



**Promoting Enabling Environment
for Women in Factories**

LEARNING BRIEFS PARTICIPATION



Design, Infograph and Illustration: Md. Mosarof Hossain (Azad)/Drik

CARE Bangladesh

RAOWA Complex (Level 7-8), VIP Road,
Mohakhali, Dhaka-1206, Bangladesh

Phone: +(880) 2 9889009

E-mail: bgdinfo@care.org

Website: www.carebangladesh.org

The RMG industry has created ample job opportunities for semi-skilled and unskilled labour – particularly for women who were previously employed by the informal sector or engaged in household work. While the opportunity for women’s economic empowerment is notable, a pervasive lack of knowledge and skills acts as a barrier not only for improving women worker’s capacity to claim their rights and entitlements, but also limits their ability to enhance their productivity as workers.

Considering the problems inherent in factory-based work that affect a predominantly female workforce, and having established relationships over time with large International brands and other relevant stakeholders, CARE Bangladesh employs a unique participatory model wherein female workers are empowered through multifaceted competency development.

Through the ‘Promoting Enabling Environment for Women in Factories’ (PEEFW) project, CARE Bangladesh in collaboration with Galeries Lafayette (GL) sought to enhance participation, promote women’s leadership and support an enabling environment for women in their workplace through a set of innovative tools. The program used an integrated approach, highlighting the individual capacity of women and her relationship with other multi-level actors and institutions necessary for transformational change. Leveraging CARE’s existing platform of women’s workers and in synergy with ongoing projects in the RMG sector, PEEWF worked with over 3500 RMG workers, their communities and the management of 5 RMG factories and 1 ceramics factory in Gazipur to build the foundation for a productive and empowered workforce. The specific objectives of the project were:

Specific Objectives



To make the management of RMG and Ceramics factories and other targeted stakeholders responsive and accountable for creating a worker friendly environment.



To build the capacity of the workers to make them able to analyze their problems within workplace and household and take measures to address the problems.



To enhance the workers skill and understanding on gender discrimination, rights and entitlement to increase the participation in the workers committees and demonstrate leadership.

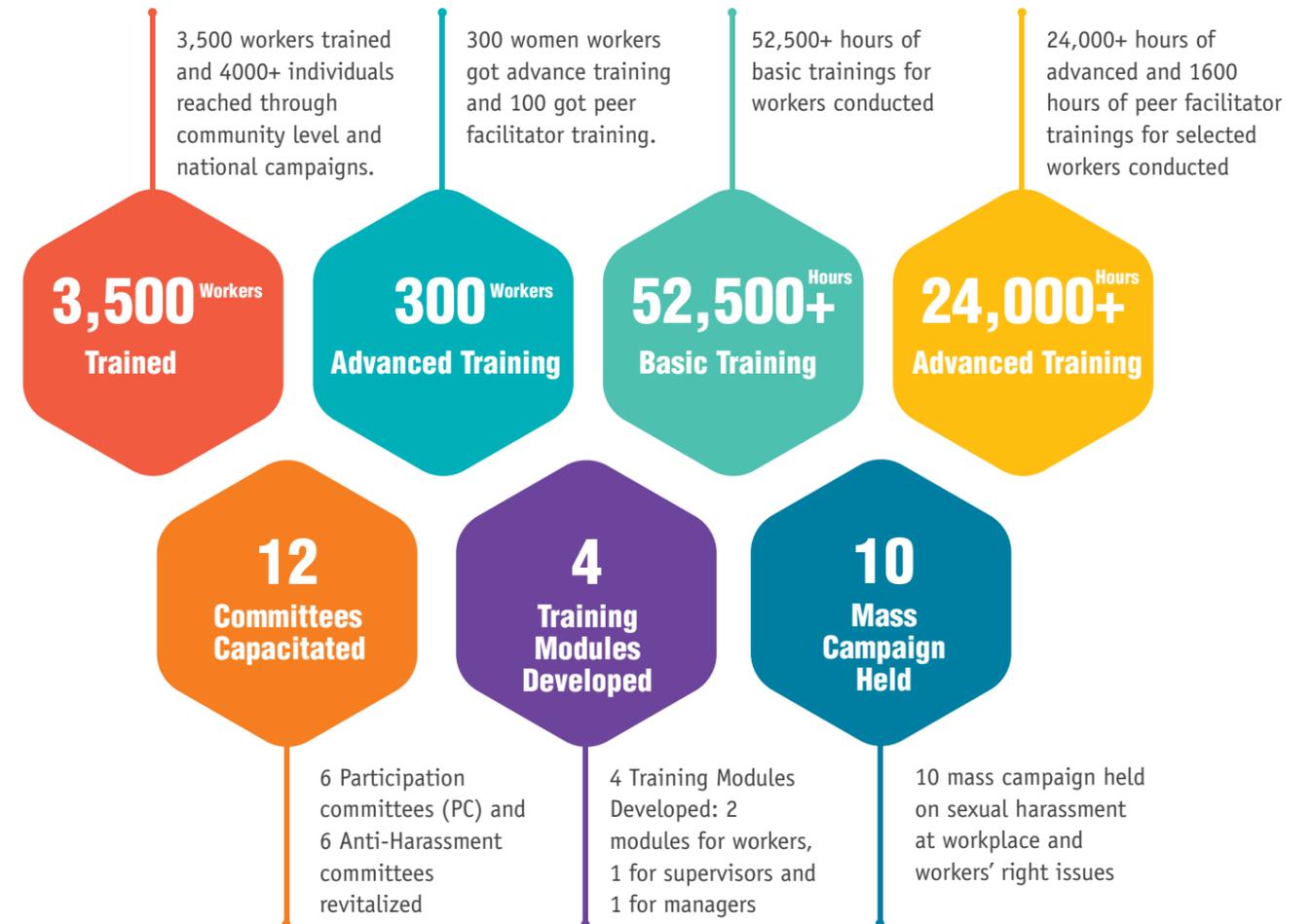


To build the capacity of factory mid-level management on workers needs and rights, professional attitude and behaviour and benefits of investment on workers welfare.



To mobilize community members to create the enabling environment at the community level.

OUTPUT AT A GLANCE



The PEEWF intervention began with a comprehensive baseline study to understand the current context and experiences of women workers and their environment and how CARE and GL may best leverage their organizational assets to design effective curriculum, trainings and interventions in the factory to maximize their benefit to women workers.

THE BASELINE ANALYSIS REVEALED

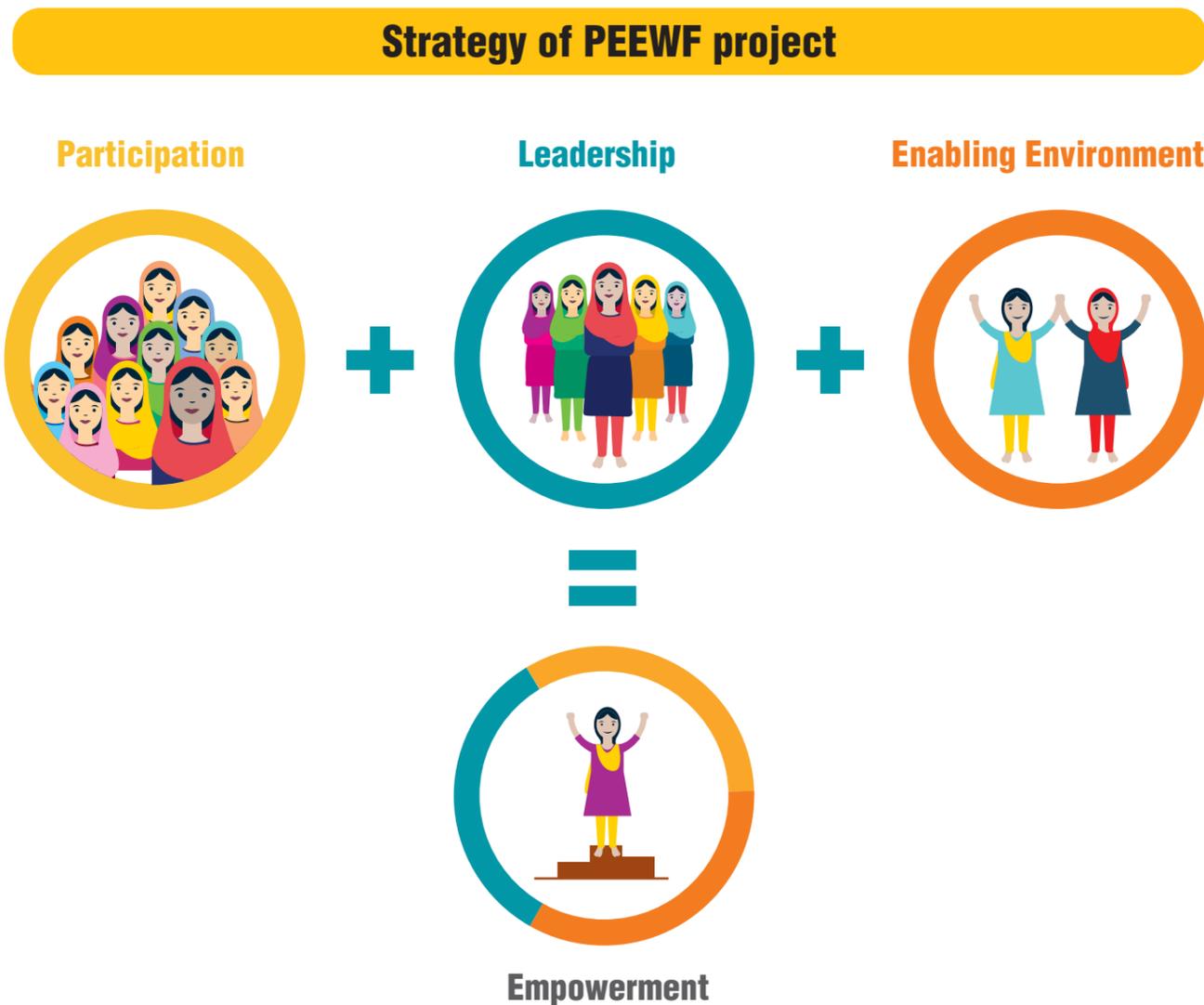
- Workers had a very limited knowledge on workers welfare, rights, and entitlements although the factories management taking notable measures to improve the working condition by providing them more facilities.
- It was observed that management, as well as the workers for the majority upheld patriarchal and traditional gender roles which proliferated violence against women and sexual harassment in the workplace.
- Due to low income, the factory workers were found to experience poor living conditions and expressed little opportunity for free time or outside activities given the double burden of paid and unpaid work.
- The majority of workers were found to be dissatisfied with their job life, and did not see career advancement as an option in their current position given the constraints identified above and lack of opportunity for upward professional mobility.

Building on these findings, the following interventions were facilitated to respond to the identified needs of workers and gaps in the factory ecosystem.

- Designing a module for capacity building of factory management and women workers
- Building the capacity of factory management and workers through a series of intensive training
- Strengthening mechanisms for worker's participation
- Supporting community dialogue with a diverse range of key stakeholders.

Following the PEEWF interventions, there were marked increases in knowledge and awareness of labour rights and laws, job satisfaction and productivity coupled with significant reductions in absenteeism and turnover.

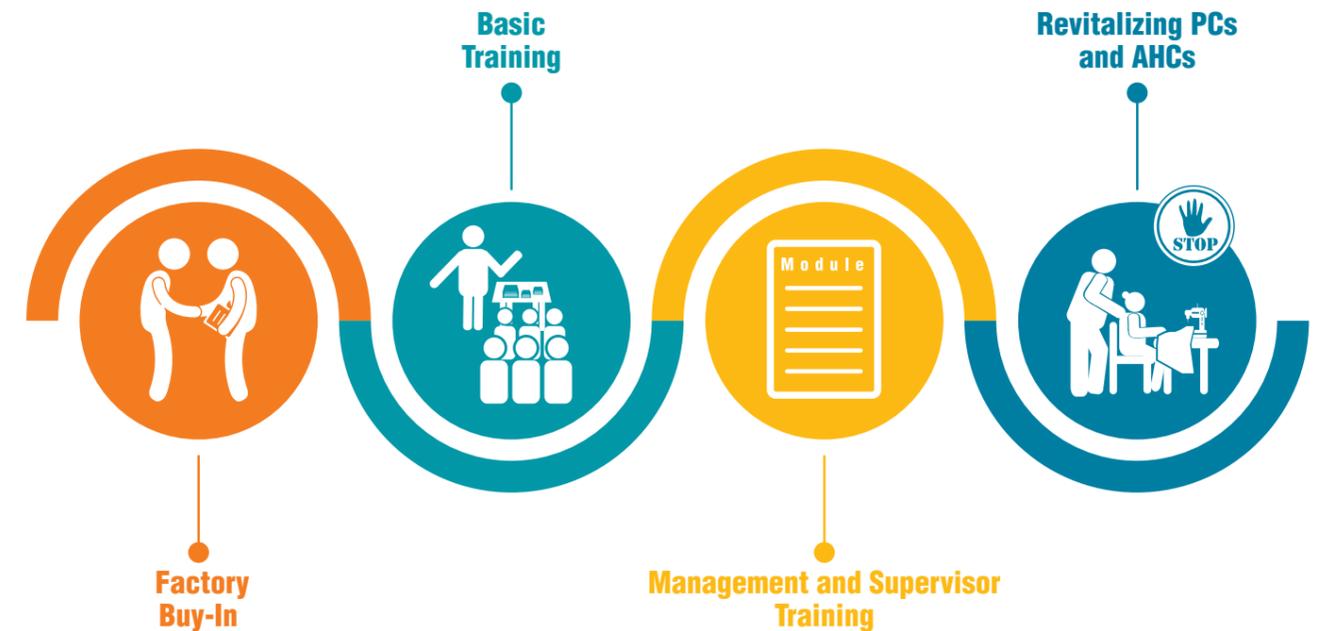
In an effort to highlight key learnings and potential future targets for both advocacy and scale of the PEEWF model in other contexts, CARE has prepared three learning briefs. These briefs seek to outline how the multilevel series of interventions under the PEEWF initiative worked in tandem to promote participation, build leadership and facilitate the enabling environment required to ensure that the demonstrated improvements at the individual and institutional level are sustained once CARE has phased out of the target communities.



PARTICIPATION



CARE Bangladesh worked to increase participation of women in institutional spaces through a multistage process. In working to secure buy in from factories, building the capacity of workers and management revitalizing the legally mandated participation committees (PC) and Anti-Harassment Committees (AHC) so that they better respond to the specific needs of women workers, the process outlined below was successful in increasing meaningful participation among women in workplace.



With buy-in from Top Management secured, CARE began to work in collaboration with factories to revitalize the previously underutilized and under sourced Participation (PC) and Anti-Harassment (AHC) Committees. While worker's participation committees were in place within factories, they were not functional. Workers required a stronger formal platform through which they could voice their demands for the realization of their rights, entitlements and a better working environment. Targeted advocacy was the primary approach to ensure that the PC and AHCs remained both open and effective. As CARE worked directly with workers and management under the purview of the current national Labour law, many committees were reinstated and now function more effectively CARE Bangladesh has provided technical support to targeted factories in the form of training, development of an action plan and support in devising a policy for the structure and function of both PC and AHC within the factory over time. Similarly, CARE facilitated workshops with PC and AHC members to enhance their capacity to properly identify and address workers' issues within the factory. CARE continued to host monthly meetings to ensure the equitable participation of PC and AHC committee members. This engagement was demonstrated to be crucial in facilitating the participation of women in other spaces and forums, both formal and informal throughout the factory and built the foundation on which leadership could thrive.

To build the capacity of workers, management and supervisors, CARE developed a series of four training modules intended to generate awareness among workers about their rights and entitlements while building the foundation for advanced training for those who demonstrated strong capacity for leadership and interest in career progression. Basic trainings were intended to be broad in scope and interactive with workers. Over 10 sessions, workers received training on topics ranging from communication to basic financial literacy to occupational safety and stress management. 5 high potential leaders were then selected from each training group for a more in depth series of advanced trainings over an 80 hour course with a select few then receiving further training as 'in-house' Peer Facilitators (PF).

WHAT WORKERS SAY ABOUT PARTICIPATION

To gather insight on the outcomes and impacts of the PEEWF a series of workshops were conducted with workers, supervisors and senior factory management. In addition, KII was also conducted with selected factory representatives and workers to further contextualize the findings. Workers described participation as:



Respondents from Management noted that the project “significantly improved the management-worker relationship” while workers identified that they are now “better able to speak to the management.” Groups indicated that they saw a marked increase in both self-confidence and productivity. Similarly, women identified that the process of participation has extended into their lives outside of the factory, allowing them to decide on how their income will be spent and on what and ‘jointly work to implement any decision agreed on whether in the family or inside factory’.

“Participation enhances our ability to express our opinions and use logic to resolve challenges. It allows us to feel that our opinions are taken seriously”.

Sathi (22), Operator, Intramax



EMPOWERMENT THROUGH PARTICIPATION

Nazneen (26), an operator in the intramax knitwear limited started working in the RMG sector as a means to bring herself out of poverty. She also believed that working in this type of formal sector would give her opportunity to live an independent life. From the time she joined the factory, Nazneen was aware of the issues she and her female colleagues experience, but remained silent. She identifies that the culture of silence inside the factory walls was largely due to her lack of opportunity to participate in any formal meetings with management. “There was no space for us”. Through the PEEWF intervention in collaboration with CARE Bangladesh Nazneen took part in the basic and advanced training sessions in factory. From the training Nazneen understood how to raise voice on women’s issues and she also understood the best way to claim any rights or resolve any problem is to place the issue in a formal setup. While factory management arranged an election for the PC committee, Nazneen decided to contest for a general member position. . With notable support from the coworkers, Nazneen was elected with distinction. Following her election to the PC committee, Nazneen attended every formal meeting and tried to raise women’s issues formally.. She has become somewhat of an idol among other women workers as she speaks up in various formal and informal meetings with confidence, raising her voice on behalf of herself and coworkers to management to improve conditions in factory. While giving an interview Nazneen stated:



“I was always trying to raise different issues that needed to be addressed but there was no one to talk to about women’s issues in particular. I didn’t have access to any kind of formal support. Being elected in the PC committee has been blessing for me because now I can participate in every formal meeting and platform. Other women workers are also participating in various meetings. More women are now enthusiastic to participate in the election of different committees. This happened because we realized we have to speak up. If we remain silent then nobody will talk for us.”

Nazneen has been advocating to inspire other women of the factories to participate in different meetings. While participation among her female colleagues was low beforehand, the PEEWF intervention has improved the ratio of men and women in meetings across the board. There are now a number of women who have taken new roles on various committees, including the safety, health and anti-harassment committees (AHCs) revitalized with the support of the PEEWF project.