

Focus Group Discussion Report 1

“Capacitating the garment industry workers for a greener transition in Bangladesh”

By Afsara Binte Mirza and Maliha Momtaz Himu

Acknowledgement

This publication provides a summary of discussions from the focus group discussion for the project's research and module development purpose. We extend our sincere gratitude to the project staff and the volunteers for their active participation at this discussion. A special thanks to Osman Goni Raju for being an active rapporteur and Fahmid Mohtasin for being a brilliant photographer at the event.

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The Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted to hear the lived realities of ready-made garment sector's workers related to their current workplaces' (mainly factories) working condition; socio-economic challenges; and impacts of climate change on the workers' lives and livelihoods. The discussion also delved into understanding ways to tackle the knowledge gap of the climatic risks and uncertainties. The discussion took place on the 7th of February 2025 at the Community Resource Centre in Kallyanpur Slum, Dhaka with 10 garment workers. The map below shows the location of the center at Kallyanpur in Dhaka city.

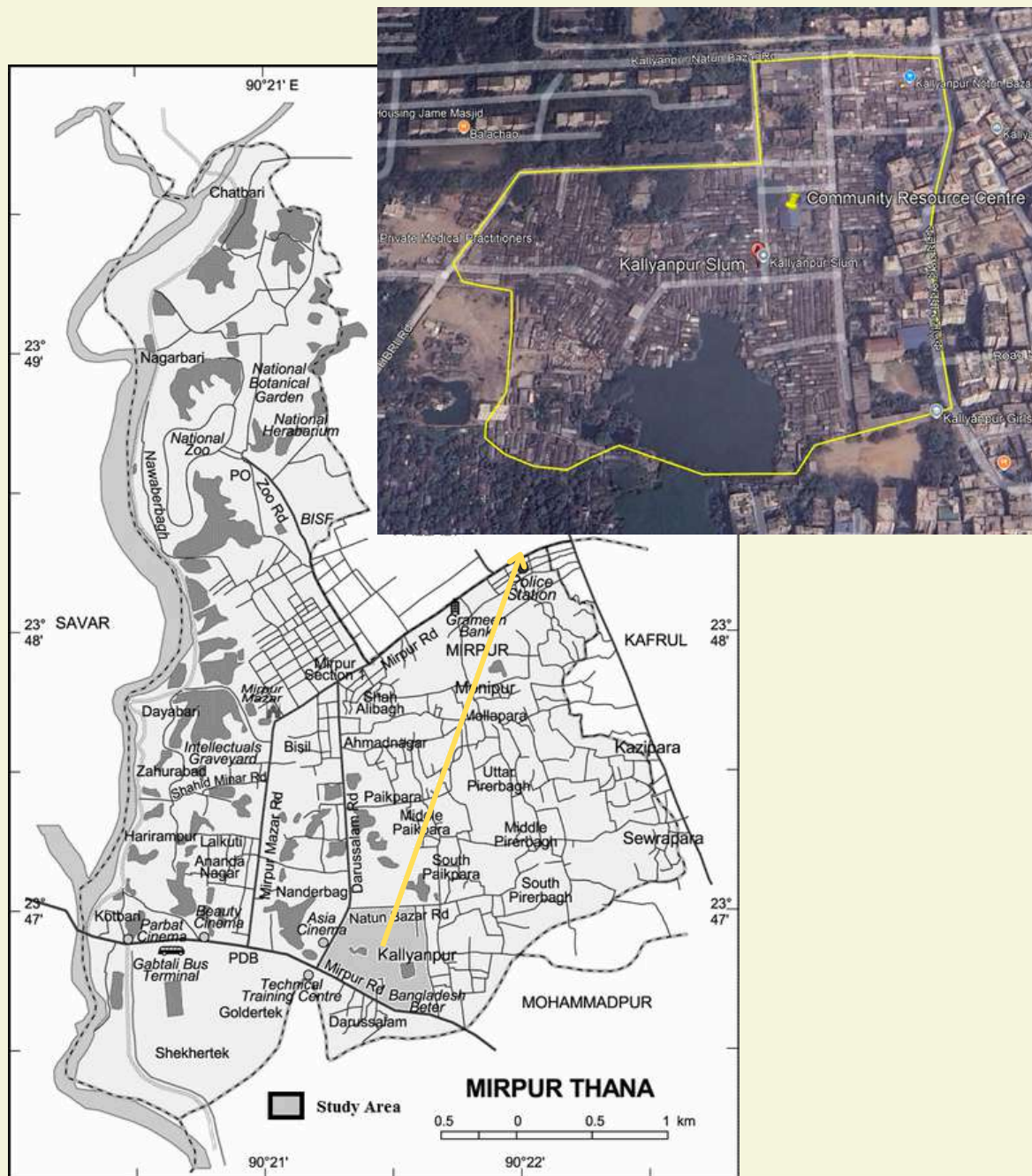


Figure 1: Map and Picture of the FGD location and the neighbouring areas where FGD was conducted. Source: Banglapedia, 2008; Google Earth Pro, 2025 and Latif et al., 2016.

Reference:

Latif, M. B., Irin, A., & Ferdous, J. (2016). Socio-economic and health status of slum dwellers of the Kallyanpur slum in Dhaka city. *Bangladesh Journal of Scientific Research*, 29(1), 73-83.

Workers mentioned that while the workload is exhausting with minimal breaks, working alongside fellow co-workers brings them a sense of happiness. During the group discussion, we identified two groups of workers. Some works at large garment factory (compliant) and others at small and medium sized garment factory (non-compliant). The questionnaire responses also varied between these two groups. The info-graph below shows a summary of varied response from the two groups of garment workers.

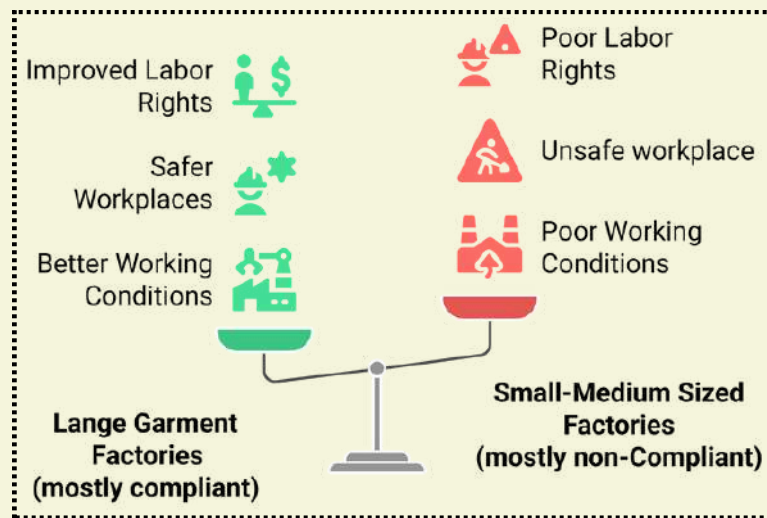


Figure 2: Difference between compliant and non-compliant garment factories

Key topics discussed with the garment workers:

Awareness and understanding regarding climate change



Most workers were familiar with the word ‘climate change’ linking it to the heatwaves, erratic rainfall leading to water logging and colder winters. However, their understanding of climatic risks was limited. Over the past 3–5 years, they noted the rising trends of heatwaves which is worsening their working conditions and causing frequent power outages in their homes and factories putting a toll on their health and well-being.

Climate-related health impacts are becoming a new normal



Workers frequently reported headaches, dizziness, nausea, excessive sweating and fatigue due to indoor heat condition. Many workers avoided drinking water to reduce restroom breaks leading to urinary infection. Poor ventilation in small factories exacerbates the impacts felt due to heatwaves, while water logging during monsoon rainy season increases waterborne diseases in the workers’ households and communities. Despite these challenges, they are expected to report to work early in the morning and take minimal leaves even if their health condition deteriorates.

Glimpses captured during the discussion



A special thanks to Fahmid Mohtasin for his invaluable support in capturing these photos.

Limited flexibility and lack of well-being facilities in smaller factories



Workers mentioned the lack of designated rest areas in factories is a barrier to boost their productivity when they fall sick during heatwaves. They also reported salary deductions for late arrivals or sick leaves during flooding and heatwaves. Even if some workers leave just 2–3 hours before the office hours end due to feeling unwell/sick/personal reasons, they are often counted as absent for that full-day. While some small-sized factories provides drinking water, the water quality is not safe to drink which undermines their well-being during heat stress. Smaller factories also have poorly managed sanitation facilities. Workers involved in heat-intensive tasks such as ironing-faced extreme exhaustion due to prolonged exposure to elevated temperatures. Larger factories offers some paid leave, but smaller ones provided none, especially for climate-related health issues.

Work-life balance is a big struggle for women workers



Women workers struggled to balance their and household chores. The female workers spend long hours, almost 10-12 hrs and goes back to their homes to complete the never-ending responsibility of household chores. During flooding and heatwaves, women face devastating health impacts such as urinary infection, exhaustion, dehydration, diarrhoea, etc. While some large factories provide childcare, smaller and non-compliant ones lacks this important facility for women. The extreme spells of heatwaves causes disruption in their sleeping cycles and causes more exhaustion. Without any formal workplace support, managing work, household chores and childcare can takes a huge physical and emotional strain on the women workers.

Inadequate knowledge and action on climate change adaptation



Workers stated that factories provided little or no support in addressing the climate change impacts. Some larger and compliant factories offer comparatively better ventilation conditions, healthcare support and conducts awareness session. However, workers suggested to upgrade outdated equipment to reduce physical exhaustion and indoor heat occurrences. Additionally, they reported that no formal reporting mechanisms exists to address climate-related complaints, with most factories only maintaining a general complaint box that does not specifically address any climate change or environment related complaints.

Recommendation of the potential contents and modality of climate change training module



Workers were eager to learn about climate change adaptation strategies, particularly practical ways to mitigate extreme heat impacts at their household levels. Many showed interest in solar energy as a solution to unstable electricity supply. They would prefer the training to be interactive and included street theatre, group discussions, and storytelling over powerpoint presentation. Frequent peer-to-peer learning sessions were also was emphasized over one-time workshops for better engagement and knowledge retention.



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Annex

Project Brief: ICCCAD with the support of Laudes Foundation are aiming to capacitate the ready-made garment (RMG) sector workers from different tiers of the work level on the nexus of climate change, labour rights and just transition to improve their agency, working conditions and adaptive capacities. This initiative aims to co-develop and deliver a context-specific training module for the garment workers and the management by incorporating diverse viewpoints of workers, employers, trade unions, labour rights organizations, NGOs, INGO, buyers and brands, government ministries, civil society bodies, etc., to make the capacity building initiative fruitful and sustainable.

Objective of the Focus Group Discussion: To understand the impacts of climate change on the lives of the RMG sector workers and gathering knowledge for developing localized, context-specific and participatory training modules for them. Additionally, the data gathered will be presented in a research report.

Project Deliverable: Conducting Interviews with relevant stakeholders (10 RMG workers) data from which will feed into the research report and design of the training module.

Project Team (ICCCAD): Mahzabeen Mahfuz (Field Coordinator, Research Officer) and Maliha Momtaj Himu (Research Officer) and Afsara Binte Mirza (Project Manager).

Field Support Team (Only for this event): Mahzabeen Mahfuz (Field Coordinator, FGD Conductor, Research Officer), Maliha Momtaj Himu (Research Officer), Fahmid Mohtasin for photography (Research Officer), Osman Goni Raju (Research Officer) for rapporteur.

Safety Concerns: No present safety concerns to declare. Team movement will take place in transportation arranged by ICCCAD. Prior to departure, road situation and any other relevant safety issues will be consulted with the local contact Ms. Rowshan and Osman Goni Raju who also resides in Kallyanpur.

Time and Activity:

- 2:00 PM-3:00 : Travelling from IUB to Kallyanpur
- 3:00 PM-3:10 PM: Project brief given by ICCCAD researchers & Introduction of participants
- 3:10 PM-4:40 PM: Conduction of Focus Group Discussion with garment workers
- 4: 40 PM-5:00 PM: Reflections from the discussion, closing and group photo upon consent