

44

CHILDREN

WITH PARENTS WORKING IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY
DREAM OF A BETTER LIFE



AKHI is 11. She lives in Dhaka with her mother, father, grandmother and little sister in a 10 m² room. The house is built on waterlogged land where waste water collects. The outside latrine is shared with 12 other families. Akhi has stopped going to school to take care of her sister while her mother is working. "Sometimes there is no food for lunch. My sister gets difficult when she is hungry. Then I feel helpless and sad."



The children in the photographs are not the children in the quotations, neither is their name and age information correct. This is in order to protect the children's integrity and make it difficult to identify individual children in the study.



NILUFA is 10. She lives in the Sattar Mollar Basti slum in Dhaka in a 9 m² room with her mother and father and three brothers and sisters. When Nilufa comes home from school she takes care of her youngest sister and does simple chores. "If I had three wishes I would wish for money so my mother could pay off our debts. Then she would not have to work so much and we could buy our own house and live a better life."





FAHIMA is 13. She and her younger sister live with their uncle and his family in the Kishorganj District. "I feel that we are very poor. My uncle earns more than my mother and they might be able to buy things for me but I don't feel I can ask for anything just for me." In spite of the fact that Fahima lives with her relatives, she feels lonely and would like to live with her mother.

A lost generation?

THE CHILDREN OF THE PEOPLE WHO SEW OUR CLOTHES are poor. They are children who long for their parents, who often feel ill, who wish they could maybe get an apple to eat, who dream of a better life. Many of these children will drop out of school. The majority will start working long before they turn 16, and they will probably never leave the slums. In ten years' time, these children will be working 10 to 12 hours a day to sew our clothes. If nothing is done.

"In Dhaka the children spend their days watching TV in dark, hot corrugated tin sheds or playing among the garbage and open drains in the stinking, teeming slum."

In this report we met 44 children aged 2-13: half live in the slums of Dhaka with one or both parents and half live in villages with relatives. The children's parents sew clothes for Swedish and international buyers.

In Dhaka the children spend their days watching TV in dark, hot corrugated tin sheds or playing among the garbage and open sewers in the stinking, teeming slum. They go to school for a couple of hours a day. Sometimes older siblings, neighbours or a relative look in on them but mostly they have to manage by themselves. Many have fevers that persist, most have cuts and infections.

IN THE RURAL VILLAGES THE CHILDREN HAVE been left with relatives and have little contact with their parents except on a few high days and holidays during the year.

This report applies the children's perspective and rights. It gives examples of children's rights threatened by the effects of the textile industry. Even if human rights are increasingly integrated into corporate sustainability activities, there is often no specific child-rights focus in CSR policies and strategies. We asked 20 Swedish companies with suppliers in Bangladesh how they manage the child-rights perspective in their supply chains, and the factors they believe to be most important for the improvement of these children's situation. By applying the Children's Rights and Business Principles, companies can prioritise children on their CSR agendas. This includes enabling ways out of poverty for textile workers and their children. If not, these children risk becoming a lost generation.

THE TRUE COST OF CLOTHES

The textile industry is the driving force behind economic growth in Bangladesh, and cheap labour is its fuel. But when workers' pay is not enough to feed a family, the children pay the highest price.

THE BANGLADESHI TEXTILE miracle began more than 30 years ago. After a troubled 1970s, the country opened up to privatisation and foreign investment and access to cheap labour made this poverty-stricken, densely populated country attractive for production in the labour-intensive textile industry. Since then this sector has exploded and is currently responsible for around 80% of total exports. In 1984, 120 000 people were employed in 384 factories. 2014 sees 4 million people working in more than 5 600 factories manufacturing our clothes. 8 out of 10 are women.

The textile industry has been the driving force behind the country's GNP growth of almost 6 % annually since the end of the 90s, thanks to the steadily-growing demand for cheap, fast fashion. Consumers are becoming increasingly demanding and many companies produce collections on a continuous basis and have given

up working in seasons, while the fashion industry continually captures new markets.

In spite of the stable upward curve, the clothing industry has not lifted the Bangladeshi workers and their families out of poverty. They live in the same kind of slums as they did 30 years ago, in a life plagued by poverty. The most vulnerable people in a society that is still strongly patriarchal are women and their children. Corruption, weak governance and international buyers' price competition form some of the major structural constraints on sustainable development.

THE RANA PLAZA COLLAPSE IN May 2013 that cost some 1 138 lives brought a number of important consequences. International buyers, global and local unions and a number of NGOs placed considerable pressure on the industry to implement structural improvements regarding safety and work en-

vironment. Two international agreements focused on safety and factory inspections were signed by clothing companies all over the world and the global unions IndustriALL and UNI: the Accord for European companies and the Alliance for American companies. Wild-cat strikes and international pressure on the Bangladeshi Government forced the reform of labour legislation which included opportunities for stronger unions. This was also an important step on the path to Bangladesh implementing its undertakings according to the ILO Core Conventions in practice. After tough negotiations, six months after the Rana Plaza collapse, the minimum wage was finally increased.

However in spite of the 77% increase in December 2013, pay levels in Bangladesh are still among the lowest of the major textile export countries. New data also shows that the workers did not benefit from these pay rises.

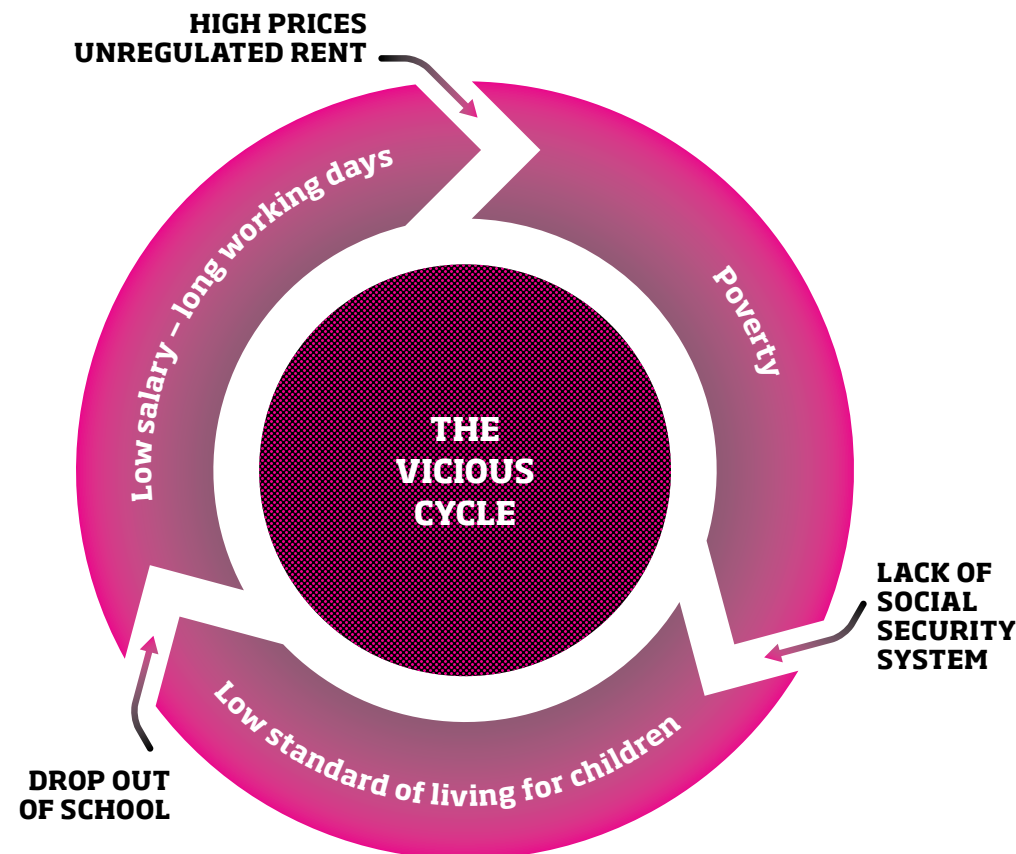


ILLUSTRATION DANIEL FAGERSTROM

The basic pay share of total salary has decreased at the same time as rental levels on the unregulated housing market in Dhaka's slum have increased. The effect is bizarre – the rent per square metre for an unventilated shed made of corrugated tin sheets with no kitchen or toilet in the slum is now up to three times as much as the rent of a flat in a middle-class area. For a textile worker family, rent accounts for 60–70 % of the minimum wage. At the same time the money in the wallets of most workers has shrunk as the essential overtime has disappeared or decreased drastically

in 2014 as a result of increased wage costs for factory owners and more severe requirements from buyers as concerns decreased overtime coupled with unchanged price levels. The factories have established higher production targets for normal working hours and the workers that Swedwatch talked to described increased stress, violence and tongue-lashings from their managers.

DEVELOPMENTS IN BANGLADESH are paradoxical and quite dramatic; the unique safety agreements aim at strengthening the industry's competitive edge and making it more so-

cially sustainable by allowing union organisation as well as more worker influence. At the same time these additional requirements have reverberated down the sub-supply chain. A large number of factories have been forced to close leaving an increasing number of workers with no means of supporting themselves. The union movement is also young and weak, workers have few opportunities to organise and to make their voices heard. At the political level the tone is indignant and sometimes furious about what is considered to be perhaps the destruction of the most important industry in

“They sleep in smoke from the stoves and drink polluted water. **They have no one to care for them and they rarely attend school more than a few hours a day.**”

Bangladesh. A large number of parliamentarians own factories and place their own financial interests highest on the agenda. The international union representatives that Swedwatch has spoken to express enormous frustration about the situation.

THE 2014–2015 FINANCIAL YEAR looks like it will be a cliff-hanger for the Bangladeshi textile industry. In July and August new orders have declined, particularly from the American market which has led to growth in the industry approaching 0 %. Several of the major international buyers are waiting with their orders or looking towards other markets. This primarily affects the smaller factories that are now losing their contracts as subcontractors, both as a result of reduced orders and increased demands for controls throughout the supply chain.

This is the textile industry's dilemma. Legitimate and essential demands for better wages and radically improved safety in the workplace has made production more expensive. At the same time there is still great uncertainty about who will carry the costs

for these improvements. The industry's ability to meet consumers' and buyers' demands for sustainable production of cheap, fast fashion seems to have reached its limit.

The local unions are still fundamentally positive to the Accord and the Alliance, but they are worried about the developments. The new labour legislation opens up for greater union influence, and in one year more than 200 new unions have been registered. However it takes time to establish functioning social dialogue between unions and factory owners and many unions are controlled, either directly or indirectly, by the factory owners themselves. Union leaders Swedwatch talked to now say that the workers ignore safety measures if using them means losing their jobs: “We need food on the table for our children.”

TEXTILE WORKER PARENTS HAVE a life marked by hardship and challenges, but they worry most about their children's future. Should they learn maths in school so they get out of the slums and live a better life? Will they stay healthy? Socioeconomic and cultural factors interact to

imprison workers in the slums of Dhaka and Chittagong.

The highest price is paid by the children. Parents' low wages, long working hours and job insecurity, combined with the lack of social security systems and poor access to social services, mean that children's chances of breaking the poverty circle are slim. They are sick and hungry. They sleep in the smoke from stoves, and drink polluted water. They have no one to care for them and they rarely attend school more than a few hours a day in the early school years. Many start to work at a young age, and they will soon form the next generation of underpaid, worn out workers.

HOWEVER THERE ARE exceptions, and Swedwatch has met a handful of former textile workers who managed to escape poverty and leave the slums. They devote their lives to strengthening and supporting textile workers through training and union organisation. These union representatives say that the children are incredibly motivated to improve their lives. “They want to leave the slums, become doctors, teachers or lawyers.”



THE LIVING CONDITIONS OF THE CHILDREN OF THE WORKERS IN THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY - WHAT DOES THE UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD SAY? READ MORE.

#9

»A child shall not be separated from his or her parents against their will, except when this separation occurs in the best interest of the child.«

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
ARTICLE 9

"I love being with my mum when she comes home to celebrate Eid! She cooks for me and I follow her everywhere all the time. Oh, I miss my mum so much when she is gone so I get very sad."
/ Rabik, 7

WHEN THE WOMEN MOVE from the rural areas to work in the textile industry, sooner or later they have to make a choice – live together with their children in the slum, or leave them with relatives or neighbours back home in the village. Leaving the children back home often means their living conditions are a little better, but it also brings other problems. There are not enough toilets in the villages and there is a lack of awareness among the elderly regarding hygiene and sanitation. The children we spoke to, between ages 6 and 13 said that their telephone conversations with their mothers concerned health, food and school.

In spite of the fact that labour-related migration from rural areas is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, migrant workers as a group have not been studied and there is no systematic approach applied. The children left behind who we met in Bangladeshi villages express problems, such as depression, sadness and guilt. They often see themselves as a burden, both on their parents and on their caregivers. Several of them said that because of this they accept that they are sometimes beaten.

OFTEN THESE CHILDREN HAVE to take care of themselves as the person they are staying with is busy with other activities. It is not uncommon that the children move around between different relatives and neighbours without any fixed home. One girl described how her two grandmothers usually fight over having her

only when money is being sent home. The children of textile workers usually only get to see their parents once or twice a year, often in connection with holidays such as Eid at the end of Ramadan. Phonecalls are expensive and the children are very aware that it costs money to talk to their parents when they are sad or lonely. Several children we talked to felt no attachment to their parents and do not even want to talk to them on the phone. Others did not want to talk to their parents because it was too upsetting. Their longing became too strong.

ACCORDING TO ARTICLE 9 OF the UN Convention, children are entitled to live with their parents. An industry that has made itself largely dependent on a generally migrant labour force should therefore work to minimise the negative effects of their operations on the children left behind.





LILY is 8. She lives in the Sat Tola Basti slum in Dhaka with her mother, father (a night guard) and two siblings. Lily's older sister has been married off so Lily has taken over responsibility for looking after her younger brother after school. Lily has rheumatic fever. When she is feeling ill the neighbours help to take care of her brother. "My mother is very strict if I don't behave properly. Sometimes she hits me if I have been fighting with my little brother. Then I feel really sad."

#28

»Children have the right to education, on the basis of equal opportunity.«

**UN CONVENTION ON
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**
ARTICLE 28

*"If I go to school, who will take care of my little sister? I can't just go to school and leave her alone."
/ Akhi, 11*

IN BANGLADESH, SCHOOLING is compulsory between the ages of 6–10, up to Year 5. Tuition is free until the age of 18. Due to strategic investments in education, the percentage of children who attend school has increased dramatically over the last few years. By the end of 2013, 79 % of girls and 75 % of boys completed full primary school and the percentage of children who dropped out decreased from more than half to less than a quarter in under a decade according to official statistics. Focus on schooling for girls has led to Bangladesh achieving gender equality from primary to upper secondary school.

However school hours are short, Years 1 and 2 attend for only 2 hours in the morning

and Years 3–5 for 3.5 hours in the afternoon.

The statistics include wide differences due to socioeconomic factors. According to UNICEF, only a little more than half of the children who live in the slums complete Years 1–5. A quarter of the girls in the slums are never enrolled in any type of schooling. Although tuition is free there are related costs – snacks, stationary, books and uniforms – costs that many textile worker families just cannot manage. Thus children, and boys especially, have to leave school to help the family financially. Girls often combine school with household tasks.

OVER 40 % OF EARLY DROPOUTS can be explained primarily by poverty. The second most common dropout reason is "lack of motivation", which in turn is due to poor teaching quality, lack of teachers, unsafe access to school and premises

that lack ventilation, lights and toilets.

In the Swedwatch study, all the children except one (who took care of younger siblings while their mother worked) attended some form of schooling, at least for a few hours a day. All the children said they liked school. However, several of the children attended a lower class than their age group, one 11 year old attended year 2 together with mostly 7 year olds.

VERY FEW CHILDREN IN Bangladesh attend pre-school. The factories' pre-school provisions are often extremely poor and the parents own arrangements do not prepare the children for school. In addition, the parents themselves have a low level of education, and several of the women working in the textile industry interviewed by Swedwatch would rather that their children left school to help support the family.

#27

»Every child has the right to a standard of living adequate for the child's development.«

**UN CONVENTION ON
THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD**

ARTICLE 27

"If I had a magic wand I would ask for an apple."

/ Tamanna, 7

41 % OF CHILDREN IN BANGLADESH suffer from chronic malnutrition, and Save the Children estimates that 3 of 4 children are not getting the nutrition they need for development. Almost half of the children in Bangladesh have some form of cognitive problem, such as delayed language development, due to different environmental and growth factors. Malnutrition levels are twice as high for the children of the poorest fifth, including textile workers' children, than for children belonging to the richest fifth of the population. 9 of 10 children in our study usually get three meals a day. However the food is unvaried and inadequate, usually only rice, lentils or mashed potatoes. Several children do not get lunch regularly when the money runs out. Only half of

the children eat fish, chicken or eggs every week.

Only three of the children in the study eat fruit. Often they have to arrange for meals themselves as the adults looking after them are busy, or parents are working late in the evenings. A monotonous, inadequate diet in itself is a major problem, but combined with poor attachment to parents, the situation is further deteriorated and presents a serious risk that the child's development will be delayed.

IN THE SLUMS, CHILDREN OFTEN drink polluted water which hasn't been boiled first, as there is little time and long queues to the shared kitchens. Untreated water and the dirty environment pose serious health risks for children. Diarrhoea as well as various respiratory diseases are very common. Almost half of the children interviewed stated that they feel feverish most of

the time. Children have cuts and infections. The parents cannot afford to seek medical help for their children when they are seriously ill. Of the children Swedwatch interviewed, only two had ever been taken to a doctor.

THE CONVENTION ON THE Rights of the Child places clear responsibility on states to ensure good health and an adequate standard of living for children. Article 10 of the Child Rights Principles also states that "Companies should strengthen society and the government's efforts to protect and ensure children's rights." Furthermore, it is clear that the standard of living for these children is low, despite the fact that their parents are working more than full time. Production which assumes low wages, long hours and many temporary contracts may consequently exert a negative impact on children's health and living standards.



PANNA is 6. She lives with her two grandmothers alternately in two neighbouring villages in the Mymensing District. Both her parents work in textile factories in Dhaka. Panna mostly plays by herself and sometimes goes alone to the pond to bathe. Her two grandmothers are in conflict as both want to be paid for caring for her. "Both of them want me to be with them when it is time for mummy to send money. I don't know which is my home."

#19

»Children have the right to protection against all forms of violence, neglect, maltreatment, injury or abuse.«

UN CONVENTION ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD
ARTICLE 19

*"My grandmother hits me when she feels I've misbehaved."
/ Panna, 6 år*

Factories in Bangladesh are required by law to arrange childcare for workers' children. Few parents use this facility. Lack of staff, unsafe, dirty rooms, unhelpful opening hours and cultural pressure makes women leave their children in their villages or at home in the slum, either in the care of older siblings, grandparents or neighbours, or the children fend for themselves for large parts of the day. Lack of care and poor attachment mean these children risk being subjected to neglect. They are also at higher risk of exposure to various forms of violence and abuse.

UNICEF noted in a report from 2012 that inadequate childcare in pre-school age exerts a clearly negative effect on children's health. Risk of accidents increases dramatically when children are not properly supervised. In the villages we visited in

Mymensingh in the countryside outside Dakar, we saw how children aged 3 were playing next to ponds and ditches with no adults around. Drowning is the leading cause of death among children of pre-school age in Bangladesh. Accidents occur during the daytime when children are playing without supervision or when older siblings are watching them. Risk of drowning for pre-school children is 50 times higher in Bangladesh than in many high-income countries.

In the slums of Dhaka and Chittagong, the children play in the narrow alleys amongst garbage and open sewers while their parents work. Sometimes the fathers are at home, but usually they work in the textile industry too, or with various day labouring jobs. At best older siblings or neighbours keep an eye on the youngest children, but accidents are common. The alleys are full of deep holes, the corrugated tin sheds are red

hot with sharp edges, rickshaws and motorcycles cruise past the playing children. Inadequate sanitation, overfull latrines and polluted water mean diseases spread easily. Shared toilets and showers with no doors provide great risks of abuse. Young girls are particularly at risk.

The situation for children in the villages and children in slums are different, but taken together, Save the Children estimate that more than 75% of pre-school children in Bangladesh receive inadequate care. The problems are greatest in the slums where textile workers live as public services there are extremely limited. Many of the working parents are plagued by the knowledge that their children are not well supervised. This leads to worry, anxiety and depression, which affects both parenting and work capacity. Hope for a better life for their children constitutes the main driving force of many of the parents in the textile industry.

ASHRAFUL is 6. He lives with his grandmother in a village in the Mymensing District. He has not yet started school but goes to the Mosque to learn Arabic. Sometimes the teacher hits him when he has not learned the verses by heart. Ashraful says that he is often sad but that he does not know why. He misses his father especially and likes to talk to him on the phone.

THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

The Children's Rights and Business Principles is a framework for understanding and addressing the impact of business on the rights and well-being of children. The principles are a joint initiative between UNICEF, Save the Children and the United Nations Global Compact and were launched in March 2012.

THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND Business Principles (Business Principles) stems from the rights in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which recognises the importance and interdependence of children's civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights. The Principles are also based on the ILO's conventions on child labour and minimum age. They clarify existing standards to comply with for companies, such as the UN Global Compact and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights but also add a child rights perspective. Each of the ten Business Principles lays out actions that businesses can take to respect children's rights, as well as suggested actions to support children's rights in the workplace, marketplace and the community.

Companies should prioritise children as a stakeholder group, as it is a vulnerable group, which requires particular attention to respect their human rights. It is not limited to child labour, but rather companies should consider their direct impacts on children's rights and the negative or positive impacts that they cause indirectly through suppliers and other business partners, as well as customers through for example product design and advertising.

IN ORDER TO ANALYSE THE impact of the business from a child rights perspective, there needs to be a due diligence process which focuses on the best interests of the child. For example, the impact on a child from a parent's poverty and inability to live a dignified life despite a fulltime occupation has

to be understood and included in a company's impact assessment. The Swedish companies do not directly employ the parents of the children in this report, but they do impact the living environment of the families through pressing prices and lead-times. Understanding impact is not only a matter of a systematic and procedural approach but also considering questions like; "what does it mean for a child living in poverty?" and "how is an infant affected by staying in a cramped room without proper water and sanitation?"

THROUGH ADOPTING A POLICY and a continuous due diligence process, companies will be able to systematically work toward counteracting and handling risks of adversely impacting the rights of children. Obtaining a senior-level

THE CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND BUSINESS PRINCIPLES

- 1 >** Meet their responsibility to respect children's rights and commit to supporting the human rights of children
- 2 >** Contribute to the elimination of child labour, including in all business activities and business relationships
- 3 >** Provide decent work for young workers, parents and caregivers
- 4 >** Ensure the protection and safety of children in all business activities and facilities
- 5 >** Ensure that products and services are safe, and seek to support children's rights through them
- 6 >** Use marketing and advertising that respect and support children's rights
- 7 >** Respect and support children's rights in relation to the environment and to land acquisition and use
- 8 >** Respect and support children's rights in security arrangements
- 9 >** Help protect children affected by emergencies
- 10 >** Reinforce community and government efforts to protect and fulfil children's rights

BASED ON: UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO conventions 138 and 182 concerning child labour (for states) and UN Global Compact and UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (for states and companies). For the full text of Children's Rights and Business Principles see www.childrenandbusiness.org

ILLUSTRATION ANDERS BERGERSSON

”A risk analysis should begin with cause and effect.”

commitment and allocating responsibilities is highly important to achieve adequate processes in the implementation of the Business Principles.

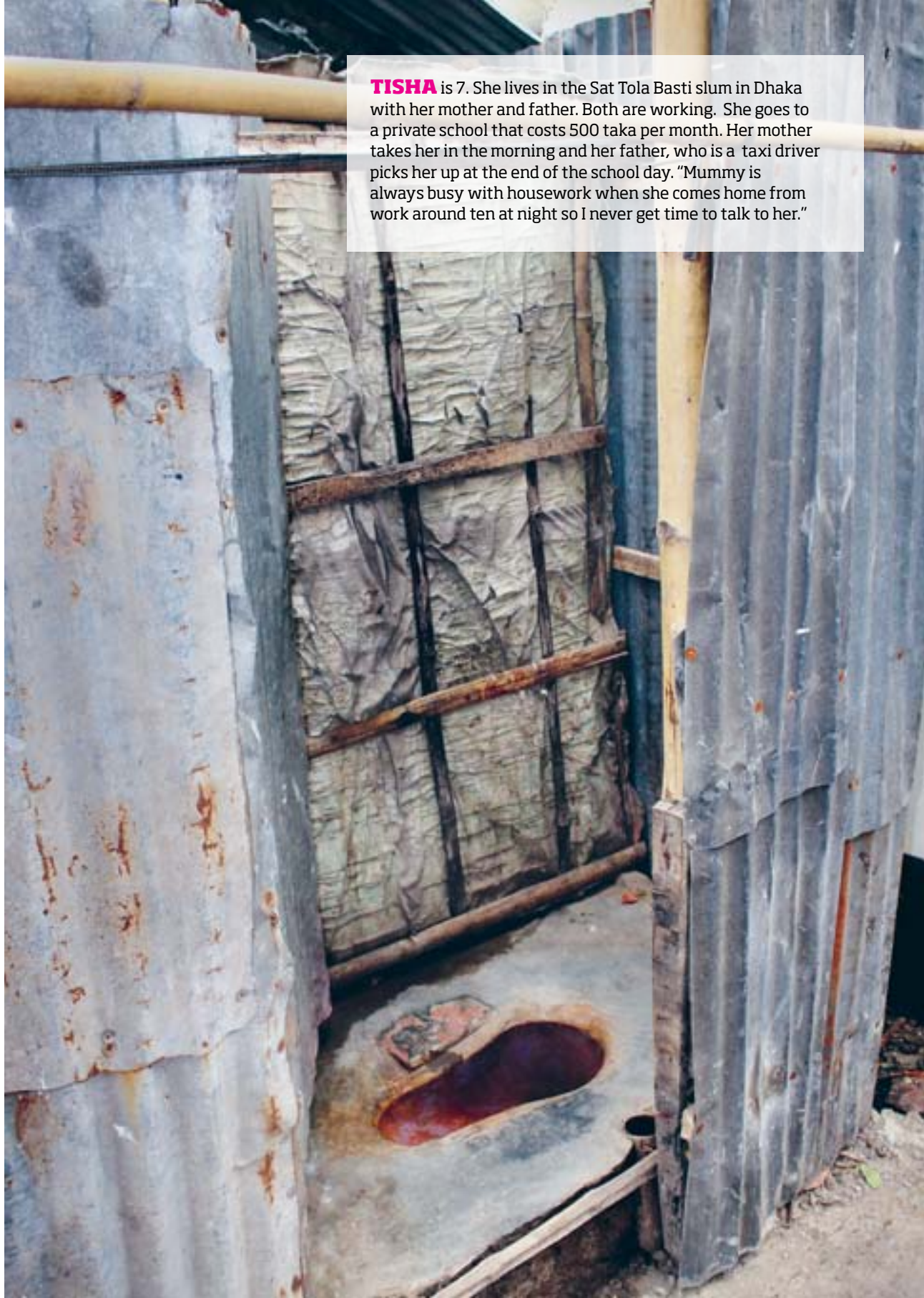
Businesses have to ensure that respecting and supporting children's rights become part of the company culture, and for this, companies need to provide guidance for managers and employees in relation to matters that may impact the rights of children. A strategy is needed for informing, building capacity and aligning suppliers and other business partners so that they realise the special considerations required to protect children from potential risks.

SWEDWATCH'S REPORT HAS two dimensions; one is children living with their parents in an urban set-up where safety and protection becomes the core concerns, and the other is children living in the rural set-up in a separation scenario i.e. children living away from their parents for extended periods. Here of course, safety and protection is a core concern as well, but Swedwatch has studied the actual emotional effects on a child, such as longing and sadness.

A risk analysis has to be initiated by a cause and effect approach where root causes are understood by companies especially the part of business, which has caused an effect, in order to counter or mitigate the adverse impact.

THIS IS HOW COMPANIES SHOULD MANAGE RISKS BASED ON A CHILD-RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

- 1 >** Establish root causes of the lack of security and protection, as well as the separation of children from their parents.
- 2 >** Outline types of risks connected to the lack of security, lack of sanitation, and separation from parents. Direct, indirect and potential risks should be considered.
- 3 >** Regular monitoring of capacity building initiatives; in-house and external, aimed toward employees, suppliers and local communities.
- 4 >** Map existing practices for protection of child rights.
- 5 >** Map the situation of children of workers living in slums, rural areas, and those using the child care facilities of the company.
- 6 >** Support community- and government initiatives for protecting and meeting the rights of children.
- 7 >** Special focus on the girl child as they are particularly vulnerable with regard to access to quality education and recreation. This special focus is underlined in the Bangladesh National Children Policy 2011.
- 8 >** Put in place a mechanism whereby workers can submit confidential complaints, regarding their or their children's situation.
- 9 >** Fully define and clarify in a practical manner important child rights terms, such as; adequate child-care, child-care facility, child-friendly spaces, child perspective, child rights remediation plan, child vulnerability and other terms referred to in either company policy or local legislation, or both.
- 10 >** Companies should consider association with child rights experts or organisations to screen and support in company child rights strategies, mitigation and remediation plans based on the Business Principles.



TISHA is 7. She lives in the Sat Tola Basti slum in Dhaka with her mother and father. Both are working. She goes to a private school that costs 500 taka per month. Her mother takes her in the morning and her father, who is a taxi driver picks her up at the end of the school day. “Mummy is always busy with housework when she comes home from work around ten at night so I never get time to talk to her.”



ASHIQR is 11. He and his younger brother look after themselves while their parents are at work. "Who takes care of me?! When I get home from school I take care of my younger brother." Ashiqr cooks food, washes dishes, cleans and bathes his brother when he comes home from school. The area of the slum in Mirpur where Ashiqr lives is dirty and crowded. 20 families share the same toilet.

Higher minimum wage means factories try to avoid expensive overtime. Production rates are pressed upwards. To “motivate” employees, signs to praise or shame them are used.



WHAT DO THE SWEDISH BUYERS SAY?

Living wage is top of the list when the Swedish companies rank the most important factors for the workers’ children. However no practical measures have yet been taken.

THE MOTHERS OF THE CHILDREN interviewed in this report all work in factories that deliver to Swedish textile companies and the Swedish clothing market, and they all complain about their low wages. Consequently, Swedwatch has asked 20 Swedish companies how they work with children’s rights in Bangladesh, and whether they consider that they bear any responsibility for this situation. All except two companies responded. Swedwatch has not verified their answers and can, consequently, not guarantee their authenticity. However, Swedwatch will follow up on them.

Most Swedish clothing companies have been working to integrate human rights into their CSR work. However, there

is no focus on children’s rights, with the exception of prohibiting child labour. According to international frameworks, companies have a responsibility to respect human rights throughout their supply chain and to minimise risks of violating human rights in all ranks; through business partners, customers and suppliers. The frameworks also place great emphasis on companies carrying out continuous impact assessments and due diligence.

IN SPITE OF THIS, NONE OF THE clothing companies examined operated any systematic activities aimed at identifying and managing risks concerning negative impact on the rights of workers’ children, although some had begun to look at this

issue. Yet, all companies in the survey saw a linkage between their activities and the situation of the textile workers’ children. All the companies also feel that they share a responsibility for improving the situation of the children. Responses thus identify a gap between theory and practice and the necessity of developing methods to strengthen children’s rights in the supply chains of the companies.

Swedwatch also asked companies to rank the individual factors that would have the greatest positive impact on textile workers’ children. A living wage heads the list followed by subsidised schools and pre-schools and the third most important is shorter working days.

How companies rank factors important to children. Results from all companies.

1	Living wage
2	Subsidised schools and pre-schools
3	Reduced working hours
4	Family-friendly social security systems
5	Medical insurances for workers families
6	Community-based child care centres
7	Low-income housing for workers
8	Women’s participation in trade unions
9	Multi-stakeholder initiatives (eg. housing, social dialogue, etc.)
10	Flexible working hours

Factors with possible positive influence on textile workers' children 1=most important, 10=least important	C. Jahn	Coop	Ellos	Gekås	Gina Tricot	H&M	ICA		IKEA	Intersport	KappAhl	Kwintet	Lindex	MQ	New Wave Group	RNB	Sandryds	Stadium	Åhléns
Living wage	4	1	1	1	2	1	3		2	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	4	1	1
Reduced working hours	7	2	2	2	1	2	1		6	4	3	10	5	7	4	10	6	8	8
Flexible working hours	10	7	7	10	10	10	6		5	5	9	2	2	8	10	9	10	6	7
Community-based child care centers	2	8	8	3	5	8	5		7	10	5	3	9	4	8	6	9	7	3
Low-income housing for workers	3	5	9	4	7	4	7		9	8	4	9	8	2	6	8	8	5	9
Multi-stakeholder initiatives (child care, housing, social dialogue at factory etc.)	8	6	6	9	3	9	4		10	3	10	5	4	9	9	7	5	9	10
Subsidised schools and pre-schools	1	4	3	5	6	5	2		1	9	1	4	3	3	3	1	2	2	2
Family-friendly social security system	6	10	4	8	8	6	8		4	7	8	7	6	6	1	5	1	3	4
Medical insurance for workers' families	5	3	5	6	9	7	9		3	6	6	8	7	5	5	3	3	4	5
Womens' participation in trade unions	9	9	10	7	4	3	10		8	2	7	6	10	10	7	4	7	10	6
Included in suppliers' checks in Bangladesh X= Included																			
Supplier ensures adequate child care in an appropriate space available to all workers children below 6 during all working hours.	X				X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Caregivers at the child care facilities have adequate training (eg. early childhood development and child rights.)	X				X				X						X			X	
How the factory-based child care centres are utilised and reasons for overcrowded or empty facilities.	X				X	X					X	X	X	X	X		X	X	
Factory management have adequate knowledge on children's needs and rights from a child-friendly perspective.	X					X												X	
That the factory management supports women's participation in trade unions or Worker Participation Committees (WPC).	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
If the working hours constitute any risk for the children of the factory workers.	X		X		X	X				X		X							

The matrix shows the answers to questions posed to twenty Swedish companies that buy clothes or textiles from Bangladesh. Two companies, Base of Trade and Hemtex, choose not want to respond to the questions.

	Have signed The Accord	Do you see a link between your company and the wellbeing of workers' children?	Do you consider that you bear responsibility to improve the situation of textile workers' children?		Do you measure how your operations affect children's rights?	Have you taken steps to investigate what constitutes an adequate living wage in Bangladesh?	Do you have policy commitments promoting a living wage?
C. Jahn	No	Yes	Yes. The Bangladeshi economy is dependent on the textile industry which means that the buyers can influence the situation of textile workers' children.		No	Yes	No
Coop	*N/A	Yes	Yes		No	No	Yes
Ellos	No	Yes	Yes		No	No	Yes, work is underway concerning new guidelines which include a living wage.
Gekås	No	Yes	Yes		Yes, but only concerning child labour.	Yes	Yes
Gina Tricot	Yes	Yes	Yes. Dialogue with our suppliers now places children in focus in a wider sense. It may concern such things as training of nursery staff, subsidized food or supporting schools.		No	Yes	Yes
H&M	Yes	Yes	Yes, and we take responsibility by, e.g. actively advocating the issue of a fair living wage.		No, but we map where we can influence children's rights and take measures.	Yes, in accordance with our strategy for fair living wages	Yes, we have a broad strategy to achieve Fair Living Wage and our Code of Conduct is currently under review.
ICA	Yes	Yes	Yes, but this is a complex issue. responsibility rests with many different actors.		Yes, but checks do not cover workers' children.	No	No. In 2014 we have initiated a project that takes up living wages.
IKEA	*N/A	Yes	Yes, the wellbeing of children (and families) is affected by the parents' work situation.		Yes, situation of children is included in our studies.	Yes	Yes. We are developing a definition of living wage and have visited families in Bangladesh to learn more about their living conditions.
Intersport	Yes	Yes	Both the state and buyers are duty-bound to a certain degree to work to improve the situation for workers and their families. Parents' working conditions indirectly affect their children.		No, workers' children outside workplaces are not yet included in our checks.	No	Yes. In accordance with the BSCI Code of Conduct.
KappAhl	Yes	Yes	Yes, parents' working conditions have an influence on their children.		No	No	Yes
Kwintet	No	Yes	Yes. Companies bear responsibility to improve the situation of workers' children. Our controls and investments in better working conditions have a direct effect on children's situation.		No	Yes	Yes
Lindex	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes, but only concerning child labour.	Yes	Yes. In accordance with the BSCI Code of Conduct.
MQ	No	Yes	Yes. Our responsibility is to identify risks at suppliers and cooperate with them so that they implement our Code of Conduct. So we can indirectly influence the situation for workers' children.		No	Yes	Yes. In accordance with the BSCI Code of Conduct.
New Wave Group	Yes	Yes	We have an opportunity to contribute to improving the situation which we should utilise, but have no obligation to do so.		Yes, in certain cases.	No	Yes. We require that our business partners pay the agreed minimum wage based on what had been negotiated by the labour market partners.
RNB	Yes	Yes	The state, suppliers and parents share this responsibility. However as buyers we must undertake ethical business and take responsibility for conditions in our supply chain.		No	Yes	Yes
Sandryds	Yes	Yes	As a company we should, together with our suppliers, take responsibility for improving working conditions. This is a complex issue which is affected by the political situation in Bangladesh.		No	No	Yes. In accordance with the BSCI Code of Conduct.
Stadium	Yes	Yes	Yes and no. We check that the factories we order from comply with legislation, agreements and sustainability requirements. But the state must guarantee the social security system.		No, we do not make any direct checks of workers' children's rights.	We follow the wages debate closely.	Yes, our Code of Conduct guarantees statutory minimum wage. Wages must be high enough to pay for workers' basic needs.
Åhléns	Yes	Yes	Companies have an indirect responsibility which means that they must guarantee good working conditions and wages that enable families to give their children a reasonable standard.		Yes, but only concerning child labour.	No	Yes. In accordance with the BSCI Code of Conduct.

* In September 2014 the agreement only covers companies involved in clothes production.

BSCI (Business Social Compliance Initiative) is a company-driven initiative primarily aimed at improving workers' conditions. The new BSCI Code of Conduct includes a reference to wages that must be possible to live on.



SHOHAG is 6. He lives in a tin shed in a large slum area of Dhaka with his mother. His father lives somewhere else. A neighbour helps to look after him when his mother is working at the textile factory. "I would like an ice cream and to go to the zoo with my parents, but I've never told my mom. Since she can't afford it she would just get sad."

THE WAY OUT OF POVERTY

Responsibility for the children's situation is shared. Both structural barriers and low wages lock workers into poverty. To date there have been no broader initiatives to find a solution.

CHILD LABOUR WAS A MAJOR PROBLEM in textile factories in Asia in the 1990s. When campaigning led to consumer boycotts in the United States and Europe, companies were forced to act. They began to impose requirements on social and working environments and to inspect factories. Children and young people working in factories is still a problem, but there are fewer of them. Today however, there are still millions of children who are closely linked to international companies' production in textile factories; the workers' children. So far they have been neglected. Perhaps children's rights in Bangladesh have never been so much on the back burner as now when the focus is on fire and building safety of the factories.

THE 44 CHILDREN WHO ARE INCLUDED in the research for this report have mothers who sew clothes at supplier factories for Swedish and international buyers. Workers' children have been more or less forgotten in corporate CSR strategies. All the Swedish companies in our survey stated that they see a linkage between their operations and textile workers' children's wellbeing. All the companies interviewed also accept at least a shared responsibility for the situation of the children. At the same time we can see that none of the companies systematically include workers' children and families in their

CSR work. A few have begun to look at the issue, but it is essential to develop new strategies in this field – and map the workers' living conditions. It is impossible to separate labour rights from other human rights issues such as the right to health, housing, social security and water in a country like Bangladesh. These challenges are inexorably linked.

WHEN SWEDWATCH ASKED THE companies to rank individual factors that they believed would exert the greatest positive impact on textile workers' children, a living wage was number one. Companies also identified areas of responsibility that extend more widely than their current activities. However the issue of a living wage is complex. In the aftermath of the Rana Plaza collapse in April 2013, unsafe factories and low wages moved into the international spotlight. Both pressure from international consumers and buyers and from Bangladeshi workers and unions resulted in reformed labour legislation and a 77% increase in the minimum wage. The workers demanded the equivalent of USD 100 a month. They got USD 68. Most analysts agree that this level is still well below a living wage. However the lack of national comparative pay data and sound methods for calculating makes it very difficult to determine how much the new minimum wage differs from a living wage.

“Much indicates that the Bangladeshi textile industry, one year after Rana Plaza is at a crossroads.”

What we do know, however, is that a 77 % wage increase does not mean 77 % more money in the pocket of the worker. This is due to several factors. Employers cut bonuses and overtime pay and moved workers down to lower pay grades to avoid paying more. Those who have an interest in workers' purchasing power do what they can to grab part of any increase – food retailers, transportation companies and landlords – all raised their prices. Covariant factors such as inflation, corruption and a totally unregulated informal rental market in the slums leads to the conclusion that pay is not the entire solution to the problems of the workers. Despite the increase in the minimum wage, more and more reports are coming in that parents, who do not feel they can afford to keep their children in town, instead send them home to the villages.

IT IS THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE Bangladeshi state to protect the rights of the children. Companies have a responsibility to analyse the situation and work towards minimising the negative impacts on children within the supply chain. Production with low wages and long working hours is one aspect which affects children, and which makes it difficult for parents to organise in trade unions, as they lack the time and energy.

The hundreds of unions formed due to legislative reform are challenged by a repressive regime and employers who sabotage union organisation.

There is a deep distrust of unions in Bangladesh and corruption pervades all sectors of society. The unions are not exempt. Considerable effort is required from both companies and global unions to support and educate, motivate and exert pressure on all sides in Bangladesh

so that the workers are finally able to negotiate their own terms. Until collective agreements become reality, the minimum wage should be raised annually in order to approach a living wage more rapidly.

The problems in the textile industry need solutions that are based on a thorough analysis of the workers and their children's situation and needs. There are supplier companies in Bangladesh working with workers' following a rights based approach on welfare; they establish subsidised shops on the factory site, housing, nurseries and schools. Initiatives that are community based are paid too little attention and could involve Swedish buyer companies to a much higher degree. Broadly based initiatives and strategies to strengthen the rights of children – and thereby respect human rights in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights – are conspicuous by their absence. Swedish and international companies need to address the issue of human rights in general, and children's rights in particular, in a comprehensive and long term plan.

MUCH INDICATES THAT THE BANGLADESHI textile industry, one year after Rana Plaza, is at a crossroads. If international buyers leave the country, this would be devastating for the textile working families who are currently living on the margins. Export revenues from the, to date, so profitable textile industry are also essential as the tax base for necessary social reforms. Meanwhile, consumers worldwide must show companies that they are willing to bear their share of the costs both for safe workplaces and for wages that textile workers, and their children can live on.



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www.swedwatch.org

for full information on methods and a complete list of sources.

