

INITIATIVE

Three siblings, Kendall, Courtney and Trevor Islam, based in California, USA have taken it upon themselves to provide football boots to the girls of Safura Khatun Girls High School in Karimpur - a remote char (island) in Narshingdi.

This brilliant idea surfaced when Kendall visited the school in 2014, which was founded by her grandfather. The schoolgirls' passion for the game and their skills are what that drove Kendall and her siblings to initiate the campaign called "Kickstart Karimpur" in October, 2015.

"Their soccer skills were impressive, but they played in traditional Bengali clothing and sandals. After returning home, we wanted to support the school in a way that was special to both the students and to us, so we started an organisation called "KickStart Karimpur" to collect soccer cleats and donate them to the girls," Kendal writes in the project's homepage.

Kendall and her siblings managed to collect 120 pairs of shoes and additionally raised funds to cover the shipment cost within December 2015. Unfortunately, the schoolgirls of Karimpur did not ultimately receive the football boots as



KickStart Karimpur: Awaiting Justice and Mercy

they are held by the Customs Authority at Dhaka Shahjalal International Airport since they arrived back in January 2016, for paying off customs duty of \$2500 which is equivalent to Tk. 1,60,000, an amount that neither Kendall and her siblings nor the school can afford to pay.

INTELLECT.com.bd captured the news and published it in February 2016. A team of lawyers from Old Bailey Chambers took interest in the issue and took it up on pro-bono basis. For over seven months now, the lawyers at Old Bailey Chambers have been fighting for the release of the football boots on legal grounds. In February they wrote to NBR seeking exemption of customs duty worth Tk. 160,000, so that the boots are released without having to pay the duty. Customs law allows NBR to exempt any goods from payment of duty, in public interest under circumstances of exceptional nature. NBR never paid any attention to that letter.

The lawyers' team to find a way out for the boots filed a Writ Petition on 11.04.2016 seeking direction from the High Court. High Court issued Rule Nisi. No interim order was passed though. Later on during the Rule hearing, the Government Counsels' vehemently opposed the duty exemption. They argued that the recipient Safura Khatun Girls High School must first obtain an NOC from Ministry of Commerce, and then for being an educational institution apply to Ministry of Education for permission.

"The proposition made by the Government lawyers at the High Court is completely unknown to, and not prescribed by any statute or law in Bangladesh. The 120 pairs of used boots were collected through charity in USA

TAHMINISHA SAYARAH KHAN

PHOTO COURTESY: KICKSTART KARIMPUR

and were then sent to the School for charitable purpose in public interest. They were not imported, and cannot be termed as 'import'. But the Government lawyers kept on pressing the same time and again, and thus consumed few good months as Barrister Hamidul Mishbah, the lawyer for the Writ Petition commented.

On 23rd August 2016, High Court passed an order directing the customs to exempt boots from paying the customs duty, and further, observed that the distribution of the shoes be done in presence of the local UNO & Upazila Education Officer.

"With passing of this order the wait for the coveted football boots could have been over soon for the schoolgirls! But then, along came the "crusader of government duty" - a superficial character from the government's armor, who aspired to leave no stone unturned to deny the poor and disadvantaged schoolgirls their long cherished desire of playing football wearing boots, in the name of ensuring earning a lump sum duty of Tk. 160,000 upon suppressing a greater public interest. This incident draws our attention to the utter lack of guidelines in our country as to how government organs

weigh the importance of greater public interest as opposed to petite pecuniary benefits, i.e. collecting Tk. 160,000 duty," Nahid Hossain, a lawyer at Old Bailey Chambers, commented.

Well, only time will tell, whether a 'genuine cause and public interest' would get preference over government collecting a mere amount of Tk. 160,000 as duty from the used boots. ■



AWARENESS

Momina Khatun (not her real name) has been working in a garment factory in Savar for three years. She is a mother of a 4 year-old boy. Her husband also works in another garment factory and with both of their hard earned income; they take care of their small family and their parents residing in the rural areas of Bangladesh's Kushtia district.

"When I was employed in the factory my son was only a year old. When I went to work I used to keep my boy with an elderly neighbour of mine and I

Momina heard that one of her colleague's son of the same age died from drowning in a pool when the mother was at work, this was the only solution anxious Momina could come up with.

The strict working schedule in these garment factories also added further hardships for these working mothers. Long working hours often do not allow them to maintain health precautions that are necessary for lactating mothers. "Our factory and residences are both in Savar, adjacent to the Dhaka-Aricha

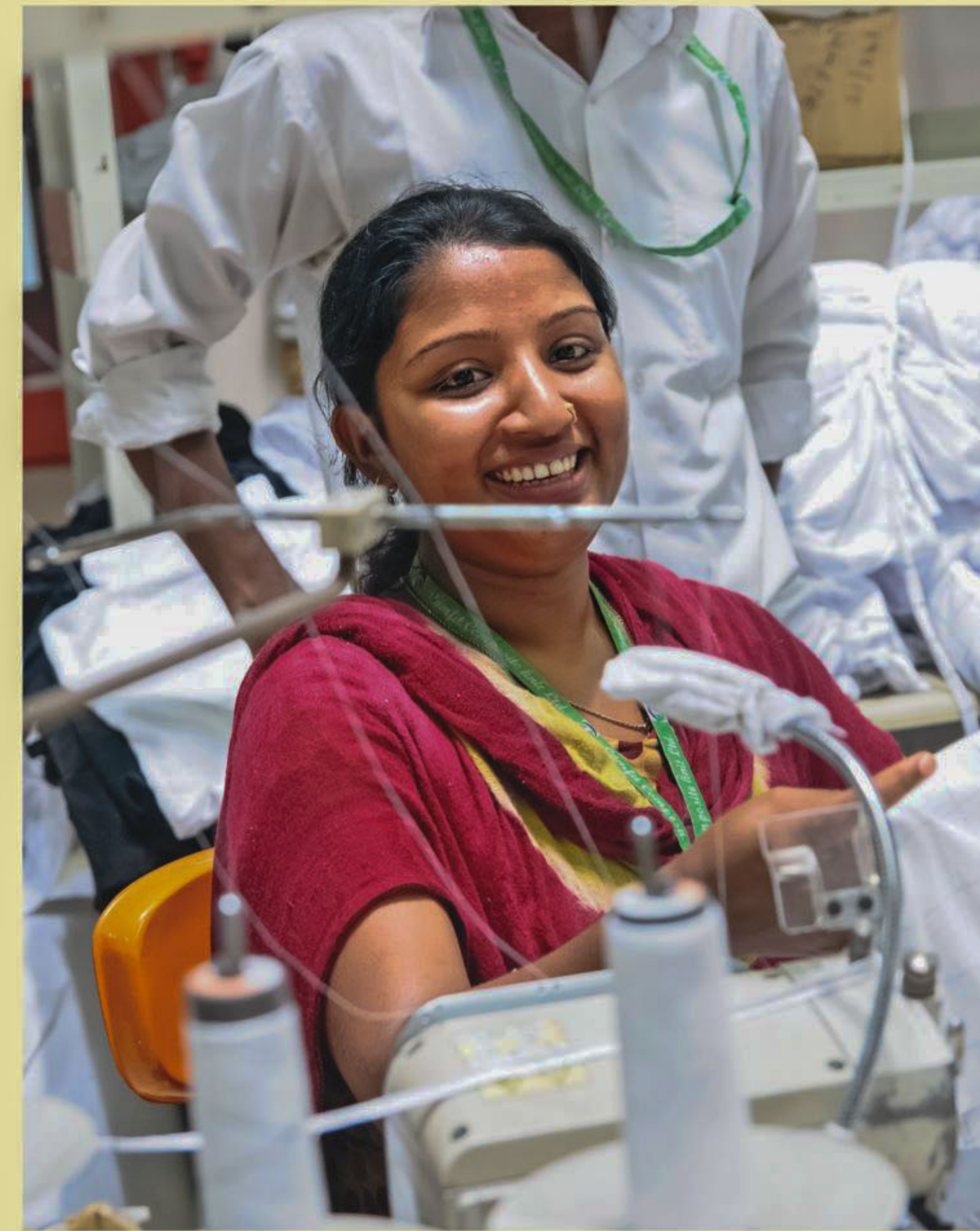
includes clinics, garment factories and women workers to build their capacity to provide sexual and reproductive healthcare facilities to the workers. The healthcare professionals of clinics adjacent to garment factories are provided with funds and capacity building trainings so that they can offer sufficient services to these women. On the other hand, the garment factory management is consulted to work with the nearby clinics so that their workers can get proper healthcare facilities in due time and in affordable price.

healthcare facilities for 22,000 female workers. "This unique model builds the capacity of every stakeholder such as healthcare professionals, garment workers and factory managers to make it sustainable and effective. By providing quality services medical centres will be benefitted, by getting healthy manpower the production line of the industries will be increased and the workers will lead a healthy life and this sustainable developed future is our goal," says Fartheeba Rahat Khan, team leader of Working with Women Project

WOES OF GARMENTS WORKERS INTRODUCING SRHR

MD SHAHNAWAZ KHAN CHANDAN

PHOTOS: ?????



Four million female workers are working in more than four thousand garment factories in Bangladesh which is the lifeline of the country's economy. Many factories are still negligent about this basic right of their workers.

had to pay her a good amount of money. However, I soon started to realise that I was unable to afford the expenditure and my toddler son was also not taken care of properly. My son was also too restive to be controlled by an old person," says Momina.

As a result, Momina had to come up with a solution that was effective but not acceptable. "Now when I go to work I tie my son with a shackle to the door of their only room. The shackle is a few yards in length which allows him to move and feed but not to go outside the room," shares Momina. When

highway. If we or our children fall sick, we have to travel a long distance to get better treatment. And, quality treatment for the mothers of new born babies is really very scarce and quite expensive for us, shares Sharifa Akhter a colleague of Momina.

However, an initiative has been taken to establish the rights of these working mothers; the right to give proper care to themselves and to their beloved children. SNV Netherlands Development Organisation has come up with a unique model called Inclusive Business Model which

A management of Northern Corporation Limited says, "We welcomed the development workers when they came to train our officials and workers about the sexual and reproductive health rights of female RMG workers. We have started working with a nearby clinic and hospital where our workers can get medical facilities at discounted price and they have also hired a female doctor to provide maternal and gynaecological services."

At present, SNV has reached 20 garment factories and enabled them to provide sexual and reproductive

which has been implementing Inclusive Business Model in Bangladesh.

Four million female workers are working in more than four thousand garment factories in Bangladesh which is the lifeline of the country's economy. Many factories are still negligent about this basic right of their workers. The government should take step to encourage these initiatives and monitor the implementation so that the workers can truly be benefitted which will ultimately nourish the country's economy.