

MAINSTREAMING THE CULTURE OF PREVENTION IN THE LEATHER INDUSTRY



Md. Ruhul Amin
Deputy Secretary
Ministry of Labour and
Employment
Government of the People's
Republic of Bangladesh

We are committed to safeguarding the industry for which we have brought about relevant amendments to the labour law. There have been other developments, such as elimination of child labour in the tannery sector within the past four months. We have also gone for overseas visits to gain experience and later developed an OHS policy to maintain standards. Even an OHS academy is being opened in Rajshahi. The leather sector has huge potential after the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry, especially due to the easy availability of raw materials. Compliance would automatically attract business for the sector. The government has also taken initiatives such as increasing the number of inspectors from 175 to 475. We have applied to the public administration ministry to increase the number of inspectors to 2,000. Moreover work is also ongoing to augment the capacity of institutions tasked with enforcing the law.



Luther Szych
GIZ/DGUV

The prevention strategy differs from country to country. In Germany, the prevention strategy dates back to some 130 years. It takes a lot of time. It is very important to have a very good PPE for the workers. The first strategy in my opinion is to minimise the hazards and risks and, if that is not possible, to provide the PPE. Experience can be gathered and we can provide support.



Syed Ibtesham Yameen
Procurement In-charge
Alpha Sports Gear BD Ltd

Since we are talking about culture, we should also think of informal ways of creating awareness through social media such as Facebook as it is not only popular in the managerial level but also among workers. We could have a platform with pictures showing different prevention methods which would be easy for workers to understand and have a much larger penetration. To create a culture of raising awareness, we must take on an interdisciplinary approach bringing in people from other fields.



Firoz Alam
Technical Advisor
Employment Injury Protection
Scheme for Workers in the
Textile and Leather Industries
(EIPS), GIZ

There are huge differences between footwear/leather goods and tannery sectors with regards to implementation of health and safety measures. The PPE is the last resort of the sector as control measures such as risk assessments should be carried out at first. However, whenever there is any risk assessment training being conducted, people from the corporate office are sent to take part although they have nothing to do with the implementation. They have no link with the operator at the plants, for which no learning is being communicated or disseminated at the plant level. The associations must come up.



Md. Mominul Ahsan
Chief Executive Officer
COEL

Bangladesh's manufacturing industries have been long plagued by occupation health and safety concerns and have been unable to proactively respond to these issues. The leather sector in particular still lacks the general awareness required to mitigate these longstanding problems. We have to bear in mind that industry growth and the rights and safety of its hard working labour force go hand in hand. We cannot expect our labour force to ceaselessly contribute to the development of our sector without ensuring their rights being ensured. In fact, the industry's growth needs to be adequately supported by frameworks and schemes with the appropriate capacity to support its biggest resource – the workers. As industry leaders and stakeholders, we must be able to develop the empathy and kindness required to alleviate their concerns regarding injuries, illness, exhaustion and even something as simple as backaches, in addition to many other health and safety concerns.

Many attempts have been made by industry experts to take measures and strategies to prevent, control, reduce or eliminate occupational hazards and safety concerns in the workplace. However, they were not strong enough to eliminate these issues entirely. Effective controls protect workers from workplace hazards; help avoid injuries, illnesses, and incidents; minimize or eliminate safety and health risks; and help employers provide workers with safe and healthy working place.

To effectively control and prevent hazards, we should:

The Centre of Excellence for Leather Skill Bangladesh Limited (COEL) in collaboration with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH organised a round table meeting on "Mainstreaming the Culture of Prevention in the Leather Industry" on 25 November 2019 in Dhaka.

Md. Ruhul Amin, Deputy Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, was the chief guest at the event where sector leaders, development partners and other stakeholders were also present.

Through the presentation, the COEL showcased activities carried out to build awareness on preventive measures on Occupational Health & Safety (OHS). Afterwards, an open discussion was held among the participants seeking future guidance and suggestions regarding the issue.

The Centre of Excellence for Leather Skill Bangladesh Limited (COEL) is an organisation dedicated to assess demands and cater services for the leather sector. It plays a vital role for both manufacturers, as well as supply chain players to effectively disseminate technical information, route knowledge diffusion and provide skill solutions. It is guided by Industry Skills Council (ISC) and has an important role in materialising National Skills Development Policy. Responsive to industry needs and emerging challenges, it brings solutions enabling the sustainability of the sector.

The COEL promotes Skill Development, OHS management system, Decent Work, Gender Mainstreaming, and Social Compliance.

The COEL provides: Customised training for machine operator, supervisors and machine maintenance; Audit and environmental, labour law and social compliance services and training on fire and electrical safety and OHS etc; Design and product development through basic and advance (CAD) designing training and grading and pattern making; and Consultancy on business plan, training need analysis, project proposal, training manual, research and development, and baseline survey.

The COEL's services benefit the industry as it addresses the needs and requirements of the leading supply chain players and caters customised services to them, provides skill training to

the industry in order to minimise the skill gap and enhance productivity and provides service to all the leather sector association members including tanneries and SME clusters.

The COEL's partnerships are with the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Leathergoods And Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB), the Footwear Design and Development Institute of India, International Labour Organization, The University of Northampton, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, CRP-Bangladesh, European Union, Central Leather Research Institute of India, WRAP, Gana Unnayan Kendra, Bangladesh Paduka Prostutkarak Samity and GIZ.

The COEL's achievements include training 18,000+ machine operators and 7,000+ mid-level managers, empowering 70% of women among them, 98% employment generation after training and developing leather SME cluster.

The COEL's strategic advantages are its strong connection and trust, wider & easy access to industry, promotion of gender & social compliance, past record of ensuring occupational health & safety and introducing personal protective equipment to some factories, SME clusters and tanneries.



Imran Namul Kopol
Manager Operations
COEL

delivered the presentation:

The COEL's intervention with GIZ was through GIZ supported project named Employment Injury Protection Scheme for Workers in the Textile and Leather Industries (EIPS). The EIPS project's intervention period was from 1 October 2018 to 30 October 2019.

As per International Labour Organization: Workers suffer over 250 million accidents every year and 160 million occupational diseases; Almost 2 million die each year from their jobs (5,500/day); The economic losses are equivalent to 4 per cent of the world's gross national product; and Social consequence for families and communities are incalculable.

The prevention mechanism's legal framework will be guided by employers who take the responsibility of preparing the workplace which is safe and has workable conditions and try to minimise the risk and hazard, employees who try to be aware of what is harmful for them and act accordingly, and law enforcement groups whose responsibility is to periodically visit factories and establishments to see their conditions and report on them.

The massive improvements have been aided by strong steering from the Ministry of Labour and Employment (MoLE). For providing the legal framework for the improvements, the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) was amended and Bangladesh Labour Rules were released in 2015.

German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) has commissioned GIZ to support the development of an employment injury protection scheme for the workers in the textile, garment and leather sectors in Bangladesh.

Against this backdrop, the COEL has been engaged by GIZ with a holistic approach to ensure mainstreaming of the Risk Assessment to improve health & safety status of the industry and certain factory management with the necessary skills.

As for prevention practices, the use of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has strong impact on occupational disease prevention in a sector where workers are exposed to the chemicals, dusts, and their components, etc.

In the intervention on prevention issues, the COEL and GIZ worked on process map development for tannery, leather goods and footwear sub-sector, amendment of the training materials according to the leather sector, train the trainer program for developing trainers for risk assessment on OHS issues, and the COEL's internal capacity building and publicity (SEO of COEL Website) and social media advertisements.

The two organisations also provided training on risk assessment for Occupational Health & Safety; sustainability related capacity building among the mid-level managers of the leather sector on soft skills development and grievance management, supply chain management and sustainability,

- Involve workers, who often have the best understanding of the conditions that create hazards and insights into how they can be controlled.
- Identify and evaluate options for controlling hazards, using a "hierarchy of controls."
- Use a hazard control plan to guide the selection and implementation of controls, and implement controls according to the plan.
- Develop plans with measures to protect workers during emergencies and non-routine activities.
- Evaluate the effectiveness of existing controls to determine whether they continue to provide protection, or whether different controls may be more effective. Review new technologies for their potential to be more protective, more reliable, or less costly.

It is an absolute necessity to Mainstream the Culture of Prevention of Occupational Health and Safety concerns that would effectively allow our workforce to be appropriately aware of injuries and prevention mechanisms.

The GIZ has been a long-term friend to our industry and has successfully contributed to many positive changes through provision of training programmes and advocating for the overall prosperity of our industry and its stakeholders. This initiative was to mainstream the culture of prevention of Occupational Health & Safety to develop the capacity of factory members from the Bangladesh Tanners Association (BTA), Leathergoods And Footwear Manufacturers & Exporters

managing gender inequality and diversity at workplace and Occupational Health & Safety; and training on social issues including compensation, rehabilitation, and return to work.

Major learnings of the training on risk assessment of Occupational Health & Safety: identify the hazards, identify all affected by the hazard and how, evaluate the risk, identify and prioritise appropriate control measures, and assessment of risk.

According to the study on Workplace Injuries and Occupational Diseases in the Leather Sector in Bangladesh conducted by BIDS and GIZ Bangladesh the lessons learnt are that injury can be minimised at the initial stage by the following:

1. Conducting proper risk assessment on OHS is the integral part of OHS management system, through which the employer can get the overview of hazards and risks exist at the factory
2. Workers should be supplied with proper PPE and in sufficient quantities
3. Health and safety training should take place at least twice a year and there should also be fresher's training for the new entrants
4. Every factory should have a functional safety committee and the committee should conduct regular meetings
5. Workers should be made aware to the possible hazards of the activities they are performing
6. The employers should make all effort to spread knowledge among the workers on how to maintain good health, help develop a positive attitude among the workers and encourage the practice of using PPE
7. The employers should help the workers maintain their health, screen early detection of work related symptoms and provide better health care services
8. Safety related stickers, leaflets, posters, should be developed, posted in the factories, and distributed among the employees
9. All enterprises should have permanent medical officers/ doctors to provide immediate assistance to the injured and also provide medical advice regarding occupational diseases
10. The employers should help the workers maintain their health, screen early detection of work related symptoms and provide better health care services
11. Develop trainers/experts at factory level to implement prevention activities

The suggestions are that many of the injuries and occupational diseases could be avoided if the workers were supplied with proper and sufficient quantities of PPE. It may not be possible to completely prevent accidents, but appropriate preventive and curative measures could be taken to minimise the incidents and mitigate the severity of the injuries and occupational diseases. Even in some cases, workers could return to work more quickly after encountering accidents if they receive early medical attention and timely compensation for their injury as the delay in treatment only worsens the situation.

Association of Bangladesh (LFMEAB) and the Bangladesh Finished Leather & Leather Goods & Footwear Exporters Association (BFLFEA) to address and mitigate occupational health and safety concerns. Through the course of this project, several training sessions were conducted on Risk Assessment for Occupational Health and Safety which were attended by a total of approximately 150 participants from the member factories. The main objective of these sessions was to create awareness on OHS and develop the capacities of the participants to contribute to the implementation of the EIPS scheme at their respective organisations. I must say that this project would not have been successful without the kind cooperation of LFMEAB, BFLFEA and BTA, my heartfelt gratitude goes out to them for their contribution to making this project a success.

From a historical and ideological viewpoint, there has been a dramatic transformation in the nature of work, working style and work-related stress. As these changes continue to evolve, it is necessary to detect tasks changing with the times, provide interventional services by taking in results from studies, including those in related to scientific fields, and verify the results of the intervention. The important issues in occupational safety and health that needs to be addressed for the future are:

- (1) Establishment of a service system for all workers of the sector
- (2) Continuous review of occupational health & safety (OHS)



Dr Silvia Popp
Project Manager
GIZ Bangladesh

The leather industry is one of the priority and emerging sectors of Bangladesh with a target of reaching \$5 billion in exports by 2021. Compliance with international standards and international law will become more and more important. Bangladesh will become a middle income country soon and in 2021 some standards, such as the preferential "Everything but Arms" treatment will no longer apply for it, for which it will be more important to rely on standards and certifications. Prevention is one part where certifications can help improve labour standards. The long-term objective of the EIPS is to establish an accident insurance in the textile and leather sectors in Bangladesh. Accident insurance works based on three pillars: prevention, rehabilitation and compensation. The underlying fact is that we focus prevention because it means less accidents and hence less compensation is needed.

Challenges lie ahead in the leather sector, one being that the tannery subsector lags behind that of footwear and leather goods probably due to delays in the relocation from Hazaribagh to Savar. Nevertheless we have completed the certification process for ISO 4501, which is an important component for footwear. We hope to reach the knowledge to the ground level and not limit it to the corporate level. Factory managements should also be mobilised to bring in practices and then associations can work towards that end.



Imran Namul Kopol
Manager Operations
COEL

There is huge scope of work in the tannery sector, especially in raising awareness among both owners on how risky long term exposure is for the workers and workers on understanding what are harmful for them. Industry people know that they have to use PPE and others but are not aware of the dangers and so are not using those regularly. The awareness needs to come to avail certifications such as that from Leather Working Group.



Md Mostafizur Rahman
Head of HR
Administration and
Compliance
FB Footwear Ltd

Trainings on occupational health and safety are very much important for the footwear sector as it is faring well in other factors such as market growth and wages. Disciplinary actions do not work when it comes to having workers use PPE. Only rewards work. Training sessions can incorporate visual narrations including videos on the detrimental effects of not using PPE as images have a much bigger impact on the mind. Factory owners also need to humely consider the impact the work leaves on workers and act accordingly.



KM Asadun Noor
Program Officer
Solidaridad Network

Our experience says that first commitment is necessary to bring about the changes in the industry. Then after assessment of risks, solutions are provided. Afterwards, on-site implementation needs to be carried out. One catalyst for bringing about the changes is incentive for compliance and that can be through publicly voicing out appreciation of compliant establishments and giving out rewards. Within the establishment, names of workers can be made public.



Md. Arifur Rahman Bhuiyan
Coordinator-Training
Job Placement and Database
LFMEAB-SEIP PIU

Sometimes factories focus too much on the cost of the PPE and at other times lag behind in building awareness to those who use and keep those stocked up. So not only do these awareness building trainings need to be conducted but also follow-ups carried out on practical implementation. People are only moved when something affects them personally. So impact videos on the detrimental consequences can be created and screened every two or three months. These can be followed up by organisations like the COEL.

content depending on the social condition, and (3) Introduction of new evident and preventive solution. Development and introduction of the guides displaying the degree of health and the indication for predicting future condition is essential for the promotion of workers' health. Hence, I would like to invite GIZ Bangladesh to continue their support to the nation's social and economic development and I would say that COEL will be there to move along this qualitative transformation of the Bangladesh leather sector.