



## Promoting Social Dialogue and Harmonious Industrial Relations in Bangladesh. Independent final evaluation, September – December 2022

### QUICK FACTS

**Countries:** Bangladesh

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**Evaluation timing:** Final

**Administrative Office:** ILO Country Office, Dhaka

Technical Office: Labour Law and Social Dialogue units under the Department of Governance and Tripartism (GOVERNANCE) and ACTRAV, ACT/EMP, as well as the Decent Work Team based in New Delhi.

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## BACKGROUND & CONTEXT

### Summary of the project purpose, logic and structure

The overall **purpose** of the SDIR project is to promote social dialogue and harmonious industrial relations in RMG industry.

The **development objective** of the SDIR Project is “Contributing to establish an effective industrial relations framework with a focus on the RMG sector.” There are **three key outcomes** to be reached at the end of the Project as follows:

1. Sustainable improvement in social dialogue, workplace cooperation and grievance handling (to be reached through **three outputs**; each output in turn to be reached by a number of **activities**);
2. Sustainable and effective mechanisms for conciliation and arbitration are established (to be reached through **four outputs**; each output in turn to be reached by a number of **activities**); and
3. Enhanced capacities of employers’ and workers’ organizations to dialogue and prevent and resolve disputes including those of gender concerns (to be reached through **two outputs**; each output in turn to be reached by a number of **activities**).

### Present situation of the project

The Project came to an end 31<sup>st</sup> December 2022.

### Purpose, scope and clients of the evaluation

The main **purpose** of this evaluation is accountability, learning, planning, and building knowledge to the key stakeholders, and identify and share learnings for design of similar projects in the future. There are a number of specific objectives, including assessing the project performance; weighing coherence and compatibility of the project with broader ILO works; gauging the effectiveness and efficient use of project resources; assessing its sustainability and impact; and documenting lessons learned from project implementation.

The **scope** includes assessing the Project’s progress, implementation, partnerships, achievements, challenges and to identify good practices, and lessons learned during the project’s entire duration, i.e., from 2015-16 to August 2022.



	<p>The <b>clients</b> of this evaluation are the ILO, including the project team, the ILO constituents (Government of Bangladesh, Employers’ and Workers’ organisations), the development partner (donor agencies), and other project implementing partners.</p>
<p><b>Methodology of evaluation</b></p>	<p>A <b>mix of methods</b> has been applied in the collection of both quantitative and qualitative information/data. Efforts were made to identify activities and interventions that have contributed to the achievement of the Project’s three outcomes. Multiple sources of evidence have been used. The evaluation has cross-validated data to verify their accuracy, and used different data gathering methods including documentation review; Key Informant Interviews (KII) via the Zoom platform and face-to-face; Focus Group Discussions (FGD); E-mails and a questionnaire. To ensure credibility and validity of the results, methodological <b>triangulation</b> of the data/information from the various above-mentioned methods was applied throughout - the information received was cross-checked with other sources.</p> <p>The evaluation team made <b>40 KIIs (10 women)</b>, and led the discussions in <b>6 FGDs in which 44 persons (21 women)</b> actively took part. One field visit was made to a DECCO garment factory in Mirpur.</p> <p>Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants in the evaluation – and triangulation and cross-checking have been applied <i>throughout</i> data collection and analysis to mitigate any risk for bias. The evaluation has been mindful of <b>gender equality and discrimination issues</b>, as well as other cross-cutting concerns. On 28 November, 2022, the Evaluation presented its preliminary findings in a Stakeholders’ Workshop in Dhaka, in which 47 persons participated, representing the key stakeholders and ILO. This was an opportunity for the evaluation team to gather more information from the participants.</p>

<p><b>MAIN FINDINGS &amp; CONCLUSIONS</b></p>	<p><b><u>MAIN FINDINGS</u></b></p> <p>It was found that the SDIR project is <b>relevant</b>, and the intervention design <b>overall is valid</b>. The stakeholder needs and priorities identified at the design stage in consultations with the ILO tripartite partners (constituents) have to a <i>large</i> extent been addressed.</p>
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The Project is also relevant in view of ILO Dhaka Country Office's Cluster initiative, in particular work stream iii) Labour administration and working conditions, and the fact that it is in line with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) roadmap and National Action Plan (NAP) on the Labour Sector of Bangladesh (2021-2026) that entail specific actions needed to be taken regarding legal and administrative reforms, enforcement of laws, and capacity building. The Project has had good cooperation with the Trade for Decent Work Project (EU) and the brand H&M.

It was found that there is mutual leveraging and complementarity (**coherence**) among SDIR and other ILO projects in the RMG sector and it has been able to adapt to contextual changes in the course of implementation, as when the COVID -19 virus started spreading in March 2020. Complementarity also exists between the different streams/themes of work under the three outcomes, and also synergy e.g. in terms of cooperation of the involved stakeholders.

Regarding the Project's design, it was found that, **overall, it is valid**, however, it was noted that Collective Bargaining Agreements and are not part of any outcomes/outputs, and there are no policy-related outputs/outcomes which would have been logical in view of the policy-oriented activities. It was also found that the Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) matrix is not sufficiently *user-friendly* in showing the relationships between outputs and outcomes.

The SDIR Project has worked in close cooperation with the tripartite constituents and also other partners/stakeholders that ILO commissioned to undertake specific activities, such as BRAC. BRAC was commissioned to develop a COVID-19 safety outreach campaign for RMG workers and their communities and a communication materials package was produced/used. The H&M also cooperated with the Project, engaging factories to participate in the Project's activities.

Regarding project **effectiveness** (in implementation) **tangible outputs, under each outcome, were identified**. The Project contributed to the establishing of the National Tripartite Consultative Council and the RMG Tripartite Consultative Council in



2017, to institutionalize social dialogue in the sector. The Project was instrumental in supporting the Government in setting up of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) on Trade Union Registration and Investigation of Anti-Union Discrimination, and Unfair Labour Practices. GoB has included these SOPs in the 2018 amended Bangladesh Labour Act (BLA). The Workers Resource Centre (WRC), is a “brain child” of the Project, set up in cooperation with NCCWE and IBC in 2017. Another successful result is that Paralegals (trained in 2019 and 2021) linked to the WRC have been able to help resolve many disputes at enterprise/factory level and thus prevented workers’ complaints to go into the national machinery and end up at the Labour Court – where the backlog reportedly is more than 20,000 pending cases.

In some other components, effectiveness has been *lower*, such as the establishing an effective arbitration system/mechanism and dispute resolution at national level, as well as the lack of tangible results from collective bargaining training in the form of materialising CBAs. The COVID-19 pandemic was a major challenge to the Project, as was the challenge to encourage unionized factories to participate in the activities. A large and quite successful component of the Project is awareness raising activities and capacity building.

Looking at the entirety of the Project, it was found that the **efficiency** in relation to the use of resources was at medium level. Overall, the results achieved justify the costs, including resources used to promote gender equality. Although the covid situation brought more funds into the Project, its ability to use the resources as planned was seriously weakened. as these had to be used mainly for other covid-related training activities, which was a situation that was outside its control.

For the National TCC and a RMG TCC (which the Project helped set up) to have real and long-lasting impact *these need to be fully active* - which requires commitment from the tripartite partners to hold meetings and discussions as intended. The two SoPs that were integrated into the BLA, are examples of tangible **impact**, which led to a rise in membership of basic unions from 2012 to 2019. The



Publicly Accessible Database is likely to have an impact in the sense that it contributes to transparency on labour market information. Another important impact of the Project is the WRC that has brought NCCWE and IBC to one single platform, two bodies that “earlier did not talk to each other”. Several of the key stakeholders claim that they have acquired knowledge from the various awareness raising events and training courses, or from cooperating with the Project – which is another important impact - particularly DoL, NCCWE, IBC, and WRC representatives claimed that they have increased their learning. Impact from Paralegal’s work is evident.

Regarding **sustainability**, the new Cluster approach is expected to safeguard continuation of ILO’s core work in the country and funding from e.g. the EU member states, but also from other donors that have been approached and who have shown interest to fund technical cooperation initiatives. Regarding the WRC, it has published a comprehensive *sustainability plan* in consultation with broader labour constituents with the goal to achieve financial sustainability of WRC.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

### **1. Relevance and validity of intervention design**

**a)** It is concluded that the SDIR Project is relevant and that there exists complementarity among the different streams/themes of work areas. The stakeholder needs and priorities identified at the design stage have been addressed to a large extent. The Project is relevant in a larger perspective also, in view of the GOB roadmap and the NAP.

**b)** The SDIR project design as reflected in the Project document and LFA matrices, is not sufficiently user-friendly in showing the relationship between the outputs and outcomes.

### **2. Coherence**

SDIR is clearly in line with international and national development and strategic plans. It is concluded that some coherence and mutual leveraging, and complementarity, exist between SDIR and two other RMG sector projects (RMGP II and the BWB Programme). It is in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 8; the Decent Work Country

Programme (DWCP) 2017-2020 (extended to 2021) and the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) 2017- 2021.

## 2. Effectiveness

It is concluded that, overall, the Project has been able to demonstrate **above medium level effectiveness**, despite delays and challenges brought on by COVID-19. It has throughout, placed much importance on promoting dialogue, social dialogue and harmonious relations. The “institutionalization” of social dialogue and harmonious relations, in the form of National TCC and RMG-TCC, is a good achievement that needs to be maintained by the constituents, through holding regular meetings among other.

Some of the other major achievements are the “traditional” capacity building and awareness raising activities with numbers of trainees that sometimes have exceeded the targets; the Covid related training; the active operations of the WRC which could continue to be very beneficial for the trade unions’ work and the workers in the sector if the centre could earn revenue and become more sustainable.

Other good achievements are two SoPs, the publicly accessible Database at DoL. Regarding this database it is necessary to ensure that the trade unions that are registered are *real* trade unions and that trade union federations are involved in the process of identifying this problem. An effective Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) system - i.e. with information to users about monitoring questions and relevant data collection processes - has been lacking in the SDIR project which is something the ILO should consider putting more efforts into, in the new cluster initiative.

## 3. Efficiency

Looking at the entire Project, the conclusion is that the **efficiency was at medium level**. The COVID-19 situation brought more funds into the Project but its ability to use the resources as planned was seriously weakened as these had to be used mainly for the covid-related training activities. No physical gatherings could be organised during the COVID pandemic for capacity building and awareness raising workshops – instead these were done virtually (online) (with

much lower costs involved). Regarding the Project's human resources it is also concluded that for a project in which M&E and gender mainstreaming are so crucial - the Project would have benefitted from having fulltime staff posts and expertise on Communication and M&E; and Gender equality mainstreaming, respectively.

#### 4. Impact

It is concluded that the **Project has had impact both at national and enterprise level** – the latter mainly in terms of dispute resolution. Increased learning and improved knowledge resulting from the comprehensive capacity building is also a positive impact of the Project. The two SoPs that were integrated into the BLA, is a tangible impact which led to a rise in membership of basic unions from 2012 to 2019, and so is the Publicly Accessible Database set up at DoL with a likely impact transparency and accountability regarding labour market information in the country. The NTCC and a RMG TCC are good project achievements, as mentioned here - but if they are to have real and long-lasting impact, they need to be fully active - which requires commitment from the tripartite partners.

#### 5. Sustainability

The themes of the current SDIR Project will **continue to be pursued** through the new Labour Administration and Working Conditions (LAWC) Cluster. Regarding the **sustainability of the WRC**, it has produced a Sustainability Plan and both NCCWE and IBC have agreed to look for ways where WRC can contribute more at national level, rather than only sectoral level.

The plan suggests ways for the WRC to generate revenue and depicts short and medium activities - plus identifying 3 to 4 areas where work can be done in longer term.

WRC has a pool of Master trainers who can be used to provide services to generate revenue, and paralegal services that WRC can "market" to other organisations/sectors. It is also concluded that it would need external support to set up a viable M&E system to enable to conduct its own assessments of progress, and also improve its capacity to develop realistic proposals, soliciting for funds from potential funders.





**Cross-cutting issues**

Regarding **gender equality**, the Project has made good efforts to ensure and improve women’s participation in the various capacity building activities and in supporting the WRC’s Women’s Committee and its GBV advocacy and women leadership training. The ILO should continue to support this important work of the WRC. **Tripartism** and **International standards** were also addressed. **Covid-19** has been a major component in the Project, while **environment issues** has not played any significant role in the Project. The evaluation has not been able to identify any specific analysis, action, output or strategy to address **disability**.

**RECOMMENDATIONS, LESSONS LEARNED AND GOOD PRACTICES**

**Main recommendations**

**Recommendation 1.** When developing Logical Framework Analysis (LFA) matrices as management tools for projects/cluster initiatives, ILO should ensure that they are user-friendly and coherent, clearly showing logical relationships between the components, particularly outputs and outcomes. *The recommendation is directed to ILO. Timeframe: Immediate (when new projects are being formulated). Priority: High; Level of resources: Low.*

**Recommendation 2.** In the new ILO Cluster initiative, ILO should ensure that there are regular meetings/discussions and activities where the managers for the various ILO streams/clusters share information to a) avoid duplication of efforts; and b) have joint activities. *The recommendation is directed to ILO. Timeframe: 6 months -1 year. Priority: High; Level of resources: Low.*

**Recommendation 3.** ILO should continue to support WRC, including the Women Committee in its quest for more self-reliance and sustainability, including working with the Paralegals. *The recommendations is are directed to ILO. Timeframe: 6 months -1 year. Priority: High; Level of resources: Medium.*

**Recommendation 4.** DoL and the Trade Union Federations should ensure that only real trade unions are registered in the publicly available database, and avoid the so called “yellow unions” to be

registered. *The recommendation is directed to DoL, NCCWE and IBC. Timeframe: Immediate. Priority: High; Level of resources: Low-Medium*

**Recommendation 5.** In view of the dire needs for reform in the RMG sector ILO should (in close cooperation with MoLE/DoL) continue to pursue issues that were unsuccessful in the SDIR project, namely:

Grievance handling and dispute resolution mechanisms at national level; A functional independent arbitration cell to be part of a separate Statutory Regulatory Ordinance (and SoP to guide the functioning of such a cell); Encourage the GoB to amend the Labour Law in 2023, and promote CBAs at enterprise level. *The recommendation is directed to ILO. Timeframe: 6 months – 1 year. Priority: High; Level of resources: Medium-high.*

**Recommendation 6.** In the new proposal for a cluster initiative on labour administration, the ILO should ensure that the work stream/cluster initiative has the following: **a)** Dedicated expertise on posts for Communication and M&E; and **b)** A user-friendly digital M&E system; and c) Expertise and experience on non-discrimination (including gender equality mainstreaming and disability issues). *The recommendation is directed to ILO. Timeframe: 6 months – 1 year. Priority: Medium; Level of resources: High*

**Recommendation 7.**

**a)** In the new cluster on labour administration proposed to be implemented, ILO should ensure that a specific and separate non-discrimination analysis is conducted, with results that can serve as the basis for relevant strategies on both gender equality and disability themes– as both these should be mainstreamed in the cluster;

**b)** ILO should increase its efforts to highlight gender-based violence and support the WRC’s Women’s Committee.

*The recommendation is directed to ILO. Timeframe: 6 months – 1 year. Priority: High; Level of resources: Medium-high.*

**Main lessons learned and good practices**

**Lessons Learned**



ILO cluster initiatives and projects should specify that disability (related to non-discrimination) is important **and need to be specified as activities and outputs, with performance indicators** in the Project Documents and Logical Framework Analysis matrices.

**Good Practice**

The Covid 19 virus spread, and the circumstances surrounding it, has required flexibility and initiatives from the project staff. **This project has shown the importance of being able to redesign approaches for capacity building**, including retraining of Master Trainers and adapt, or produce, new training materials and guidelines in order for them to conduct virtual online capacity building. Costs can be kept low in comparison with face-to-face training.