MADE BY WOMEN: CARE’S STRATEGY TO TRANSFORM THE GARMENT INDUSTRY

CARE is pursuing an ambitious new strategy on Dignified Work in Asia, called Made By Women. We aim to economically empower 8 million women garment workers through Dignified Work by 2021.

Made by Women is part of CARE’s strategy to ensure greater access to and control over economic resources for 30 million women by 2020 and is one of our major contributions to the ILO’s Decent Work Agenda and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 8.

The Garment Industry in Asia

Do you know how your clothes were made? Where they were made? Who made them? Odds are, your clothes were Made by Women, in factories and homes across Asia.

Most major clothes retailers and brands don’t own or manage the factories where their clothes are made. Instead, they place orders that are filled by factories across the world, particularly in Asia in countries like: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

40 million
people work in the garment, textile and footwear industry in Asia¹
The industry in Asia has an export value of $601 billion, representing 60% of the value of garment, textile and footwear exports globally.³
Lack of governance

**Value Captured**

**Price Pressure**

**Visibility**

**Home Workers** – are women working in their own homes. Retailers and brands often don’t know homeworkers are in the supply chain. They receive very low pay and are not protected by the labour law or social security.

**Middle Men** – are sometimes used by factories to sub-contract to smaller factories, workshops and even homeworkers.

**Tier N factories** – many tier 1 factories sub-contract to smaller factories to help them complete orders. Sometimes these factories are not registered businesses and their workers are not protected by the labour law.

**Tier 1 factories** – are garment factories in countries like Bangladesh and Cambodia. Some factory owners own multiple factories and employ thousands of workers.

**Buying Agents** – are often used by brands and retailers. They agree contracts with factories to complete orders.

**Retailers / Brands** – design and sell the clothes that you wear. Many are well known names on the high street. They order their clothes from factories, particularly in Asia, to keep costs low.

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The impact of this business model is clear...

**Price pressure** – brands and retailers want to keep the price of their products low. They squeeze the profit margins of those further down the supply chain and place orders in countries where wages, labour protections and taxes are low. This price competition encourages governments and factories to compete with each other to keep wages and taxes low.

**Time pressure** – the ‘fast fashion’ revolution means brands and retailers want to offer new product lines to their customers regularly, leading to short ‘lead times’ (the time between initiating an order and completing it) and frequent last minute changes to designs. This puts pressure on factories, with managers harassing workers to work faster and work longer hours to meet the order, and it also encourages unauthorised sub-contracting.

**Value capture** - brands and retailers at the top of the supply chain capture multi-million pound profits, whilst factory workers and homeworkers make very little money from their work and often live in poverty.

**Visibility** – garment brands and retailers know which tier 1 factories make their clothes, but the factories often don’t tell brands when they sub-contract and the factories themselves are not always aware where the trail of sub-contracting ends.

**Poor governance and accountability** – voluntary codes of conduct have failed to prevent widespread abuse of human rights, and governments have failed to regulate global supply chains effectively. Labour laws in countries where garments are made are poorly enforced and labour inspectorates are often under-staffed. Low levels of unionisation in the garment industry also makes it difficult for organised labour to hold employers and the government accountable for respecting existing laws and labour rights.

Please follow this link to watch a day in the life of Sonia, a garment worker in Bangladesh, and learn more about CARE’s work to support her.
THE INJUSTICE

On average, garment workers only receive 1-3% of the retail price of clothing – it is estimated that if a t-shirt costs $11, only 33 cents goes to workers. The result is that workers fall far short of a living wage, women workers face a significant gender pay gap in most countries, and many workers live in poverty. The injustices faced by women garment workers are complex and multifaceted, and CARE is focusing on the following set of issues that we believe can transform the lives of women workers for the better and where there is a window of opportunity to drive change.

Women garment workers struggle to organise into representative organisations and engage in social dialogue and collective bargaining. Without this, it is impossible for them to hold their employers and governments accountable for respecting their rights. Worker attempts to organise are often repressed by employers and governments and many garment trade unions remain patriarchal, resulting in the specific concerns of women workers being ignored.

10% of factories in Bangladesh have registered trade unions. Employer and government repression keeps the figure low, such as the illegal sacking of 1,500 workers and detention of union leaders in 2017.

30% the target quota of women in leadership positions set by global trade unions. Many unions in the garment industry don’t meet this quota despite 75% or more of the workforce being female.

Garment workers face the risk of gender-based violence in their homes, on their way to and from work, and during the workday. The risk of gender-based violence is exacerbated through power differences between a mostly female workforce and majority male management, and deep-rooted social norms and practices that de-value women. Despite this, gender-based violence remains a largely hidden issue; it rarely appears on ethical audit reports, data on prevalence is fractured, and it is often low on the priority list as it is not considered a ‘core’ labour rights issue.

1 in 3 female garment workers in Cambodia experienced sexual harassment in the past 12 months.

Women in Vietnam who experience domestic violence earn 35% less due to productivity loss.

Many garment brands don’t publicly report where their clothes are made, and even those that are willing to often only know who their direct supply factories are. Lack of transparency makes it hard for civil society and unions to hold brands accountable for poor working conditions and means consumers don’t know where their clothes were made. It also means sub-contracting factories avoid government regulation and homeworkers remain invisible, so they are not protected by the labour law and do not have access to social security and related protections.

60% of garment production in Asia that is done at home. This means there are millions of garment workers that are invisible, unrecognised and unprotected, including an estimated 5 million in India alone.

56% more factories, and nearly 1 million more workers – a recent estimate of the actual size of the garment industry in Bangladesh in comparison to what the government and industry reports.
OUR FOUNDATION

CARE has worked in the garment industry for over 15 years, working in more than 200 factories in the supply chains of 13 global garment brands. In this time, we have learnt a lot about what does and doesn’t work in promoting the rights of women garment workers.

Building worker agency is a vital starting point, improving worker knowledge of their rights and gender awareness, strengthening soft skills – such as problem solving, decision making and communication – and increasing confidence. Workers who took part in CARE’s soft skills training across 5 countries were shown to be 3 times more likely than non-participants to advance in their careers, whilst similar training for 50,000 workers in Bangladesh demonstrated an improved sense of empowerment and job satisfaction and a reduced tolerance for gender-based violence.

Managers need to create an enabling environment for economic empowerment in workplaces. This requires implementing better policies and management systems, shifting management mind-sets to seeing workers as empowered human beings, and challenging deeply engrained gender norms about women and work. Following this approach, CARE Cambodia achieved a 20% decrease in the perceived risk of harassment among workers in seven factories, and CARE Bangladesh saw a significant increase in workers reporting their supervisors treat them with respect. CARE’s experience shows that supportive supervisors are directly correlated to better training outcomes for workers, whilst unsupportive managers sometimes result in increased conflict in the workplace.

The barriers to women’s economic empowerment through dignified work don’t end at the factory gates. CARE’s experience shows that linking in-factory work to engaging with service providers, getting power-holder buy-in and delivering gender sensitisation activities with men and boys in communities encourages more positive outcomes at the household level and reinforces workplace outcomes, such as men being more willing to take on a fair share of unpaid care work in the home.
Transformative change cannot happen in individual workplaces, or factory by factory. Harmful business practices in supply chains, worker repression, ineffective public policies and social protections, and harmful gender norms, cannot be tackled effectively in individual workplaces. Workplace capacity building must be part of broader initiatives for change in the industry. The Safe Workplaces Safe Communities project in Cambodia is a good example, integrating workplace capacity building on tackling sexual harassment with worker organising and solidarity building, capacity building for service providers, social norms change campaigns, engagement with employer associations and successful government advocacy to amend public policy.

Changing power relations and achieving sustainable change means supporting collective action and allowing workers to set the agenda for change. Organising workers into Empowerment Knowledge and Transformative Action (EKATA) groups in Bangladesh has played a major role in empowering women, supporting reductions in the gender wage gap and enabling 3,000 women garment workers to get take action to claim their rights in their communities and workplaces. Worker Participation Committees in factories and Community Development Forums on tea plantations also point to the importance of social dialogue for creating lasting solutions and ensuring employer accountability for respecting workers’ rights.

Supporting movement building is difficult and hard to measure, but it’s vital for achieving structural impact. CARE’s Strategic Impact Inquiry showed that supporting women’s groups to mobilise for their rights is vital for achieving structural impact and broader social change. The OIKKO project in Bangladesh aims to do just that, linking EKATA leaders with 30 trade union federations for joint advocacy and to promote women leaders. CARE’s work to promote dignified work for domestic workers in Latin America has also demonstrated the possibilities of working as part of a movement for change. CARE is building on this experience in Asia through investing in strategic partnerships with the labour movement for co-creation, capacity building and joint advocacy; but much remains to be learned about how to engage and support the labour movement, and how to promote women leaders.

CARE’s experience shows that we need to build the agency of individual workers through improved knowledge, skills and confidence; change power-relations between women workers, their employers and their families through promoting social dialogue and collective action; and transform structures through challenging engrained social norms and harmful business practices, and securing legal and social protections for workers.
CARE believes that transformational change will only happen in the garment industry if female garment workers are able to organize, and work collectively to realise their rights free from repression. This is true not only for workers in tier 1 factories, but also women in sub-contracting factories and homeworkers.

**CHANGES WE WANT TO SEE**

- Women workers are organised into trade unions and worker associations, worker committees and community associations and can effectively advocate for their rights and engage in dialogue with power-holders.

- More women workers are leaders in trade unions, on committees and in community associations; and the labour movement gives the gender-specific concerns and priorities of women workers more prominence in advocacy and collective bargaining with the government and employers.

- Governments and the private sector show greater respect for workers’ right to freely associate.

**ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2016-17**

- Organised 3,265 female garment workers into community solidarity groups and supported elected Worker Participation Committees in 5 factories.

- Trained over 1,600 female garment workers in advanced leadership skills and supported over 400 to become leaders in Community Worker Associations.

- Supported over 40 trade unions to organize women workers, promote women leaders, increase knowledge of gender-based violence and sign workplace agreements.

“Many workers like me become victims of discrimination but this time (after support from CARE) I protested and started fighting to get my payments. My co-participants helped me a lot to move forward. I am now a registered member of the workers federation and am fighting for the rights of other workers”

– Female garment worker, Bangladesh.
Worker’s rights need to be secured through effective public policies that ensure decent working conditions and a universal social safety net.

CARE will focus on protections against gender-based violence and extending labour protections and access to social security to homeworkers.

**CHANGES WE WANT TO SEE**

- An ILO convention on ending violence and harassment in the world of work is created with tripartite support, creating a global legal framework and momentum for change.
- Public policies are adopted, amended or better enforced to prevent gender-based violence in the workplace in garment producing countries.
- Public policies are adopted, amended or better enforced to recognise the rights of homeworkers, particularly through the ratification of ILO Convention 177 on Home Work.

**ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2016-17**

- Delivered political economy analyses in Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam to refine our policy asks and begin to build relationships with key stakeholders.
- Organised a workshop with partners from trade unions, informal worker associations and civil society to co-create detailed advocacy objectives.
- Lobbied 10 governments around the world, including 6 in Asia, to respond to the ILO’s questionnaire on a potential convention ending violence and harassment in the world of work, and include CARE’s policy asks. CARE India, Pakistan and Bangladesh also organised multi-stakeholder roundtables to co-create questionnaire responses and held positive meetings with the government to present CARE’s asks.
CARE believes the garment industry itself has an important role to play in enabling dignified work and economic empowerment for workers. Brands, retailers and factory owners have a responsibility to adopt improved practices that respect workers’ rights.

**CHANGES WE WANT TO SEE**

- Employers adopt best practice approaches to tackling gender-based violence and respecting freedom of association and worker organizing in the supply chain.
- Garment brands publicly report on their supply chains, including beyond the first tier, and improve recognition of homeworkers in the supply chain.
- Governments in the global north legislate to enforce mandatory supply chain due diligence and transparency.

**ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2016-17**

- Designed an anti-sexual harassment policy in collaboration with factory managers and supported managers from more than 60 factories to implement sexual harassment protections.
- Achieved a 38% reduction in women garment workers reporting experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace in Myanmar and a 20% reduction in the perceived risk in Cambodia.
- Engaged with 4 brands and civil society allies to lobby for the release of detained union leaders and reinstatement of 1,500 workers that were illegally sacked in Bangladesh in 2016.
MULTIPLYING IMPACT

CARE knows that we can’t improve the lives of 8 million women garment workers on our own, and we also won’t achieve it just by delivering projects. We will multiply the impact of our work in 3 ways:

1. PARTNER WITH THE LABOUR MOVEMENT TO STRENGTHEN WOMEN’S ORGANISING AND LEADERSHIP

CARE aims to impact the lives of 1.5 million women garment workers through supporting worker organising and leadership.

CARE believes that partnering with the labour movement to organise women and support them in leadership positions will significantly multiply our impact. Women leaders can support and organise other workers, and being part of the labour movement means they can negotiate with employers and advocate to hold government and the private sector accountable for respecting workers’ rights.

2. NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL POLICY CHANGE

CARE aims to impact the lives of 4 million women garment workers through advocating for policy change.

The adoption, amendment and better implementation of public policies can have an impact on the lives of millions of workers. In all our advocacy work, we will aim to work in alliances and support garment workers themselves to promote their agenda.

3. PROMOTE IMPROVED PRACTICES IN GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS

CARE aims to impact the lives of 2.5 million women garment workers through promoting improved practices in global supply chains.

Changing the perceptions of factory managers and improving management systems can improve the working conditions of thousands of workers in the factory. Supporting a garment brand to improve ethical supply chain policies and practices can have an impact on hundreds of thousands – and in some cases millions – of workers in the supply chain.
PARTNERS FOR CHANGE

The Labour Movement
Supporting the labour movement is crucial for achieving change in the garment industry. CARE has worked with more than 40 garment worker trade union federations in Bangladesh to sensitize their leadership on gender equality, build the capacity of outreach workers to organize women workers and promote women’s leadership within the union movement. Our partnerships with national trade unions include the Confederation of Trade Unions in Myanmar, Laos Federation of Trade Unions and Vietnam General Confederation of Labour. We are also working alongside the International Trade Union Confederation as part of the global campaign to end violence and harassment at work, and forging new partnerships with organizations such as HomeNet South Asia and 3F.

“CARE’s strategy reflects ITUC-AP’s current priorities... and we look forward to working with CARE on matters of mutual interest”
- Shoya Yoshida, General Secretary, International Trade Union Confederation – Asia Pacific

We look forward to see CARE as an even stronger player on workers’ rights in the region. We hope CARE will do this in cooperation with us and other trade union organisations and structures such as ITUC-APRO.”
– Sten Toft Peterson, Regional Program Coordinator, 3F (Danish Trade Union Federation).

Advocating for Dignified Work: Government relations in Asia
CARE has long-standing relationships with the relevant government departments in numerous countries in Asia, giving us opportunities to influence legislation, open doors for our partners and support governments to effective deliver legal and social protections for workers. Our existing government relationships include Ministries of Labour in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

“CARE is a long-term partner working on ending violence against women. This work in both workplaces and communities where women are particularly vulnerable will help to promote better working conditions and living situations for women. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs is happy to cooperate with CARE to achieve these common goals.” - H.E. Ing Kuntha Phavy, Minister for Women’s Affairs, Cambodia.

CARE and the garment industry
CARE has worked closely with garment industry stakeholders for over a decade from the top to the bottom of the supply chain, in order to influence and implement better business practices that respect workers’ rights. We have worked with over 13 garment brands to implement projects to improve respect for workers’ rights in supply chains, built the capacity of over 200 factories to introduce better management systems and challenged deeply engrained social norms among management.

“Levi has partnered with CARE for over a decade to improve worker well-being within our supply chain. We now use the Sexual Harassment Prevention Package developed by CARE in the factories we work with in Cambodia as this is a straightforward, effective way to prevent sexual harassment within the workplace.” - Senior Specialist, Sustainability, Levi’s.

Our new donors
New and diversified funding is key to the success of the strategy. Since the inception of the strategy in 2016, the portfolio has secured new funds from DFAT (Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade), Global Fund for Women, Target, and UN Women, totalling over $9 million. This funding will contribute directly to the outcomes of Made by Women: scaling CARE’s approach to tackling sexual harassment in factories across the Mekong, organizing women workers into EKATA groups in 3 countries, and expanding the number of countries where we are delivering Made by Women projects from 4 to 6.
MADE BY WOMEN LEADERSHIP TEAM

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Endnotes

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4  Labour Behind the Label, Living Wage.
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7  Human Rights Watch, Bangladesh Garment Workers’ Union Rights Bleak.
8  ITUC, Count Us In!
9  UN Women (2012), Estimating the costs of domestic violence against women in Viet Nam.
11  S. Labowitz and D. Baumann-Pauly (2015), Beyond the Tip of the Iceberg: Bangladesh’ Forgotten Apparel Workers

For more information on CARE’s work, please visit the Dignified Work in-depth section at CARE Insights.