



MADE IN

RESILIENCE

Beyond the label: Faces of the RMG sector

MADE IN RESILIENCE

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oporajita

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FOREWORD

When women thrive, entire societies benefit. Research consistently shows that advancing gender equality is one of the most powerful ways to boost economic growth, reduce poverty, and create more resilient communities. In Bangladesh's RMG sector, millions of women work tirelessly to build better futures—not just for themselves, but for those around them. Despite their efforts, they continue to face challenges: balancing work and family, breaking barriers to leadership, and striving for better opportunities. This is why we initiated Oporajita, a collective effort to create real, lasting change by improving workplaces, strengthening rights, and opening doors for women to lead.

This photobook offers a glimpse into their everyday lives at work. Through these images, we see their focus on the factory floor, their engagement in skills training, and their determination to keep going, despite the persistent belief that leadership isn't for women and that tech is for men. These stories aren't just about struggle. They're about resilience, progress, hope and the everyday moments that shape our lives.

We hope these pages inspire you as much as they have inspired us. They remind us that investing in women is not just the right thing to do—it is the smart thing to do, for a brighter and more inclusive future for all.

Charlotte Brunnström

Programme Director
H&M Foundation



INTRODUCTION

Made in Bangladesh — Clothing stitched in Bangladesh carries a label, a symbol of the country’s craftsmanship, labour, and unwavering spirit. Yet beneath the fabric and thread lies a deeper story woven into every seam: *Made in Resilience*. This is the true mark of the women behind the industry—those who rise before the sun, endure long hours, and bear the weight of dreams, ambition, and expectation. They are not just workers; they are the heartbeat of a nation—providers, leaders, and changemakers.

In the vast expanse of Bangladesh’s readymade garment (RMG) sector—its largest industrial employer, driving over 80% of export earnings—women make up 53.7% (2021, BGMEA) of the four million workers. Yet, despite their vital contributions, many women still lack the necessary skills to navigate new technologies, advance in their careers, or access opportunities beyond the factory floor. They face limited access to safe workplaces, digital and financial literacy, and childcare—while

outdated gender norms continue to restrict their full potential at home, in communities, and in the industry. But each day they persist, not as shadows in the system, but as architects of a fairer future.


This photobook is not just a collection of images—it is a testament to strength in motion. It captures resilience in quiet moments, ambition in everyday struggles, and dignity. It also underscores the urgent need for systemic change. While women have built this industry, they continue to face barriers that prevent them from fully benefiting from its growth.

True, lasting change requires more than individual efforts—it demands collective action. These moments capture a transformation still unfolding—led by many who are stepping up, taking responsibility, and beginning to feel the impact of collective progress. This is why collectives like **Oporajita** bring together businesses, NGOs, and community

organizations to address these challenges head-on. Oporajita focuses on improving access to upskilling, digital and financial literacy, safe and gender-inclusive workplaces, childcare services, and leadership pathways—so that women not only contribute to the industry but can truly thrive within it.

Collaboration lies at the heart of this effort—because no single entity can transform the industry alone. As global markets evolve and Bangladesh’s RMG sector adapts to new demands, the role of women must not be an afterthought. A stronger, fairer industry is only possible when the women who sustain it are given the recognition, opportunities, and support they deserve.

The question is no longer whether change is needed—it is how quickly we can make it.

The background is a soft-focus photograph of an industrial setting, likely a garment factory. In the foreground, the hands of a person wearing a dark headscarf are visible, working on a piece of light-colored fabric. The background shows various pieces of machinery and equipment, with a prominent white circular light fixture. The overall lighting is bright and even.

Through skills training, Rita Rani has become an assistant embroidery machine operator. The stitching patterns she masters, the deadlines she meets, and the quality she ensures are exceptional. Her contributions have enhanced her self-confidence and increased her team's productivity. Fakir Apparels Ltd., Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 17 October 2024.





Oporajita is a transformative program that empowers women in Bangladesh's RMG sector, lighting the path to equality. In partnership with 11 organizations, it creates a collective impact, lifting women's economic and social well-being. Through training, mentorship, safety and growth opportunities, Oporajita helps break barriers and ignite lasting change. Initiated by H&M Foundation, and supported by Sweden and COS, it fuels a movement where women workers not only thrive but lead the charge for a brighter, more inclusive future in the industry. Together, we rise, shaping a world of opportunity, strength, and hope.





As workers enter the factory for their shifts, security guards assist them in crossing the road safely. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



Workers enter the factory to start their shifts in the morning. Punctuality is vital in factory operations to maintain production schedules and meet deadlines. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



On the factory's sewing floor, where bright lights and busy hands abound, everyone works together with focus and precision. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.



A woman cleans the sewing floor, collecting waste from garment production. She carefully gathers remnants to maintain a tidy workspace for the next shift. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.



Sewing machine operators working together during factory shifts in the sewing section. Skills training and a supportive work environment provide garment workers with equal job responsibilities, safety, and guidance. Fakir Apparels Ltd., Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 17 October 2024.



Workers carrying raw materials essential to the production process, ensuring all components are available. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 17 October 2024.



Quality control supervisor Sonia Aktar (left) checks the garments' quality to ensure production quality. She started working in the factory eight years ago, and with years of training, diligent work, and skill enhancement, she reached an advanced role as a supervisor. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



To measure progress and address concerns, Tahmina Akter a female supervisor discusses work with workers. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.







Women workers learn complex stitching from a senior supervisor, which helps them master advanced techniques, boosting their confidence and promoting their growth. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.


Previous Page: Workers are working in the Finishing section. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



Sharmin works in the quality control section. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



A worker is working in the knitting section. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



*Behind the hum of every
machine are hands that
craft, create, and power
an industry built on
resilience.*



Nisha Khatun operates digital weaving machinery that requires training to operate. Haesong Korea Ltd., Ashulia, Dhaka. 5 May 2024.



Ummol Masakin Nusrat is a trailblazer, recognized as one of the few female electrical engineers in the Bangladeshi garment industry. She oversees the Woven Division's maintenance team, ensuring smooth operations. Ummol's work is more than a career; it's a statement demonstrating that women can succeed in roles traditionally dominated by men. Azim Garment Factory, Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.







An RMG worker engages in hands-on learning, using a tablet to understand machinery operations during an Oporajita-led training session.

Previous Page: A worker in a textile production facility attentively monitors the spinning and weaving process. Her protective clothing and face mask indicate adherence to workplace safety and hygiene standards. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



While women RMG workers often shy away from using digital machinery, Arshi here is helping her colleague Mizanur with it. Haesong Korea Ltd., Ashulia, Dhaka. 5 May 2024.



Workers are working in Jacquard and Flat knitting section. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



Taslim Akhter, a sewing machine operator, wearing a face mask and head covering, skillfully stitches with unwavering focus as she transforms raw materials into a finished garment. Azim Garment Factory, Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



The skilled hands of an operator, adorned with henna, stitching a fabric beneath a sewing machine.
Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.



A swing machine operator, Tazmin Akhter, smiles as she works her shift. Her precise stitching and attention to detail ensure that every garment meets the highest quality standards. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.



3

4



5



Workers in the printing division screen-printing the t-shirts. They are responsible for operating the printing machines and ensuring each t-shirt has the correct design. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2025.

Previous Page: Multi-colour thread cones are attached to the knitting machine in the knitting section. This allows for the creation of intricate patterns and designs without the need for manual colour changes. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



Workers carefully wash the produced garments, ensuring quality and precision at every step. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



A worker meticulously presses freshly made garments using a steam iron. The rising steam highlights the intensity of his task. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



*A chorus of hands,
working in silent
harmony—
steady, skilled,
and strong.*



During a quality check of a produced garment, quality control supervisor Sonia Aktar talks with a sewing operator. Hams Fashion Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



Assistant embroidery machine operators exhibit their intricate and colorful products. Using attractive patterns, colors, and textures, they create beautiful pieces. Fakir Apparels Ltd., Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 17 October 2024.







A worker checks the quality of the products at the quality control section. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.


Previous Page: Md Habibullah inspects the knitting threads to ensure a smooth production process. He is assigned to the floor as the rescue person. He and other rescue workers on different factory floors are trained as first responders, responsible for mitigating damage when incidents occur during work. Hams Fashion Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



To ensure accuracy, a sewing machine operator measures the length of a produced garment following the design layout. Measuring accuracy minimizes material waste and reduces costly alterations or remakes. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



Habiba Akter chats with her colleague, Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.



*Even on factory floors,
time softens—
into shared snacks,
smiles, and seconds
of stillness.*



The finished garments hang neatly at Azim Garments Factory, awaiting final quality inspection. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



Humayra Anika is a fashion designer with a keen sense of colour, texture, and style. Through proper mentorship from supervisors, she has refined her sketching skills and expanded her creative horizons. Fakir Apparels Ltd., Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 17 October 2024.







A smile spreads across swing machine operator Anju Ara's face as she works in the factory. She takes pride in her craft instills a sense of hope, growth, and accomplishment in her. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 10 October 2024.

Previous Page: A garment worker in the factory takes a short nap during her break amid sewing machines and unfinished fabric. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



Yasmin Akter, a student at the Asian University for Women (AUW) and an employee of Azim Group's Quality Control department, visits her colleagues in the sewing section. An innovative scholarship program at the factory supports five women to pursue education at AUW every year. Yasmin is one of them. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



During the ongoing labour union election at Azim Group's factory, a garment worker verifies her identity before casting her vote. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



An Azim Group factory worker votes for a committee member in an ongoing labour union election. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



Inside Azim Group's garment factory, balloons representing candidate symbols, including an elephant and horse, hang from the ceiling, setting the stage for the ongoing labour union election. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



Ruma Aktar celebrates her birthday at the factory, which acknowledges employees' birthdays. The purpose of these celebrations is to foster community and boost employee morale. Fakir Apparels Ltd., Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 17 October 2024.







To control damage and ensure safety during fire casualties, the factory has a fire brigade point. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.


Previous Page: A worker oversees the Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP), which treats factory wastewater. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



A fire drill takes place in a factory setting, with security guards observing from the rooftop. A high-pressure water stream is being sprayed from below, simulating an emergency response scenario. The drill emphasizes workplace safety and preparedness in fire situations. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



Md Arman, a fire safety worker, conducts regular maintenance on Azim Garments' fire safety system. He carefully inspects and adjusts components, ensuring the system functions properly in case of emergency. Fire safety and fire preparedness are two of the factory's top priorities. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



*Between laughter at lunch, a
child's hug at daycare, stories
shared between friends, and
the warmth of family waiting at
home, the day is stitched with
connection, care, and quiet hope.*



Factory workers wash their hands at a handwashing station provided by the facility to ensure their health and safety. By regularly washing their hands, workers reduce the risk of contaminating surfaces and products, protecting themselves and others. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



Sewing machine operator Afsana returning to work after lunch at the factory canteen. In the last four and a half years, her skills and craft have made her a dedicated machine operator. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 15 October 2024.







Garment workers connect during their free time in the factory. Workers view this as a time to relax and decompress from demanding work shifts. This fosters stronger teamwork and enhances communication in the workplace. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 15 October 2024.

Previous Page: Workers socialize during their free time after lunch on the factory sewing floor. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



Garment workers socialize during their break inside the factory premise. These breaks are crucial for workers to rest and recover, enabling them to recharge both physically and mentally. Fakir Apparels Ltd. Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 17 October 2024.



Farzana is a sewing machine operator with a five-month-old daughter. She gets a half-hour break during her shift to breastfeed her child. Usually, she goes home, but occasionally, Farzana's mother, who cares for the child, brings him/her to the factory child-care center (having a childcare space isn't the case for all factories) so she can feed her. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



Farzana (left) and her husband Musa Khan (right) work together at the factory. While they are away from home, they leave their daughter Maisha mostly in the care of Farzana's mother. The couple earns and contributes equally to the family's well-being and future. Hams Fashion Ltd, Sreepur, Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



Md Hasan and Fateha Jannat work in the printing section on different shifts. They take turns looking after their daughter who mostly stays home. Sometimes, they take her to the factory's child daycare center. Their workplace flexibility allows them to visit, feed, and play with her. Keeping a consistent caretaking routine helps them foster a healthy relationship with their daughter. Hams Fashion Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



Fateha Jannat is a junior quality operator in the printing section. Occasionally, during her shift, she brings her daughter, Mehejin Janvi, to the factory's childcare center. In her free time, she visits her child and plays with her, which brings them both great joy. Hams Fashion Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 16 October 2024.



In the in-house healthcare facility, a female worker undergoes a regular medical check-up. It demonstrates the factory's commitment to employee health and safety. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



A worker visits in-house eye specialist for an eye examination and treatment. Proper eye care is essential for workers, especially in environments where eye strain or injury is a risk. Azim Group of Companies, Chattogram. 11 May 2024.



A worker returns to work after lunch. Garment workers often receive subsidized lunches, which provide nutritious meals and ease financial stress. Workers claim that it improves their morale since it's subsidized. Additionally, shared meals promote workplace harmony and strengthen team bonds. Fakir Apparels Ltd., Narayanganj, Dhaka, Bangladesh. 17 October 2024.



Garment workers enter the factory early in the morning to start their workday. Diganta Sweaters Ltd., Gazipur, Dhaka. 17 October 2024.



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