery, only worsened by COVID-19. Together, the partners will also recommend strategies to achieve deep supply chain due diligence and to engage this workforce in an ethical and transparent manner. When companies resume placing orders, likely at a reduced level, the workforce will be even more vulnerable due to lack of jobs and poverty.

Objectives

The objectives are to achieve transparency for bottom supply chain, informal apparel workers, offer relief with food and other resources, and remedy to child, forced or bonded labourers. Guidance for governments, companies, and suppliers will ensure traceability and protections to hidden workers and resilient market re-entry. Companies have acknowledged that the problem of undisclosed production remains unsolved, despite auditing and worker-centric policies. Target beneficiaries are informal apparel workers, predominantly women in outsourced production, migrants, and modern slavery victims. Direct beneficiaries will exceed 25,000 of the most marginalized apparel workers: a number small in comparison to the total number of apparel workers in Bangladesh, yet one representing deep impact for those most vulnerable and least likely to be reached by relief efforts underway. Later reach to over a million workers is possible in VF's supply chain alone.

Activities

- Map supply chains – incentivize suppliers to provide outsourcing networks, map producer communities from the ground up, and use other investigative strategies to gain a comprehensive picture. Conduct 300 worker surveys to make a statistically useful rapid assessment, and interview other community members.

- Record data on tablets, upload to GoodWeave's Supply Chain Traceability Platform, and continually update analysis.

Provide services and care

- Relief to any workers without access to food or basic hygiene supplies,
- Remediation for child, forced, or bonded labour victims in line with GoodWeave protocols and procedures. Ensure safety of the team and the victim and link victims to services, such as counselling, education, and skills development.
- Use every touchpoint and communication with informal workers to inform them of safety protocols, share basic information about COVID-19, and their rights.

Key outcomes

- Informal workers and their families provided aid
- Confirmed cases of child, forced or bonded labour (and their remediation)
- Total workers accounted for as part of garment supply chains pre-Covid-19 (and made aware of rights, safety protocols, and sources of aid/relief)
- Awaj staff trained
- Company staff briefed on their supply chains and the states of worker communities
- Internal and public facing reports produced with actionable recommendations.
- Cost benefit analysis per direct- and indirect-beneficiary.

Case Study

Collective Bargaining Agreements in the time of Covid

Hop Lun Apparels Ltd. Sommilito Sramik Union (HLALSSU) signed a groundbreaking 24-point Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) with the management of Hop Lun Apparels Ltd on 6 June 2020, under the leadership of Union leader Aklima Akter. While the rest of the country's workforce struggled with the impacts of COVID-19 and a lockdown—RMG workers in particular faced challenges ranging from lost wages, cancelled orders and forced redundancies—Hop Lun's 2,000-strong labour force was protected by this CBA.

The CBA was facilitated by Awaj Foundation's sister labour union, Sommilito Garments Sramik Federation (SGSF). Awaj Foundation's Executive Director and SGSF President Ms Nazma Akter, and SGSF's General Secretary Nahidul Hasan Nayan oversaw the negotiations panned out across 6 months before the eventual signing of the agreement.

"A CBA is a powerful tool. It helped us in Hop Lun Apparels Ltd. (Unit-2) to bring our teams together, discuss the details and come to an agreement. It kept us connected as we worked to survive through the pandemic time. It's the whole process which needs to be looked at, not the mere outcome of the CBA"

Amilthan Suntharalingam, Expert,
Hop Lun Apparels Ltd, Unit 2

Background of the CBA

Collective bargaining allows organised labour unions to negotiate with representatives and management of garment factories, ideally for the benefit of both parties. This agreement is facilitated by agents from both sides. For HLALSSU's CBA, the

Executive Director of Awaj Foundation and President of SGSF, Nazma Akter negotiated on behalf of the union.

Both HLALSSU and SGSF worked with Hop Lun workers from December 2019 to note down all demands of workers, and their complaints. This was then converted into a 24-point Charter of Demands, 18 of which was accepted by the factory management. The Union submitted this Charter in February 2020, with the understanding that the agreement would commence retroactively from January 2020.

Details of the agreement

Hop Lun Apparels Ltd factory management eventually signed the agreement on 6 June 2020. The agreement was groundbreaking in terms of accepting to pay double the amount of pay increase, at a time when orders were uncertain and RMG workers were being laid off around the country. Not only did all workers retain their jobs, but the management ensured their safety throughout the pandemic, and ensured the wellbeing of workers and their families.

The CBA also launched Hop Lun Apparel Ltd's anti-harassment and prevention of violence measures and daycare facilities for workers' children. This allows women workers to work without worrying about the safety of their children. Women are also now eligible for more promotions and leadership. The daycare will host workers' children under 6 years of age, and provide them with quality care and education.

The most remarkable achievement, however, was the 10% annual salary increment, whereas the government mandated a salary increment of 5%. Hop Lun management also agreed to establish

provident funds, against which workers would be able to take loans.

HLALSSU also reached an agreement to provide an office for the union within the factory itself where union members can work on issues pertaining to the union during work hours, without being penalised.

"The guarantee of promotions for women to higher positions, and the establishment of the sexual harassment committee will empower women and provide safeguarding against sexual abuse and harassment in our factory."

– Aklima Akter, HLALSSU president.

Importance of CBAs for workers

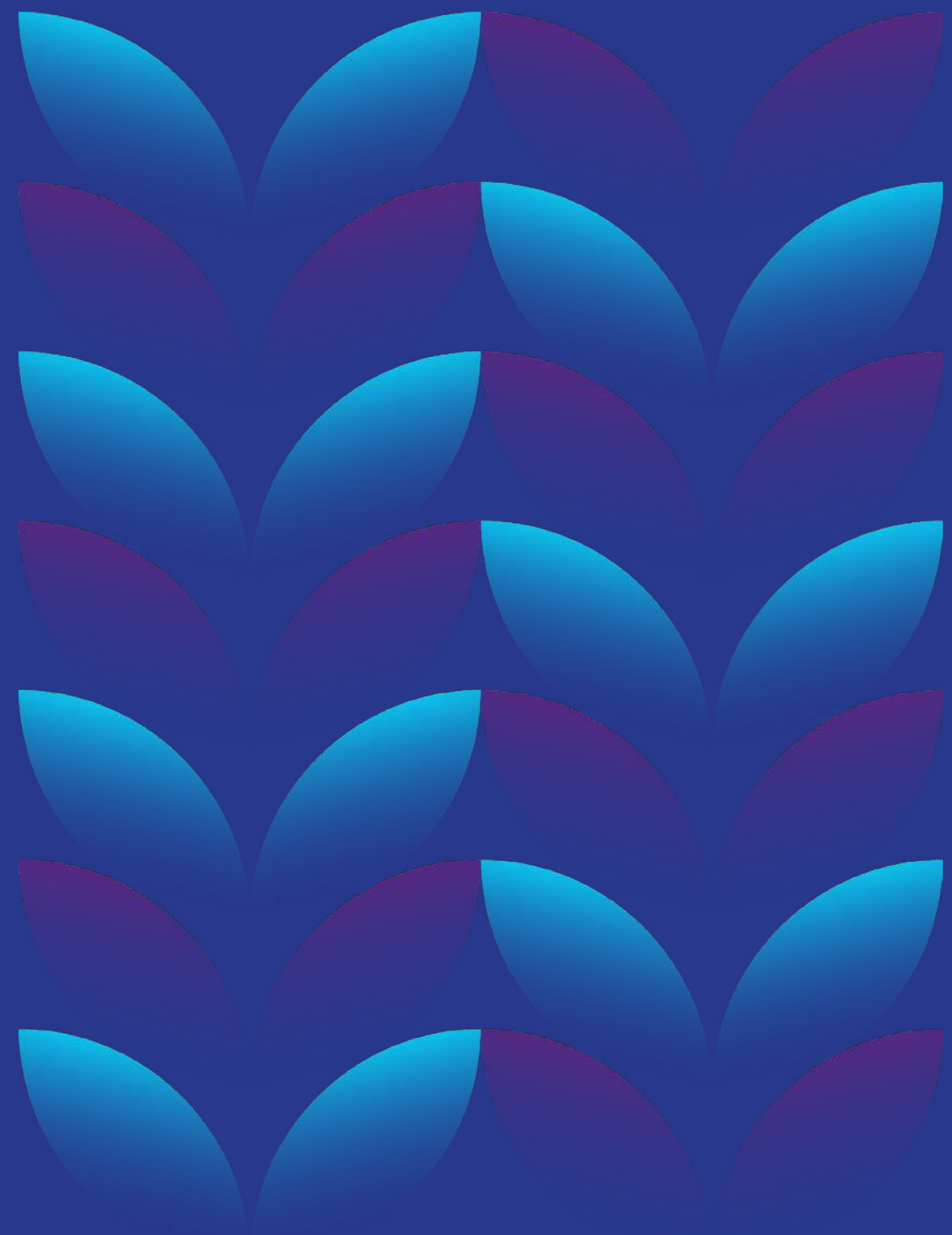
While Collective Bargaining is ratified by Bangladeshi labour laws, the process itself has been historically very weak. An inaccessibility to and lack of unionisation, agents who did not have the best interests of workers at mind, and unions who were motivated by self-promotion often prevented these agreements from forming.

Hop Lun's CBA is a testament to the fact that both union and factory management are integral to ensure the social protection of workers and for smooth operations within the factory itself. It sets a standard for a changing narrative for the RMG sector in Bangladesh, where factory management works alongside the workers, and not against them.

This CBA will protect Hop Lun workers and management till June 2022. HLALSSU can amend the terms of the CBA, or enter into an entirely new CBA afterwards, if the workers also agree to a new one.



awajfoundation.org



Research & Advocacy

During pandemic Awaj along with Plan international & Girls Advocacy Alliance did a research named "COVID-19 & Women's Empowerment: A Rapid Analysis of the Bangladesh Ready Made Garment Sector with 115 workers from four factories. The broad objective is to know to what extent COVID-19 affected Women's empowerment through the RMG factories in Bangladesh.

Our survey was conducted in late September 2020, at a time when many workers had resumed their jobs or left the industry. Yet, 32% of those surveyed say that they have experienced a loss of income due to COVID-19. Pregnant workers who have long been susceptible to firing and discrimination have been among the worst affected of the pandemic, with a spike in the rise of firings.

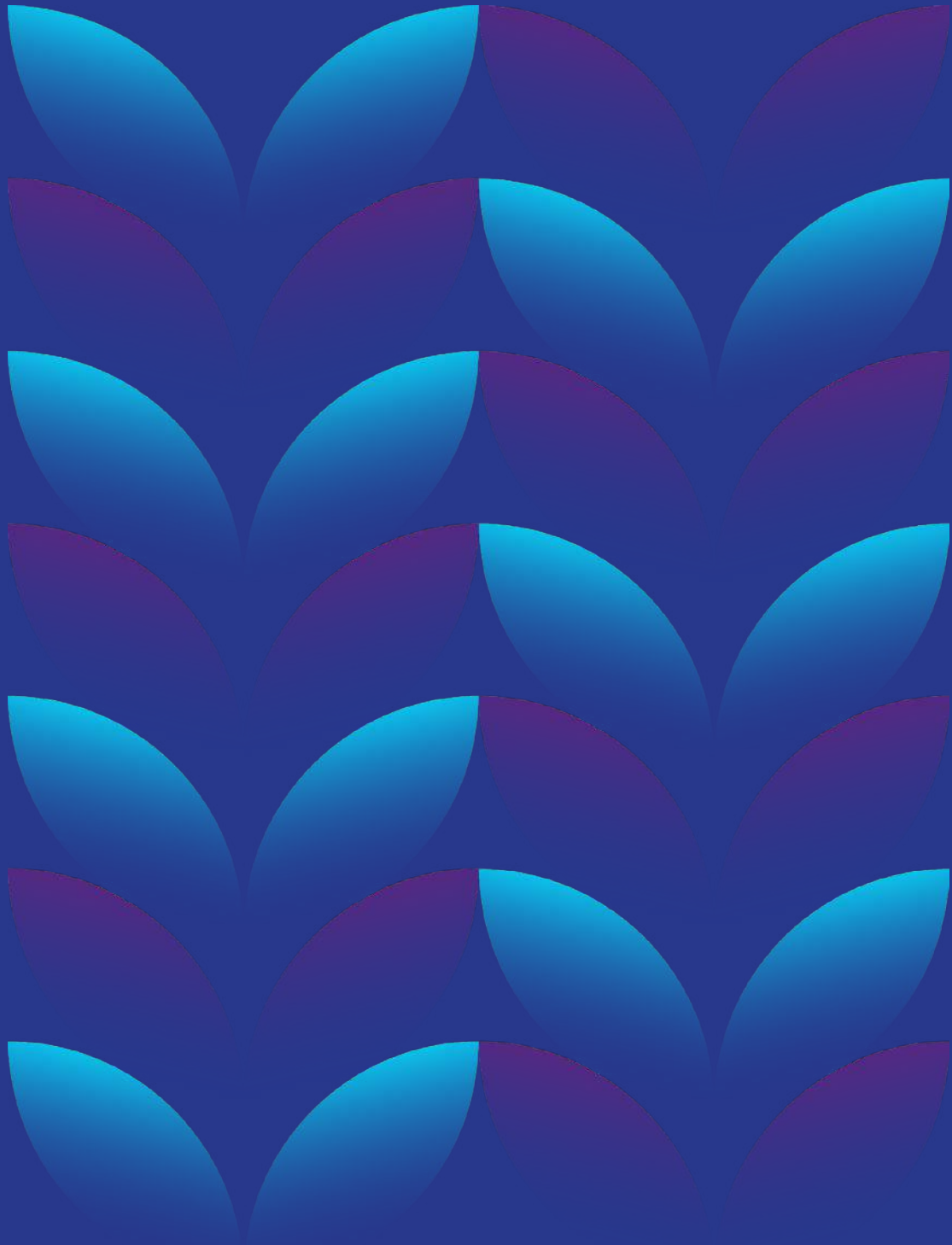
An increase in gender-based violence in factories is also being reported connected to the lack of social auditing conducted by brands due to COVID-19 concerns. 48 Furthermore, the pandemic has also contributed to increased reports of gender-based violence in the home connected to the financial and other stresses.












awajfoundation.org

Awaj in Social Media



Awaj in Social Media

				
Demands to ratify ILO Convention 190				
Video	Published	Minutes...	3-sec video views	
	Impact of COVID-19 on RMG workers in Bangladesh: Salma's story	27/04/2020 00:39	773	1.7K
	Impact of COVID-19 on RMG workers in Bangladesh: Pushpo's story	28/04/2020 01:11	585	1.7K
	Nazma Akhter on the 7th anniversary of the Rana Plaza disaster	22/04/2020 23:18	434	1K
	Impact of COVID-19 on RMG workers in Bangladesh: Sabina's story	30/04/2020 03:19	304	729
	Support workers like Shaheda	25/04/2020 00:55	225	638
	COVID-19 has affected businesses all over the world. International research...	26/04/2020 01:03	32	97

During this timeline, Awaj Foundation’s social media page (Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, Twitter) got a push in presence of new communication officer and also from the support of expert assigned under project. Several videos on covid -19 awareness raising, Awaj Foundation will help COVID-19 vaccine registration - <https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/bangladeshi-women-garments-workers-voice-against-violence-at-workplace/580792893026685/>

May Day video 2021 - <https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/may-day-video-2021/3873651149420973/>

COVID-19 vaccination awareness - <https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/womens-leadership-in-the-time-of-covid/712461289440898/>
Women’s leadership in the time of COVID-19 -

Asma calls to ensure the social wellbeing of workers in Bangladesh.
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/16-days-of-activism-asma-concord-garments-ltd/2455432651419387/>

Shorifunnesa talks about fighting gender-based violence-
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/16-days-of-activism-shorifunnesa-donglian-fashion-ltd-sromik-union/1001980606967087/>

Impact of COVID 19 on RMG workers in Bangladesh
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/16-days-of-activism-shorifunnesa-donglian-fashion-ltd-sromik-union/1001980606967087/>

Impact of COVID 19 on RMG workers in Bangladesh: Pushpo’s story -
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/impact-of-covid-19-on-rmg-workers-in-bangladesh-pushpos-story/2553361374918410/>

Support workers like Shaheda -
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/support-workers-like-shaheda/639741283544938/>