

# The impact of COVID-19 on garment workers

*Review of the situation  
live from India & Bangladesh*

Webinar  
24th April 2020



# FEMNET

> [www.femnet.de](http://www.femnet.de)  
Association and Team

- member-based women's rights association
- founded in 2007
- work for the economic, social and cultural rights of women worldwide
- focus on women in the garment industry
- Member of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC)



## FEMNET's work: Three Pillars



Campaigning & Advocacy



Education & Counselling



#SolidarityWorks:  
Joint projects and campaigns with partner  
organisations in Bangladesh and India



24th April 2013 | We will not forget – Rana Plaza never again!





## Today's Speakers and Experts



### Kalpona Akter

- BCWS (Bangladesh Center for Workers Solidarity )
- Managing Director
- Dhaka, Bangladesh



### Deepika Rao

- Cividep (Workers' Rights & Corporate Accountability)
- Programme Director
- Bangalore, India



### Mary Viyakula

- SAVE (Social Awareness & Voluntary Education)
- Executive Director
- Tamil Nadu, India



### Gisela Burckhardt

- FEMNET
- Chairwoman
- Bonn, Germany

## Garment industry in Bangladesh

More than 4 million garment workers

Garments make up 80% of export earnings

> 4.000 factories

### Impact of Corona Pandemic

- 90% closed, re-opening 26th of April – 5th May
- \$ 3.13 billion export orders cancelled/suspended, reported by 1127 factories, affecting 2.2 million workers, mostly females (source: BGMEA)
- government has provided 600 million\$ fund as loan without interest to export-oriented companies to cover salaries, functions only partly
- protests in front of many factories as March salaries were not paid
- More than 30.000 workers fired (source: BCWS)

# Covid pandemic spread in India

- More than 23,000 cases and 700 deaths across India
- Worst affected cities - Mumbai, Delhi among others
- Nationwide lockdown since 24th March
- Second phase of lockdown till 3rd May
- Essential services allowed to operate





# Sudden lockdown leads to mass exodus of migrant workers from cities

Photo credit: PTI Photo, Economic Time; migrants walk back home in absence of public transport





# Textile Industry in India - Covid Impact

- Comprises 80% micro, small and medium enterprises - impacted heavily
- 10 million jobs might be lost
- Causes: drop in export demand, order cancellations, lockdown of factories, health scare and subsequent disruption of supply chains
- Industry demanding government relief
- Government likely to push for labour law changes, eg., 12 hour work days



Picture Courtesy: The Wire. Workers outside closed place of work

# Situation in Bangalore

- Factories are shut; likely to open after 3rd May with reduced workforce
- Some workers received wages for March, many did not
- Shortage of affordable food, job insecurity, impossible social distancing, spike in domestic violence add to health related fears due to pandemic



Workers walk in front of Vidhan Soudha (Seat of State Legislature, Karnataka)



# Relief work being carried out by GLU, Munnade and Cividep

- For immediate relief to workers:-
  - Food stuff provision, Cooking gas refill, Phone recharges, Cash transfer for rent support
  - Disease related awareness
  - Connecting workers to government relief and support agencies
- For long-term relief to workers:-
  - Tracking conditions through survey
  - Advocating along with trade unions for government aid and employer responsibility
  - Collaborating with international partners to put pressure on brands
  - Supporting workers through legal aid to claim all statutory benefits as well as welfare provisions
  - Documenting and analysing situation which is expected to lead to far-reaching consequences for the industry and its workers

## Garment industry in Tamil Nadu

- 800.000 workers in garment industry
- 250.000 interstate migrants
- 2.200 spinning mills







Emergency Aid for Workers in Tamil Nadu / India





Emergency Aid for Workers in Tamil Nadu / India





**Emergency Aid for Workers in Tamil Nadu / India**



## Support workers now

[www.femnet.de/spenden](http://www.femnet.de/spenden)

### Corona-Relief Fund

Bank account of FEMNET at GLS  
Bank

IBAN: DE 93 4306 0967 0300 800  
800





## Consequences of Corona pandemic

- Since years only little progress on workers' social and economic rights: lack of living wage, lack of social protection for workers, female workers suffer the most
- Corona crisis: \$ 3.13 billion export orders cancelled/suspended, reported by 1127 factories, affecting 2.2 million workers
- Mc Kinsey study: price negotiation for approx. 50% of all orders
- **After Corona:** payment of goods must cover all costs: living wage, benefits, social security scheme, safety, could be done by an additional charge levied on FOB price
- **Rethinking of business model:** overproduction at the expense of the environment/our earth and exploitation of mostly female workers must stop

# Our demands

## Protection of workers` income and health

- Brands to **publicly commit** to a responsible sourcing, including payment of orders completed or in production, no new price negotiations, no cancellation, extension of production times, no delay sanctions
- Payment of wages, including severance payment, no firing of workers
- Protection of workers` health if production takes place (personal protective equipment, physical distancing, adaption of transport)

**Emergency relief** with contributions from multilateral institutions, donor governments, brands in order to finance

- a) Short-term: emergency relief, credits, loans to provide quick income
- b) Long-term: to enhance social protection floors for workers (unemployment benefits, social security systems)

## Mandatory human rights due diligence (mHRDD)

- Legislation: European governments and EU must make due diligence obligatory for brands/retailers including sanctions when obligations are neglected ("Lieferkettengesetz" in Germany)



Live Blog - Stay tuned:  
<https://cleanclothes.org/news/2020/live-blog-on-how-the-coronavirus-influences-workers-in-supply-chains>

24th April 2013

**We will not forget**





## Recommended reading

- 21<sup>st</sup> April: German Partnership for Sustainable Textiles together with other MSI issued paper „Responding responsibly to the COVID-19 crisis“ (Textilbündnis, FWF, FLA, ETI, AGT, amfori, SAC):  
<https://www.textilbuendnis.com/joint-statement-msi-covid19/>
- 22<sup>nd</sup> April: “Covid 19: Action in the Global Garment Industry”, paper issued by ACT members plus IndustriAll, ITUC:  
[https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/sectoral/WCMS\\_742343/lang--ja/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/coronavirus/sectoral/WCMS_742343/lang--ja/index.htm)
- 22<sup>nd</sup> April: Clean Clothes Campaign statement on Covid 19:  
<https://cleanclothes.org/news/2020/covid-19--a-global-approach-to-protecting-garment-workers-in-supply-chains>
- 23<sup>rd</sup> April: “Civil Society European Strategy for Sustainable Textiles, Garments, Leather & Footwear” issued by more than 50 NGOs : call on EU, contributes to upcoming “comprehensive EU strategy for Textiles” in 2021: <https://eeb.org/library/european-civil-society-strategy-for-sustainable-textile-garments-leather-and-footwear/>
- Which brands are doing what? Brand tracker:  
<https://www.workersrights.org/issues/covid-19/tracker/>