

PROTECTING THE CHILDREN OF BANGLADESHI GARMENT WORKERS



Context

Bangladesh is the world's second largest producer of clothes for high street fashion retailers. The garment industry is the single biggest factor in the growth of Bangladesh's GDP, from USD 21.77 billion in 1986 to

USD 221.42 billion by 2016 (World Bank). More than 80% of the country's export market is ready made clothes for Europe and America. There are around 3.5 million people working in 5,000 factories and 85% of them are women.

The problem

The rapid growth of the garment industry has created many opportunities for women to work. However, with the majority of the factories located in and around the capital Dhaka, this has resulted in huge migration from rural areas to the city. Many of the women who are moving to the city are single mothers. Once they have moved to the city, they no longer have the support of their family or the wider community. Most find themselves living in slums with poor housing and very limited access to proper sanitation, clean drinking water, healthcare or education. They and their children are often unsafe and prone to disease and illness.

Working conditions at the factories are poor - hours are long, breaks are short and very few have any childcare facilities. Combine poor working conditions with wages as low as £35 a month and the result is women who can't afford childcare or education fees. Born in rural areas, many of their children do not have birth certificates so are not entitled to government support. Children as young as two are left alone at home for hours, or go out to work on the streets and rubbish dumps, as domestic workers. They are at risk of being abused or trafficked and are hurt in accidents.



Project objectives

We directly improve the lives of 200 children of garment workers who live in the Mirpur and Mohammadpur slums of Dhaka. We indirectly reach thousands more through work to promote the rights of children and women. Specifically we are:

- Providing early education for 80 children aged two to five years to prepare them for primary school.
- Providing 120 working children aged six to 16 with basic education and life skills training.
- Delivering awareness raising campaigns and activities on child and worker rights that reach garment workers, factory owners and policy makers.

Our local partner

Our local partner is Nagorik Uddyog, meaning Citizen's Initiative. Since 1997, Nagorik Uddyog has been working to raise awareness of the rights of some of the most disadvantaged groups across Bangladesh. In 2006 they began working in the slum areas of Dhaka and have enabled women to demand better wages, develop their leadership skills, campaign against gender rights violations and access legal assistance, education and healthcare. Nagorik Uddyog asked ChildHope to help them build their expertise in working with children and young people. Our partnership began in 2009 with a focus on street working children and waste pickers. We began working together to support garment workers and their children in 2013.

Our donor

Our donor is [TRAID](#), a charity that turns clothes waste into funds and resources to reduce the environmental and social impacts of our clothes. Since 2013 TR Aid has contributed £325,203 of funding to our work with Bangladeshi garment workers. The current grant is worth £129,208 and runs from 2017-2019. This is an area of work we would like to scale up so if you are interested in partnering with us, please [get in touch](#).

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Our activities

We are running two day-care centres for 80 children aged two to five years. Children who attend receive early years education, meals and health check-ups. At least 30 children will be supported to move into primary school when they turn six.

We are running two drop-in centres for children aged six to 16 years who are working to supplement their mothers' income. We are targeting those who are working in the most hazardous situations, such as on rubbish dumps. They are receiving basic literacy and numeracy education and life skills training, including child rights. At least 40 of those aged six to 13 years are moving out of work and into school.

We are undertaking a range of advocacy activities. This includes negotiating with employers of working children to allow them to attend the drop-in centres and securing birth certificates for unregistered children so they can become citizens of their own country. We are also lobbying decision-makers, meeting with trade unions and factory owners and educating mothers about child and worker rights.

The first two activities provide the immediate support that children need to break the cycle of poverty while the third is helping communities to protect and support children, and access the government services they are entitled to.

In numbers

Over the five years that this project has been running we have achieved the following impacts and outcomes:

- Provided early years support to **259** children aged two to five.
- Helped **122** six-year-old children register for primary school.
- Helped **422** working children aged six to 16 out of work and into education and training.
- Secured birth certificates for **263** children of garment workers.
- Reached **450** garment workers with information about their rights.

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In their words

Rukhsar's story

Rukhsar* is a bright student and talented seamstress. Her journey through education has been filled with challenges, but that hasn't stopped her.

Rukhsar is 15 years old. She used to live in her native village with her older sister and parents. When her older sister was about to get married, her father sold the small piece of land he owned to his brothers to provide the dowry. However, the price the brothers offered was unfair and it turned into an ugly family dispute. Rukhsar's uncles became so violent that they threatened to kill her father. The family had to flee to Dhaka. There her parents started working as labourers.

Living in a single room in a slum in Dhaka, Rukhsar's parents carried sand, earning 300-400 Bangladeshi taka (£2.80- £3.80) a day. Rukhsar's older sister started working at a garment factory and lived with Rukhsar's parents, along with her husband.

"Due to poverty, I couldn't attend school. However, many of my friends here attended the drop-in centre, free of cost. I saw them visiting the centre regularly, playing and learning. I also joined the centre in March 2016."

Rukhsar was enrolled in Nagorik Uddyog's drop-in centre and was put in the beginners' section. Soon after, she was moved to the fast learners' group. Seeing her progress, she was enrolled in a mainstream primary school in Class 4 under the

supervision of a teacher from the centre.

"Learning at the centre has transformed my life. I am more conscientious now and participate in all workshops and activities. I attended a workshop on animation organised by TRAIID and Rainbow Collective. I also got training on cooking and sewing at the drop-in centre."

As Rukhsar's school has been closed for almost a year, due to the global pandemic, she has been working at an embroidery factory to support her family. The basic training in tailoring that Rukhsar received at the drop in centre has helped her to secure a job which gives her around 11,000 taka (£104) a month.

"I am pleased to be able to support my family, as well as continue learning at the drop-in centre."

You can read more stories from ChildHope [here](#).