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22 Business Models in Bangladesh: Problems and Prospects

Abstract: While Bangladesh's garment industry is snowballing, it is beginning to face several problems in various areas. This chapter aims to catalogue the obstacles to sustainability faced by Bangladesh's garment industry and outline possible opportunities. This chapter is qualitative and constructed from secondary sources. The data came from various published sources, including journals, articles, reports, websites and online databases. According to the study, low wages, gender inequality, a dearth of trade unions, fire safety and risk issues and unfavourable working conditions are important issues in Bangladesh. The government, private organisations and factory owners should take responsible measures to guarantee a better working environment with increased satisfaction if the industry is to achieve a satisfactory sustainable position.

Keywords: fashion, Bangladesh, business models

Context

Nearly three million low-income garment workers in Bangladesh have a cumulative impact on foreign exchange of $34.13 billion per fiscal year (Usman Sabir, 2021). As a result, preserving this industry is crucial to the country's long-term economic growth. The ready-made clothing industry has been a driving force in Bangladesh's economic growth (Paul et al., 2019). Formerly known as a "bottomless basket". Bangladesh has achieved remarkable human and social development despite severe resource constraints, growing its GDP by an average of 6% each year. For whatever reason, in the last decade, Bangladesh's garment industry has rapidly grown to become the country's primary export earner (Ashraf & Prentice, 2019). Rapid industrial development has shown the potential for new job creation and poverty alleviation initiatives. Bangladesh is the world's second-largest exporter of garments. According to the most recent data from the Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), Bangladesh's garment exports

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climbed by 30 percent to $23.99 billion between July 2021 and January 2022 (BGMEA, 2021; Islam, 2021).

Bangladesh's economy relies heavily on the garment industry, but this sector has come under pressure in recent times (Rahman & Anwar, 2007). Hundreds of garment factory employees in Bangladesh have lost their lives due to fires, which have become all too common in that country's garment industry (Chowdhury et al., 2014). Also, the 2013 collapse of the Savar garment factory, which killed thousands of workers, received widespread media attention in Bangladesh and beyond. The safety and longevity of Bangladesh's garment industry have been called into question by this catastrophe. The vast majority of clothing factory owners do not implement even the most basic safety measures. The lack of a proper policy and a real labour union policy in this industry is a major issue. The manufacturing owners see this as an opportunity to increase profits without increasing investment. This leads them to act corruptly in a series of ways that often culminate in the types of situation mentioned above.

Several regular international buyers of ready-made clothing products have already stated that they will not do business with enterprises that have this culture because of the absence of safety and a suitable workplace environment. In addition, there is a growing demand from purchasing departments for greener goods. Environmental indicators such as life cycle evaluations, water footprints and CO_2 emissions associated with production are increasingly being included in product labelling and posted on company websites. In order to educate their consumers, they reveal details of their manufacturing procedure. However, the bulk of Bangladeshi garment makers and producers are still clueless about the growing need for eco-friendly products (Ansary & Barua, 2015). They have yet to adopt a green strategy or incorporate sustainability metrics into their manufacturing procedures. Thus, the garment sector in Bangladesh is most at risk of losing access to the global market, which might quickly lead to the economic collapse of the country. The purpose of this article is, then, to investigate the difficulties associated with achieving sustainability in Bangladesh's garment sector and to outline potential solutions.

Historical Development

Bangladeshi textiles, particularly Muslim and Jamdani fabrics, gained worldwide recognition in the past and were worn by the kings and queens of Europe and other nations. The British government in India did not provide significant support to the textile industry and preferred to see England prosper. The manufacturing of ready-made garments (RMGs) is a relatively young industry in Bangladesh, and the coordinated mass manufacturing of them is even newer. Until the mid-twentieth century, customers told tailor exactly what they wanted, and the customers also supplied the fabric. With the exception of infant and toddler wear and men's knit underwear

(*genji*), Bangladesh had essentially no local market for ready-made clothing prior to the 1960s.

It was not until the late 1970s that Bangladesh's RMG industry shifted its attention primarily to exporting. However, the demand for RMG inside the country has been on the rise recently due to rising incomes and shifting consumer preferences. Employment, profits in foreign currency and the sector's contribution to GDP all increased rapidly as the sector expanded. And as the RMG industry has expanded, a new breed of business owners has emerged and established a robust private sector. Women make up a sizable proportion of these company owners. A businesswoman established Baishakhi Garment in 1977; it was one of the first textile firms to place an emphasis on exporting. The RMG industryhas expanded greatly during the past 15 years. In 1978, there were only nine factories that made clothes to be exported. Less than a million dollars in export revenue was generated by these plants. Smaller companies produced clothing for both the U.S. and other nations. Reaz Garments, Paris Garments, Jewel Garments and Baishakhi Garments were the names of four of these venerable but outdated manufacturers. Established in 1960 as a small tailoring business in Dhaka, Reaz Garments is now a global leader in the garment industry. It was the first company of its kind. For the first 15 years or so, sales were restricted to residents of the home nation.

In 1973, the company's name was changed to M/s. Reaz Garments Ltd. In 1978, the company sold 10,000 men's shirts to a Parisian firm for 13 million francs. This business pioneered the practise of shipping goods internationally directly from Bangladesh. Desh Garments Ltd. was the first non-equity joint venture in the clothing business, established in 1979. Desh and the Daewoo Corporation of South Korea worked together on technical and marketing issues. The corporation was the first to have exporting as its only focus. Production at the firm began in 1980. It had about 120 workers, three of whom were women who had been trained in South Korea. In 1980, a South Korean company and a Bangladeshi company opened the first clothing factory that they both owned. Bangladeshi partners put up 51% of the capital for the new company, which was called Young ones Bangladesh. It sold its first batch of padded and unpadded jackets to Sweden in December 1980. It is estimated that by the end of 1982, 47 factories were producing clothing. In 1984–1985, there were 587 clothing manufacturers, which was a big change. Nearly 2,900 RMG plants operated in 1999, an increase from the previous year. If you were looking for a place to buy clothes, Bangladesh was one of the top twelve exporters in the world.

Current Status

Since the 1980s, Bangladesh's garment sector has made steady improvements. Nurul Quader Khan established Bangladesh's clothing industry. He dreamed of improving the country's position. In 1978, he sent 130 trainees to South Korea to learn garment

manufacturing. In Bangladesh, he founded the Desh Garment Factory with trainees. At the same time, the late Akter Mohammad Musa of Bond Garments, the late Mohammad Reyazuddin of Riaz Garments, Mohammad Humayun of Paris Garments, Mohammad Fazlul Azim, Engineer of Azim Group, Major (Ret.) Abdul Mannan of Sunman Group, M Shamsur Rahman of Stylecraft Ltd. and AM Subid Ali of Stylecraft Ltd. came forward to enrol their names as pioneers, after which Bangladesh's clothing industry soared. The country has 5,500 woven garment factories, 1,700 knitwear enterprises and 1,300 spinning, finishing and dyeing facilities (Hasan et al., 2020). Currently, 3.5 million women work in theindustry. Sixty percent of RMG exports go to the EU, 23% to the US, 4.8% to Canada and 12.1% elsewhere (Zaman, 2021). Bangladesh exports knitwear to 93 countries, with the EU and US being the biggest importers (Abreu, 2015). Despite recent obstacles, the industry has carved itself a niche in the global market and is thriving.

After a bloodless coup, President Hussein Muhammad Ershad implemented the New Industrial Policy (NIP) in 1982, distorting the textile industry, creating export processing zones (EPZs) and encouraging foreign direct investment. The New Industrial Strategy returned 33 jute mills and 27 textile mills to their owners (NPI). Overstock and internal supplies hampered ready-made clothing exports. The knit division has exported shirts, t-shirts, trousers, sweaters and jackets since the 1990s. In 2006, the US and Europe provided 90% of Bangladesh's RMG sector's revenue. Bangladesh was the world's sixth-largest exporter in 2006. Since its beginning, different inspirations have led to the industry's progress and evolution. Child labour was discovered in 1994 and eliminated in 1995. From 1995 until 2005, the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) was in place, with industrialised nations committing to export fewer textiles and limited quotas. The 10-year accord gave Bangladesh quota-free access to European markets and preferential quotas for the U.S. and Canada. The MFA quota helped establish, develop and mature the apparel industry. As the quota scheme ended in 2004, many believed it would hurt exports. Bangladesh's 2006 exports accounted for 2.8% of global revenues. In 2007, the U.S. was the leading export market at $3.23 billion. Bangladesh's exports climbed 43.36 percent year on year to $15.66 billion in 2010–11, despite the global recession of 2007–2008. Bangladesh was China's second-largest ready-made clothing producer in 2011.

In 2011–12, Bangladesh exported $19.09 billion in garments. At $2.42 billion, the US is Bangladesh's largest woven textile market. Bangladesh exported $5.36 billion in garments to the EU, or half of its total exports. Afire at Tazreen Fashions Ltd. revealed poor fire safety and working conditions. In 2019–2020, garment exports accounted for 84% of total export revenues, which is both heartening and worrying (BGMEA, 2021; Islam, 2021). Bangladesh's ready-made clothing sector has been its biggest source of foreign revenues for 25 years (Das et al., 2018; Rahman, 2021; Zaman, 2021). After the quota system was eliminated, Bangladesh's apparel exports grew 21% per year from 2005 to 2022.

Sustainability Drivers

The garment industry of Bangladesh lags far behind in terms of sustainability. Many concerns are lacking when the three areas of sustainability are evaluated. Only the economic conditions may have reasonable and good achievements among the environment, social and economic perspectives of Bangladesh's garment industry. The benefit of increased earnings flows straight to the owners in the garment industry. Profits barely cover the wages of the workers. The economic growth of Bangladesh is also reliant on garment exports because garment items account for 80% of the total exports of Bangladesh. So in this regard it can be stated that the garment industry has a significant link with the economic development of Bangladesh. The GDP growth of this countryhas been consistent since 2000 with an annual growth rate of roughly 6%. In this connection profit sharing with the garment workers is urgently needed to ensure their commitment for the improvement of this sector; this initiative can be one of the most important determinants toward the sustainability of this industry, which is shown in the Figure 22.1.
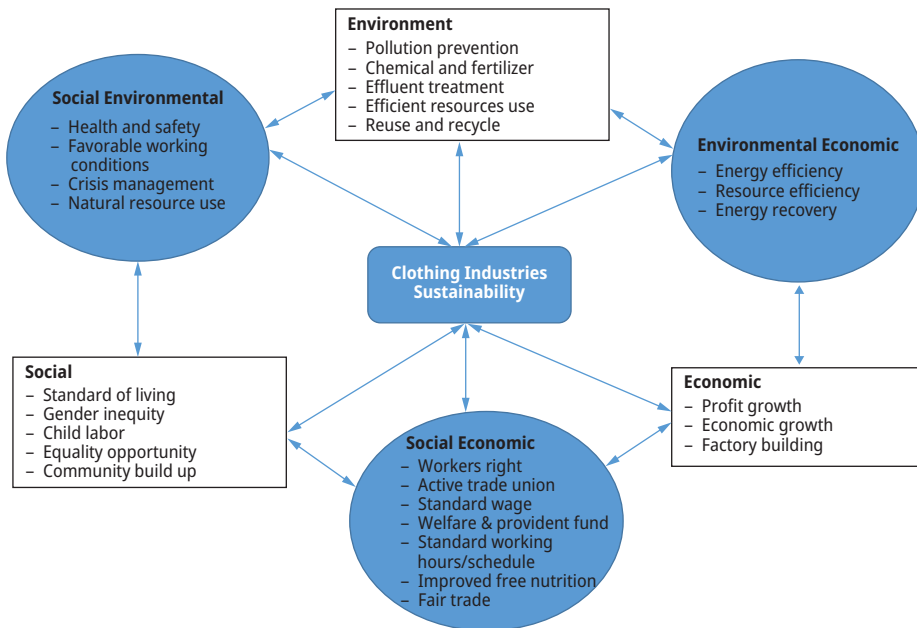

Figure 22.1: Determining factors of clothing industries' sustainability.
Source: Authors' contribution.

Workers have an extremely low quality of living standards because they are paid the lowest wage. Gender equality in terms of wage and employment status is not properly maintained. Despite the fact that child labour in the garment industry has decreased drastically after the Harkin Bill in the United States in 1992, there are still many children working in small scale informal industries. The majority of them are 12 to 15-year-old female workers from rural areas. There is a lack of strong community development among garment workers. Most of the workers dwell in the slum regions and are socially classified as lower-class individuals.

Vulnerability of the workers' health and safety issues indicate very poor socio-environmental conditions. Fires, building collapses and other threats have surfaced. Many people are killed or wounded every year as a result of workplace risks. Many factories still have very low levels of worker safety. None of the factory authorities take the workers' health into account. They frequently become ill as a result of their working conditions. Crisis management is ineffective as well. Workers are often forced to return to work during "Hartal", a typical practice of political parties calling strikes. Working during Hartal puts their lives in danger because violence and confrontations are common during this period.

Workers' rights, trade unions, fair trade, wages, worker welfare and provident fund increases and working hours are all examples of socioeconomic conditions. All of these have a negative impact on Bangladesh's clothing industry if not well-managed. Workers are unaware of their rights, and there are no measures to educate them. Trade union federations are uncommon, although labour unions are frequently associated with political parties. Union leaders are preoccupied with politics for their own interests without considering the protection of the workers' rights. Therefore, many firms have deducted a fixed amount of money from workers' monthly salary which has been termed as a welfare fund, with this deduction creating an extra burden on garment workers. However, low salaries for garment workers contribute to a poor and unhealthy lifestyle. As long as this dimension will not be taken in consideration, the term sustainability fails to come to pass.

Challenges Confronting Sustainable Garments Industry

Gender Inequality

The employment of women in the workplace is one of the goals of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).The primary components for women's economic development or empowerment are a suitable work position and a source of income.It is nearly impossible to empower women in the economic sector without having a positive work environment for them. However, the Ready-Made Garment sector, on the

other hand, contributes the most foreign revenue to Bangladesh (RMG). The overall number of workers in this sector is estimated to be around 4.2 million, with more than 90% of them being women from the rural areas of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, the working atmosphere in this industry is hostile to women, making it difficult for them to work comfortably, and labour rights and social compliance are violated. Every financial year, women and men work together to earn a huge amount of foreign revenue, which helps Bangladesh maintain a stable GDP. The contribution of women to economic development in Bangladesh cannot be denied. Moreover, their contributions and efforts in the RMG industry are outstanding. Nonetheless, female workers have superior abilities, competency and learning behaviour as compared to their male colleagues.

However, it is a matter of great concern that female employees face sexual harassment, salary disparities and inequitable perks such as maternity leave and daycare, which is both unpleasant and unacceptable (Haque et al., 2019; Hossan et al., 2012). Female workers are not well protected in terms of their safety, security and benefits. Notably, in the RMG industry of Bangladesh, most women are frequently subjected to workplace discrimination and are seen as inferior compared to their male co-workers (Mustafa et al., 2016). Female garment workers being touched inappropriately at work by their superiors accounted for 28% of all sexual harassment occurrences. On public transportation and on sidewalks, over 40% of women were harassed and abused. In addition, one-quarter of the female garment workers said they felt unsafe in the workplace. Along with this, low payment, wage delays, few promotions, poor healthcare, unwillingness to provide maternity leave and a hazardous working environment are all quite frequent occurrences for women workers.

Fire Safety and Risk Factors

In terms of safety, the Bangladeshi garment industry has one of the worst records in the world. In the clothing sector, fires are fairly prevalent. According to the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defense, the country had 383 industrial fires in 2020, with 273 of those occurring in clothing factories (Barua & Sharmili, 2020).

According to the Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies, at least 1,841 employees have died in various forms of incidents in the readymade garment business in the last 12 years, including in building collapses and fires (Fardaus Mobarok, 2022). More than 9,595 garment workers have been wounded as a result of the accidents and many of them have lost their jobs (FardausMobarok, 2022). Moreover, the families of the workers who were hurt were not compensated. In the last five years, there have been 5,834 industrial fires with a financial loss of Tk 2.5 billion. According to the Bangladesh Fire Service and Civil Defence, Dhaka division had the most industrial fires, while Sylhet had the least.

Unfavourable Working Conditions

Workplace conditions and occupational tasks involved in the garment industry induce physical health vulnerabilities of the clothing industry workers. It is found from previous studies that garments workers are facing some remarkable health issues including respiratory problems (Chumchai et al., 2015), musculoskeletal problems (Parimalam et al., 2007), hearing loss (Khan et. al., 2015), skin diseases/problems (Akhter et. al., 2010) and cardiovascular diseases (Fatema et. al., 2014). Additionally, back/joint pain, cough and common cold, headache, loss of sight, hepatitis, fever, diarrhoea and acidity are identified as the most common diseases which result when RMG workers' health statuses become vulnerable. An unhealthy workplace environment and chemical dangers such as dust, smoke, mist, fumes and dusty raw materials have all been identified as contributing to these illnesses and diseases. Furthermore, vulnerable health is caused by a lack of nutritional intake as garment workers are paid low wages which limits their ability to purchase enough nutritional foods which leads to their being underweight and affected by anaemia and iron deficiency.

In addition to physical health problems, many past studies found that garment workers are also sensitive to psychological problems. Trauma, work stress, depression and its associated risk factors such as insomnia, hypertension, heart attack, somatic illness, anxiety, social dysfunction and sleeplessness are some of the most common symptoms of psychological issues identified in the literature.Work-related demands like long working hours, worry about mistakes, time pressure, exposure to harsh language and emotional abuse and physical strain are the primary causes of work stress, which largely promotes psychological vulnerabilities and work-related issues such as job insecurity, lack of job promotion opportunities and part-time work. Furthermore, long working hours, boredom, workplace injury, feeling insecure at work and a lack of acknowledgment have been recognised as key causes of psychological health vulnerabilities among RMG workers.

Reduced Inequality: The UN Sustainable Development Goal

UN member nations created the Sustainable Development Goals to alleviate poverty, promote peace and prosperity and safeguard the planet (Wright, 2019). These aims were based on the notion that society may attain its goals without suffering. They tackle inequality and boost innovative production and consumption. Bangladesh's clothing sector violates most UN Sustainable Development Goals. Most industry workers are impoverished and cannot fulfil basic demands. Despite worldwide efforts to combat inequality, these actors disregard it. These corporations assign women time-consuming, low-paying duties. They favour less-educated, unmarried, young women because they can be influenced. Equal rights for women must be addressed. They deserve equal opportunity and their pay should reflect their effort and the country's

economy. The UN has applied some of the above garment industry policies to help address the exploitation of women's rights in other developing economies, especially in Africa. According to Brinkmann and Garren (2018), women have equal opportunities in the East African garment industry. The international community's efforts have improved these workers' working conditions, wages and quality of life. Local stakeholders, notably government and union leaders, may address these challenges in the local economy. This industry should encourage responsible manufacturing. Businesses must understand their responsibility for ensuring human rights-compliant product distribution. Globally, responsible consumption is gaining popularity (Lo and Ha-Brookshire, 2018). Using social and mainstream media, consumers may be made aware of the process behind certain items.

Improved Working Conditions

Bangladeshi garment workers face social and economic challenges. It is important to find long-term solutions to the problems these people face while making clothes for global markets. Thorbeck (2015) says creating shared value is one of the greatest methods to resolve industry stakeholders' issues. This approach protects everyone's interests as a company provides value to its customers. On-the-job training can supplement management's formal education. The management must also consider the health of all stakeholders. Many Bangladeshi garment companies do not care about employee health; worker safety has been ignored in this industry. Affordable housing may improve workers' economic status and quality of life. Another pillar should empower the local community through CSR. Renewable energy sources and responsible water use should be encouraged. Government authorities must commit to addressing the challenges Bangladeshi garment workers face. Industry or individual companies may adopt global best practices. Kramer and Pfitzer (2016) say more than brilliant policies on paper is needed. The targeted group must benefit from their implementation. The government should inspect these companies regularly to ensure that employee interests are protected and that they are paid according to policy.

Best Practices

Corporate social responsibility is being ingrained in the garment industry's best practises. As worker frustrations are publicised in social and mass media, companies in this industry are becoming more sensitive to sourcing practises. These manufacturers can no longer disregard employee hardship and suffering. Sanders et al. (2019) say ethical sourcing goes beyond reducing waste and protecting the environment. It emphasises always protecting human rights. Most manufacturers' reputations have been

tarnished by media coverage of garment workers' pain and suffering. They must re-think their production strategies.

As companies strive to be ethical, global best practises emerge. According to Stan-wick and Stanwick (2015), some of the leading firms in the apparel industry have de-veloped new strategies that focus on human rights, equality and workplace safety. Adidas has embraced ethical sourcing in the apparel industry. The company monitors its entire supply chain to ensure its partners, especially suppliers, do not oppress em-ployees. Patagonia, H&M and Marks & Spencer have adopted these best practises to meet customer demand. Everlene, Polo RL and Levi's also use these methods. These companies are sourcing fashion more sustainably. They believe they can promote eth-ical sourcing and be profitable. The fashion industry is becoming increasingly con-cerned about ethical sourcing because of the changing perception of their clients about labour issues. These companies have realised that some of their clients may switch their loyalty to other companies when they realise that some of the practises that the company embraces are unethical. Players in this industry are developing standards that must be observed when sourcing for materials and products. These sourcing standards are meant to address most of the issues that have been raised in the case study about the garment industry in Bangladesh.

Challenges

Despite the fact thatthe Bangladeshi garment sector is rapidly expanding, it has already begun to encounter a number of issues in several areas. Many readymade clothing com-panies begin as local household tailoring outfits. After a period of time, firms begin to receive sub-orders from other major Bangladeshi garment exporting enterprises, even-tually transforming into large independent garment manufacturers. Therefore, no in-dustrial building structure or policies are followed from the beginning of the setup. Furthermore, many people come directly from the rural region to work in these small industries, having previously worked in agriculture or having no prior work experi-ence. Because of their lack of skills and the disparity in living styles between village and city areas, these impoverished individuals will be most vulnerable to garment vio-lence and disaster. They are paid less and live in deplorable conditions. At work, they frequently face a slew of issues and harassment. Hasan et al. (2018) claim that they fre-quently do not receive their salaries, bonuses, or overtime pay on time. Manyare even forced to work overtime in factories without being paid for it. Because the majority of workers are unskilled and illiterate, they are unable to join a good trade union and con-sequently have no influence over policymaking or access to trade union aid.

After a few years of agitation, primarily over wage hikes for 4.4 million workers, the garment industry saw a tranquil and stable climate in 2019.However, since August of the same year, the clothing sector, which generally produces 84% of national ex-ports, has seen a downward trend in shipment. According to figures from the Export

Promotion Bureau, Bangladesh exported garment items worth $30.14 billion in the first 11 months of 2019, from January to November (EPB). The slowdown in export growth appears to be a reflection of Bangladesh's RMG industry's declining competitiveness (Sarkar, 2020).

The pandemic has exacerbated a downward trend in global garment usage, and we have no idea what the situation will be post-pandemic. Apparel producers likewise have no clue what will happen in the next two to three years because most factories have received orders at less than half of their capacity. In April 2020, exports grew at a negative rate of 85% (The Financial Express, 2020). Given the current circumstances, we must consider certain specific areas of development that will aid in overcoming the mountain of obstacles that the RMG sector has in terms of sustainability.

Conclusion

The clothing industry in Bangladesh is considered the country's economic lifeline. Since the late 1970s, Bangladesh's garment industry has grown to become the country's single most important export sector, accounting for 80% of total export revenue. This vast industrial sector employs millions of people, most of whom are women. As it is seen as the backbone of the country's economy, it requires high-level attention to ensure future stability and sustainability. Many international buyersare concerned about environmental issues and are asking for more environmentally friendly items. Some clothing companies have already begun to include standard environmental labelling in their products and on their websites. These businesses strive to make their customers concerned by incorporating LCA, water footprints and global warming potentials into their products. Bangladeshi garment manufacturers should adopt these environmental precautions and provide the requested information in the export contract with the buyer. This will improve the product manufacturing process while also promoting a more sustainable approach.There have also been a number of fires and-building collapses, all of which pose serious concerns to the future of Bangladesh's garment industry. Due to fire and worker safety concerns, some frequent foreign clients have opted not to purchase any further products from Bangladesh. Many factory owners are not concernedwith the garment industry'ssafety rules. Additionally, there is no proper policy or concrete labour and trade union policy. As a result, factory owners engage in a slew of illicit activities and frequently cause the aforementioned kinds of risks. There are currently significant concerns of losing access to the global market, which could jeopardise Bangladesh's stable economic progress. Workers' rights and standard wage levels should be amended and examined because the garment sector is one of the country's most important drivers of economic growth.In order to establish a satisfactory position for the clothing industry, the government,

private organisations and factory owners must adopt responsible efforts and strive for a better working environment.

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