

# Women's Participation in Trade Unionism: A Review of Bangladesh's RMG Industry

**ASM Anam Ullah, Soma Dhar & Khadiza Khatun**

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*Trade unions can make a country more viable, make its workforce more competitive and productive, create more jobs with skilled people, and ensure a decent minimum wage for workers and employees. Since the 1980s, particularly after globalization and the introduction of neoliberal policies, macroeconomic power, and trade unionism have declined in Western and developing countries. As a developing country, Bangladesh shows less trade unionism associated with globalization and neoliberalism. Most importantly, due to low education, skill, and socio-economic diversity, women's participation in trade unionism, mainly in Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector, is predominantly low. This review article analyses the factors hindering women's participation in trade unions in Bangladesh's RMG sector.*

**ASM Anam Ullah** is from the School of Business, Swinburne University of Technology, Sydney. Email: russell\_adib@yahoo.com.au. **Soma Dhar** is from the Chittagong University, Bangladesh. Email: soma.chowdhury7@yahoo.com. **Khadiza Khatun** is from the University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: khadizakhatundu2020@gmail.com.

## Introduction

The Ready-made Garments (RMG) sector is one of the few industries that has succeeded with the rise of Bangladesh and the tidal flow of globalization and neoliberalism that began in the early 1980s (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Saxena, 2022; Ullah, 2022a,b; Ullah, 2023a,b). The RMG sector has contributed significantly to the economic growth and prosperity of the country by generating employment and earning foreign exchange since the industry's inception in the 1980s. Most importantly, the RMG sector pioneered empowering rural women who had no social status in Bangladesh since ancient times (Hasan, 2021). From 9 in 1978 the number of RMG factories had grown to more than 4,500 in late 2019 (Strumpell & Ashraf, 2021). However, other international scholarships suggest that there are around 7000 RMG factories in Bangladesh. Many smaller ones, known as Bangla factories, are not included in the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

and The Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA), which are the parent organizations of RMG employers in Bangladesh (Labowitz, 2016).

Women constitute the main labor force of the RMG industry as there were low wages and long working hours without proper economic and social benefits (Siddiqi, 2019; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Rahman & Rahman, 2020). RMG factory owners in Bangladesh claim themselves as catalysts for women's empowerment. Nevertheless, it depicts the gendered ratio of exploitation in global production networks. Capitalism and class exploitation succeed in racism, and sexism is behind the real strategy (Strumpell & Ashraf, 2021; Saxena, 2022; Ullah, 2022a,b; Ullah, 2023a,b).

The Tazreen Fashions fire in 2012 was the deadliest incident in Bangladesh's RMG industry (Solaiman, 2013; Ullah, 2022). On November 24, in the industrial city of Ashulia, Bangladesh, a devastating fire broke out in a nine-storey building, killing 112 RMGs workers while approximately 200 were injured. Nevertheless, the world experienced the most precarious building collapse; the Rana Plaza was used as the RMG production hub for most Western and European giant apparel brands. The building collapse was a horrific experience for an estimated 1134 RMG workers in Bangladesh who lost their lives and injured thousands more (The Guardian, 2014, 2015; Siddiqi, 2019; Goodwin, 2004; Otlewski, 2014; Ullah, 2022a,b).

**The largest informal economic sector, RMG, employs more than 6 million workers, and nearly 80 percent of the workforce is drawn from rural women.**

Scholars argue that Bangladesh's largest informal economic sector, RMG, has yet to be regulated due to low trade unionism (Siddiqi, 2017; Ashraf & Prentice, 2019; Prentice, 2021). For example, international scholars such as Ashraf and Prentice (2019) suggest that trade unionism in Bangladesh, mainly in the RMG sector, is low due to the anti-trade union policies of RMG employers and the Government of Bangladesh. Although the current state of trade unionism in Bangladesh does not paint a healthy picture, the participation of women in trade unionism in the RMG sector needs to be revised. Most importantly, the largest informal economic sector, RMG, employs more than 6 million workers, and nearly 80 percent of the workforce is drawn from rural women. We will discuss the issue of many women's employment in the RMG sector in the theoretical discourse of the article and why the industry is yet to see substantial women's participation and leading role in trade unionism in Bangladesh.

### **Aims & Objectives**

This review article aims to comprehend women's participation in the trade unions of the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh. First, it analyses the reasons behind women's low participa-

tion in trade unionism in Bangladesh's RMG sector. Second, it identifies the factors which inhibit women's success in the leadership role in trade unionism in Bangladesh.

### **Research Questions**

- (a) What factors inhibit many women's employment in the Bangladesh RMG sector?
- (b) What factors inhibit women's participation in the Bangladesh RMG sector's trade unionism?
- (c) How can women's participation in trade unionism be improved in the RMG sector in Bangladesh?

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a qualitative method using the case study method inspired by Yin (2003). The qualitative methodology explains in-depth and analyzes every point more informatively. We reviewed the literature on how women workers were intentionally targeted in the RMG sector in Bangladesh since the industry's inception in the 1980s when Bangladesh merged with the new macroeconomic market forces, globalization, and neoliberalism. In critically exploring the research topic, we aim to understand whether women's participation in trade unionism in Bangladesh's RMG sector is low because of these new macroeconomic market forces. More specifically, this review article is based on a critical understanding of academic and grey literature on demographic issues of RMG workers, globalization, neoliberalism, and

trade unionism of RMG workers in Bangladesh. We have intensely reviewed theoretical arguments led by several international scholars, such as David Harvey, Diana Siddiqi, Sanchita Banerjee Saxena, and Alamgir and Banerjee, who meditated in the discourse of globalization and neoliberalism in the last few decades and pointed out the impact of globalization and neoliberalism on the current dilemma of RMG sector including the low level of trade unionism.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this section, first, we discuss demographic factors in Bangladesh to understand how they hinder women's participation in trade unionism and their higher position in trade union organizations, mainly in the RMG industry. Second, we aim to discuss how globalization and neoliberalism have undermined the power of trade unionism, particularly women's participation in trade unionism in the RMG sector of Bangladesh.

Our first aim was to understand the reason behind the low women's participation in trade unionism from demographic aspects in Bangladesh in terms of legal, social, and economic dimensions that uphold women at the margin. Our analysis through scholarly reasoning suggests that women workers are exploited in many ways in the RMG sector. The reasons emphasized are legal provisions, structure and policies of the trade unions, the hostility of societal performers, and lack of women's ability and attention to the underlying value of trade unions (Asaduzzaman & Islam, 2015).

International scholars, such as Ahmed (2004) and Al Mamun and Hoque (2022), argue that, traditionally, the patriarchal society in Bangladesh maintains the segregation of women. The Bengali societal norms control women's free mobility and opportunities in public spaces, making a young female child or woman an economic burden on the family. Early marriages were common in Bangladesh to avoid the family's economic burden (Rock, 2003). So, from the socio-economic and cultural reality, women's participation in trade unionism, particularly in higher positions such as leadership, is challenging (Ullah, 2023a,b).

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A similar argument is found in Kabir, Maple, and Fatema's (2018) research on women workers' vulnerabilities in Bangladesh. Our theoretical construction and other socio-economic and global factors mainly rely on Kabir, Maple, and Fatema's (2018) proposition about women workers' participation as a workforce in the RMG sector and their position in joining trade unionism. Scholars such as Kabir, Maple, and Fatema (2018) also pointed out the issue of trade unionism in Bangladesh, where there were male-dominated trade unions, and women had fewer opportunities to become potential trade union members, resulting in less leadership in trade unionism. Most importantly, as discussed ear-

lier, female leadership is considered shameful to men due to socio-economic and cultural diversity. From this point of view, women were found to be less engaged in trade unionism and in higher positions in trade union organizations in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, due to low education and lack of awareness, women could not raise their voices against any form of exploitation in the RMG industry in Bangladesh since its inception. RMG workers had no judicial protection for working in factories until 2006 when the Government of Bangladesh first enacted the National Labor Act (Amended in 2013) (Afrin, 2014; Ullah, 2021; Ullah, 2022a, b). Despite the enactment of the National Labor Act and its amendment in 2013 after the Rana Plaza building collapse, the overall situation of trade unionism remained, by and large, the same. Workers, mainly women, are still working in precarious factories with very minimum and low wages and benefits for long hours, a clear sign of modern slavery (Hasan, 2022).

If we look at the overall condition of the RMG sector in Bangladesh we see that globalization and neoliberalism are connected to the misery of workers (Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019). For example, among the three dimensions of globalization (economic, socio-cultural, and political), economic globalization enhanced trade liberalization, which led to the boost of RMG and provided new employment opportunities for women (Ahmed, 2004; Morshed, 2007; Hossain et al., 2013). The leading industry in

Bangladesh is RMG, where around 80 percent of women became the dominant workforce. However, the failure was to recognize that women in Bangladesh were being placed into this new labor category because they were treated as cheap and could easily be controlled and manipulated without having solid collective bargaining power (Dhar, 2021). Other scholars argue that in the RMG sector in Bangladesh, exploitation of surplus labor exists as the capitalist mode of production leads to the formation and control of the industry. In his critical views, Marx's surplus labor theory can best fit to reveal the current labor condition of the RMG sector in Bangladesh (Lozovsky, 1935; Ullah, 2022a).

From the time of Marx to the current era of globalization and neoliberalism, the overall image of trade unions has mostly stayed the same. Capitalists still believe trade unionism is useless in modern organizations (Ullah, 2022b). Moreover, trade union membership worldwide has declined due to structural factors such as smaller public sectors and fewer large organizations replacing people with technology or robots. On the other hand, the labor market has become more explosive, with worker mobility, part-time work, and adaptive work sequences. Moreover, enlightened management and mobility of capital, labor pool, and workplace unionization have reduced the benefits of trade union integration, reduced the bargaining power of trade unions, and increased the cost of organizing.

Nevertheless, the overall picture of trade unionism in Bangladesh during glo-

balization and neoliberalism is well illustrated by Siddiqi (2017) and Ashraf and Prentice (2019). Ashraf and Prentice (2019), for example, argue that trade unionism has found difficulty in forming, which is often hampered by the bureaucratic policies of the government in Bangladesh (see also Prentice, 2021). Why and how trade unionism was obstructed in Bangladesh can be best understood in the report of the Human Rights Watch published in 2013 and 2015 (see also Harvey, 2007 & 2016). For example, 30 percent of the workers' participation in the total workforce of the factory is compulsory to form trade unionism in Bangladesh. As a result, it is often challenging to collect many workers when they wish to establish a trade union at the factory (Human et al., 2013; 2015). So, the Government of Bangladesh is in favor of the RMG employers and their global trading partners, those known as capitalists, who often criticize trade unionism (Harvey, 2007 & 2016; Ullah, 2022b).

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However, these obstacles are intentional as scholars believe that the Government of Bangladesh, since the 1980s, when neoliberal state policies were on the central agenda of the government, trade unionism was deliberately blocked in the RMG sector (Siddiqi, 2017; Alamgir & Banerjee, 2019; Ullah, 2022b). Nevertheless, here we can con-

nect the argument of Harvey (2007) and Harvey (2016), in which the author described the characteristics of globalization and neoliberalism. In his view, Western and European states deliberately designed free market economic systems to support globalization and neoliberalism in the 1980s. Since then, Western and European capitalists have tried to push their capital into less regulated countries, mainly developing countries where trade unionism was relatively low or restricted in factories. On the other hand, in a country like Bangladesh, with its major informal industries such as RMG, trade unionism was intentionally discouraged or not allowed in factories to connect with Western and European capitalists who were seeking a trade union-free manufacturing hub to invest capital for secure and high return (Harvey, 2007; 2016).

Most importantly, further discussion of the low level of trade unionism in the RMG sector focuses on the large-scale women's participation in factory work, which is connected with globalization and neoliberalism can be best understood from Siddiqi (2017); Alamgir and Banerjee (2019) and Kabir, Maple, and Fatema (2018). For example, Kabir, Maple, and Fatema (2018) suggest that women were intentionally targeted to pay low wages and to exploit them in factory work. They further argue that rural women in Bangladesh who were given jobs in RMG factories have had little scope to join the collective bargaining process due to the patriarchal social norms. On the other hand, women are also easy to terminate from work. Suppose we consider the argument of

Harvey (2016). In that case, we can specifically establish further argument that rural Bangladeshi women were internationally targeted in RMG factories to boost production by exploiting them by giving them no trade union rights. So, globalization and neoliberalism significantly controlled women's participation in trade unionism in the RMG sector in Bangladesh (Ullah, 2022a).

From this heuristic theoretical framework analysis, we can conclude with two significant findings: (a) demographic factors of Bangladesh significantly resulted in low women's participation in trade unionism in Bangladesh, and (b) globalization and neoliberalism significantly weakened women's participation in trade unionism in Bangladesh's RMG industry.

### **Literature Review**

Considering the historical context and the conceptualization of empowerment, it can be observed that women belonging to the impoverished and working-class segments in Bangladesh have encountered restricted opportunities to engage in resistance, both in their capacity as laborers and as women. The inclusion of working-class women, particularly textile workers, has been insufficiently addressed by mainstream women's organizations in Bangladesh. The integration of women's organizations into the development agenda has broadened their focus on issues about working women. However, these organizations have encountered challenges in effectively addressing the specific concerns of garment workers within

their overall mission (Ahmed, 2018; Huq, 2019).

Regarding the register of trade unions, Bangladesh has 32 national federations comprising 6,967 unions. These unions collectively boast a membership of 21,56,307 individuals. The active involvement of women in leadership roles enables them to serve as exemplary figures for workers in general, motivating additional female workers to engage in trade union endeavors. In a study conducted by BILS (2009), data was gathered from 17 federations to examine the extent of female membership within trade unions. The findings revealed a considerable variation in female participation rates, ranging from 0.2 percent to almost 43 percent. The mean percentage of female participation is approximately 15 percent. Among the 17 trade union federations; it is noteworthy that only two organizations, Bangladesh Jatiya Sramik Jote (BJSJ) and Jatiya Sramik Party (JSP), have female presidents. The predominant leadership roles for women in these organizations mainly consist of such posts as secretary of women's affairs, culture, and education and training, which are often considered avenues for advancement.

However, the necessity for women's involvement in labor unions in Bangladesh is evident to amplify their voices. The treatment of women as inexpensive labor is due to various factors. In contemporary society, women must cultivate strength within the professional sphere, decision-making, and self-defense to navigate and combat many forms

of injustice. The subsequent case studies of Nazma Akter and Kalpona Akter are noteworthy illustrations of female trade unionists. Initially employed as garment workers, they became advocates for women's rights and safety upon joining the trade union. Presently, they are recognized as the founders of many organizations.

### **Why Discourage Women's Participation?**

Various factors discourage women's involvement in trade unionism within Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector. To begin with, there exists an imbalance in the gender composition of the workforce, whereby women constitute a majority of the employed individuals. A power disparity might present challenges for women in expressing their rights and establishing labor unions (Shajahan et al., 2021). Secondly, it is essential to address the prevalent concerns regarding workplace harassment and discrimination women face. These concerns encompass verbal harassment and sexual exploitation by male coworkers, supervisors, and managers. A hostile climate within trade unions may deter women from joining since they may fear potential reprisal or continued harassment (Zaman & Khan, 2021). Thirdly, it is worth noting that the ready-made garment (RMG) industry presents insufficient job stability and limited avenues for women, potentially suppressing their inclination towards engaging in trade union activities (Akter, 2021; Haque et al., 2020). Matsuura and Teng (2020) also encountered that women are

unwilling to join trade unions due to job insecurity. Fourthly, the efficacy of trade unionism in safeguarding workers' rights remains constrained within the RMG sector, encompassing labor rights employees and factory owners. The government and factory owners have actively facilitated the formation of numerous unions to foster positive relationships with the international world, demonstrating Bangladesh's commitment to labor rights. Factory proprietors' opposition to trade unions persists, as they actively discourage workers from affiliating themselves with any labor union (Haque, 2022). In certain instances, fifthly, factory proprietors would enlist the services of local individuals of questionable repute to undermine workers who sought to form a union while also utilizing law enforcement agencies to target and oppress union affiliates (Haque, 2022). These factors collectively deter women's engagement in trade unionism within Bangladesh's RMG industry.

### **Low Education & Awareness**

Bangladesh's RMG is now under scrutiny by several global and regional governments and operations (for example, the UN, the ILO, the Global Sustainability Compact, and others). Yet, the lack of knowledge and awareness among women regarding the National Labor Act or ILO norms exacerbates the problem in Bangladesh. The lack of enforcement of national regulations and inadequate implementation of labor laws lead to a failure to comply with fundamental labor standards. Consequently, there are various detrimental conse-

quences experienced by labor, society, and the overall national economy (Chowdhury, 2017).

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In addition, the extent to which women workers encounter constraints in their engagement with trade union activities and leadership roles is contingent upon various factors encompassing legal, social, and economic dimensions. The disparity in skills and educational attainment is particularly pronounced within the workforce of the RMG industry. In his study, Islam (2018) investigated a sample of 100 female workers who participated in 12 focus group discussions (FGDs). The study's findings indicated that approximately 48 percent of the women workers had completed their education between grades six and ten. Over one-quarter (27 percent) had completed their education between grades one and five. A mere 15% of female employees only possess the ability to sign. The absence of formal education and limited understanding contributes to a heightened sense of fear among individuals in the workforce. The disorganized nature of this particular group hinders women's ability to assert their rights. Female employees are disproportionately vulnerable to social insecurity. Social insecurity, economic weakness, employment insecurity, and threats significantly undermine women's ability to assert their rights. The

limited level of education and lack of knowledge regarding the many functions of labor acts have impacted the involvement of individuals in trade unions within Bangladesh's RMG industry.

### **Critical Discourse**

Several studies have identified key factors crucial for enhancing women's involvement in leadership roles. These factors include motivation, flexibility, succession planning, communication, positive organizational culture, equitable compensation, gender equality, health and safety, and dignity (Zahidi & Ibarra, 2010; Lumby, 2011; Ogunsanya, 2007). Women encounter numerous obstacles in the labor sector. Most of these issues can be attributed to the limited availability of supportive circumstances in the workplace that hinder women's participation in workplace governance. Islam et al. (2017) suggest that the extent to which succession planning, flexibility, and communications are employed within RMG industries in Bangladesh plays a crucial role in facilitating the inclusion of women in leadership positions. According to Islam (2017), female unionists are identified as the most susceptible to vulnerability, even though both male and female unionists encounter challenges in unionizing.

The participation of women in the RMG sector, along with efforts to enhance cognitive abilities and implement promotional initiatives, will contribute to raising awareness among young women who are taking their first steps in the workforce and engaging in trade union

activities. Women must assert themselves to improve working conditions and combat exploitation, particularly in Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) within the RMG sector. Nevertheless, due to the neoliberal policies implemented by the Government of Bangladesh, millions of women workers were recruited into the RMG sector to promote women's empowerment. However, it is worth noting that these women have not been granted any form of collective bargaining rights, as highlighted by Prentice (2019). In contrast, Ashraf and Prentice (2019) presented three reasons concerning the perilous and expanding disparity between official labor unions and the lived realities of daily employees. First and foremost, it is essential to acknowledge that while the RMG factories in Bangladesh may be deemed safe, there is a tendency to disregard the underlying structural factors that contribute to violence, coercion, and adverse health conditions experienced by the workers. In addition, the involvement of labor unions is progressing in safety endeavors, intensifying the pre-existing schism between the established trade union movement and the everyday strategies, opposition, and demonstrations of workers. Furthermore, the escalating disparity in protests denouncing the mistreatment of employees signifies a persistent deterioration of labor rights, as highlighted in a recently published research titled 'Barriers to Women's Involvement in Trade Unions and Labor Organizations,' by the Sharma Institute in Bangladesh. The report revealed that women workers are hindered from engaging in unionism due to harassment from the government, which en-

compasses legal, social, and economic aspects (The New Age, 2019).

Huq (2019) pointed out that the trade union movement serves as a platform and organizational mechanism for women workers to exercise their agency in the workplace, addressing issues relevant to women's lives. Despite facing societal and legal barriers to labor organizing and the dominance of male union leaders, women workers have achieved some degree of success in recognizing concrete socio-economic demands through their involvement in trade unions. Based on the findings of the Bangladesh Institute for Labour Studies (BILS, 2009), it can be observed that the presence of comprehensive legal constraints on unions, the prevailing governmental structures governing trade unions, and the marginalization of male union members collectively constitute significant barriers to the active involvement of women in trade unions. The active engagement of women in leadership roles enables them to serve as exemplars for female employees, motivating them to engage in trade union activities that are both lawful and have implications for societal and economic spheres. The trade union movement can recognize occupational safety and health (OSH) as a fundamental aspect of its activities and responsibilities. The movement should prioritize concentration, adherence to rights-based principles, efficiency, and alignment with the regulatory criteria outlined in the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) and the Labour Rules (2016).

Moreover, the labor markets of the present are undergoing significant trans-

formations due to globalization, as well as demographic, environmental, and technological shifts. These developments will play a crucial role in shaping future labor markets. Various factors contribute to the erosion of union authority and widening employers' bargaining advantage over workers. As per Hossain and Akter (2016), effective communication and a streamlined tripartite process are crucial in ensuring workplace safety, fair wage compensation, and decent work within the RMG sector. Bangladesh's RMG sector is also severely under consideration or the extent to which automation has already begun, undermining human labor and trade unionism.

Women workers, especially in labor-intensive sectors such as textiles, often face poor working conditions, low wages, and job insecurity. These challenges may discourage women from actively engaging in trade unionism for fear of reprisals. So, this is a fundamental question: Despite the critical patriarchal social norms that already hinder women's participation in trade unionism in Bangladesh, mainly in the RMG sector, how can gender norms and cultural factors be overthrown? Otherwise, our research shows that this can lead to limited opportunities for women to participate in activities outside their homes, including trade union activities. It is essential to understand that many industries in Bangladesh are gender-segregated, with women working mainly in less unionized sectors, such as the garment industry. This isolation can limit women's visibility in trade unions. Another vital issue is that women may not fully know their rights, including their right to join a trade union.

A lack of information and awareness campaigns may hinder their participation. On the other hand, women may have fewer opportunities to network and connect with other trade union members, making it difficult for them to get involved in trade unionism in Bangladesh. Our study also reflects upon a very crucial issue, such as women who become active in trade unions may face harassment, intimidation, or backlash from both employers and colleagues, discouraging them from participating. The political and economic landscape can influence women's participation in trade unions, particularly in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach involving the efforts of trade unions, government agencies, civil society organizations, and the private sector. Encouraging women's participation in trade unions includes promoting gender equality, raising awareness of women's rights, challenging stereotypes, creating safe spaces, and providing the necessary support and resources to enable women to engage in collective bargaining and activism.

However, our research shows that developing countries like Bangladesh are favorable destinations for Western and European capitals to invest in low-regulated countries to maximize profit. Moreover, our study revealed that globalization and neoliberalism were an agenda by Western and European capitalists and their nations; it targeted poor women workers in Bangladesh to undermine their civil and working rights at the workplace by diminishing the scope for trade unionism. Therefore, this study focused on and

analyzed the variers for women's participation in trade unionism in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. From our research findings, we recommend encouraging and ensuring women's participation on a larger scale in trade union activities in Bangladesh. Otherwise, catastrophic factory incidents such as the Tazreen Fashions fire and Rana Plaza building collapse will repeatedly occur (Young, 2014) and innocent workers with no trade union rights in Bangladesh will suffer extensively.

### Recommendations

For increasing women's participation in the trade unions in Bangladesh, however, some recommendations are:

1. Continuation of standard educational symposia
2. Establishing a support group within the labor union
3. Establishing formal organizations that prioritize women's needs and interests
4. Arranging gender-specific programs for women
5. The persistent reminder of upcoming activities
6. Organizing seminars on work-life harmonization
7. Implementation of labor legislation
8. Enhancing efforts of the women's committee
9. Establishing a women-friendly environment

10. Making sure protection of women's health and safety issues
11. Enhancing technological skills among female workers
12. Organizing and providing proper training programs
13. Raising awareness about strict action in stalking and harassment
14. Taking measures for adaptation to part-time school or increased knowledge
15. Enhancing conversational proficiency
16. Promoting awareness and the process of attracting individuals to participate
17. Ensuring community outreach for social welfare and fostering positive relationships,
18. Enhancing the perception of trade unions within the workforce
19. Improving the image of trade unions among workers
20. Altering the masculine culture of the union
21. Advocacy for modifying legal frameworks (e.g., Bangladesh Labor Act 2006, Amended in 2013) and the Bangladesh Government, international trade union bodies, and organizations such as the ILO and mainly Bangladesh's RMG employers' support is essential to boost women's participation in trade unionism in Bangladesh, mainly in the RMG sector.

## **Conclusions**

This study focused on the representation of women in trade unionism within the RMG sector in Bangladesh. The study revealed that demographic issues, specifically socioeconomic and cultural diversity, adversely impact women's engagement in trade unionism. The limited knowledge, inadequate awareness, and apprehension towards expressing opinions also contribute to diminished engagement in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry. Furthermore, the correlation between globalization and neoliberalism can be attributed to the plight experienced by Bangladesh's RMG workers. The research illustrated that within the RMG industry, exploitation and surplus labor persist due to the capitalist mode of production. This has led to a decrease in the advantages gained by trade union integration, a decline in the bargaining strength of trade unions, and an escalation in the costs associated with organizing. This study additionally implemented suggestions to assist decision-makers in formulating solid and efficient regulations in Bangladesh's RMG business and governing bodies. This was achieved by identifying the reasons that may impede women's involvement in trade unionism within the RMG sector.

In order to enhance the participation and advancement of women, it is imperative to ensure that trade union institutions are more accommodating and supportive of women. The mainstreaming of women's status is crucial, and it is essential to encourage the advancement of women leaders in more expansive realms

of responsibility. It is recommended that trade unions prioritize the establishment of organizing cells to effectively include the perspectives and experiences of women within their ranks, thereby fostering a pool of capable women organizers. Providing suitable residential facilities for women's committees is vital in realizing women's rights. The need to prioritize the representation and involvement of women in areas where they constitute the majority of the workforce necessitates a concerted effort to comprehend the challenges they face in joining trade union federations and local trade unions. To effectively address discriminatory language in collective agreements, trade unions must also engage in a comprehensive dialogue regarding contemporary gender-based disparities in compensation.

We should pay more attention to removing the obstacles to women's participation in labor markets. There is a short possibility of encouraging women to be part of the trade union unless they feel empowered working in the sector. Gender-focused analysis, awareness raising, and capacity building are necessary to overcome the plan to disassemble the barriers to women's participation in trade unionism. It is high time for the enhancement of the capability of women to promote and protect workers' rights from a role of responsibility that conveys much more aggressive action on the trade unions to generate awareness and activity on issues pertinent to the rights of workers and women to improve women's participation and representation.

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