

Country Strategic Plan India 2010

Introduction

India is one of the four priority countries for FWF. Currently the Fair Wear affiliates source from about 60 factories in India. Since the 1980s, India's economy has been expanding at five to nine percent per annum¹. But the robust economic development does not necessarily lead to a rapid growth in the income level. For example, the legal minimum daily wage in Bangalore was raised from about Rs.108 to Rs.127 in March 2009, the first increase in seven years. Paying the new minimum wage has become a major challenge for factories in the area, let alone a living wage². Workers are therefore in favour of overtime work to earn extra money to support their families. Undocumented and underpaid overtime work is probably the most common labour rights violence in India. In some factories overtime can be accumulated to 30-40 hours per week.

Apart from wage and overtime work, freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining is another big challenge. Majority of workers are women, who need to balance the time they work at factories and bare family responsibilities at home as part of the Indian culture. Most workers in the garment industry are not unionised, in some ways due to the lack of time to spend on organising activities. Awareness of union functions and activities is generally low among workers. In some cases, factories were reported to have fired union members and tried to prevent workers from joining union.

Child labour has not been seen frequently in factories directly supplying FWF's affiliates. One argument is that child labour is not a common problem in the garment industry comparing to other industries of India. However, child labour remains a risk as many factories do not have a system to check and maintain copies of personal identification documents of the employees.

Over the years, FWF has established an experienced audit team and several complaints handlers in India. FWF has also maintained continuous dialogues with various stakeholders in the country. In 2010, the focus of FWF's work in India will be updating its country study, initiating more social dialogues, conducting audits and improving the complaints handling system.

Country study

The FWF country study for India was published in 2004 with the focus on Tirupur. Two extra papers were written on wage and new developments on the industry and workers rights in Tirupur in 2004 and 2007 respectively. Tirupur and Bangalore were the main cities which FWF affiliates sourced from during that period. In recent years, as new affiliates joined while others left, suppliers of FWF affiliates have been scattered in many different areas in India. Therefore, a new study giving an overview on India is indispensable.

Deliverables 2010

- Update country study on India

¹ World Bank, India at a Glance, http://devdata.worldbank.org/AAG/ind_aag.pdf

² Worker Rights Consortium, Preliminary Report on Minimum Wage Violations in Bangalore, India, http://www.workersrights.org/linkedddocs/Bangalore%20Minimum%20Wage_Preliminary%20Report.pdf



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Audit training and audits

India has one of the most experienced FWF audit teams. Fourteen audits had been carried out by FWF in 2008 and 2009. Difference in languages and regulations in different states can be a challenge to social audits. There are eighteen recognised official languages, though the principal official languages are Hindi and English. Most documents are written in English while workers usually speak only the local official languages. There is a need to train workers interviewers who speak the right local language to communicate with workers.

FWF planned two verification audits in India. Number of audits on behalf of affiliates is totally dependent on the companies themselves. The affiliates can choose to deploy the FWF audit team or use other auditing bodies to monitor their supply chain, as long as the quality of the audits meets the FWF standards.

Deliverables 2010

- Small scale audit training for workers interviewers
- About three audits will be carried out in India

Stakeholder consultation and engagement

Engagement with local stakeholders is an essential part of FWF's strategy. It will maintain cooperation with stakeholders and include their perspectives in updating the country study. Some stakeholders will continue to participate in audits and complaints handling.

Deliverables 2010

- Stakeholders consultation report on improving labour conditions to be available at the website of FWF: www.fairwear.nl

Complaints procedure

The complaints procedure serves as a "safety net" for FWF's verification process, in case compliance systems in the factories are not fully effective. Workers are able to file their complaints directly to FWF and FWF will be responsible to investigate these cases. Corrective action plans then will be formulated if non-compliance is found.

One of the basic requirements for an effective complaints system is an accessible and trustable complaints handler. There are currently three FWF complaints handlers based in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and North India respectively. Complaints handlers are able to communicate in Karnataka, Tamil and Hindi. One complaints handler had decided to resign from the position. FWF will recruit a Tamil speaker to fill in the vacancy.

Deliverables 2010

- Recruit a Tamil complaints handler

Promotion of social dialogue

FWF will initiate discussion through its stakeholders consultation visit in June-July 2010. The result of the consultation will be used to assess the feasibility of dialogues at factory level.

Deliverables 2010

- An analysis on feasibility of social dialogue at factory level in India to be available at the website of FWF.