



Assessing the Impact of Social and Environmental Certifications and Strengthening Civil Society Dialogue with Standard Organizations

Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Study on the Impact of Social and Environmental Certifications

1. Background and Context

The textile industry is a cornerstone of Bangladesh's economy, accounting for a significant share of global textile exports. However, the efficacy of social and environmental certifications—such as GOTS, GRS, Ökotex STeP, Fairtrade, and amfori BSCI—in improving actual working and environmental conditions remains questionable. Audit processes have often fallen short, contributing little to on-the-ground improvements. Rights holders, including workers, are frequently overlooked or interviewed under restrictive conditions. Additionally, the broader environmental and health impacts of production outside factory premises are rarely assessed.

In light of these challenges, this project aims to critically evaluate the effectiveness of these certifications and address the gaps identified through worker-based monitoring (WBM) and community-based monitoring (CBM) approaches. The study will focus on a representative number of workers from 25 certified factories and their surrounding environments, guided by local experts in Bangladesh (BILS) in collaboration with FEMNET.

Current Situation in Bangladesh

As of September 2024, Bangladesh is undergoing significant political and social upheaval. The interim government, led by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, has recently acceded to the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearances, a landmark step in addressing human rights abuses. The country faces ongoing protests, allegations of enforced disappearances, and a humanitarian crisis exacerbated by severe flooding. These dynamics necessitate sensitivity in the research approach and awareness of the evolving political and social landscape. This context also underscores the importance of ensuring that textile industry certifications align with both international human rights standards and local needs.

2. Objectives

- **Primary Objective:** To critically assess the effectiveness of social and environmental certifications in improving working conditions and the well-being of the workforce within the Bangladesh RMG and textile industry.



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- **Secondary Objective:** To enhance dialogue between rightsholders, civil society and standard organizations to strengthen advocacy for rights holders in supply chains.

3. Scope of Work

- **Geographic and Demographic Scope:** The study will focus on textile production hubs in Savar, Dhaka, Bangladesh, with particular attention to certified factories and their surrounding communities.
- **Stakeholder Groups:** The research will involve interviews with workers, factory management, auditors, suppliers, and community representatives.
- **Certifications to be Evaluated:** The study will cover 3 certifications and 2 codes of labour in total:
 - 3 environmental certifications with additional social compliance requirements: Global Organic Textile Standard ([GOTS](#)), Global Recycled Standard (GRS) and OEKO-TEX STeP.
 - and 2 social compliance code of labour practices and their implementation: [amfori-BSCI](#) and Fair Wear.
- **Metrics to be Assessed:** Key social metrics will be evaluated, including working conditions, environmental impact, and community health.

4. Methodology

- **Research Methods:** A mixed-methods approach will be employed, including qualitative interviews, surveys, focus groups, and possibly case studies.
 - **Qualitative Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews with 20-25 key stakeholders including factory supervisors, managers, factory owners, certification bodies/auditors, scholars/academics and NGOs working in the textile industry. These interviews will explore personal experiences with certifications, challenges, and perceived benefits.
 - **Surveys:** A quantitative survey will be distributed to approximately 375 textile workers from 25 different factories, covering demographic details, work conditions, awareness of certifications, and perceptions of how these certifications impact their lives. Factories shall be selected from the existing Factory List (WBM) and ideally cover all 4 chosen standards/assessments/certifications per factory.



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- **Decent Work Check:** In addition to the quantitative surveys, the results of the Decent Work Check will be included in the research.
- **Focus Groups:** Around 5-6 focus group discussions will be held with the community level stakeholders e.g., workers and their family members, and community peoples, each consisting of 6-8 participants. These focus groups will help to analyse environmental and social implications of RMG/textile production in the surrounding environment and communities.
- **Consultation meeting:** Series of consultation meetings will be held with the workers representatives/TU leaders. Union leaders from factory level unions, trade union federations and national trade union centres shall join these consultations.
- **Case Studies:** At best 4-8 case studies of factories that have implemented 4 different selected certification systems (GOTS, Fair Wear, OEKO-TEX, amfori) will be conducted to evaluate the specific impacts on working conditions and environmental standards. This will allow for a comparative analysis of how different certifications are applied and experienced.
- **Analysis:** By nature, it will be a descriptive research and descriptive research statistics and univariate analysis shall be particularly encouraged. In necessary, bivariate and intersectional analyses shall have to be made.
- **Intersectional Purpose:** The study is encouraged to incorporate an intersectional analysis to understand how certifications impact different demographic groups (gender, age, migrant status, educational attainment, socioeconomic status).
 - **Gender:** Analyzing how certification standards affect women differently from men.
 - **Age:** Comparing the perspectives of young workers (18-25) who may lack awareness of their rights versus older workers (40+) who might be more affected by long-term exposure to poor working conditions.
 - **Migrant Status:** Examining how internal migrants from rural Bangladesh experience greater housing and legal insecurity compared to urban, settled workers.



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- **Educational Attainment:** Assessing whether workers with higher education levels feel more empowered to speak up during certification audits compared to illiterate workers who may not understand the process fully.
- **Centralizing Marginalized Voices/Participatory Approach:** The research will adopt a participatory approach, ensuring that the voices of marginalized groups are central to the findings.
 - **Worker-Led Surveys:** Conducting surveys that allow workers to contribute their questions or concerns, particularly about how they view the certification process and the changes (or lack thereof) it brings.
 - **Community level FGD:** Organizing FGD (focus group discussions) where marginalised groups such as community peoples, workers' family members and or migrant workers, can co-create solutions and give feedback on how certifications could address surrounding environment protection.
 - **Stakeholder Collaboration:** Involving local NGOs, worker unions, and community groups in interviews and focus groups to make sure their priorities and lived experiences are reflected in the research outcomes.
 - **Example:** A participatory workshop with a group of women workers from different factories, where they identify which certification practices they find helpful and which are failing them, helping shape recommendations for policy changes. (Can be incorporated in the project, researcher has no obligation to facilitate a workshop session)
- **Disruptive Methodologies:** Employ disruptive methodologies to challenge traditional audit processes and certification practices. This will include innovative approaches such as participatory action research (PAR) and critical reflexivity to examine power dynamics and uncover hidden impacts.
 - **Consultation with labour stakeholders (trade unions):** Labour stakeholders (trade unions) who have research locales, a base working area and/or connected with the clothing industry, deserves involvement at every stage of the research conduction and fact sheet and position paper development processes. To be more precise, 1) involve young trade union leaders in the research team, 2) organise consultation meetings with the clothing industry affiliated trade union leaders and capture their views on research metrics and cross check findings, and 3) let their voice



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override others to decide the contents of the factsheet and position paper.

- **Participatory Action Research (PAR):** Instead of simply studying the workers, PAR will involve the workers' representatives/union leaders as co-researchers, who will identify the key issues they face. For instance, the data enumerators team shall include an equal number of young union leaders and university interns. This will give workers representatives an opportunity to investigate how specific environmental certifications affect their daily work environment (e.g., air quality, waste management practices). PAR will also help uncover the shortcomings of certifications that may not address real concerns on the ground.
- **Critical Reflexivity:** The study will continuously reflect on the power dynamics between researchers, certification bodies, and workers. This will involve analyzing how the certification process might reinforce hierarchies in factories (e.g., between workers and auditors) and exploring ways to disrupt these hierarchies by democratizing the audit process.
- **Example:** Critical reflexivity could involve having factory workers audit the auditors, allowing them to give direct feedback on the certification process and highlight areas where the auditors are either biased or missing critical issues, such as undocumented overtime or harassment.

(Appears over ambitious at this stage of the research and can be dropped)

- **Innovative Data Collection:** If possible, employing innovative approaches like photovoice (where workers use cameras to document their work environments) will provide insights into the daily realities of factory life that may not be captured in traditional audits. For instance, photovoice might reveal unsafe conditions that certification audits overlook, such as improperly ventilated areas in dyeing units.
- **Challenging Assumptions:** Disruptive methodologies will also challenge the assumption that certifications automatically lead to better working conditions. For example, interviews might reveal that while factories receive certifications, workers' experiences of harassment or wage theft persist.



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5. Critical Self-Reflection

- **Conscious Partiality:** Researchers/surveyors will document and discuss their social and cultural backgrounds, acknowledging how these influence their perspectives and interactions. This will include self-reflection exercises and discussions about personal biases.
- **Engagement with Local Context:** Local researchers/surveyors and community members will be actively involved to ensure accurate representation of lived experiences and to adapt research tools and methods to local contexts.

6. Active Participation

- **Collaboration with Advocacy Groups:** Researchers/surveyors will interview potential local advocacy groups and movements to align research goals with ongoing efforts for social and environmental justice. Joint research planning and field immersion will be key components.
- **Field Immersion:** Researchers/surveyors will spend extended periods in the field to build trust and understand local challenges, participating in advocacy activities as appropriate.

7. Conscientization (tentative)

- **Educational Workshops:** Conduct workshops (e.g. with trade unions) to raise awareness about the implications of certifications and enhance participants' understanding.
- **Critical Reflection Sessions:** Facilitate discussions where researchers and participants can reflect on findings, challenges, and potential solutions to promote mutual learning and empowerment.

8. Approach to Assessing Standard Organizations

- **Assessment of Standard Organizations:** The study will evaluate the effectiveness of audit processes conducted by standard organizations, especially including their impact on working conditions, environmental conditions. Attention will be given to how rights holders are involved and the extent to which environmental and health impacts are assessed in communities.



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- **Synergies with CBM/WBM Approaches:** Insights from worker-based monitoring (WBM) and community-based monitoring (CBM) approaches will be integrated. The study will examine 4 different certifications (GOTS, amfori-BSCI, Fair Wear and OEKO-TEX SteP) based on initial findings from the study.
- **Dissemination and Advocacy:** A factsheet and position paper summarizing study results, conduct webinars with standard organizations, and arrange bilateral meetings to discuss the integration of monitoring tools into audit processes will be developed.

10. Deliverables

- **Report:** A comprehensive report detailing findings and recommendations.
- **Factsheet and Position Paper:** Summarize study results and target 4 standard organizations. *(In cooperation with FEMNET)*
- **Webinars and Meetings:** At least one webinars with standard organizations and bilateral meetings to discuss integration of monitoring tools. *(In cooperation with FEMNET)*

11. Roles and Responsibilities

- **Project Team:** Responsible for research design, data collection, and analysis.
- **Local Partners:** Facilitate access to stakeholders and ensure cultural relevance.
- **Consultant Lavinia Muth:** Provide expertise in specific areas, such as intersectional analysis, environmental impact assessment and labor rights.

12. Ethical Considerations

- **Informed Consent:** Ensuring that all participants provide informed consent and are aware of their rights.
- **Confidentiality:** Maintaining confidentiality, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- **Risk Minimization:** Addressing potential risks and ensure participant safety.



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13. Evaluation and Monitoring

- **Progress Monitoring:** Regularly monitoring progress and adjusting as needed.
- **Key Performance Indicators:** Establishing KPIs to measure impact and effectiveness. The KPIs proposed are:
 - Data Collection Completion Rate: Percentage of interviews (target: 30-40), focus groups (target: 5-6), and surveys (target: 300-375) completed by the end of the phase.
 - Completion of Data Analysis: 100% completion of the qualitative and quantitative data analysis by February 2025.
 - Certifications Assessed: Number of social and environmental certifications (target: 2 social, 2 ecological) critically evaluated by the end of the study.
 - Report writing completion
 - Summary result factsheet and position paper preparation

14. Timeline

1. Preparation Phase: December 2024 - February 2025 (1.5 months)

- Finalize research design and methodology
- Secure local partnerships and logistical arrangements

Conduct initial training and orientation for the research team

2. Research Phase: February 2025 - Mid-April 2025 (2.5 months)

- Fieldwork and data collection, including interviews, surveys, and focus groups
- Engage with stakeholders (workers, factory owners, certification bodies, NGOs)
- Begin preliminary data analysis during the data collection process

3. Analysis and Reporting Phase: Mid-April 2025 - June 2025 (1.5 months)

- Complete full data analysis
- Draft and revise the final report, ensuring feedback from key stakeholders
- Develop supplementary materials like factsheets and a position paper

4. Dissemination and Advocacy Phase: June 2025 - August 2025 (2 months)

- Conduct webinars and bilateral meetings to present the findings



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- Finalize and distribute the report and related materials
- Engage in advocacy and follow-up activities with partners and stakeholders

15. General Terms & Conditions

- The team will maintain regular communication with BILS focal point to provide updates on progress, discuss emerging issues, and seek guidance as needed.
- Any document, information or data entrusted to or produced by in connection with this assignment, shall be strictly confidential. After completion of this assignment only BILS and the partners of the project shall be eligible to use them. However, in case of any emerging need to use it or any part of it by any academics or other users, prior informing and written endorsement from all project partners is mandatory.
- The copyright of the final product will be endowed with the BILS and other partners.
- In the event of any emerging priorities and needs, concerned authority at BILS, in consultation with all project partners, shall enjoy the authority to reschedule the operational framework of this research assignment.
- BILS 's Finance section shall follow the country's legal framework to deduct VAT & Tax as per requirements.

16. Communication and Submission of Proposals

Interested parties are requested to submit proposals to Executive Director, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies –BILS, Razzak Villa, 8/Ka/A, Dhaka-1209 or through email: bils@citech.net with a copy to nyesmin83@yahoo.com by **January 05, 2025**.