

Concept Paper #2

Leveraging Digital Tools for Capacity Development of Workers on Labour Rights in the Textile, Garment and Footwear Industry in Asia



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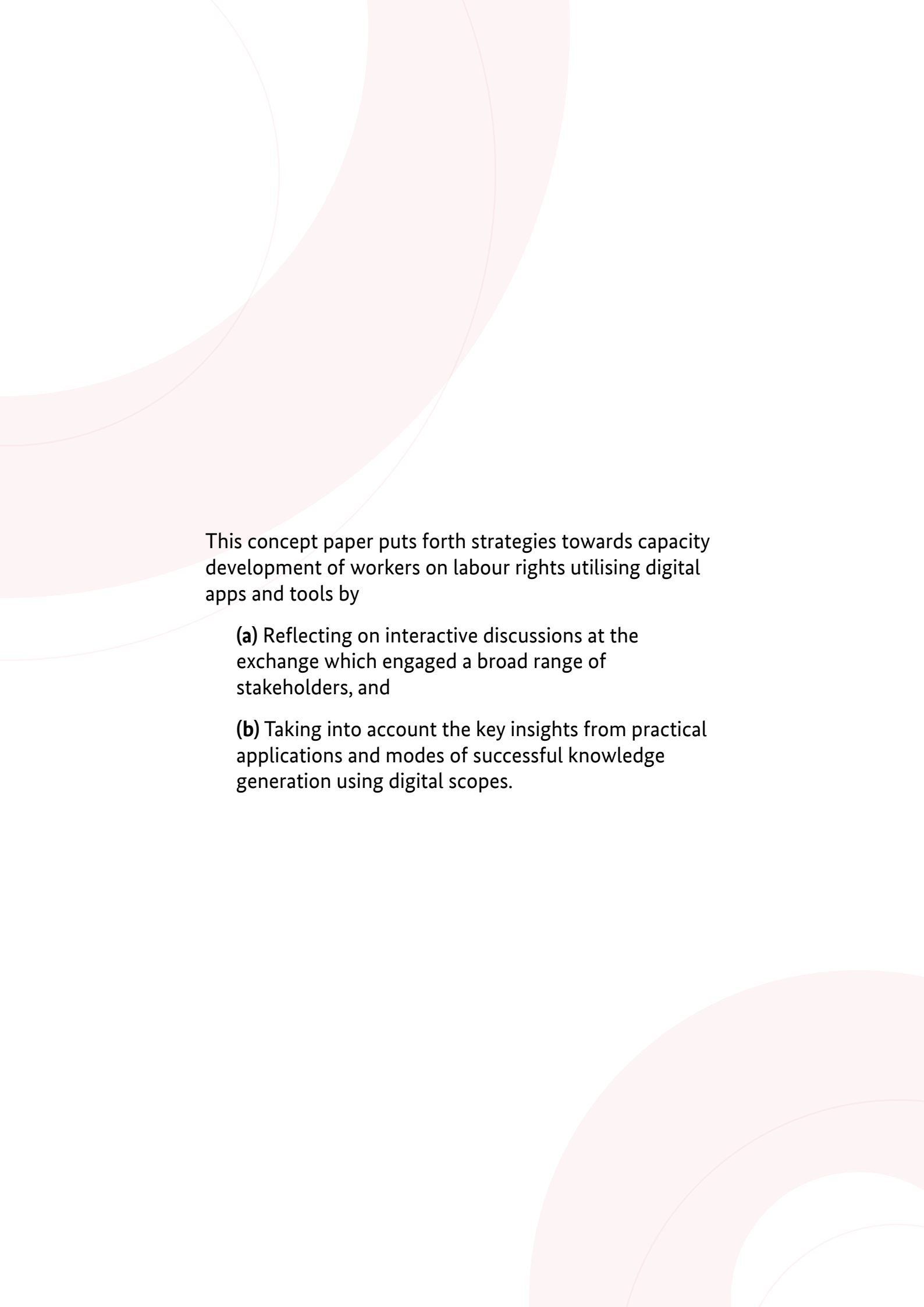
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This concept paper puts forth strategies towards capacity development of workers on labour rights utilising digital apps and tools by

- (a)** Reflecting on interactive discussions at the exchange which engaged a broad range of stakeholders, and
- (b)** Taking into account the key insights from practical applications and modes of successful knowledge generation using digital scopes.





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I. CONTEXT

The textile, garment and footwear industry in Asia is a critical driver of economic growth, providing employment to millions of workers, the majority of whom are women. However, challenges persist in ensuring that workers are fully aware of and able to exercise their labour rights, particularly in the areas of workplace safety, collective bargaining, fair wages, and gender-equitable working conditions. Traditional capacity-building efforts, such as in-person training and workshops, often face logistical and accessibility constraints, limiting their reach and impact.

In response to these challenges, the GIZ FABRIC in Asia project recognises the

transformative potential of digital tools in expanding worker capacity development and supporting sustainable improvements in labour rights and gender equity across the industry. By leveraging digital tools, such as mobile applications, online learning platforms, interactive chatbots, and digital grievance mechanisms, capacity-building efforts can be more scalable, accessible, and adaptable to the diverse needs of workers in manufacturing countries. These tools not only enable real-time access to vital labour rights information but also create avenues for workers to engage, seek assistance, and share their experiences in a safe and anonymous manner. The integration of digital approaches into existing worker

education and empowerment programmes has helped ensure capacity building interventions effective, user-friendly, and gender-sensitive. Digital tools can be designed to cater specifically to the learning preferences and technological literacy levels of textile and garment workers, taking into account of the language accessibility and cultural contexts. Additionally, by incorporating gender-responsive features, these tools can address workplace challenges that disproportionately affect women, such as sexual harassment, discrimination, and barriers to career advancement.

Strengthening the use of digital tools for worker capacity development aligns with the broader goals of the GIZ FABRIC in Asia (Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and

Garment Industry in Asia) project: to promote responsible supply chains, enhance worker empowerment, and drive meaningful improvements in working conditions. Ultimately, harnessing digital solutions will contribute to a more informed, engaged, and resilient workforce in the textile and garment industry, fostering long-term sustainability and gender-equitable workplaces.

This concept paper puts forth strategies towards worker capacity development on labour rights utilising digital apps and tools by (a) reflecting on interactive discussions at the exchange which engaged a broad range of stakeholders, and (b) taking into account the key insights from practical applications and modes of successful knowledge generation using digital scopes.





II. BACKGROUND

The FABRIC Asia project is committed to fostering a competitive, socially and environmentally sustainable textile and garment industry across Asia. In collaboration with a diverse range of stakeholders, including factory owners, government ministries, civil society organisations, and international brands and manufacturers, the project aims to further strengthen a unified vision for sustainability that ensure fair treatment of workers while maintaining environmental responsibility. As a regional think tank, the FABRIC project in Asia consolidates best practices from successful initiatives, promotes engagement with global sustainability efforts and advocates for joint positions on sustainable production. The project impact spans key manufacturing

countries, seeking to drive meaningful change in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Vietnam, and China.

THE ROLES OF THE WOMEN'S CENTERS AND REGIONAL EXCHANGE

Within the framework of the FABRIC Asia project, there is a dedicated effort to enhance knowledge exchange among women's centers for garment workers throughout the region. These centers, originally established in countries such as Bangladesh, Cambodia and Myanmar, provide a safe space for women workers to receive essential services, learn about their rights, and access to gender-

sensitive support mechanisms. The women's centers offer a blend of social, legal and educational resources tailored to empower female workers, who often face unique challenges in the industry.

To enhance collaboration and amplify impact, the project launched the Women's Center Network, facilitating cross-country exchanges to share lessons learnt and best practices. The inaugural event, held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in December 2023, brought together diverse stakeholders, including the women's centers' staff, local NGOs, development partners, union representatives, and garment workers to exchange lessons learnt and success stories of the initiatives. Building on these discussions, a follow up exchange event in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in April 2024, focused on gender-specific challenges, incorporating factory visits and interactive sessions to provide practical insights into the working conditions and support mechanisms for female garment workers.

WOMEN'S CENTERS AS SAFE AND EMPOWERING SPACES

The Women's Centers are designed as safe spaces to support female garment workers by promoting their rights, providing essential services, and fostering a safe and inclusive work environment. In Bangladesh, GIZ supported Women's Cafés that serve as community-based platforms where female garment and leather workers learn about their rights, access to resources on labour laws and workplace safety and exchange with peers on various topics. Built on their success in Bangladesh, these cafés were later replicated in Myanmar and Cambodia. Before the 2021 coup, the Women's Centers in Myanmar made a meaningful impact on beneficiaries, providing garment workers important support and services. However, the political situation has shifted significantly the landscape, leading to restrictions that have hindered both the

operations and potential expansion of these centers across the country. In Cambodia, the [WE House](#) (Women Empowerment House) was established in partnership with the GIZ-FABRIC, Solidarity Center and the Women Union Network (WUN), providing a secure environment for workers to seek support, exchange experiences, and advance gender equality.

The Women's Center Network is the result of the project effort to scale up effective strategies, foster peer learning, and strengthen collective voice of female garment workers. The network brought together diverse stakeholders, including the Women's Centers' staff, local NGOs, development partners, union representatives, and garment workers to exchange and facilitated structure dialogues that address pressing labour concerns, including workplace safety, fair wages, discrimination, and gender-based violence.

USING DIGITAL TOOLS AS EFFECTIVE METHOD OF CAPACITY BUILDING

While in-person training events at the Women's Centers play a crucial role in empowering workers, digital tools have been emerging as an equally important means of spreading awareness and enhancing capacity development. Given the increasing use of mobile technology and social media among garment workers, the digital platforms offer a flexible and cost-effective way to provide legal education and labour right trainings. By integrating digital solutions into capacity building efforts, the FABRIC Asia project aligns with its broader mission of promoting sustainability, gender equity, social dialogue and cooperation across the garment industry. These tools complement existing Women's Centers by ensuring that knowledge dissemination is not restricted to physical locations but reaches a wider audience in a more dynamic and interactive manners.



III. OVERVIEW

CURRENT STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

The integration of digital applications and tools into the workplace presents both challenges and opportunities and concerning digitalisation and access to rights. While these technologies can enhance productivity and flexibility, they also introduce complexities that may hinder workers' ability to understand and exercise their rights effectively.

CHALLENGES OF THE USAGE OF DIGITAL APPS AND TOOLS

i. Limitations to Usage of Digital Apps and Tools

According to the data analysed by [ILOSTAT 2023](#) Asia is the largest employer of garment sector workers, accounting for 75% of all workers. An estimated 42 million women

garment workers are employed in Asia which averages to 52%. In Myanmar, this share of women in Asia's total garment employment is at 83% and in Cambodia it is 76%. In Bangladesh, despite a recent decline in the number of women workers, they still make up a substantial portion of the industry's workforce ¹ at 44%. However, these women are predominantly confined to less-skilled and lower-paid roles and only a minimal percentage of women workers could advance to supervisory position (e.g. 1% of 665 surveyed women workers).

This gender disparity extends to digital access and usage, where societal norms and gender biases severely limit women's interaction with digital tools. Usage patterns are often predetermined by these biases, with societal perceptions influencing whether and how women can use technology. There is a prevalent belief that digital tools are not appropriate for women, and this belief is compounded by concerns over their safety and a general lack of understanding about the potential benefits of digital technologies.² In 2019, the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) reports that more than 50% of the world's women are offline, and while the 2023 Mobile Gender Gap report demonstrates that the gender gap in mobile usage had seen a reduction for a period, post covid-19 pandemic, the rate of change has significantly stagnated.

Additionally, within the South and Southeast context, there remains differences in the literacy levels which also affects the capacity to use digital tools/apps, often owing to the behavioural familiarity. For example, in Bangladesh lower general literacy levels

among women in the textile, garment, and footwear industry further impede their ability to engage with digital tools effectively. This literacy gap adds another layer of challenge, limiting some women in the South Asian context from fully participating in and benefiting from the digital aspects of the industry, thereby reinforcing their confinement to lower-skilled, lower-paid roles.³ In countries with higher literacy rates, the access to information and internet usage tends to be greater, as seen in Cambodia. The purpose of use is also often more diverse, where the digital realm is used to facilitate finances, education and create social networks, especially among younger age groups. While access to the internet itself may not have a large gap as one of the key findings from the 2018 Girl Effect Impact report suggests, the determinants to access are often different based on gender, as the 2023 Mobile Gender Gap Report illustrates, where for women barriers are often social belief, and literacy levels.

Based on the current reality and conditions across the region, it is evident that sociocultural norms and values which are expressed via normative gender identities, are superimposed on and determine the way workers navigate their roles and positions within the industry. General perceptions towards women in the industry, as an extension of social belief systems, is that they are less skilled with technologies, be it digital tools or be it machinery in the factories. This limits the roles allocated for them in the current dimension, and with a shift of the industry towards automation and AI interfaces to seek sustainability in the production process, women's employment

¹ Rahman et al., Declining Women Garment Workers; Report, "Failures in Cambodia RMG Sector"; Genzmer, "Sunday Cafés and Women's Center: Empowering Garment Workers in Myanmar"; Gavalyugova and Cunningham, "Gender Analysis of the Cambodian Labor Market The World Bank."

² UNICEF East Asia & Pacific, "What We Know about the Gender Digital Divide for Girls: A Literature Review."

³ Rahman et al., Declining Women Garment Workers.

opportunities are rendered further limited. In spite of the barriers and challenges discussed here, there are great strides in closing the mobile gender gap, and exemplar response to digital apps such as Cambodia's '[Seth Yerng - Our Rights](#)' with more than 30k downloads, or the Bangladesh based '[Amader Mili](#)' YouTube channel with 29.3k subscribers, indicate that capacity development on local law and familiarity with the rights and justice framework are bound to be successful when pursued with digital mediums of intervention.

ii. Digitalisation and Access to Rights

Most workers do not have access to the knowledge framework which would allow them to distinguish the legal bindings which exist to ensure rightful working conditions and remunerations. Beyond that, workers without access to this knowledge cannot exercise or participate in actions oriented towards collective bargaining. Working towards gender equity necessarily means addressing the gaps to access within all levels of interaction, i.e. job roles, wages, working hours and occupational mobility. This move towards capacity development in local law will also enable one to overcome structural or systemic differences in the sociocultural norms which often are expressed via tropes such as men being successful in leadership roles, and women being assumed responsible for unpaid care work.

BENEFITS OF THE USAGE OF DIGITAL APPS AND TOOLS

a) Accessibility and Convenience

Digital tools make legal information easily accessible to workers, regardless of their location. Mobile apps, websites, and online



platforms can provide workers with 24/7 access to legal resources, training modules, and information about their rights. This convenience is particularly valuable for workers with demanding schedules who might not be able to attend in-person training sessions. This characteristic allows flexibility for the users to learn and familiarise themselves as they go through the modules at their own pace. Moreover, this medium allows one to easily look back at the information they have previously referred to, creating a feedback mechanism that can keep informing improved learning designs that can be adapted relatively fast. In addition, the digital platforms can host comprehensive resource libraries that include legal documents, case studies, FAQs,



and other educational materials. Workers can access these resources as needed to deepen their understanding of specific legal issues or to find answers to their questions.

b) Interactive Learning and Gamification

Digital platforms offer interactive learning experiences, such as quizzes, simulations, and scenario-based training. These methods can help workers better understand and retain complex legal concepts by engaging them actively in the learning process. Interactive content can also be customised to address specific legal issues relevant to the garment industry. Gamification involves

incorporating game-like elements into the training process, such as rewards, challenges, and progress tracking. This approach can make learning about local laws more engaging and motivating for workers, encouraging them to complete training modules and apply their knowledge in real-life situations. In Bangladesh, the Ami Nargis campaign was successful due to employing tools combining education and entertainment, such as the use of quiz shows.

c) Multilingual Support

Language barriers can be a significant obstacle in legal education. Digital tools can



offer multilingual support, providing training materials and resources in various languages spoken by workers in different regions. This ensures that more workers can understand and benefit from the training, regardless of their native language.

d) Scalability

Digital tools can be scaled to reach a large number of workers across multiple locations simultaneously. This scalability is cost-effective and efficient, allowing organisations to extend their training programmes to a broader audience without the need for extensive physical infrastructure or personnel.

e) Transformative Information Streamlining

Legal frameworks and regulations can change frequently. Digital platforms can be updated quickly to reflect the latest legal developments, ensuring that workers always have access to the most current information. This is critical for keeping workers informed about their rights and any new protections or obligations. Many of the online tools were also adapted to provide information related to emergencies, such as during the COVID-19 crisis.

f) Confidentiality and Safety

Digital tools can offer a level of confidentiality and safety that is not always



possible with in-person training sessions. Workers can access information and training discreetly, which is particularly important in environments where discussing labour rights might be discouraged or could lead to retaliation from employers. Instead of having to be physically and visibly present at events where they risk being identified, they can access the information through their homes, using mobile data.

g) Peer Learning and Support

Online forums, chat groups, and social media platforms can facilitate peer-to-peer learning and support. Workers can share their experiences, ask questions, and provide advice to each other, fostering a sense of

community and collective empowerment. These digital communities can also help in mobilising and organising workers for collective actions.

h) Monitoring and Evaluation

Digital tools can track progress and assess the effectiveness of training programmes through data analytics. This allows organisations to monitor how well workers are understanding and applying the information, and to make data-driven adjustments to improve the training programmes over time.

CURRENT UTILITIES OF DIGITAL TOOLS ACROSS THE REGIONS

Current strategies and practices using digital tools for enhancing workers' capacities in knowledge about rights and legal frameworks in the garment industry across regions involve a variety of innovative approaches. These strategies leverage technology to make legal education more accessible, engaging, and effective. Additionally, existing media platforms are instrumental in countries, where challenges such as resistance from employers, limited resources, cultural barriers, legal and regulatory hurdles, and intersectional challenges persist, according to the Multistakeholder Alliance for Decent Employment Myanmar-MADE in Myanmar. These challenges tend to curtail collective organisation efforts to connect women, provide resources, and support their rights and well-being in crisis response to rights violations, especially those occurring on the grounds of Gender Based Violence and Harassment (GBVH).

Below are some notable strategies and practices:

EXISTING PLATFORMS

AMI NARGIS



Bangladesh

The Ami Nargis Digital Campaign is a comprehensive initiative aimed at educating and supporting workers in Bangladesh. Launched in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the campaign uses a fictional character, Nargis, to disseminate health information through various digital platforms.

Areas Addressed

Occupational health and safety.

Collaborators/Supporters

Ami Nargis Digital Campaign is funded by GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit) and implemented by SIWI (Stockholm International Water Institute).

Target/Reach

> 6000 garment and leather factory workers on our social media platforms along with 15 highly motivated community leaders.

Specific Features

The campaign includes comic series, animation videos, live doctor sessions, quizzes, and roadshows to engage workers and raise awareness about health issues like COVID-19 and dengue. It also celebrates special days with workers to build strong community ties.

- Comics
- Doctors' Live sessions
- Radio Shows
- Fun Activities
- TV Shows
- Competitions

Relevant Links



AMADER MILI



Bangladesh

Amader Mili is programmed to raise awareness about workers protections, legal rights, and working environment in the Textile and Leather Sectors.

Areas Addressed

Website: Multimedia approach to learning about workers health and rights spanning issues on gender based violence and harassment, gender based discrimination, women worker's needs and protection mechanism, and awareness about women's cafes.

Collaborators/Supporters

Amader Mili is a programme as part of the Sustainability in the Textile and Leather Sector (STILE) project Commissioned by German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, implemented by GIZ, with associate partners Particip, RedOrange Communications and COEL.

Target/Reach

29.3k subscribers on their YouTube channel.

Specific Features

Songs, Talk Shows, YouTube Shorts, Dramas, and Series.

Relevant Links



SETH YERNG - OUR RIGHTS



Cambodia

‘Seth Yerng - Our Rights’ aims to improve textile workers’ knowledge of their rights and occupational health and safety issues, empowering Cambodian garment workers by enhancing their knowledge of labour laws and occupational health and safety regulations.

Areas Addressed

App: wage calculator; learning labour laws and rights, and occupational health and safety via story and quiz.

Collaborators/Supporters

The “Seth Yerng - Our Rights” app, is developed by the GIZ FABRIC project. The app collaborates with brands to promote its use in factories, aiming to improve working conditions and support workers in asserting their rights.

The main objective is to improve the knowledge of garment workers on their rights and obligations under the Cambodian labour law with a focus on the following 2 main sections

- The most important labour laws
- Occupational health and safety (OHS) regulations in the workplace

Target/Reach

Launched in March 2021, the app has been downloaded more than 31,000 times and has reached over half a million people via social networks. 49 factories have participated in the trainings reaching an estimated 66,000 workers.

Specific Features

Songs, Talk Shows, YouTube Shorts, Dramas, and Series.

Relevant Links



SHWE JOB



Myanmar

This app, presents the most important rights and duties at work in an easily understandable form and language to increase awareness and knowledge of the existing labour laws in Myanmar.

Areas Addressed

App: Learning labour laws and rights, and occupational health and safety.

Collaborators/Supporters

Shwe Job is an app created by SMART Myanmar, funded by the European Union and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Target/Reach

The Shwe Job app has registered about 16,000 downloads since May 2017.

300 graduates from the Aung Myin Hmu Garment Skills Training Centre for garment workers were trained on occupational health and safety and human resources practices using the Shwe Job app.

Specific Features

Anecdotal knowledge transfer; salary calculator.

Relevant Links



SATYONE SUPERSTAR



Myanmar

The app Satyone Superstar (factory superstar), queries the content of the Shwe Job app via an interactive game taking place in a factory.

Areas Addressed

App: Learning labour laws and rights, and occupational health and safety.

Collaborators/Supporters

Satyone Superstar is an app created by SMART Myanmar, funded by the European Union and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH.

Target/Reach

The game app Satyone Superstar, introduced in February 2018, has reached more than more than 3,000 downloads so far.

Specific Features

Points-based progression game connected to knowledge gained on Shwe Job app

The concept behind it: Give the target group not only what it needs, but also what it wants. After six long working days in the factory the women want to rest and recover. A game that invites users to have fun is therefore a sensible addition to the information app.

Relevant Links



RISE DIGITAL



RISE Digital is an app-based programme which provides critical training for female and male workers and managers in global supply chains, including information on health, financial resilience, and tools for building harmonious relationships and handling stress.

Areas Addressed

Critical training for female and male workers and managers in global supply chains, including information on health, financial resilience, and tools for building harmonious relationships and handling stress. The programme increases workers' digital and tech literacy, especially among low-income women with low tech skills. RISE Digital enables suppliers to offer valuable worker training on essential topics.

Collaborators/Supporters

RISE: Reimagining Industry to Support Equality is a collaborative initiative supporting industry to advance equality for women workers in global garment supply chains.

RISE brings together the four largest women's empowerment programmes in the apparel industry - from BSR's HERproject, Gap Inc. P.A.C.E, CARE and Better Work - to build from proven approaches, scale impact and improve efficiency.

Specific Features

The RISE Digital app was developed with workers in mind—ensuring usability for those with low tech literacy and low literacy levels. Once downloaded on tablets, the app is available offline, which is ideal for workplaces where connectivity is low. The app includes animations to teach core concepts, games to solidify understanding, and pre- and post- quizzes to assess learning.

Relevant Links

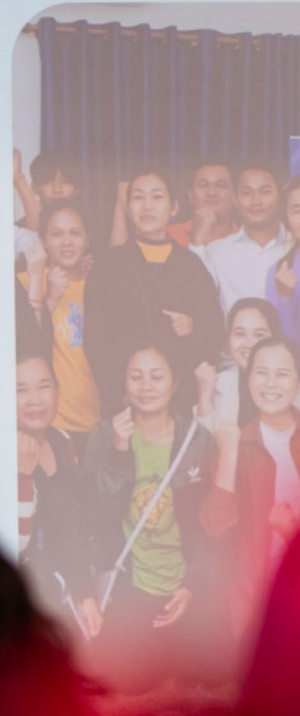


WELCOME

TO

WOMEN'S CENTERS NETWORK

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IV. STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIONS

The Women's Center Network Exchange in Bangladesh in April 2024 brought together key stakeholders involved in the management, implementation, and support of Women's Cafés in Bangladesh, Women's Centers in Myanmar, and the Women Empowerment House (WE House) in Cambodia. Participants included development partners, local NGOs operating the cafes, managers and responsible individuals from the Women Cafes, and notably, female garment workers from Bangladesh. Over three days, the exchange provided a platform for stakeholders to

address the challenges and opportunities faced by the Women's Centers in each country with a focus on how Women's Cafés in different countries use digital apps and tools to raise awareness among workers. Through collaborative discussions, they explored effective approaches and strategies to foster a more holistic mechanism on integrating and using digital realms.

The key stakeholder discussions amongst partner NGO's and workers explored the following:

a) Roles of Women's Cafés in Using Digital Tools

The Women's Cafés are leveraging digital tools to enhance communication, education, and empowerment among female garment workers. Social media and digital platforms facilitate cultural exchange and promote the use of digital tools, making them essential for capacity development through human-centric design where video clips, movies, short films, and interactive formats such as quiz competitions are used widely to communicate actions and enhance knowledge on rights frameworks.

b) Cultural Exchange and Adaptability

The Women's Cafés serve as spaces for cultural exchange, using digital platforms to connect women across regions, fostering understanding and solidarity. These spaces adapt to different times and events, demonstrating flexibility and resilience in response to changing circumstances, and extending inclusion of family members to create ease of access and demonstrate need for such third spaces.

c) Similar Realities Across Regions

Women in Cambodia, Bangladesh, and Myanmar face similar challenges, making shared solutions and strategies relevant across borders, such as an unequal share in care work, sexual violence, wage discrimination, etc. Digital tools and spaces need time to be understood and tailored to address the intersectional realities of women's lives.

d) Addressing Systemic Limitations

Multifaceted approaches are needed to address systemic limitations. Women workers shared that their mobility and engagements are regulated to the extent that suspicion and aggression will arise when asking for holidays to participate in such

activities, so they either find an alternative reason or they synchronise their calendars to identify existing holidays to partake in dialogues. As such, the platforms that facilitate exchanges between different hierarchical levels can help bridge communication gaps and foster mutual understanding and accessible digital tools can help alleviate these risks.

These discussions underscore the importance of a holistic, community-driven approach to enhancing the capacities and rights of female garment workers through the strategic use of digital tools and collaborative efforts.





V. RECOMMENDATIONS TO ACTIONS

Developing strategies to enhance women's confidence and skills in using digital tools while connecting them to social and digital networks is key. Making information on local laws clear, practical, and easy to apply, while overcoming language and cultural barriers, can spark greater interest and engagement, ensuring more women benefit from these resources.

a) Highlighting Success Stories

Sharing success stories can inspire and motivate workers, demonstrating the tangible benefits of collaborative efforts and

digital tools make this information available for such comprehension.

b) Community Approach and Toolkit Development

A community approach has proven most successful in achieving real change, emphasising the importance of collective efforts. As such, developing industry-level toolkits and course schedules for basic training can standardise and upscale the education of workers on their rights and skills.

c) Social and Monetary Gaps in Access

to Educational Resources

Efforts must be made to bridge social and monetary gaps, ensuring equitable access to resources and opportunities. To this end, education and training using exemplary strategies such as the 2-Minute School Format with short, easily accessible educational formats can help workers quickly gain valuable knowledge.

workers' rights and well-being. By establishing dedicated steering committees and fostering skill-sharing initiatives among women, we can create a supportive environment that not only strengthens their knowledge of rights but also empowers them to stay engaged in the workforce. These efforts ensure long-term sustainability and prevent women from being left behind due to a lack of awareness or opportunities.

d) Safeguarding and Redressal Mechanisms

Effective safeguarding and redressal mechanisms are essential to protecting



