

# Ensuring Sustainable Livelihood for the Workers for the Sustainable Development in Ready Made Garments Industry in Bangladesh: An Empirical Study

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**Abstract:** For the last few decades Bangladesh export oriented Ready Made Garments (RMG) sector has made significant contribution to country's economic development and earning foreign exchange. All this progress will come undone unless Bangladesh can make ensure sustainable livelihood for garments workers. It is high time to give concern in poverty alleviation as well as overcoming vulnerability among workers. If sustainable livelihood is not ensure for marginal level workers, no sustainable development of workers like training program, career development program, performance management development which are the indicators of Human Resource Development is possible. As a result sustainable development in RMG Industry can't be ensured. So, in the first stage, this study attempted to explore workers sustainable livelihood considering their income along with expenditure in basic needs. Most of the marginal workers have to expense all the income to manage minimum food and shelter for family. So there is no option of education, medicine or recreation. For this study, relevant data were collected from garments workers on Tongi, Gazipur commercial area. Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were done to achieve the objectives. It is found that socio economic condition of garment workers is not in a sustainable stage. Workers who work down to dusk but their wages are not in the satisfactory level. They cannot afford their minimum foods, cloths, housing, medicines and educations of their children as they are ill paid. Their children suffer from malnutrition and unhygienic complexities. At the end, some recommendations were placed for sustainable livelihood for the workers for the sustainable development in RMG industry in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** livelihood status, ill paid garment workers, basic needs and sustainable development.

## I. Introduction

The readymade garment sector is a growth engine for Bangladesh. It is a multi-billion-dollar manufacturing and export industry. With about 4 million workers employed in the sector, about 80 percent of whom are women. The RMG sector alone does export worth \$24 billion a year, which is almost 79 percent of the total export earnings of our country. So the vulnerability and threat on this sector should be a matter of concern such as sustainable growth and sustainable livelihood of workers.

Garments workers cannot demand their rights and raise their voice because they are powerless poor, jobless people. They are afraid to lose their job or they are replaceable by poor jobless people who are looking for work.

The sustainable livelihood is the coping ability and continuity of livelihood. It is also subject to dignity. Workers' rights are also essential to sustain an adequate standard of living which is not possible with insecure and poor payment.

## II. Literature

According to BANGLADESH- THE WORLD BANK DOCUMENTS, WORLD BANK GROUP, Bangladesh is now the world's second largest exporter of readymade garments after China, making it unique among low-income countries in its high share of manufactured goods in exports. The share of exports in GDP has more than trebled since 1981. Nowadays this sector contributes around 15 percent of total Gross Domestic Production (GDP). In FY14, exports of the ready-made garment sector exceeded US\$24 billion, and the sector employed an estimated 4 million workers, mostly women, many of whom were from poor rural areas.

This is true that the enormous contribution of this sector is helping Bangladesh to reduce poverty by generating employment for poor people. But the insufficient wages and company negligence make workers' livelihoods more vulnerable and can lead them into the cycle of poverty again.

The concept of vulnerability and sustainable livelihoods are depending on the place, time, form there are different perspectives to understand vulnerability. For this research, most suitable definition of vulnerability is defined by O'Riordan (2002), "Vulnerability as the incapacity to avoid danger, or to be uninformed of impending threat, or to be as politically powerless and poor as to be forced to live in conditions to danger" (p 369). This might be the circumstances of the garments who work with crude wages, insecure job and company owner's conditions just because they are poor or their own need. Livelihood refers to gaining a living, including livelihood capabilities, tangible assets and intangible assets (Chambers and Conway, 1992). In the sustainable livelihoods framework, a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future (DFID, 1999).

For lack of livelihood assets, workers have to depend on their work and this dependency might give the opportunity to Garment's Owners to exploit these workers. This exploitation starts poor wages and insecure job. Without standard wages according to market and secure job, it might be hard to secure sustainable livelihoods.

This study is attempted to explore workers vulnerability considering the sustainable livelihood and ill payment.

### III. Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are to examine some important aspect of garment industry in Bangladesh. The specific objectives are as follows

1. To explore workers vulnerability considering the poor payment.
2. To examine workers sustainable livelihood considering their income along with expenditure in basic needs.

### IV. Data Source and Methodology

Both qualitative and quantitative analyses were done to achieve the objectives. . A detailed questionnaire has been made for collection of primary data focusing on their income, expenditure, job security, their accommodation and education etc. A **stratified sampling** technique has been used for selection of the sample.

Primary data have been collected from 100 garments workers who live in Telultola slum which is located in near the mill gate Tongi, Gazipur within Dhaka Division. Most of the works are female and their age limit was 18-50 years. They work in different garments located near their slum. Their education level is from primary to S.S.C level where 7 percent workers are S.S.C pass, 33 percent workers have secondary education and 40 per cent workers are only able to write their names.

### V. Result and Discussion

Bangladesh is now the world's second largest exporter of readymade garments. . In FY14, exports of the ready-made garment sector exceeded US\$24 billion. Behind this success, the thing which is hidden is garments worker's time, labor even their valuable life. After that they lead a miserable life. Their present socio-economic condition can be described as follows.

- 1.Their income and expenditure
- 2.Job insecurity
- 3.Their accommodation and housing
- 4.Education of themselves and their children
- 5.Their savings and loans
- 6.Their leisure and recreation
- 7.Malnutrition

#### 5.1 Their income and expenditure

The garments workers are earning their daily food by very hard labor .To arrange the minimum food for their family they have to work from the dawn to dark.

Their salaries are very poor. Most of the workers are paid 6000 to 8000 tk. Sometimes they are being paid one month later by showing various causes even reduction of their wages, counting their late attendances are the very common practices in the garments sector.

### Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.976 <sup>a</sup>	.953	.953	1128.665

a. Predictors: (Constant), Total income  
Coefficients<sup>a</sup>

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	325.534	317.639		1.025	.308
	Total income	.991	.022	.976	44.760	.000

Dependent Variable: Total Expenditure

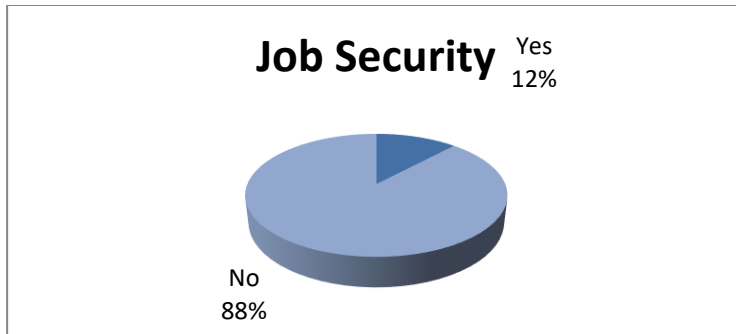
Independent Variable: Total Income

From the regression analysis, it can be interpreted as, for 1 taka increase in income their expenditure will be increased by 0.991 taka. This result is statistically significant at 0% significance level. R square and adjusted R square is very high that is 95% variation of dependent variable (Expenditure) can be explained by independent variable (Income).

Their income and expenditure are same. They have to spend almost all the money for food and shelter. Sometimes their expenditure is more than income as they borrow money, take loan from others.

### 5.2 Job insecurity

In Bangladesh, garments workers have no job security. Garments workers may be suspended, demotion, transferred even sacked from the company any time showing some unusual reasons or without any reason. Although there is a rule in the service policy that, the sacked employee should get at least one month salary from the company if they are sacked from the company without any reason (surplus, lack of works) but in reality, the due salary is not given sometimes. Most of the companies do not abide by the rules of Govt., BGMEA. Owner runs the company by their own rules. According to the survey only 12% think that their jobs are secure. Rest of them feel insecurity with their job.



### 5.3 Their accommodation and housing

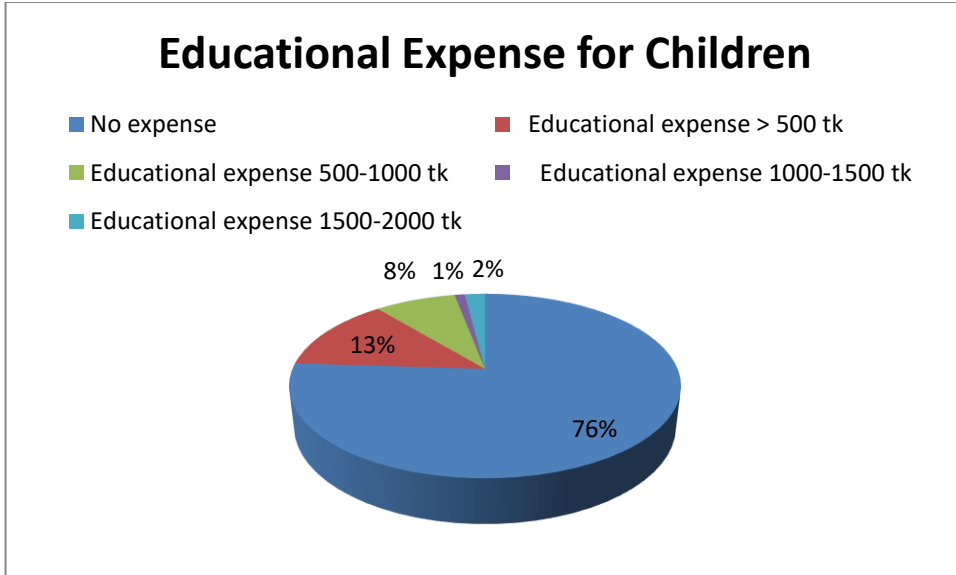
All of the garments workers are ill paid. Hardly can they manage food and shelter with their poor payment. Most of the garments workers are live in the rented slums. The housing structure of the slum is very poor. The most of the rooms are built by tin-shed roof and tin-shed boundary. Within the slum there are many hanging rooms built upon the dirty water pound. Most of the room is 10 feet by 6 feet. Monthly rent each of the room is Tk.1200 (one Thousand two hundred). Common unhygienic bath, kitchen for 8-10 family, no gas oven(natural gas oven) for cooking, shortage of water, crude electricity line, air pollution, poor sanitary and sewerage system etc are the real scenario of slum. That is, they lead life in unhygienic environment.

### 5.4 Education of themselves and their children

The garments workers have low profile education level. Their academic education is from primary to S.S.C level where only 7 percent workers are S.S.C pass, 33 percent workers have education upto level nine and 40 per cent workers are only able to write their names. Poverty and ignorance can be outlined the causes of less education amongst the garments workers:

Garments workers are have no scope to guide their children for education As they have to work day long. Most of their children are going govt. primary schools, some NGO’s school (BRAC, PROSHIKA, and UCEP etc) for their education. Near the slum there are some private schools such as, NISHAD School , MONNU School and OLEMPIA School.

According to the survey 78% garments workers have no expense regarding their children education. Among them some of them have no school going children. Rest of them do not think that education is that much important. They think girls need not to go to school. Girls need to do the household work look after the house when her mothers are in working place. Others think that they can not afford the cost of education rather they prefer to engage their children to some work for which their family can run smoothly.



### 5.5 Their savings and loans

Still they are. Some of the factories do compromise with the rules and regulations while others are not, showing different causes. Though garments worker are ill paid, they are not paying regularly. They not well-enough as they can hardly carry out their needs by their earnings. At the end of the month they have no excess money in their hand. So there are no way of savings. Nonetheless, there are some workers who are members of the NGO's. They deposit their savings or take loans with high interest from that organizations Most of them are female workers. They also draw loan with the very high rate of interest from those NGOs. Only 6% have regular bank deposit and 10% have savings in different NGO's and others have very few personal savings.

### 5.6 Malnutrition

Hanging housing is a problem of the slum. Over flow of water in rainy season causes flood most of these household. They suffer from various diseases including **malnutrition**. Approximately sixty percent children are affected from malnutrition.

### 5.7 Their leisure and recreation

As human being they need leisure time, to refresh the mind. Sometimes they have no holidays even they are forced to work in the holydays. So garments worker can hardly manage time to have the recreation. In holydays, when they get time they go to the cinema or visit their near and dear ones. They also visit their village homes to see their parents and relatives.

### 5.8 Recession in RMG

Because of recession many small factories and buying offices have shut down. Many workers became jobless. Sometimes their wages are in due to the garments owners for which

they cannot lead their livelihood. As result unemployment is increased this leads increasing social crimes.

## **VI. Recommendations**

According to the study to ensure the sustainable livelihood of garments workers some recommendations can be made. Such as

1. Garments workers' salary structure should be up to date according to the present market condition.
2. Their wages should be given in regular basis on right time.
3. There are many irregularities in the factories such as suspended, demotion, transferred even sacked from the company any time showing some unusual reasons or without any reason, abuse, etc which should be checked from the govt.
4. Their salary is randomly cutting down in the name of late attendance, bad performance, bad quality etc which should there be minimized.
5. Child day care system may be introduced for the garments workers' children.
6. Bangladesh govt. should take steps to ensure the minimum education for their children.

## **VII. Conclusion**

Livelihood in Bangladesh is hard without alternative means to earn an income. Workers have the ability to earn, but they are not capable of earning enough to sustain their livelihoods in the RMG sector. They try to ensure a sustainable livelihood for themselves and also for their family. Some but not all of them cannot manage this. Quantitative survey findings suggest that workers cannot manage their basic needs such as food, cloths, shelter, education, medicine etc. Their job is insecure. Sometimes company owners violate of workers' rights start from their working rules. Workers do not have any written contract. On the other hand, workers are powerless due to poverty. Workers cannot demand their rights because they are afraid of losing their jobs, as they are easily replaceable by other jobless poor workers.

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