

Role of Government in Promoting Corporate Social Responsibility: Analysis of the Bangladesh Ready-Made Garment (RMG) Industry

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Received: 7 December 2017 Accepted: 2 January 2018 Published: 15 January 2018

Abstract

The paper focuses on the role of Bangladesh government in promoting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in the country's Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry. Based on the four public policy roles proposed by Fox, Ward, and Howard (2002), this paper investigates the point to which the Bangladesh government has facilitated or initiated CSR practices in the selected sector. It reveals that since 2013, the government has taken various noteworthy initiatives from the perspectives of policy formulation, creating enabling environment for practicing CSR, instigating social dialogues, supporting stakeholder engagement, etc. However, it is urgent to adopt measures so that firms get recognition of their positive initiatives and become concerned to violate or ignore the government rules.

Index terms— corporate social responsibility, bangladesh RMG industry, government role, business

1 Introduction

Government interest in CSR is comparatively a recent phenomenon. Different contexts and motivations including social demands, social competitiveness, and sustainable development guide government attention (Steurer, 2010). Although there is much evidence that signifies the relationship between government and CSR, the topic remains overlooked by the researchers (Gond, Kang & Moon, 2011). One probable cause is that the government-CSR relationship is counter-intuitive to many researchers.

A large number of researchers argued that CSR activities are voluntary and they are beyond government rules and regulations (Brammer, Jackson & Matten, 2012). On the other hand, many researchers include Gondet. Et al. (2011) offers a typology of the correlation between CSR and government that requires multifaceted interaction between them. They comment that government has the central role in CSR and it is not only self-regulation (voluntary) or substitute governance form that alters government roles but also viewed as self-regulation that is aided by government, coordinated with government and mandated by the government.

The government can encourage CSR using its legal power (Moon, 2005). While traditional soft-laws (voluntary Initiatives) do not require any particular behavior rather than producing regular reports on CSR activities in the firms, Government regulations can be more inclusive and explicit (Moon, 2005). Furthermore, Government regulations can set a binding minimum standard as well as quality assuring systems for environmental protection, health & safety and, employment rights to support CSR. Also, firms work for CSR activity when state regulations provide clear orientations (Barth, Wolff & Schmitt, 2007, 34). The Government can also provide policy and institutional framework that stimulate companies to raise their performance beyond minimum legal standards.

Recognizing new needs, the government in many countries started to participate actively in CSR enacting activities (Steurer, 2010). However, previous literature on government actions in CSR mostly focused on developed countries. Consequently, there is a dearth of research on the issue from developing country's perspectives (Belal, 2001; Belal, 2006; Zabin, 2013). In this perspective, the aim of this paper is to examine

43 the level to which the government of Bangladesh has accelerated CSR practices in the country's Ready-made
44 Garment (RMG) industry.

45 2 II.

46 3 Literature Review a) CSR

47 Despite many efforts, a neutral definition of CSR has not been established. According to Carroll (1979), in
48 addition to economic and legal obligations, corporations have ethical duties. Similarly, Bowen (1953) points
49 out that policies or strategies of large corporations have an impact on society. For this reason, business should
50 consider society's values and objectives while preparing and implementing business policies or decisions. The
51 researcher assumes that CSR works in an environment where trade, governmental, legal and societal factors
52 interact under some rules and shared responsiveness. developed countries. Also, in developing countries, CSR
53 is considered as philanthropic, religious in nature. In contrast, philanthropy is a small part of CSR in developed
54 countries where CSR is considered as a way to increase firm's performances (Frynas, 2005).

55 Bangladesh garment industry has become the lifeline of Bangladesh economy, as it earns more than 80% of its
56 foreign currency. The garment sector launched CSR programs in the early 90s when external buyers put pressure
57 on the owners to follow social compliance of the business. As a result, some issues like the elimination of child
58 labor got initial priority, and the sector has achieved some success in the CSR. Analysing the development of
59 CSR execution in Bangladesh, it is noted that the sector adopted some initiatives due to local or foreign or both
60 pressures, which is a big problem of the industry to execute CSR voluntarily (Zabin, 2013). Consequently, social
61 compliance of the business remains poor (Ahamed, 2013).

62 Most firms in Bangladesh still considered CSR as traditional practices or philanthropic activities rather than
63 business profit (Zabin, 2013). Hossain, Islam & Andrew (2006) conducted research based on companies' financial
64 reports and found that only 8.33% companies disclose their social and environmental information in the annual
65 reports. Sobhan (2014) has conducted a study on CSR in Bangladesh and found that most of the respondents
66 understand the concept of CSR but do not align with government policies or advises.

67 Due to insufficient CSR implementation, women workers became the most vulnerable group in the sector
68 (Shoma, 2017) The 'Rana Plaza' incident also shows that CSR is not practiced in Bangladesh garment industry
69 properly. After the tragic event, national and international media, civil society organizations and foreign buyers
70 criticised government because of its ineffective role in governing the sector (Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016). Thus, for
71 sustainable development of garment industry, it is important to strengthen government roles and initiatives to
72 reduce environmental pollution, improve occupational health and safety, ease gender-based discrimination, and
73 ensure labor rights (Masud, Hoque, Hossain & Hoque, 2013; Zabin, 2013; Mausumi, 2017). All these attempts will
74 foster exportability of Bangladesh garment products.

75 4 III. Objectives of the Paper

76 There are about 6000 garment factories in Bangladesh, and the sector has significant contributions towards
77 country's recent economic development (Haque & Azmat, 2015). However, to supply products at low price,
78 many companies sacrifice CSR to reduce production cost. Consequently, labor conditions, safety at work,
79 natural environment deteriorate. Although other stakeholders like brands, firms, and civil society launched some
80 initiatives (e.g., Accord, Alliance), these are for short period of time and less comprehensive (Haar & Keune,
81 2014). In this condition, the state should approach for the sustainable solutions to the problems. The future of
82 the sectors largely depends on how government policies will regulate the sectors. In this way, the objective of
83 this paper is to investigate the extent of Bangladesh government's role in fostering CSR implementation in the
84 garment industry. The findings would be helpful for the government to locate its loopholes and work accordingly.
85 Also, contextual information on CSR is limited in the global supply chain. This attempt will examine the roles of
86 government institutions and their decision-making and bring to light the potentials of CSR in developing country.

87 IV.

88 5 Theoretical Underpinning of the Research

89 This paper used the useful model of

90 6 a) Mandating

91 The government set some minimum standards within the existing legal frameworks that industry should follow.
92 Through mandating, the government can catalyze innovation in the business and inject some requirements that
93 firms must follow. For example, firms should adopt available modern techniques, best practices, code of conduct
94 to manage the commerce and its environment.

95 7 b) Facilitating

96 The government acts as a secondary agent or a supporting actor. Government creates enabling environment so
97 that firms feel motivated and engage themselves in CSR related activities. For example, the government can
98 arrange training programs, campaigns, and awareness building actions.

99 Furthermore, the public sector can develop or encourage suitable CSR management techniques and execute
100 international principles.

101 **8 c) Partnering**

102 The idea of partnership is significant for the CSR program. Through the partnership, complex societal or
103 environmental issues can be solved with the participation of various stakeholders including local and central
104 governments, between government, international organization, civil society, business, and workers organization.
105 The government can be solely a participant, convenor or organizer. Such partnerships can create business profits,
106 improve social development impact, as well as add constructive value for the government.

107 **9 d) Endorsing**

108 Public sector authorization can take various practices incorporating via policy document, practices in the
109 government sector, or straight recognition of any firm or individual through providing the award; even recognition
110 can happen when the political dignitaries praise individuals endeavor in their speech.

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113 **11 Methodology**

114 This is explorative research aiming to analyze government roles in supporting CSR in Bangladesh garment
115 industry. The research used both primary and secondary. The primary data came from the researcher's master's
116 thesis. The researcher conducted 25 open-ended interviews in the participation of various stakeholder of the
117 industry including industry owners, workers, human rights workers, trade union leaders, and journalists. The
118 sources of secondary data included journals, magazines, annual reports of Bangladesh government, newspaper
119 articles, policy documents of the government, NGOs reports, and website materials including the Department of
120 Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE).

121 **12 VI.**

122 **13 Result**

123 After Rana Plaza incident in 2013, the miserable working conditions and labor rights came under serious scrutiny.
124 The incident creates pressure on the owners, buyers as well as government because of their ineffective roles.
125 In addition, national and international media reports added extra pressure on the respective stakeholders.
126 Consequently, the brand 'Made in Bangladesh' faced enormous challenges to continue its global recognition
127 and business. To minimize the difficulty and uphold its global image, the government of Bangladesh initiated
128 different programs.

129 government plays its various roles and responsibilities for creating the effecting environment for implementing
130 CSR (See Table 3).

131 **14 a) Mandating Role of Bangladesh Government**

132 Bangladesh labor law is the prime legal framework that shapes minimum standards for safety and labor rights in
133 Bangladesh. The government of Bangladesh amended its labor law in 2013 to ensure safety and security of the
134 workers. Regarding safety, the regulation indicates that all factories should have active and usable emergency exit
135 stairs, active fire alarms, unhindered passage, regular fire check in the factory. In addition to physical safety, the
136 law also incorporates workers rights including the formation of the trade union, OHS (Occupational Health and
137 Safety) committee at the factory level. Furthermore, the law mentioned about formal appointment contacts
138 between owners and employees, working hours, rights of women workers, and implementation of minimum
139 wages, encourage collective bargaining while needed. The owners should maintain workers register for better
140 management, set job termination process, compensation, introduce group insurance for the workers, maternity
141 leave and benefit, daily and weekly fixed working hours.

142 Besides, amending the law, Bangladesh government formulated National Occupational Safety and Health
143 Policy in October 2013 to improve occupational safety, health and workers rights. The plan covers all sectors
144 of the country including ready-made garment. According to the policy, the authority should implement related
145 national laws and international declarations, conventions and take every step to protect health and wellbeing
146 of the employees. Additionally, the authority should maintain register containing the number of the accident
147 with casualties. Furthermore, the policy distributed the roles and responsibilities of the respective stakeholders.
148 Furthermore, it also adopts provision of to prevent future disruption of the policy (Better work, 2017; Barua &
149 Ansary, 2017). Although the four public policy roles disclose overall initiatives of the government, distinctions
150 among these roles are not always clear. For example, one single program of the government can be leveled
151 as facilitating, partnership and endorsing responsibility. However, one big advantage of these roles is their
152 generality power. Similarly, in Bangladesh case, it is quite difficult to differentiate all programs under these

153 categories. Therefore, the author tries to encompass major initiatives of the government to discourse how the
154 Furthermore, after the massive protest against low salary, Bangladesh government increased minimum wage for
155 the garment workers. While RMG workers were got the minimum monthly salary of 38USD and average 78USD,
156 since December 2013, the government increased 77% minimum payment to BDT 5,300/month (US\$68) ??Haq
157 & Azmat, 2015). Moreover, to build the environment-friendly factory, the government of Bangladesh is offering
158 bank loans for garment sector at 9% interest rate. As a result, green factories in Bangladesh are increasing.

159 **15 b) Facilitating role of Bangladesh Government**

160 The Department of Inspection for Factories & Establishment (DIFE) plays the main role in implementing law
161 and other safety and security-related laws. Currently, DIFE enforces at least 46 labor laws, rules and regulations
162 to ensure workers safety and upgrade working environment.

163 Recently, the government has accelerated the department and increased human resources for boosting
164 monitoring activities of the RMG factories. An accountability unit has inaugurated to ensure transparency
165 of the department's activities. Factory inspections reports and related risks and information are being uploaded
166 to the website. It established a database dedicated to the RMG sectors. The government has created 392 new
167 inspectors posts. Besides, various training activities also have taken with the cooperation of ILO to increase
168 the capacity of the government personnel. The government is implementing better work programs with the help
169 of ILO. Under these programs, government arranges training, workshops; seminars are being arranged around
170 the year. The trainings focus on protesting sexual violence, reducing sexual harassment of female workers, and
171 workplace cooperation for better harmony in the workplace. (Ministry of Labor and Employment, 2018)

172 Besides, Government decides to set up a textile village in the district of Tangail through a public-private
173 partnership. The proposed project will adopt green technology and will consider environmental impacts of
174 the textile mills. Additionally, Export Promotion Bureau (EPB) has established compliance monitoring cell to
175 monitor social compliances, labor rights, and workers welfare in the ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh.
176 An occupational safety taskforce in RMG has also prepared short, mid and long-term plan considering four risks
177 including fire, building and environmental security.

178 Likewise, Bangladesh government has created a tripartite advisory council to advise government relation to
179 labor rights and other issues. One of the main aims of the authority is to resolve undesirable situation including
180 labor unrest through dialogues. Government is implementing a project for the period of 2016-2021 with the help
181 of Sweden & Denmark governments and

182 **16 Global Journal of Management and Business Research**

183 Volume XVIII Issue IV Version I Year () A technical support of ILO to mitigate the crisis in the sector through
184 dialogues. One of the main aims of the project is to enhance social dialogues for the sustainable, harmonious
185 relation between workers and employers. The government has completed another project title changing gender
186 norm of garment employees to increase awareness about gender sensitiveness in the sector (Ministry of Labor
187 and Employment, 2018).

188 **17 c) Partnering role of Bangladesh Government**

189 The government of Bangladesh, employers and employees organizations agreed on a tripartite statement of
190 commitment to improving fire safety in the Bangladesh garment industry in January 2013. However, after the
191 tragic accident of Rana Plaza, the commitment incorporated structured integrity of factories and extended as
192 National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA). Under the NTPA, a tripartite committee formed as the observer of
193 the implementation of NTPA. ILO assists in the execution and coordination of the plan while better work plays
194 a lead role in the tripartite committee. Under this initiative, BUET (Bangladesh University of Engineering and
195 Technology) inspected targeted 1500 garment factories and identified fire and structural risks. The examined
196 report is uploaded to the DIFE website. The inspection has identified 300 factories that need modifications and
197 DIFE resend the report to the authority for corrections. Along with NTPA, international buyers formulated two
198 other important programs with similar target titled The Accord on Fire and Building Safety and The Alliance for
199 Bangladesh Worker Safety with an objective to make the sector safe and sustainable. Under these initiatives, a
200 total of 150 factories gone through review panel as these factories have safety and structural hazards. According to
201 the decision of the review panel, 39 factories permanently closed their production, 42 factories were partially shut
202 down, and another 69 factories were permitted to operate business following some recommendations (Ministry of
203 Labor and Employment, 2018).

204 Another noteworthy partnership program is 'Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund'. Immediately after the incident
205 of Rana Plaza, funds were needed for the treatment of wounded workers and their rehabilitation. In this situation,
206 Prime Minister Relief Fund played a key role while BGMEA, Primark, and some development partners contributed
207 to the fund. For long-term support of the sufferers, government, employers, trade unions, NGOs together formed
208 Rana Plaza Coordination Committee (RPCC) with a target of supporting treatment and financial support for
209 the victims. In January 2014, Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund launched to manage the fund to rehabilitate
210 the sufferers. On June 2015, RPCC announced that Rana plaza trust fund already received USD 30 million as
211 donations (Barua & Ansary, 2017).

212 Since 2015, Bangladesh government is working with 2030 Water Resource Group as a participant of Multi-
213 Stakeholder Partnership targeting to ensure wastewater treatment as well as to boost efficient management of
214 water in the apparel sector of Bangladesh. In a speech on 17 January 2017, Honourable Prime Minister of
215 Bangladesh said,

216 18 d) Endorsing Role of Bangladesh Government

217 The Ministry of Labor and Employment publishes annual reports as a part of their regular activities to increase
218 transparency, accountability and informing respective stakeholders about the actions taken by the ministry.
219 The Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) is an integral part of the ministry and
220 dedicated to the rights and welfare of the labors. The report offers an overview of the department's yearly
221 progress of the taken initiatives, impacts of their implemented programs and plan for the welfare of respective
222 stakeholders. Furthermore, the report also presented Annual Performance Appraisal of the ministry from which,
223 readers can evaluate activities of the department. The report accumulates ILO conventions regarding workers
224 welfare and their progress of implementation. Additionally, it summarises yearly government activities that would
225 be a helpful policy document for the government and other stakeholders. For example, the report summarises
226 implementation progress of Bangladesh Labor Law-2006, newly adopted initiatives for the welfare of the garment
227 workers.

228 To encourage manufacturers, every year government of Bangladesh provides National export trophies to
229 recognize the contribution of the respective sectors including RMG to the states export trade. One of the criteria
230 of being chosen for the award is following social compliance of the business. In these ways, the government is
231 encouraging firms to practice CSR. In addition, very frequently head of the government & its ministers firmly
232 announce their strong commitment and support for the sector. For instance, on January 2017, honorable prime
233 minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina attended a workshop title "Shaping a New Water Economy" while joining
234 at the 47th yearly Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. Speaking on occasion, she
235 acknowledged the great contribution of Bangladesh garment industry in the economy of the country and expressed
236 the strong commitment to her government for ensuring social compliance in the sector. She pointed out that
237 Bangladesh has achieved higher compliance regarding workers rights, environmental protection and OHS in the
238 garment industry. She also added, "We are supporting the industry to 'go green'. Today, Bangladesh has 38
239 LEED certified factories. Out of the world's top 10 green factories, seven are in Bangladesh," (Bangladesh
240 Songbad Songstha, 2017) VII.

241 19 Conclusion and Future Research

242 The purpose of this research was to investigate government roles in supporting CSR in Bangladesh garment
243 industry. From the result, it is clear that since 2013, the government of Bangladesh has taken numerous
244 noteworthy initiatives to encourage CSR implementation. In mandating role, the government amended Labor law
245 that guides the CSR and workers rights related issues in the sector. Also, national OHS policy, implementation
246 of minimum wage improved stakeholders' satisfaction to some extent. In facilitating role, the government took
247 initiatives so that DIFE can perform its roles effectively, offer opportunities to build planned garment village,
248 support actions to solve the crisis through effective dialogues. In partnering role of the government, adoption
249 of NTPA, creating Rana Plaza Trust Fund for supporting victims of the incident, Government partnership
250 with 2030 Water Resources Group indicates government commitment to make the sector more sustainable with
251 the participation of respective stakeholders'. In Bangladesh, garment owners are considered as heroes as they
252 contribute hugely to the national economy. However, the workers and their rights, environmental issues are often
253 overlooked to reduce financial expenses. Sometimes, owners violate laws by their political linkage, and professional
254 strengths. Examples of Punishment for breaking the existing laws are rare. Therefore, in the endorsing role, the
255 government should reinforce its efforts to establish rules of law and supporting positive initiatives.

256 Although the paper did not attempt to evaluate the taken initiatives, the researcher identified two main issues
257 for future research or government intervention. Previous literature located various limitations of the adopted
258 policies. For example, in some cases, the amended labor law did not spell out the punishment for breaking
259 the regulations. In other cases, level of penalty is low compared to the consequences of the violations. For
260 instance, for violation the options of maternity leave, recruit children and adolescent, minimum BDT 5000 is
261 applicable. This kind of insufficient punishment may encourage authority to break the laws. Furthermore, many
262 stakeholders argued that government preserved owners' interest rather than workers rights in the law. Previous
263 studies reveal that many garment factories did not implement the minimum requirement of labor law. As a result,
264 the effectiveness of the law remained questionable. Even though the government has increased minimum wage
265 significantly, workers are demanding for further increase of their salary. Similarly, NTPA, Accord, Alliance have
266 working with similar objectives from respective platforms. They jointly cover about 3500 garment factories while
267 there are approximately 6000 factories in the country. Therefore, future studies might focus on how government
268 policies could be more explicit. Simultaneously, future research might also focus on implementation levels of the
269 taken initiatives to support CSR. ^{1 2}

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execution, lack of effective trade unions and group bargaining discrimination and irregular payments undermine the rights of women workers of the sector. Haque & Azmat (2015) also depicted gender discrimination in the industry. Compiling from various sources, they identified six CSR themes for Bangladesh garment industry. Under these six themes, they also classified existing problems in the RMG sector for improving social compliances.

. Her findings argued that weak legis
power, sexual harassment,

Figure 1: Table 1 :

2

	environment responsibility.	for practicing	corporate	so
Public Sector Roles				
Mandating "Command and control" legislation	Regulators and inspectorates		Legal and fiscal penalties and rewards	
Enabling legislation	Creating incentives		Capacity building	
Facilitating Funding support	Raising awareness		Stimulating markets	
Partnering Combining resources	Stakeholder engagement		Dialogue	
Endorsing Political support			Publicity and praise	

Figure 2: Table 2 :

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Figure 3: Table 3 :

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