LAW BOOK REVIEW

The Worker at the End of the Supply Chain

FOWZUL AZIM



Fowzul Azim is a Legal Analyst and Researcher.

Globalization has a habit of making people disappear.

We see the container ship, but not the hands that packed the box. We see the global brand, but rarely the worker who stitched the shirt. We celebrate exports, foreign investment and integration into world markets, while the human being at the far end of the supply chain is often reduced to a statistic.

Abdullah Al Faruque's *Globalization and Labour Rights: Lessons from the Experiences of Bangladesh* attempts to reverse this disappearance. The book begins with a deceptively simple premise: globalization is not merely an economic phenomenon. It is also a story about power, law and work. As capital, technology and production cross borders, the boundaries of the workplace and the nation-state become increasingly porous. For workers, this can mean opportunity and insecurity at the same time-new jobs alongside precarious employment, and greater participation in the global economy alongside diminished bargaining power.

For Bangladesh, few questions are more consequential. Over several decades, Bangladesh has moved deeply into the global economy through trade liberalisation, foreign investment and export-oriented production. This transformation has generated employment and increased women's participation in paid work. Yet it has also brought informalisation, insecure employment and new forms of vulnerability. Dr. Faruque wisely avoids presenting globalization as either salvation or catastrophe. Its consequences, he argues, depend substantially on the institutions that govern it.

That refusal to offer an easy verdict is one of the book's principal virtues. Across 12 chapters, the author examines industrial relations, labour-law institutions, export processing zones, trade unions, collective bargaining, minimum wages, dispute settlement, international labour standards, social dialogue, post-Rana Plaza initiatives and migrant workers. The subjects are diverse, but they converge on one question: how can workers exercise meaningful rights when the economic forces shaping their working lives increasingly operate beyond national borders?

Bangladesh's ready-made garment industry provides the clearest window into this dilemma. The sector has become one of the country's defining links with the global economy, creating employment on a vast scale and transforming the lives of millions, particularly women. But its success has also exposed the fault lines of global production: low wages, long hours, unsafe workplaces and restrictions on labour rights. The garments sold in affluent markets may travel thousands of miles from factories where workers have little influence over the price, timetable or conditions of production.

Dr. Faruque's discussion of global supply chains is especially revealing because it exposes the geography of value. Bangladesh largely occupies the lower-value stages of production-cutting, making, trimming and shipping-while design, branding, logistics and retail intelligence tend to sit elsewhere. The supply chain is therefore global not only in distance but also in power.

This is where the book moves beyond conventional labour-law analysis. The traditional model-state, employer, worker and union operating within a national framework-has been unsettled by multinational corporations, international buyers, private compliance schemes, transnational unions and multi-stakeholder organisations. Labour governance is no longer confined neatly within national borders.



Abdullah Al Faruque, Globalization and Labour Rights: Lessons from the Experiences of Bangladesh, Palgrave Macmillan/Springer Nature, 2026

The Rana Plaza disaster remains the darkest symbol of this transformation. In 2013, the collapse of Rana Plaza killed more than 1,000 workers and forced the world to confront the human foundations of an industry whose products were sold far beyond Bangladesh. In its aftermath came initiatives including the Accord and the Alliance, alongside wider efforts to improve factory safety and supply-chain governance. Dr. Faruque examines these developments as experiments in transnational and private regulation, raising a larger question: who should bear responsibility for labour conditions when a supply chain stretches across continents?

Yet the book does not confine the labour question to the garment factory. One of its important insights is that the most vulnerable worker may be the one who never enters the formal workplace. Informal employment dominates Bangladesh's labour market, according to the figures cited in the book, leaving a huge proportion of workers outside the effective reach of formal employment protections. Such workers may lack secure wages, fixed hours, paid leave, occupational safety and meaningful representation.

The emerging gig economy adds another layer of uncertainty. Digital platforms, freelancing, ride-sharing and delivery services may offer flexibility, but they raise familiar questions in new forms: Who is the employer? Who bears responsibility for social security? What constitutes a fair wage when the worker is technically independent? The technology may be new; the struggle over power and protection is not.

Trade unions consequently occupy an uneasy place in this landscape. Globalisation can weaken unions by fragmenting production and employment, encouraging subcontracting and eroding the standard employment relationship. Yet it can also create possibilities for transnational worker solidarity. If capital can organise across borders, labour may increasingly need to learn to do the same.

The discussion of international labour standards adds another layer. Bangladesh has ratified most of the ILO's core conventions, and many international principles have found recognition in domestic law. Yet the distance between legal recognition and everyday enforcement remains substantial. Informality, weak enforcement, inadequate resources and precarious employment complicate the translation of rights from paper into practice.

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Dr. Faruque's treatment of human rights due diligence gives the book a particularly contemporary edge. Developments in the UK, France, Australia and Germany, as well as the European Union, increasingly require companies to identify, prevent and address human-rights risks in their supply chains. For Bangladeshi exporters, compliance is therefore becoming more than a voluntary exercise in corporate responsibility; it is increasingly part of a wider regulatory expectation.

The book's breadth is both its strength and, occasionally, its limitation. Its wide-ranging treatment means that some subjects receive more conceptual than empirical attention. Yet that breadth is also what makes the work valuable. Labour law does not exist in a vacuum. Workers' rights are shaped by trade policy, corporate structures, migration regimes, technology, union strength and the ability of public institutions to enforce the law.

Ultimately, *Globalization and Labour Rights* is less a verdict on globalization than an invitation to see it differently. The book reminds us that markets do not write labour law; institutions do. Globalization may create jobs and opportunities, but without effective institutions it can also distribute its risks disproportionately to those least able to bear them.

The irony is that the more interconnected the world becomes, the easier it can be to forget the individual worker within the machinery of connection. Dr. Faruque's achievement is to put that worker back into the picture.

In the end, the book asks a question that reaches far beyond Bangladesh: when the world's economy becomes global, can justice remain local? Its answer is not simple. But its warning is clear: unless rights travel as far as capital does, the promise of globalization will remain incomplete.

LAW WATCH

Bangladesh's measles crisis and the question of legal responsibility

IRNA JAHAN SHEJUTI

Measles is amongst the most preventable diseases known to medicine. A single vaccine, dosed twice, prevents it in the overwhelming majority of children. So, when nearly a thousand children have died of measles in a nationwide outbreak since March this year, coinciding with the steepest decline in Bangladesh's vaccine coverage, from nearly 99.7 per cent as recently as in 2021 to roughly 56–59 per cent by 2025, well below the 95 per cent threshold needed to interrupt transmission, one must ask: was this risk foreseeable, and if so, did the state do enough to avert it?

In fact, in early September, the High Court Division (HCD) of the Supreme Court of Bangladesh (SCOB) has issued a rule asking why the family of a measles victim should not receive Tk 1 crore in compensation.

Constitutionally speaking, Article 15(a) imposes securing medical care among the fundamental responsibilities of the State, while Article 18(1) places public health among the State's primary duties. However, both of these provisions are part of the fundamental principles of state policy, and thus, according to Article 8(2), are judicially unenforceable. Meaning, although the Constitution recognises the importance of public health, it does not, systematically, allow a citizen to demand vaccination as an enforceable constitutional right. The workaround can be found through Article 32's protection of life, which has long been interpreted by our courts as a concept beyond mere physical existence, including protection against foreseeable and preventable threats to survival.

Moreover, the Infectious Diseases (Prevention, Control and Elimination) Act 2018 is the primary legislation that governs issues relating to prevention and control of such diseases in Bangladesh. Section 4 provides a list of infectious diseases, which is non-exhaustive, and the Government may, by gazette, bring any emerging or re-emerging diseases within the Act. The Act further places broad preventive responsibilities on the health authorities in its provisions, including duties to inspect and monitor suspected infections, declare an infected area, and take necessary measures to contain and prevent the transmission. Further, sections 25 and 26 provide for penal sanctions against individuals concealing an infection or disregarding any administrative orders directed under the Act. However, the Act does not prescribe a mandatory minimum vaccine reserve, impose a legal obligation to report a stockout, or establish a minimum coverage threshold. Section 32 empowers the government to make rules, but the Act nowhere specifies how the state should manage an emergency outbreak like the present one.

So when the state outright cancelled a previously deferred supplementary immunisation campaign rather than rescheduling it, or when it moved away from UNICEF's vaccination procurement channel toward a competitive-tender-based system, despite explicit and repeated warnings of the risks, followed by a severe decline in vaccination coverage and ultimately, the outbreak - none of it, strictly speaking, breached a legal duty. This is because the statute only contemplates the citizens failing the state, not the other way around.

The aim is not to make the State responsible for every outbreak that occurs, but to establish a legally responsible framework that will ensure a timely response, so when a similar crisis emerges, the State speaks with action rather than regret.



India shows that the alternative is not necessarily hypothetical. Its Epidemic Diseases Act 1897, together with the Disaster Management Act 2005, gives the State explicit emergency powers over public health, and a number of significant case precedents have been set out in this regard. The 2021 case of *In Re: Distribution of Essential Supplies and Services During Pandemic* (2021), where the Indian Supreme Court took *suo motu* cognisance of the second COVID-19 wave; or the 2026 case, *Rachana Gangu* v *Union of India*, where the court ordered a no-fault compensation framework, holding that grave harm following a state-led public health intervention imposes a *positive obligation* on the state, can be exemplary for Bangladesh.

International law establishes a general preventive standard. Article 12 of ICESCR requires the States to take measures for the prevention, treatment and control of epidemics and other diseases. Similarly, Article 24 of the UNCRC mandates the States to pursue appropriate measures to ensure the highest attainable right to health for children.

In conclusion, the 2018 Act should be amended to require a minimum and publicly disclosed vaccine reserve, a scientific coverage threshold and a no-fault compensation framework. Ultimately, the aim is not to make the State responsible for every outbreak that occurs, but to establish a legally responsible framework that will ensure a timely response, so when a similar crisis emerges, the State speaks with action rather than regret.

Irna Jahan Shejuti *is a student of law, University of Dhaka.*