



Annual Report 2022-2023

awajfoundation.org

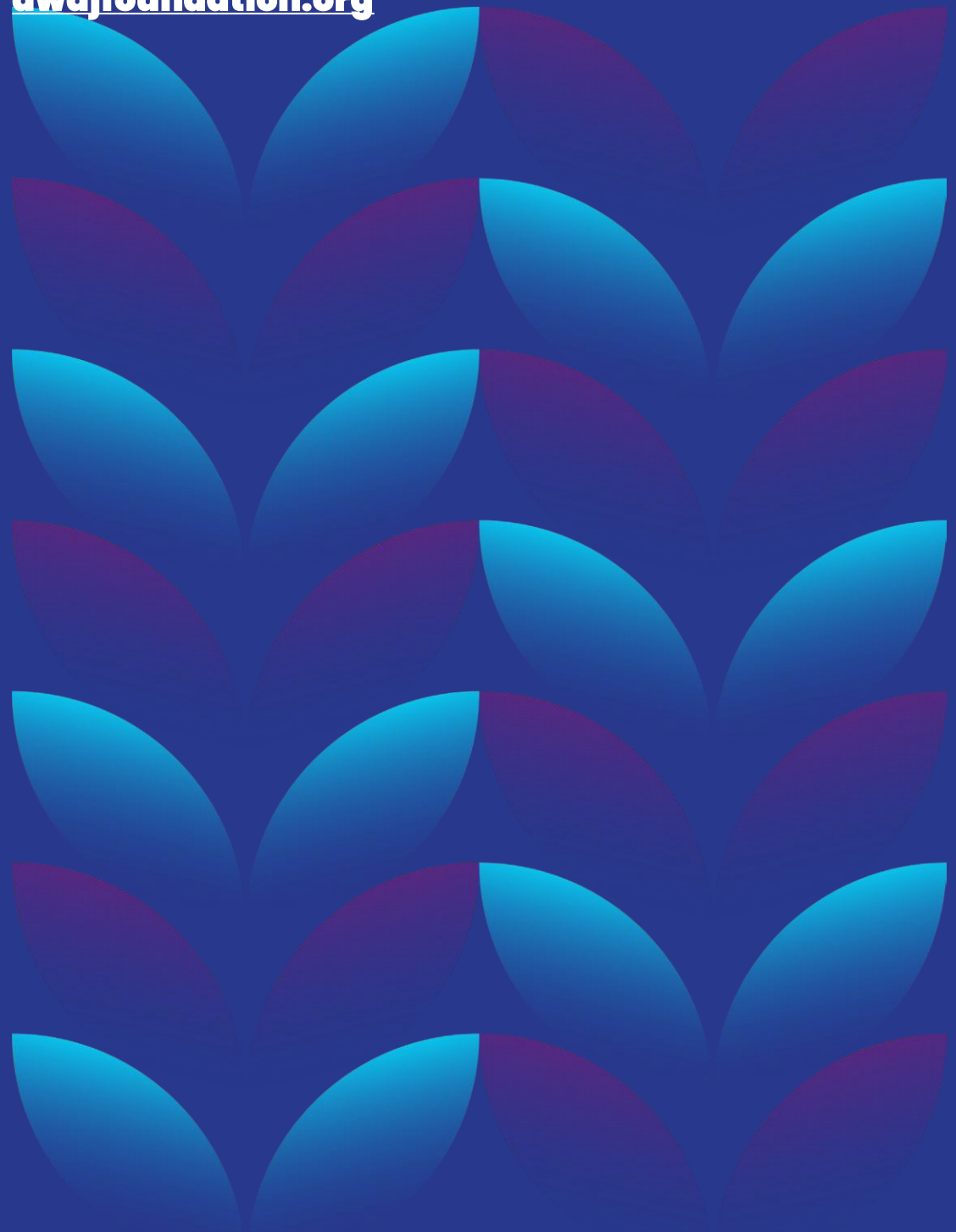
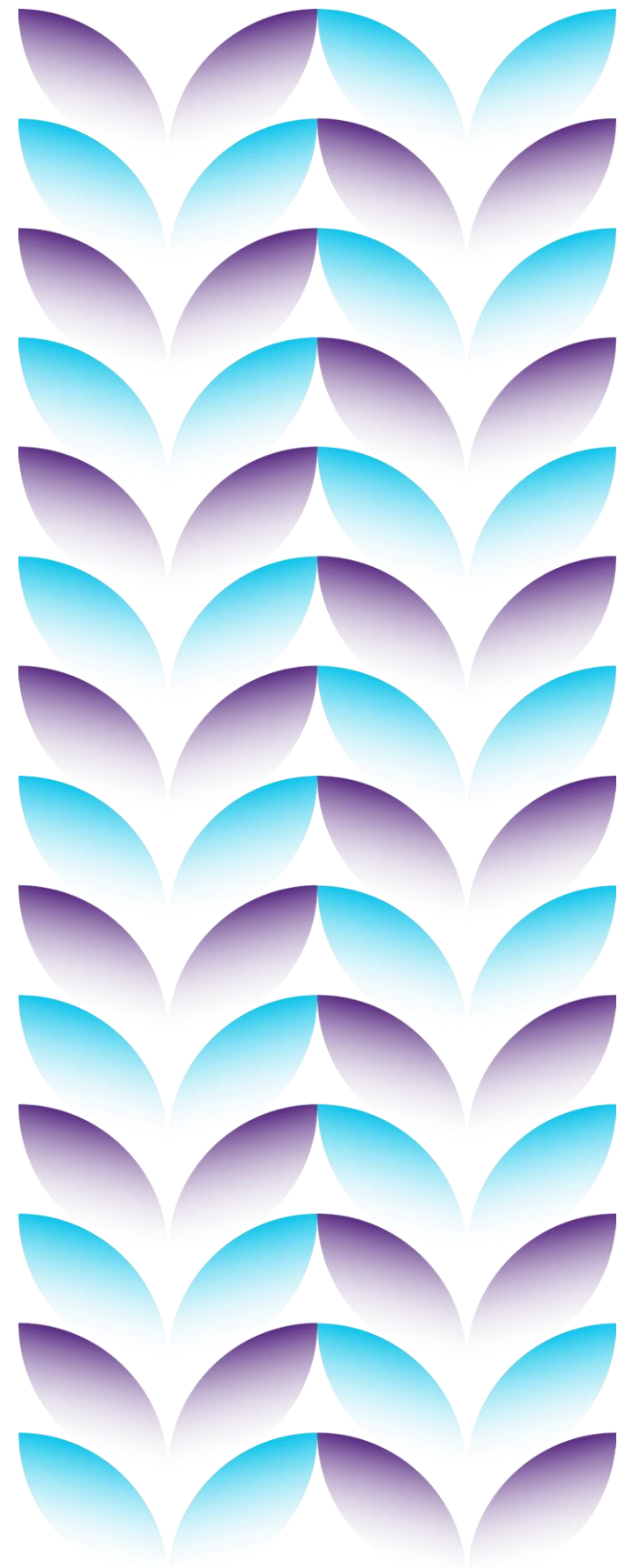


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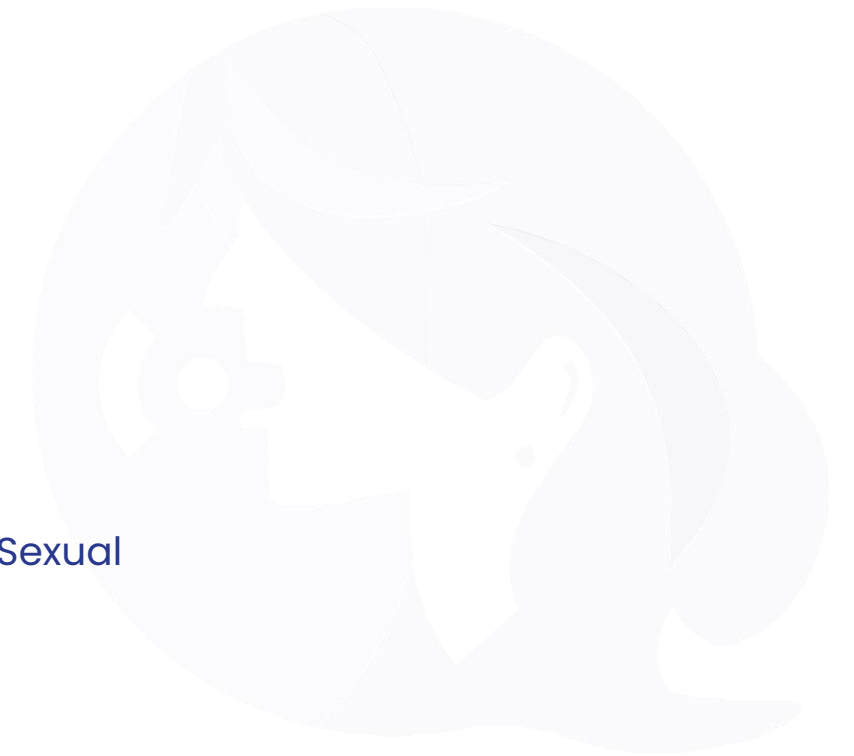
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Statement from Executive Director



As we gather here today to reflect on the past year, I am reminded of the incredible resilience and determination exhibited by our community in the face of ongoing challenges. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continued to reverberate throughout 2022, affecting countless lives and livelihoods, especially in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector in Bangladesh. The pandemic brought unprecedented hardships, but it also highlighted the unwavering spirit of our workers and the solidarity of our supporters.

Throughout 2022, Awaj Foundation remained steadfast in our mission to support RMG workers, who faced immense difficulties. The economic fallout from the pandemic led to job losses, wage cuts, and increased vulnerability among workers. Our response was immediate and robust. We provided critical support, ensuring that workers had access to essential services, healthcare, and legal aid. We facilitated the distribution of emergency relief, ensuring that no worker was left behind.

The year 2023 saw us continuing our efforts to mitigate the pandemic's impact, while also addressing new challenges that emerged. Inflation has significantly strained the financial stability of our workers, making it harder for them to afford basic necessities. In response, we intensified our advocacy for fair wages and improved working conditions. We also expanded our healthcare and daycare services, recognizing the crucial role these play in supporting the well-being of workers and their families.

Our programs, such as the Women Café initiative, have empowered over 500 women leaders through training and support. Legal aid services have reached over 2,000 workers, while our healthcare services have benefited more than 34,000 individuals, including women, men, and children. These efforts are a testament to our commitment to fostering a safe, equitable, and supportive environment for all workers.

We are immensely grateful for the unwavering support from our donors, partners, and volunteers, whose contributions have been instrumental in sustaining our initiatives. Together, we have navigated through these challenging times, emerging stronger and more resilient. As we look ahead, we remain dedicated to advocating for the rights of workers, ensuring their voices are heard, and their needs are met.

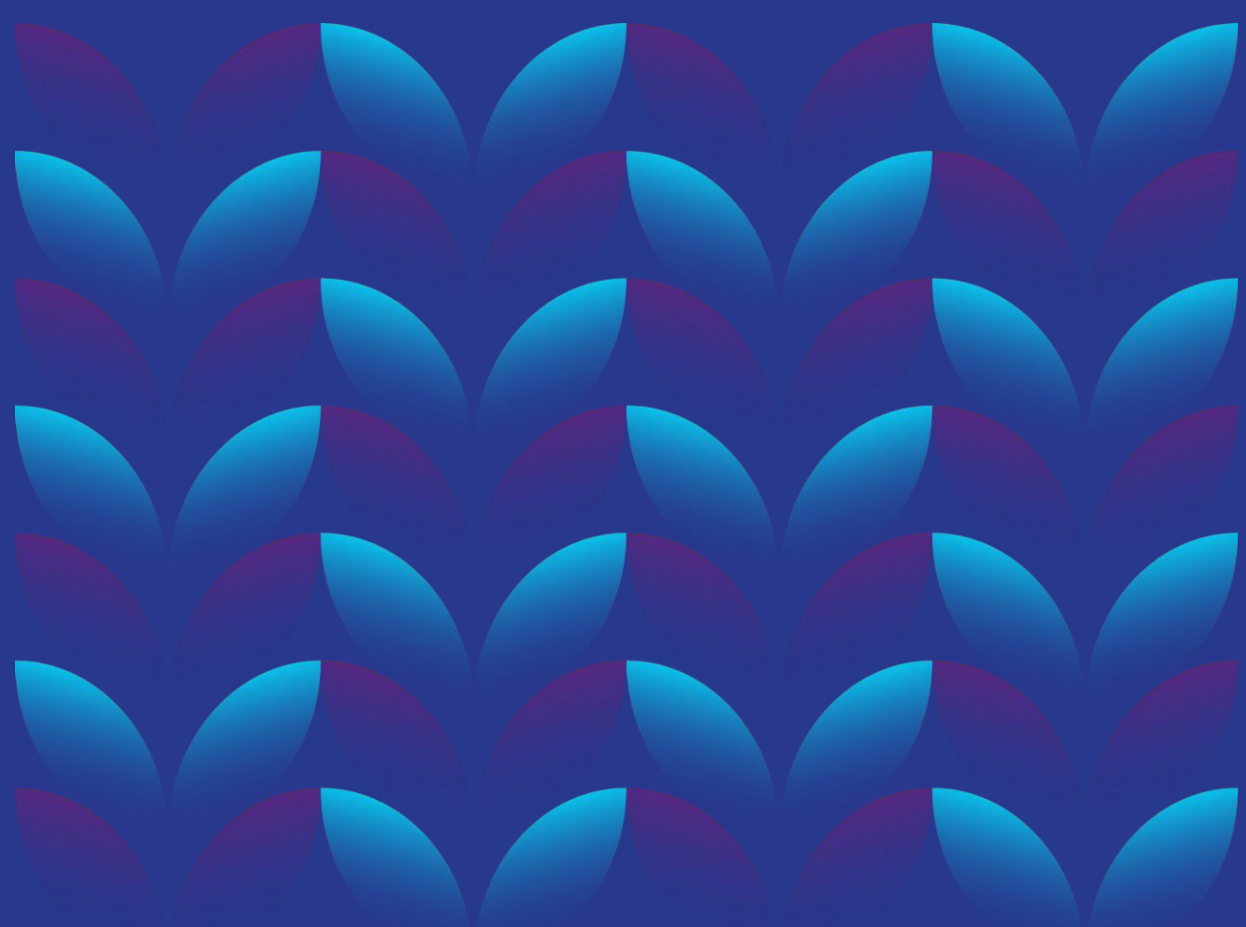
Let us continue to stand in solidarity, working towards a future where every worker enjoys dignity, respect, and justice. Thank you for your continued support and commitment to our shared mission.

Nazma Akter
Executive Director
Awaj Foundation

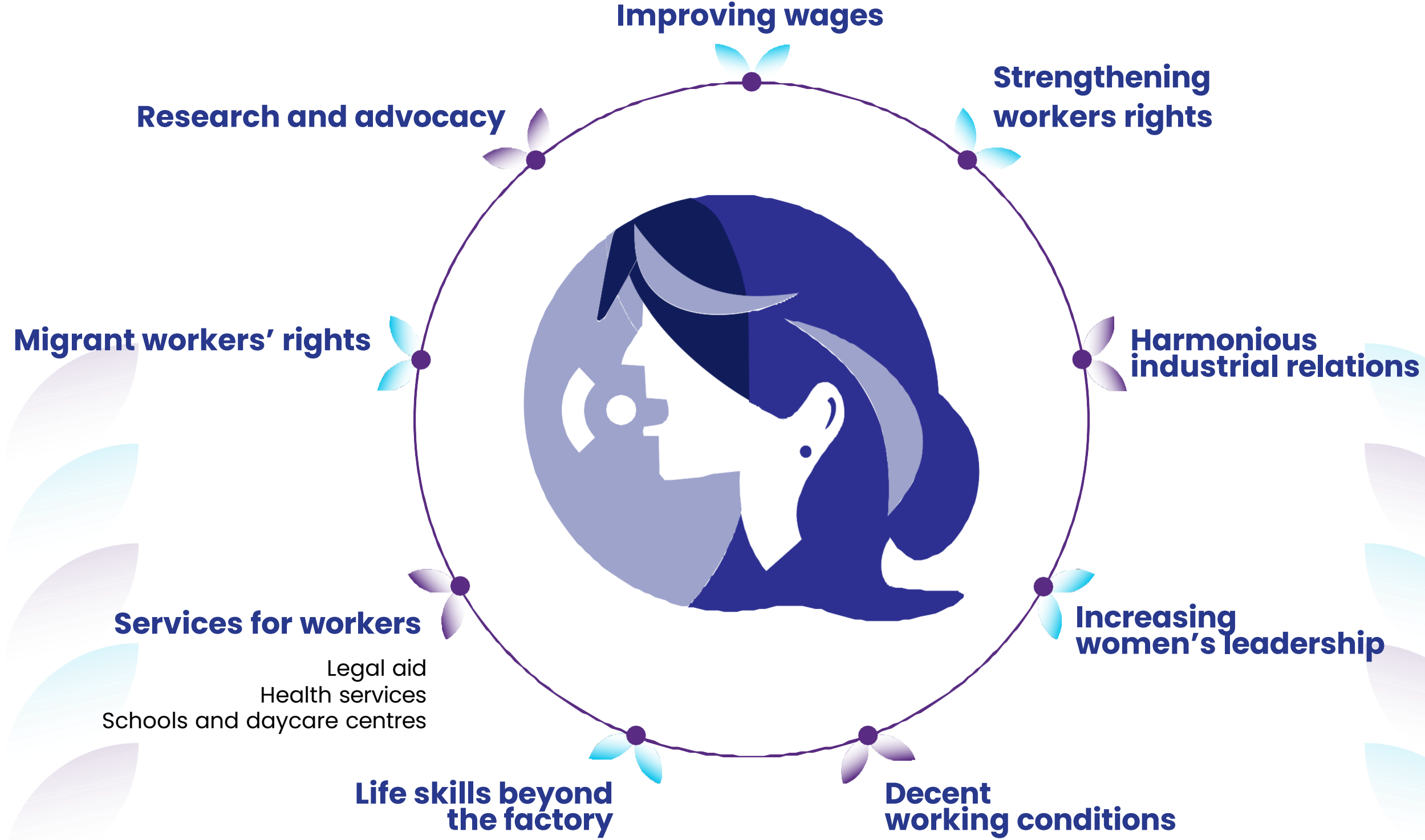




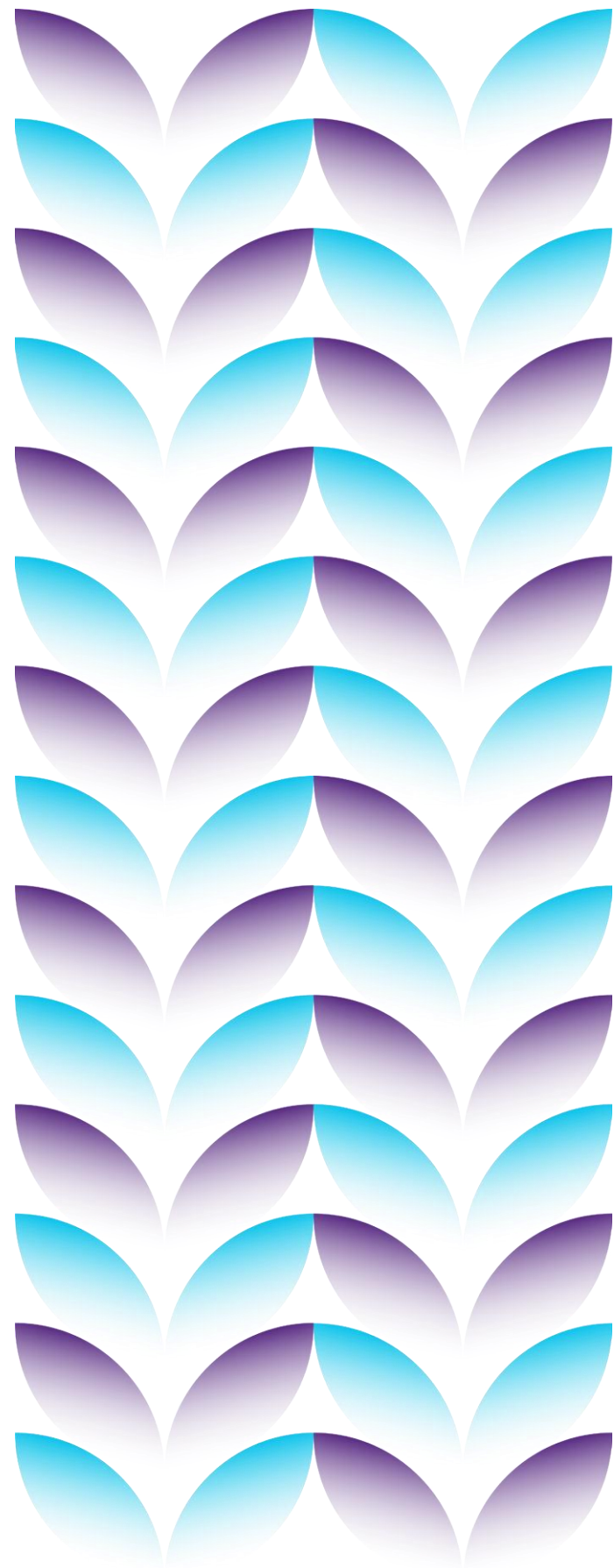
Work and impacts



Awaj's area of work



Notable Recent Projects



Projects	Name of Donor	Duration
UPI - Improving livelihoods and quality of life for worker, especially women, in the Bangladesh RMG sector	Partnership with Impactt Ltd and collaboration with Laudes Foundation	July, 2014 – Dec,2022.
Enhancing capacity for Unified Workers Voice (this is the scale up of previous grant-UP project)	Partnership with Impactt Ltd and collaboration with Laudes Foundation (former C&A Foundation).	January 2023 – Dec 2025
Health care and daycare for RMG workers and their children	KiK Textilien, Germany	March 2008 – current
Awaj Foundation –“School of learning “is a pre-schooling program for Garment workers’ children who are five years or above.	KiK Textilien und Non-Food GmbH Germany	Jan,2017- current
Improving Industrial Relations and Workplace Cooperation through Strengthening Trade Unions/Federation and Established Better Social Dialogue in RMG Sector	Mondiaal FNV, Netherlands	January2019- Dec,2025
Amplify Bangladesh- the capacity building program of workers representatives (participation committee/trade union) in garments factory of Bangladesh	Mondiaal FNV, Netherlands	March 2023 – Present
Capacity building program on prevention on Gender-based violence at workplace	Tchibo GmbH Bnagladesh Liaison office	May22-December 2022
Combating sexual violence and harassment in the industries of Bangladesh	FJS(Foundation for a Just Society), USA	January 2020-present
Educating Garments Workers on Gender based Violence on women	Resilience Fund for Women	April 2022- February 2024
Towards the universal ratification and domestication of ILO C-190	IWRAW	May 2021- April 2023
Addressing women rights and reducing gender based violence towards women in the context of climate change effect	ODERSO	September 2021 – August 2023
Surokha- Advocacy for Employment Injury Insurance (A4EII)	Collaboration with Action Aid Bangladesh and funded by GIZ and Laudes Foundation	September2021-December 2022
Just Transition in Garment industry in Bangladesh	Finnwatch	June 2022- Sep 2022



Services from Awaj

Improved health for workers and their children

Donor: KiK Textilien und Non-Food GmbH

KiK Textilien und Non-Food GmbH has been financing Awaj Foundation to improve the well-being of RMG workers and their children since 2015. Following the successful conclusion of its 2015–2021 initiative, KiK began a three-year partnership with the Awaj Foundation. The project is scheduled for 2022–2024. In the Dhaka division's Bagher bazar, Sreepur, Gazipur, Ashulia, and Savar industrial zones, Awaj has continued to provide its enhanced services to seven healthcare facilities, daycare facilities, and preschools. These centers offer free medical consultations, treatments, medicines, diagnostic assistance, and urgent surgical support to garment workers and their children. The childcare centers and preschools provide their kids with a warm, safe, and nurturing atmosphere in which to learn and play.

Services for Workers

Three essential services are offered by Awaj to fulfill its mission of enhancing working conditions for Bangladeshi leather and textile workers. This fiscal year KiK has targeted to provide following services to workers:

- Legal aid
- 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 2022- 2023

- Women café launched on this fiscal year and more than 500 women leaders have been created through several training programs.
- Awaj provided legal support to 2,000 workers across Bangladesh
- A total of 34,360 workers received healthcare services, including 26,224 women workers, 5,015 male workers, and 3,121 children
- 4420 women workers received sanitary napkins
- 63 workers received financial aid for urgent surgery and long-term treatment

Healthcare services under the program

- 7 healthcare centres are running in Rasulbagh, Mirpur, Hemayetpur, Baipail, Targach, Bagher bazaar, and Naryanganj.
- Services to workers are provided by full-time female doctors and nurses.
- Services include free diagnostic tests, urgent surgeries, and subsidized 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 subsidized medicines to RMG workers.

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 is serving 50 children in its daycare centres from July 2022 to June 2023. The children received healthy, nutritious meals every day and had access to a range of healthcare services. There are 75 students from Classes 1 to 5 in Awaj's schools including 25 children from day care. The respective project personnel receive ToT and awareness training on women's rights, health & hygiene, maternity benefits and rights, daycare rights, and its benefits.



Case Study

"My name is Jannatul. I work in SP Garments Ltd. I have two sons. I don't have a husband. I earn for my family alone. My husband does not take any notice of us. Does not provide any maintenance. I became helpless with two children. The elder son understands well but the younger son cannot be left behind. In such a situation, I talked to my colleagues. They told me about Awaj Foundation. I came to Awaj Foundation and told my problem. They told me they provide day care facility. Where I will leave my child and they will take all the responsibility of my child. They will feed them, sleep, and educate the children. I took my kid to daycare without a second thought. This day care gives my child 4 meals a day. Doctor visits once a month. All in all, Awaj Foundation is giving us very good benefits. It was going well for a few days, then suddenly my elder son fell ill. I did not have enough money and could not see a good doctor.



Then I went to Awaj Foundation again. They have their own doctor. They provide free treatment and medicines. By taking those medicine, my son recovered. My son had stomach stones. If the medicine wasn't given by the doctor and this day care, I wouldn't have seen the smile on my child's face. Now, whenever I have any kind of problem, I go to Awaj Foundation. There are some mentors here who always give us wisdom in various ways. I was also very worried about my future.

So, I talk to them and take wise advice on how to make life easier. Lastly, I don't know where my life would have gone without Awaj Foundation. Thanks to Awaj Foundation".

Lesson Learned

- **Cultural Barriers in Legal Aid Programs:** Legal aid services, especially for women, faced challenges due to cultural norms and fear of social stigma. Workers were sometimes reluctant to seek help due to concerns about privacy and potential backlash from employers or families.
- **Pandemic-Related Disruptions:** The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted many activities, including daycare services, healthcare provisions, and in-person training programs. Maintaining operations while adhering to health and safety regulations posed logistical and operational challenges.
- **Influence of Political Interests on Worker Rights:** Political actors may have had a vested interest in maintaining the status in the garment industry, which can sometimes undermine efforts to improve workers' conditions. Workers advocating for rights and benefits may have faced opposition from political figures who were aligned with business owners or industrial interests.

Program Highlights

Improving Capacity of Awaj Foundation Staff and Empowerment of Women in Preventing Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Industry

The foundation for a Just Society



FJS (Foundation for a Just Society) set a remarkable dimension on RMG sector regarding Gender Base Violence Prevention by collaborating with Awaj Foundation since 2020. Awaj Foundation in light of the project of FJS has created a huge movement regarding Sexual Harassment and Gender Base Violence by stepping up efforts to empower women workers in RMG sector, leather, ceramics, migrant workers, and Dalits. Initially, the partnership was for one pilot phase where core objectives were to combat gender-based violence (GBV) in Bangladesh's RMG, leather, and ceramic industries by increasing awareness among women workers of the problem, empowering women employees to lead systemic change, and fostering an environment that encourages accountability for harassment and violence. The partnership was extended into 2021-2023 with a goal of protecting workers and raise voice focusing women workers' rights and that platform consisting with garment workers who are currently working in the factory. The women led platform called "RMG Workers Forum" leaders expressed solidarity through their expertise in successfully implementing the prevention of gender-based violence campaign under this grant.



To date, FJS is working with 27 factories located in three industrial areas of Bangladesh Gazipur, Ashulia, and Narayanganj. Awaj Foundation effectively trained 2,950 workers in awareness-raising techniques, identified 270 future leaders, and provided them with full-day training sessions. This project aims to tackle this problem of rampant GBV in the garments, leather and ceramic sectors through four programmatic goals as outlined below:

- i) To raise awareness among workers about their rights and accountability mechanisms and develop leadership among women workers to provide support to their peers
- ii) To develop capacity of management and relevant factory committees and hold social dialogue with management and duty bearers for a conducive environment to combat GBV.
- iii) To conduct advocacy at the sectoral and national level based on the nature and prevalence of GBV
- iv) To set up a day care center in order to provide a safe environment with quality caregivers for the children of garment workers in order to fill the gap created by inadequate care facilities in the factories

Achievements



- Total 3,000 workers received training on 'GBV', High Court Verdict, Leadership and Empowerment, Labor Law, Human Rights, Trade Union.
- Trained 250 Dalit workers on Health and nutrition, prevention of child marriage, health and hygiene.
- Formation of 3 Anti-Harassment Committees (AHC). Resolution of unresolved issues by AHC.
- Conduct of 4 Dialogues and Round Table Meetings. Conducted social dialogues and round table meetings with workers and management members of all target factories and other stakeholders to reduce 'GBV' and harassment
- Day care center successfully run by 25 people.
- 25 to 30 Dalits successfully completed 'Private Tuition'.
- Raising awareness about 'GBV' on the basis of High Court Verdict.
- Increased awareness through peer-to-peer learning.
- With the right leadership of Dalit Community, the fair wage movement has been accelerated through advocacy, lobby, campaign.
- Improving workers to decision-making and leadership roles.
- After training, two women from the Dalit community left their traditional jobs as cleaners to join organizational jobs.
- Awareness raising through training on safe migration and zero migration costs
- Carrying out activities of 'Day Care Center' in a decent and suitable environment.
- Empowerment of women workers and creation of favorable working environment

Lesson Learned

- The main challenge of working with the Dalit community is that they lack basic education as well as knowledge about their rights. They are very backward in terms of education. Because of the lack of opportunities and deprivation towards them as a marginalized community, they have been lagging behind. Though the new generation has been receiving education, it is not adequate as they get disappointed when they see that they do not get acknowledged in terms of receiving jobs.
- Though, we have been raising awareness among the Dalit people through this project, this is not adequate. Our project staff, project officers, project organizers have established a strong and frequent communication and interaction with them. Because of this, the people from this community have been more benefitted and have gradually been aware regarding their rights. Another lesson we learned is that we could engage with more and more younger people from this community to bring an effective change.
- We have built committees priorly in 2021, at the beginning of the grant period. But later on, we have seen that many of the committee members are missing, left their job. We had to reform the committee in an ad hoc basis, which is a challenge. Because it was our aim to work with them till 2023. However, this year we have planned to form the committee by yearly.
- The ceramic workers are aged. Due to that, sometimes it becomes too tough for them to understand the topic, since most of them are illiterate. That's why we have to sometimes morph the traditional training method.
- We have provided services to migrant workers from Awaj main branch, that has deprived the workers from other areas, surrounding areas of Dhaka from getting services. This year we have planned to extend the services from all the branch offices of FJS for migrant workers.

Case Study

“A 25 years old lady named Salma who works in a garment factory for 7 years. Her husband is a rickshaw-puller and they have a daughter. She also has 4 sisters and 2 brothers in her family. Her monthly income is 5,500/-BDT. Despite both of their income, it gets troublesome for them to bear the cost of our family with this small amount. Her factory closes at late night; she gets so late when she reaches home. They give a huge target of work and abuse if the work is not complete within that time, the supervisor even abuses physically. They threaten to terminate her from the factory, also they don't pay properly. Moreover, she has to tolerate the torture of her husband. One day while getting back home from work at noon, she met two brother and sister from Awaj Foundation. She collected their phone number. Then she went to Awaj Foundation and feel interested about their work and got her name enlisted for the trainings under Awaj Foundation which is implementing a project with FJS Foundation on “Improving Capacity of Awaj Foundation Staff and Empowerment of Women in Preventing Sexual and Gender Based Violence in Industry” project. She has completed the training properly and learnt a lot of things through this training. She is able to make her husband understand that he did a very improper thing by torturing her and she got sick and won't be able to go to work and earn money. Then he understands his mistake. Suddenly, she got phone from her village that arrangement has been made for her younger sister's marriage. her younger sister told her that she didn't want to get married. Then she talked to her parents that they were doing mistake since her sister is not an adult and child marriage is against the law. She has also said to her parents that, an early age of marriage she won't let her sister went through the same kind of pain. She could stop that marriage after so much toil at the end.”



Increase Awareness and Empower Ready Made Garments workers towards decent working conditions

Mondiaal FNV



Awaj Foundation has been working tirelessly to empower Ready-Made Garment (RMG) workers in Bangladesh. In 2022, the foundation's took a project with Mondiaal FNV where the focus was on improving awareness, fostering leadership, and strengthening trade unions to create decent and dignified working conditions. The project has been ongoing with Mondiaal FNV since 2019.

Key Achievements

- **Worker Awareness and Training:** Conducted 40 awareness sessions for 1,000 workers across 10 factories on labour law, trade union (TU) rights, and gender-based violence (GBV).
- **Leadership Development:** Trained 150 emerging leaders, leading to the formation of 4 new trade unions, and supported existing leaders in securing 1 collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with 2 more in progress.
- **Anti-Harassment Committees (AHCs):** Activated 2 AHCs in factories, addressing worker complaints and promoting gender-sensitive workplace practices.
- **Trust-Building Workshops:** Held 5 workshops to improve social dialogue between workers and management, fostering better industrial relations.
- **Campaigns and Advocacy:** Launched a minimum wage campaign, engaging key stakeholders.
- **Observed key days** like International Women's Day, Rana Plaza Day, and International Workers' Day.

Impact in Numbers

- **Workers Empowered:** 1,000 workers trained on essential topics; 150 leaders developed for sustainable union organizing.
- **Trade Unions Strengthened:** 5 existing unions capacitated on leadership, negotiation, and sustainability; 4 new unions formed.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**:** Collaborated with brands, CSOs, and federations through multi-stakeholder roundtables to enhance worker welfare and social protection.
- **Improved Representation to Reduce GBV:** Worker grievances addressed through Anti-Harassment Committees, trust-building dialogues, and leadership capacity building.

Major Challenges and Mitigation

- **Delayed Trade Union Registrations:** Proactively engaged with the Department of Labour (DOL) to streamline the process.
- **Reluctance from Factory Management:** Conducted social dialogue workshops and lobbied with brands to overcome barriers.
- **Political Instability:** Planned and completed activities in advance to mitigate risks of disruptions.

Looking Ahead

Awaj Foundation remains committed to empowering RMG workers through enhanced leadership, social dialogue, and gender-sensitive initiatives. Future goals include scaling union development efforts, fostering stronger industrial relations, and advocating for living wages and safer workplaces.

Together, we strive for a dignified and just future for the workers who power Bangladesh's RMG industry.

Case Study

Building Trust for Decent Work: Success Story

In 2019, workers at XYZ Garments Limited (Pseudonym Name) formed a union, but their path to submitting a charter of demands was challenging. Management was initially unwilling to engage, and the factory lacked basic benefits such as a Provident Fund (PF) and proper grievance mechanisms. Harassment was widespread, working conditions were poor, and employee turnover was high, leaving workers without hope for meaningful change.

Through a series of social dialogue initiatives, the union successfully negotiated a Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA) in 2022, securing transformative benefits for workers. Key wins included a 7% annual salary increase, introduction of PF, an increased attendance bonus, a night bill allowance, a union office, and a cheque-off system for dues collection. These changes significantly reduced harassment, improved working conditions, and boosted morale, benefiting both male and female workers equally.

This success highlights the power of social dialogue and trust-building in improving industrial relations. Our focus on Freedom of Association (FOA) and collaboration played a vital role in shifting management's mindset, demonstrating that mutual trust and open communication can lead to sustainable improvements for both workers and Factories.



Program Highlights

Improving Livelihoods and Quality of Life for RMG Women Workers

UP!



A community-based training initiative called UP! seeks to uplift and enhance the lives of employees in Bangladesh's RMG industry. This fiscal year, UP! has successfully completed 4 years timeline of project from 2019-2022 despite Covid-19 situation. UP! aims to improve working conditions through improving workers' negotiation and leadership skills in the community and in the workplace and workers' participation in the improvement of workplace. The core objectives were to

1. To improve working conditions through improved worker level negotiation and the CBAs negotiation
2. To capable workers to negotiate with family members and colleagues
3. To increase participation of workers, 70% women, in the improvement of workplace conditions
4. To strengthen project management skills and ownership by Awaj in order for UP+ to be increasingly efficient and sustainable.

This project ended up with developing Women Workers as change makers in their factory, their communities and the RMG sector as a whole. Despite the challenges of Covid-19 since more than a year UP+ achieved the outcome of improving working conditions through improving workers' negotiation in advance level and enhanced leadership skills in the workplace. The key achievements are mentioned below:

- Workers led advanced negotiations and advocate for improving working conditions at a factory level through social dialogue and collective action.
- Factories' support to participate mid-management and workers in the training resulting better communication and developed good relation between them.
- Strengthening capacity of RMG Workers forum to raise voice to protect workers rights.
- RMG forum members have increased their confidence and technical skills to represent workers and communicate with different stakeholders to claim rights and organize through the RMG Forum at decision making level.
- Enhanced project team capacity in Awaj.
- Social Dialogue Sessions Strengthened Professional Working Relationships Between Management and Workers
- Developed Management Information



Lesson Learned

- Throughout the year it became clear that the Forum is a young organization which currently lacks clear strategic aims. To address this, Awaj and Impactt will have an in-person strategy planning meeting in Q1 2024 to set out the key aims and objectives of the Forum for the remainder of 2024 and 2025. This meeting will include a range of key stakeholders, including the consultant working on the registration of the Forum, Awaj staff, Impactt staff, Forum leaders and Forum members (including independent).
- The Forum leaders and members' knowledge of the climate crisis and climate-related issues is still very limited. As such, Awaj will work together with the climate consultant to ensure that they are all upskilled to become effective advocates for workers on this topic. This includes some additional climate-related activities, such as: Climate awareness training for Forum members.
- In-depth training on climate for Forum leaders.
- Multistakeholder event on just transition.
- In response to feedback from Impactt, Awaj have decided that the Forum should meet more regularly to ensure that they are operating as one cohesive body. With this, the whole Forum will now meet twice a year, rather than annually. This means that information will be shared more frequently and that they can follow up better on any actions.

Awaj has been scaled up the UP project in January, 2023, this is overwhelming news that UP! – the partnership is extended into 2023–2025 with a goal of protecting workers and raise voice focusing women workers' rights and that platform consisting with garment workers who are currently working in the factory. The RMG Workers Forum (hereafter Forum) has been established to become a unified voice for workers to advocate for workers' rights. The Forum was established in 2018, with 150 members, and has since grown to 350 members from 105 factories as of December 2023. The Forum is led by a committee of 35 members (hereafter Forum leaders), who are responsible for its day-to-day running and development. The Forum is uniquely accessible to all workers and aims to be a space for workers from various factories and unions to come together to collaborate and build a sector wide movement, and therefore to address the gap left by the myopic inclination of unions which tend to focus on factory level issues. The project aims to achieve following goals,

1. The foundations for the Forum to become a consolidated voice for workers to negotiate nationally and internationally.
2. Enhanced organizational capacity of Awaj Foundation and its staff to conduct technical training to workers and support the development of the Forum.
3. Greater collaboration between Awaj Foundation, Forum members and other climate change activists and organizations under the climate labor nexus.



Program Highlights

Case Study

'I can now read and write'



I've never even received primary education as a daughter of a daily laborer in the family of six. It was a challenge for me being an uneducated person to earn a living for my family after I moved to Dhaka at age 15. Since then it's been 24 years, I have been working at Kaniz Garments. My inability to read and write portrayed me as a diffident person in times of injustice. In 2014, I got involved with Awaj foundation and got trained about a number of things like negotiation rights, health, labor law, leadership skill, gender based violence, financial management and advanced advocacy.

I realized that if I knew about how to read, I could read labor law and be the labor representative voicing the problems of my co-workers. I requested the Awaj Foundation to give the opportunity to me and brother and sisters akin to my situation to help reading and writing. We started studying in the month of September, 2023. I feel blessed to be the President of RMG Forum and be able to read labor laws and voice my rights. Now with the help of Awaj Foundation I, Lily Begum can -

- o Spell words and read
- o Make sentences with small words
- o Read and comprehend documents before signing
- o Solve the issues by help of Labor Law book
- o Do mathematical calculations easily

'Success of Paralegal Training'



Paralegal training has been set remarkable examples among RMG Workers Forum those who received this training. About 15 leaders/forum members acted as a change maker on their respective factories. Before the training they had not such expertise about the legal ground of their rights, service benefit, factory policy etc. After the training they become stronger. Saleha, member of RMG workers forum was one of them. She worked in 4A Yarn Dyeing Ltd. She noticed that in her factory there was no documents of code of conduct, holiday list etc. hanged on notice board which was mandatory for a factory. After enrolling in paralegal course, she arose the matter among other workers and everybody agreed. Then she discussed with factory management on this regard. Management took the issue seriously and immediately hanged notice as per policy. That's how Saleha established a notice board to enhance transparency between factory and workers.

Another female leader of this Forum named Lily who participated on this paralegal training. She worked in Kaniz Garments Ltd. for a long time. She is also the President of the Trade Union in her factory. She possesses a sharp mindset. But she could not handle the problems properly because she had lack of academic educational background. Then she got the opportunity to take paralegal training provided by Awaj Foundation under UP project. As she could not read and write properly, she remembered what she learnt from the training and she went to her co-worker who can read and write and told them to write what she has learnt from the paralegal training. They wrote it and kept the record. Then, as a trade union leader she took necessary steps according the section of labor law for further workers grievance handling. She mentioned that this paralegal training supported a lot to enhance her legal capacity on workers' rights issue and capacitated her to handle more problems legally and efficiently.

Malesa Mukta, a bold Trade Union President, member of RMG Workers Forum, who received this paralegal training. She has been working in Design Express Ltd., after attended in the training she can handle complaints smoothly about service benefit, leave, maternity leave and opportunities. She became able to deal with the show-cause notice.

Before training she could not answer the show-cause notice properly. She didn't know how to response in case of show-cause what she can manage easily now. Moreover, she taught another worker how to reply show-cause. Now they are able to write show causes and others relevant legal letters according to relevant section of labor law to protect workers rights and benefits in their factory. Malesa Mukta considered herself a lucky one to receive this training.



Program Highlights

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

Supported by: Solidarity Center
Funded by: USAID



Workers' Empowerment and Participation (WEP) aims to strengthen the capacity of the independent trade unions, TUFs, workers' organizations, and community associations in the RMG and SFP sectors to collectively advocate for their rights and interests. Also, to enhance productive interaction with management to constructively participate in improving industrial relations. On this fiscal year, WEP's remarkable project outcome are following:

- 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 2022 - 2023

- 10 Community-Based Advocacy programs have been successfully done by WCC representatives as well as by the WCA leaders and community people, involving government and non-government stakeholders.
- With the help of WCC, 40 community workers received assistance for passports at government expense.
- WCA members have ensured to prevent noise pollution from the factory.
- WCA members supported 4 people from the Hijra community by giving them jobs in informal factories.
- 30 garment workers can support their children in their studies through WCA's adult education, which they could never do before.
- With the help of WCC, 50 pregnant women of the community have been given free treatment, and 3500 children of the community and children of workers have been fed Vitamin A capsules from the Government Upazila Health Complex.
- With the help of WCC, 30 community migrant workers have received financial assistance for medical treatment from the Wage Earners Welfare Board (WEWB).

- WCA members have ensured the installation of street lamps to protect RMG women workers of the community from sexual harassment and hoodlums.
- Drain newly constructed with the support of WCA Leaders and Community Leaders.
- Through the association, WCA leaders help community members get financial assistance.
- WCA leader helps community people to get jobs.
- Total 95 Awareness sessions has conducted in 3 WCCs among RMG Community people.
- A total of 2083 community members, 1635 females (1330 RMG) and 448 males (484 RMG), have attended WCC's awareness sessions.
- 3 WCA Financial & Administrative Management Training sessions have been conducted in 3WCCs.
- 3 Advocacy Capacity workshop sessions have been conducted in 3 WCCs.
- With the help of WCC, arrangements have been made to provide benefits for about 20 Community people through the Department of Social Services to provide allowances to prisoners, widows, and elderly people.

WCA members have ensured to prevent noise pollution from the factory

- 5 Advocacy Strategy Development meeting sessions were conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 3 Civic Education Training sessions were conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 9 Family & Community Support Workshop sessions have been conducted in 3WCCs.
- 3 Health & Hygienic Training sessions have been conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 10 OSH training sessions have been conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 35 Board Meeting sessions have been conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 13 WCA Membership Townhall Meeting sessions have been conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 3 Day Observation (International Women's Day) Programs have been celebrated in 3WCCs.
- 7 GBV Awareness Raising Workshop sessions have been conducted in 3 WCCs.
- 1 WCA Sustainability Workshop session has been conducted in 3 WCCs.

Life in the bustling neighborhood of Rishipara, located in the Hemayetpur area of Savar, was mostly peaceful. Three factories of the Babylon Group (Aboni Knitwear Limited, Aboni Textiles Limited and Babylon Washing Limited) were located between Rishipara and Muslimpara. Generators from these three factories made a lot of noise day and night. For the 7,000 residents of Rishipara, it was not just random sound—it became a constant assault on their health and well-being. Sahida worked at the Babylon Group's Avni Knitwear Limited factory and was a board member of the Workers' Community Association (WCA). She lived in the Rishipara area behind the factory. That was the first time she faced the problem of noise pollution from the factory's generators and the problems of the people and workers in the community. Workers couldn't sleep properly at night for that reason they were missing their attendance bonuses, and enduring stress from management's scolding for being stagnant. This was a problem that Shahida discussed with all association members at the Shahida Advocacy Workshop in January 2021. Shahida also said that beyond the factory gates, the community is constantly suffering from headaches, ear problems, and breathing problems due to noise. She later raised the issue with WCA members and the association's board in March. The WCC representative advised WCA members to contact the factory management and local potentates in the area about the issue. When Shahida approached the factory management in June, they gave a vague assurance, saying "We will look into it." By October, WCA members shared it with the landlords in the area. Several landlords took the issue to the factory management, but their concerns were dismissed. In the second attempt, at the end of October, WCA members proposed a joint application but not all the landlords were present, delaying decisive action. Later in January 2022, the WCC representative advised the WCA members to discuss the issue with Rishipara Ward Member Kajal. In February, when the WCA members discussed the issue with Ward Member Kajal, she said that she was looking into the matter.

Months passed, and in August, Sahida discussed the issue again in a board meeting. The WCA members decided to draft a formal letter addressed to the factory, the Environment Department, and the relevant authorities, supported by the signatures of the landlords. By October, the letter was being signed by all the landlords and the community, and the letter was handed over to Saiful who was the management of the Avni Neet factory. When he discussed the letter with the WCA members, he said that he would talk to all the factory management about this and requested not to send that letter to the Environment Department. Saiful presented the matter to the factory management, emphasizing the collective appeal and the potential consequences of inaction. The factory management, upon learning of the letter, began dismantling the offending generators in the factory by November 2022. On 5th January, 2023, the once-disturbed site was transformed into a peaceful car park, a symbol of the community's victory. Peace finally returned to Rishipara, not as a gift, but as a result of collective determination and continuous action. For Sahida and the WCA, it was a testament to the power of a united voice against adversity.

Surokkha- Advocacy for Employment Injury Insurance (A4EII)

The “Surokkha” project was initiated to train Ready-Made Garment (RMG) workers in Bangladesh and advocate for the Employment Injury Insurance (EII) scheme. Despite initial challenges due to the pandemic, the project successfully implemented its objectives through targeted activities and thoughtful adjustments.

The training sessions started in three cafes of Awaj Foundation in September 2021. A total of 2750 participants attended the training sessions. Among them, there are 706 males and 2044 females. The total number of training sessions were 110. 36 sessions took place in Rasulbagh café, 42 session in Tongi café and 32 in Masterbari café with the help of three café in charges in three women cafes of the project. The café in charges organized workers by visiting the communities and providing information regarding the EII training, arranged the training session and ensured active participation of the participants in each session.

During the project timeline, the GIZ and ActionAid brought 6 federation organizations in a platform with the help of the local partners and conducted meeting sessions with the trade union leaderships regarding Employment Injury Scheme (EIS). Awaj Foundation contributed in arranging 14 meetings with two labor rights organizations named Sommitito Garments Sramik Federation (SGSF) and Bangladesh Federation of Workers’ Solidarity (BFWS). In these sessions, the union and federation leaderships expressed their solidarity in raising awareness among the workers on EII.

The Shurokkha project demonstrated resilience and adaptability, overcoming pandemic-related challenges to meet its core objectives. Through capacity building, community engagement, and service delivery, it made a significant impact on RMG workers, fostering awareness and preparedness for EII implementation in Bangladesh.

Achievements

- 2750 RMG workers have been made aware about the EII, the benefits of the EII, its compensation system and to understand the process on how they can claim their rights within this system. Moreover, 350 Trade Union leaderships had been made aware regarding the EII through 2 national level federations who had also been capacitated through different training and workshops.
- The participants themselves have been aware and shared the message with fellow workers in the factories.
- The participants have requested for follow up sessions.
- Other workers from different factories and communities have come to know about this training and showed their interest to develop knowledge on EII in future.
- 18 master trainers received Training of Trainers (ToT) on EII from ILOITC in June 2021.
- Microteaching sessions and regular feedback among trainers ensured continual improvement.
- Café in-charges facilitated worker outreach, organized sessions, and encouraged active participation.

Support Services

- 6,141 workers received information services.
- 1,970 workers accessed legal services.
- 3,460 workers availed other services through the women cafes.

Engagement with Trade Unions

- Collaborations with six federation organizations facilitated by GIZ and ActionAid.
- 14 meetings organized with Sommitito Garments Sramik Federation (SGSF) and Bangladesh Federation of Workers’ Solidarity (BFWS) to promote awareness on EII among union leaderships.

Lessons learned

- The necessity of a field supervisor was realized for convenient arrangement and monitoring of the training sessions in the three women cafes, maintaining documents and report generating.
- More analysis is needed for selecting the Master Trainers like- from the organizers for capacity development.
- More follow up sessions are necessary for effective outcomes so that the participants can better consume the topic.
- The beneficiary number should be increased for reaching out to a larger number of workers.
- Creative training methodologies need to be developed for better and enthusiastic participation.
- Trade Union members should be engaged through activities and campaigns to achieve the goal of raising awareness more effectively.

Program Highlights

Case Study



Runa Akter (pseudonym) has been working in garments factory in Tongi area for more than five years now. She lives in the same area too. About six years ago Runa moved to Dhaka from a rural area of the northern part of the country dreaming of better income. She didn't wish much. She joined a garment factory in the hope of a stable income five years ago.

While working in the factory and also, in her community, Runa saw many workers to face different kind of problems related to their service, leaves, salary etc. But she was not so sure that how these people get to resolve these issues.

One day, on her way back to home from the factory, Runa met an organizer from Awaj Foundation who was talking with the workers how they can be benefitted by joining a training session where they would discuss some kind of compensation system for the workers. The organizer talked to Runa also and invited her to come to Awaj's office for this training. Runa found it interesting and attended the training session the next week.

After attending the session, Runa said the café in charge, "I should have come to know about this cafe earlier. This training session has benefitted me a lot. I like to know that the Government has signed the agreement for a successful execution of this compensation system for the RMG workers also. The EIS is a very necessary thing for the workers because we know how helpless the workers become if any accident happens or if they are injured and unable to work properly."

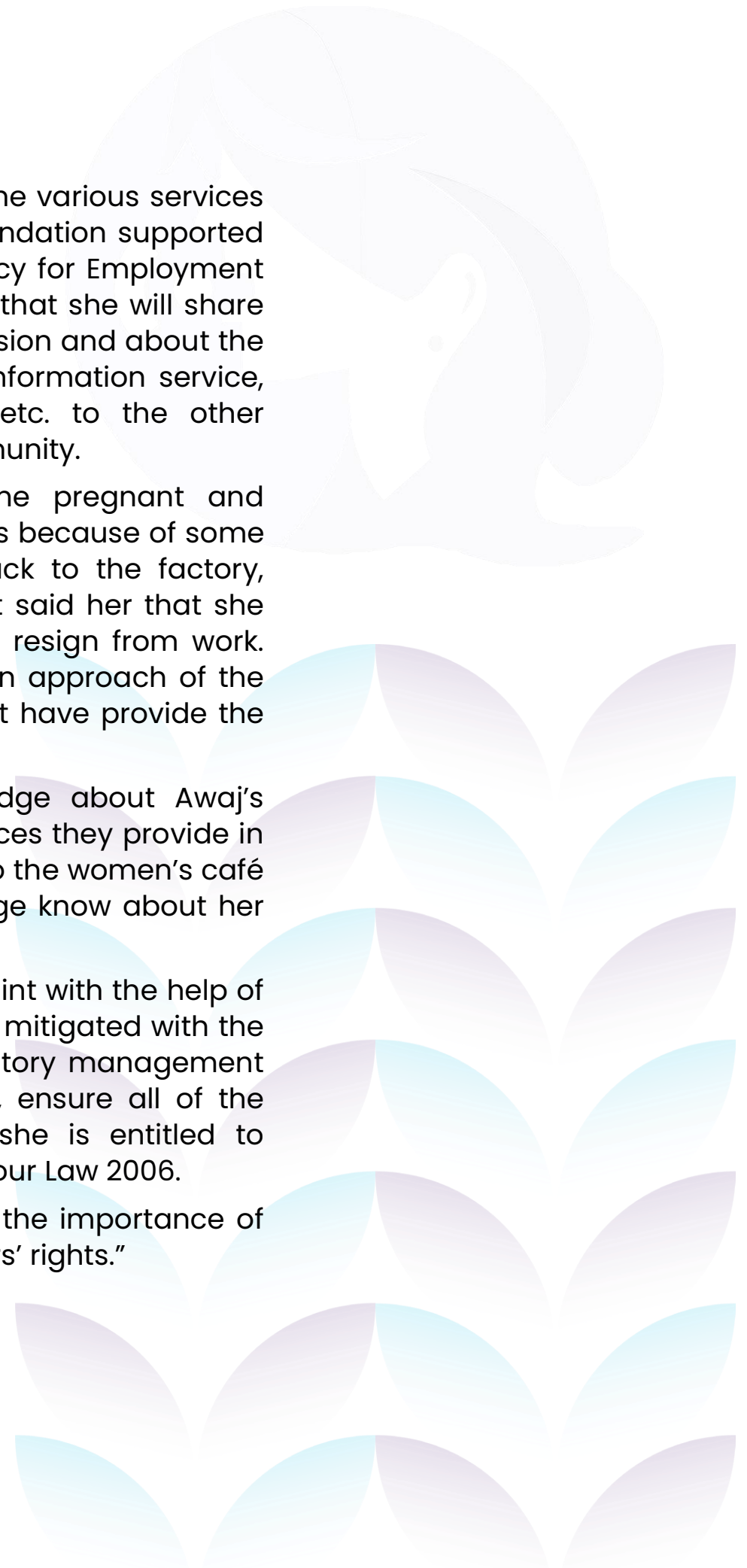
Runa also came to know about the various services of this women's café of Awaj Foundation supported by the project, Surokha-Advocacy for Employment Injury Insurance (A4EII). She said that she will share her learning from the training session and about the other services of the café like- information service, legal service, medical service etc. to the other workers in their factory and community.

In May this year, Runa became pregnant and couldn't attend office for two days because of some health issues. When she got back to the factory, after two days, the management said her that she can no longer work and have to resign from work. Runa knew that this is a common approach of the management so that they do not have provide the maternity benefits to the workers.

Runa then recalled her knowledge about Awaj's women's café and the legal services they provide in such situations. Runa then went to the women's café in Tongi and let the café in charge know about her situation.

She then lodged a formal complaint with the help of the café in charge. The issue was mitigated with the help of Awaj Foundation. The factory management reinstated her to work and also, ensure all of the maternity leaves and benefits she is entitled to according to the Bangladesh Labour Law 2006.

Runa shared, "now, I understand the importance of being aware regarding the workers' rights."



Program Highlights

Towards the Universal Ratification and Domestication of ILO C190

IWRAW



From December 2022 to March 2023, Awaj Foundation focused on advancing the ratification and implementation of ILO Convention 190 (C190) to combat workplace violence and harassment, particularly in South and Southeast Asia. The foundation achieved three primary outcomes: fostering commitment among government, employer, and worker groups for C190; empowering women garment workers to advocate for better working conditions; and strengthening regional solidarity for ratification.

Activities

Key activities included meetings with private sector stakeholders and RMG workers, national discourses with tripartite constituents, and awareness campaigns targeting gender-based violence (GBV) in the workplace. Despite delays due to COVID-19, the foundation completed its planned activities and identified the need for broader governmental and non-governmental support for C190 ratification.

Nazma Akter, Awaj Foundation’s founder, led lobbying efforts, while the foundation published a briefing paper analyzing national policies, which became a pivotal advocacy tool. Other initiatives included forming Anti-Harassment Committees, researching GBV, and drafting workplace sexual harassment laws.



Achievements

The project directly impacted 250 beneficiaries, with an estimated 1,000 indirect beneficiaries. Challenges included limited C190-related initiatives and funding gaps, but lessons learned emphasized the need for stronger education, follow-up, and awareness programs. Awaj Foundation’s participation in global tribunals and additional advocacy efforts underscored its commitment to women’s labor rights, fostering dialogue on gender equality and workplace safety.

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



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

Supporting Migrant Workers

Laboni Akhter's Story: A Journey of Survival and Resilience

Laboni Akter, a migrant worker, embarked on a journey to Saudi Arabia on November 9, 2020, under a domestic worker visa arranged by a broker named Nasir. Initially, the first three months were uneventful, but soon, Laboni became a victim of relentless sexual abuse at the hands of her employer.

Desperate for help, Laboni informed her sister, Brishti, and sought assistance through the Awaj Foundation's hotline. On February 20, 2020, Awaj Foundation lodged a formal complaint with the Bureau of Manpower, Employment, and Training (BMET), submitting all necessary documentation to demand her immediate repatriation. However, broker Nasir refused to cooperate and issued threats, further complicating the situation. After extensive hearings at BMET, the recruiting agency eventually agreed to facilitate Laboni's return with the support of Awaj Foundation. She was temporarily relocated to the Saudi branch of the recruiting agency. Unfortunately, just two days before her scheduled flight, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a sudden lockdown in Saudi Arabia, forcing the agency to return Laboni to her abusive employer's home.

Back in her employer's household, Laboni endured even more severe abuse. Regular sexual assaults left her physically and emotionally devastated, yet the abuse persisted for five grueling months. Despite maintaining regular contact with Awaj Foundation, her repatriation was delayed due to travel restrictions and a lack of cooperation from various parties, including the recruiting agency, brokers, and officials from both countries.

In this dire situation, Awaj Foundation advised Laboni to escape and seek help from the police. Acting on this guidance, Laboni approached the Saudi police, who provided her shelter for about a month. With combined efforts from the Saudi police and Awaj Foundation, Laboni was finally repatriated to Bangladesh on October 19, 2020.

Upon her return, Laboni resolved outstanding issues with the recruiting agency and resumed her life with her husband. Grateful for the unwavering support of Awaj Foundation, she expressed her deep appreciation, vowing to seek their guidance for any future overseas employment opportunities.

Laboni's story is a testament to the Awaj Foundation's commitment to supporting expatriate women workers. With steadfast loyalty and dedication, the foundation continues to stand as a beacon of hope, ready to provide help and protection during the most challenging times.



Research and Advocacy

Finnwatch

In 2022, Awaj Foundation executed a research work entitled “Just Transition in the Garment Industry in Bangladesh” in collaboration with Finnwatch. For this research, we conducted interviews with workers from three garment factories in Bangladesh. The interviews were carried out between July and September 2022 in Dhaka in person by the Awaj Foundation, commissioned by Finnwatch. The interviewed workers worked for Hop Lun Ltd, Natural Denims Ltd and Zaber and Zubair Fabrics Ltd. These factories are located in major garment and textile industry hubs, such as Gazipur just north of Dhaka, and in Ashulia, within the Dhaka District. The three companies are all suppliers to Finnish and European retailers and brands. Of the 30 interviewed workers, 6 were trade union members and another 4 also held a formal position in factory level trade unions at either Hop Lun or Natural Denims. There is no union in the Zaber and Zubair Fabrics factory. In addition to worker interviews, Finnwatch has also conducted interviews with sectoral trade union and national trade union federation leaders and representatives of NGOs operating in Bangladesh for this section. The purpose of these interviews was to hear about workers’ circumstances and vulnerabilities, which have an impact on their ability to adjust to the changes brought on by the upcoming transition to a low-carbon economy.



The research shows climate action in the clothing and textile industry has been delayed for years, while the miserable working conditions in the production countries have not been corrected. Now things have to be fixed in one fell swoop. Emissions must at least be halved by the decade, and we must move from fast fashion to a sustainable circular economy. In collaboration with the Awaj Foundation, The report published by Finnwatch opens up the perspectives of Bangladeshi garment workers on the green transition. The climate crisis is hitting Bangladesh, which depends on fast fashion, hard, both through increasing extreme weather events and the employment effects caused by climate action in the clothing industry. Employees who are already in a weak position risk being left behind if they are not taken into account in the planning of the transition. We recommend quick corrective actions to address, among other things, miserable working conditions, non-existent social security and short-sighted tax policy.



Awaj's Strength grew in Social Media learning

During this timeline, Awaj Foundation's social media performed as a third eye on different activities. Well documentation and social media sharing gave pace to Awaj's internal and external growth coverage. Under Amplify Awaj project funded by Laudes foundation Awaj team received practical training from the expert Big Blue Communications on how to film the mobile videos and that resulted in Awaj Foundation team's video making capacity which proved to be very helpful for future as we work with the workers and through mobile videos we can showcase the problems of workers and also use during various campaigns such as 16 days of Activism.

Some Mention worthy Links on Social Media:

With the support of BigBlue's expertise, an animation on Awaj's introduction was developed
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/852383629399734>

Successful Completion of Paralegal Training Course
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/P3pDJkELWbEqhTN/>

Social Dialogue on Reducing Gender-based Violence and Sexual Harassment at Workplace
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/oJ4Bnk6JxEppj7HR/>

Stop Precarious Work campaigning –
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/M7avB6roZFWGynuq/>

Roundtable Meeting with Multi stakeholders on Industrial Relations
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/p7xgfduICBJqgLug/>

Campaign for ratify ILO 190 Convention
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/ZN23R5tydB73Hewz/>

Annual Study Tour and Picnic 2022-
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/WzfsN6pmN8tYXQ5e/>

National Dialogue with relevant stakeholders along with Gender platform Bangladesh on 16 days Activism
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/QwQdV9W8GxrMpp8y/>

UP! Projects achievement Sharing program
<https://www.facebook.com/share/p/cllpfoNhpuEXTuY7/>

Unite! Stop Violence against Women (16 days of Activism Awareness video)
<https://www.facebook.com/awajfoundation.org/videos/1444651992695548>



Ali Zahir Ashraf & Co.
Chartered Accountants

AWAJ FOUNDATION
Consolidated Statement of Financial Position
As at 30 June 2023

Particulars	Notes	Amount in Taka	
		30 June 2023	30 June 2022
ASSETS			
Non-Current Asset:		7,468,610	6,945,120
Property, Plant & Equipment	3.00	7,468,610	6,945,120
Current Assets:		25,940,247	34,426,231
Advance Against office Rent	4.00	2,922,483	2,262,898
Loan to Various Project	5.00	3,456,432	3,050,819
Advance for Program		126,000	101,875
Cash & Cash Equivalents	6.00	19,435,332	29,010,639
TOTAL ASSETS		33,408,857	41,371,351
FUND AND LIABILITIES			
Fund:		25,576,799	34,562,231
Fund Accounts	7.00	25,576,799	34,562,231
Current Liabilities:		7,832,058	6,809,120
Loan from Executive Members/Others	8.00	2,950,000	3,100,000
Loan from Primark		50,000	50,000
Loan from Awaj Foundation	9.00	2,507,543	2,098,465
Provision for Expenses	10.00	2,324,515	1,560,655
TOTAL FUND AND LIABILITIES		33,408,857	41,371,351

The annexed notes and annexure form an integral part of these financial statements.

  
President **General Secretary** **Treasurer**

Signed in terms of our separate report of even date annexed

Place: Dhaka
Dated: 17th December 2023


Md. Shahjahan, ACA
Partner, Ali Zahir Ashraf & Co.
Chartered Accountants
DVC: 231217201400439570



Ali Zahir Ashraf & Co.
Chartered Accountants

AWAJ FOUNDATION
Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For the year ended June 30, 2023

Particulars	Notes	Amount in Taka	
		30 June 2023	30 June 2022
INCOME	11.00		
Local Donation		58,274,474	22,881,990
Foreign Donation		209,147,609	96,809,728
Local Donation (Project)		4,703,137	2,104,350
Awaj Contribution		94,500	157,345
FNV Fund received Via From Awaj Foundation		-	253,470
Fund received from Mondiaal FNV		878,277	115,828
Received to additional contribution from GIZ project		-	162,581
Uniqlo		-	78,877
Total Income		273,097,997	122,564,168
EXPENDITURE	12.00		
Personnel Cost (Salary)		44,563,550	44,479,154
Health Care Cost		16,765,726	15,322,033
Shurokha Project Training cost		-	48,484
Kik Womens Cafe		143,618	16,000
Meeting, Training, Workshop		37,469,846	32,664,416
Plan International Bangladesh Program Cost		-	11,500
FES Training Program Cost		814,750	2,717,831
MJF Training Cost		-	6,713
Office Rent		9,437,148	9,094,741
Stationery & Office Supplies		732,176	820,007
Transportation Cost & Others		3,891,561	4,592,614
Communication & Postage		1,053,549	1,071,376
Utilities		1,180,819	1,010,715
Repair & Maintenance		1,436,205	1,768,098
Refreshment & Entertainment		995,355	710,102
Printing & Photocopy		67,095	127,758
Staff Meeting		207,075	315,153
Gas & Fuel Cost		1,042,131	759,943
Bank Charge		40,820	46,632
Accommodation		16,000	52,000
Advertisement		113,304	148,569
Crokaries		4,200	-
Awaj Contribution		12,683	161,367
IT Enable Service		44,520	15,000
Litigation		100,312	88,650
Other Operation Expenses		342,056	249,713
Perdiem		18,900	99,400
Audit Cost		670,422	939,602
Day Observation		2,249,053	2,029,675
Day Care Center Cost		2,460,097	2,205,030
School Program Cost		1,540,219	1,660,093
Social Monitoring Cost		2,104,208	546,278
Sanitary Napkin Cost		2,323,265	1,743,203
Overhead Cost		9,463,115	9,543,351



Ali Zahir Ashraf & Co.
Chartered Accountants

AWAJ FOUNDATION
Consolidated Statement of Comprehensive Income
For the year ended June 30, 2023


Particulars	Notes	Amount in Taka	
		30 June 2023	30 June 2022
Relief for workers Expenses		1,885,464	4,350,150
Top Management Contribution Cost		643,700	556,840
Cleaning Utensils & Hygiene Products, PPE, Thermal		147,728	120,014
Baseline & Endline Survey		654,260	-
Yoga Materials		53,290	21,450
Fund Transferred		878,277	531,879
Fund Transferred-Local		44,537,932	-
Fund Transferred-Foreign		88,220,732	-
Educated to the worker about freedom of association		130,786	-
Amplify Bangladesh		1,114,751	-
Banner & Sign Board		35,160	-
Overtime		41,163	-
Legal Advisor Fee		60,000	-
Portal & Other Cost		6,000	-
Capacity Building on GBV at workplace-Tchiboo		882,428	-
Depreciation (Annexure-A)		1,632,370	1,497,205
Total Expenditure		282,227,817	142,142,738
Excess of Expenditure over Income		(9,129,820)	(19,578,570)
		273,097,997	122,564,168

The annexed notes and annexure form an integral part of these financial statements.

  
President **General Secretary** **Treasurer**

Signed in terms of our separate report of even date annexed

Place: Dhaka
Dated: 17th December 2023


Md. Shahjahan, ACA
Partner, Ali Zahir Ashraf & Co.
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DVC: 231217201400439570

