

FORUM:	Human Rights Council
ISSUE:	Measures for Improving Working Conditions and Addressing Low Wages for Laborers in the Manufacturing of Global Brand Products
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Introduction

The modern global economy is anchored on the production of global brand products, which stimulates economic development and generates jobs for millions of labor force worldwide. Nevertheless, this industry is riddled with numerous hurdles mainly in connection with harsh working conditions and low incomes, especially in developing countries. Employees in those manufacturing industries are compelled to endure extended working hours, exposed to significant health risks, lack job security, and



Poor working conditions main employment challenge

are paid inconceivably low wages that can barely cope with the inflationary rates. These circumstances violate several human rights while simultaneously maintaining a poverty trap and a system of social injustice system. The importance of this topic derives from the fact that it deals with human welfare and economic steadiness in equal measure. The protection of human rights, particularly in terms of wages for work done and working conditions, is not just a virtue – people’s rights

– but a necessity for development and growth. Lack of proper labor relations elicits several complications such as health hazards, loss of efficiency at the workplace, social tension that disrupts people’s welfare, and economic stability.

Background

The question of working conditions and wages remained low in the manufacturing sector not only for the local brands, but also for the production of famous brands of the world has a rather long



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problematic history. With globalization, progressively more manufacturing industries chose to work with outsourcing manufacturing to the developing countries in which the cost of labor is lower and the regulation is less comprehensive. This trend has resulted into large scale production facilities for apparatus such as those from Southeast Asia, South Asia, and Latin America. While this shift has created numerous economic opportunities, the rights of clients have not been respected and workers have been vulnerable to various forms of abuse.

Over the years the employees in these manufacturing regions have experienced diverse difficulties. Employees suffer long hours of work at the workplace with dangerous and unfavorable conditions. The catastrophe that befell the Rana Plaza factory building in Bangladesh in April 2013,

resulting in death of more than 1,100 workers in the garment industry, served as a strong reminder of the disturbing working conditions in the sector. Furthermore, salaries of these sectors fail to provide the basic needs of the employees and their families



It's time to tackle the root causes of poor working conditions

hence the cycle of miserable poverty engulfs them. However, regardless of the different measures that have been carried out by numerous organizations, it is still possible to point out certain problems. Globalization and the desire to become more competitive cause companies to concern themselves with economic gains more than ethical selling.

Problems Raised

Worker Exploitation and Human Rights Violations

This denied access to health care, sufficient and healthy food, job security, poor working conditions, and low wages means that the workers are exploited by having to work in dangerous conditions for long hours. These conditions are inhuman, and if not addressed, they may cause various diseases affecting workers' physical and mental health. Also, cases of child labor and forced labor are not exceptional under such setting.

Negative Economic and Social Impacts on Communities



Low wages compromise career advancement of workers, thereby cycling them through poverty in the society. A lack of finance which may be experienced in availing basic needs like health care, education, and other necessities may hamper the growth of any community. The problem of low wages and improper working conditions also cause social tensions, as workers and communities to which they belong may protest or go on a strike for better treatment, which can worsen the situation in the region.

Reputational Damage and Legal Risks for Brands

The actions and practices of a company which are not favorable to the employees may have a very detrimental impact on the global brands, since consumers regard them poorly for such practices. The consumer, activists, and organizations are more aware of their rights and have forced brands to make appropriate changes regarding fair sourcing and production. Also, organizations are exposed to legal dangers, which include lawsuits and fines, as they are regarded to be involved in the violation of labor rights. This can lead to a reverse and thus lead to loss making and is not healthy for the existence and building of the brand.



Luxury's Hidden Indian Supply Chain

Environmental Degradation

These include poor working conditions and low wages for employees which are usually associated with low standards in environmental measures in production industries. The intention to minimize the expenditure affects the environment; firms pollute, discharge wastes inadequately and exploit natural resources unsustainably. The social impacts of this environmental degradation can also be chronic since ecosystems and populations can be affected in the long term by unhealthy working conditions in connection with exposure to toxic materials and depletion of natural resources. It is also wider with regards to the environment where we are directly affecting bigger concerns like the climate change and the loss of species.

International Actions



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International Labor Organization (ILO) Conventions and Standards

The ILO is an agency of the United Nations and has developed many conventions and standards in relation to promoting decent work for people all over the world. These are the Forced Labor Convention, the Minimum Age Convention, the Worst Forms of Child Labor Conventions. These conventions define the least that can be done in protection of labor rights and conditions of work and countries which ratify such conventions are bound to domesticate such words.

United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs)

The UNGPs, adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011, offer an international benchmark for mitigating and responding to the threats that human rights risks associated with business operations pose. The principles give details on states and compliance of business on human rights, guarantee companies to ensure that they do not perpetrate abuse in their undertakings and value chains.

Key Players

International Labor Organization (ILO)

The ILO is one of the specialized agencies of the United Nations which came into existence in 1919. It unites governments, employers and workers of 187 member countries to establish the labor standards, to formulate the policies, and to develop the programs which advance the decent employment for all. The ILO is well illustrated for its conventions and recommendations together with setting up normative instruments to enhance social justice and fair globalization.



ILO: Aiming for Workers' Rights

Worker Rights Consortium (WRC)

The Worker Rights Consortium is an activist-monitored workers' rights organization established in 2000 and is independent from the companies it evaluates. Though it may not address the issue directly, the WRC is related to the topic through its comprehensive investigations and endeavors. In this regard, by pointing out the labor violations and forcing the companies to adhere to sound labor practices by levying regular fines, the



WRC has an enormous role in creating a safer workplace environment in the international manufacturing industries.

Human Rights Watch (HRW)

Although Human Rights Watch is an international human rights organization, it places significant emphasis on labor issues and working environment. This organization undertakes thorough research on violation of labor rights including child labor, forced labor, and exploitation in different industries. Through the reports they produce and the advocacy efforts, they exert an immense influence in enhancing the awareness and promoting policy change to improve human rights and working conditions globally.

Qatar

The migrant workers especially those involved in constructing world cup's infrastructures has been seen to be poorly treated in Qatar. Some of the findings are accounts of hazardous working conditions, long working hours, no payment of wages, and workers' identification documents such as passports seized, which limit mobility.

Bangladesh

The garment industry of Bangladesh has been a significant cornerstone of the country's economy, but the issue of the working conditions has been problematic. Polls reveal that employees are usually exposed to low wages, lengthy working hours, hazardous working conditions and often poor workers' protection. These severe issues came to the international level following the 2013 factor Rana Plaza factory collapse that claimed the lives of over 1,100 workers.



Scores Dead in Bangladesh Building Collapse

Democratic Republic of the Congo

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is reported to be involved in severe labor rights abuses especially in the aspect of mining. Many children up to 16 years of age work without pay, several are subjected to forced labor, and many work under dangerous conditions especially from cobalt and coltan

minerals. These minerals are fundamental to the electronics industry all over the world, although their procedure entails strife on human rights.

Possible Solutions

Strengthening Labor Laws and Enforcement

Governments have the responsibility of strengthening labor laws to offer enough safeguards such as wages, conditions of work, and freedom of association. There is the need to establish enhanced punitive measures and regulations so that the measures developed may be implemented appropriately.

Enhancing the labor laws and, in particular, the implementation of the latter is an urgent measure to address the working conditions and low wages phenomenon. This entails that governments must enhance the labor legislation. Namely, legal requirements should include the payment for a living wage as well as ban long working hours and dangerous working conditions. Also, the measures of enforcement also must be efficient, including frequent monitoring of the companies and the strict punishment of violators. There can be establishment of labor offices that are well-resourced and empowered to enforce and correct violations. In this way, the approach ensures that employers stick to proper conduct on labor issues and the workers can take legal action in case of violation of the rights hence improving on humane treatment at the workplaces.

Support for Worker Organizations and Unions



Amazon worker organization

Workers should be protected through the recognized trade unions or worker organizations through support. Employees ought to be able to negotiate for new pay structures and improved conditions of work. The support and financial assistance from the international community enhance the organizations' capability to further demand better protection for workers.

Such institutions and governments should protect workers' bargaining rights through labor unions so that they will be able to deal for better

wages and form better employee relations. Also, offering accompaniment to unions financially and technically is a way of enhancing the organization's abilities to campaign vigorously for labor rights.

Awareness-raising activities can also be provided to increase the employees' awareness of their rights and



the advantages of joining a union. Thus, by supporting unions and worker organizations, this approach brings a change in the power relations between employers and employees with the result of fairer labor relations.

Consumer Awareness and Advocacy

This in turn increases the openness of consumers on the conditions under which products are manufactured hence setting pace on the demand of ethically manufactured goods. While awareness projects and labels like Fair Trade should enable consumers to avoid making wrong purchases and to



Labor unions are on the front lines in battle over worker protections

force companies into improving their policies.

Organizations can show people areas where workers are abused or put in dangerous situations to prompt them to seek better treatment from corporations. In addition, there are special certification programs, for instance, Fair Trade that can help people to make the right choice. Finally, the advocacy on social media and other related sites is helpful in increasing public awareness and other activist putting pressure on companies to change on their labor practices.

International Collaboration and Agreements

Such more encompassing international formations as ILO and UN should further promote cooperation and agreements for the enhancement of labor conditions throughout the world. Some of the aspects that may be contained in trade agreements are labor requirements which set civil conditions that have to be followed by the contracting nations.

This relates to joint effort through the organization like the ILO in setting up the global labor standards and implementing them. Trade related organizations may also include labor clauses whereby the veritable partners in the trade must adhere to these standards to level the playing grounds and avoid lowering of standards. Through encouraging international collaboration, this approach guarantees that labor rights are protected globally.

Economic Incentives for Compliance



Each country's government and intergovernmental organizations can grant tax exemptions, subsidies, or better conditions for imports and exports to the companies that prove they are committed to proper treatment of workers. These incentives help to align the self-interest of a business with sound ethical practices thus making it easier for the business to make ethical operations more financially feasible. Further, financial penalties that can range from fines to exclusion from large or prestigious deals, can discourage firms from continuing with oppression. Offering funds towards improving the readiness levels of workers through providing training sessions and improving the physical facilities can also help in compliance. With payoff proportional to good behavior integrated into the system, it encourages the firms to pay their employees fairly and provide them with a safe working environment.

Glossary

Lay Off Workers

If workers are laid off, they are told by their employers to leave their job, usually because there is no more work for them to do.

Living Wage

A wage sufficient to provide a worker and their family with the necessities of life, including food, housing, healthcare, education, and other essentials, allowing them to live with dignity.

Minimum Wage

The lowest legal hourly pay that employers can offer workers, set by government legislation, intended to protect workers from exploitation and ensure a basic standard of living.

Collective Bargaining

A process in which workers, through their unions, negotiate with employers on terms of employment, including wages, working hours, benefits, and working conditions.

Child Labor

The employment of children in any work that deprives them of their childhood, interferes with their ability to attend school, and is harmful to their physical or mental development.

Forced Labor

Situations in which persons are coerced to work through the use of violence or intimidation, or by more subtle means such as accumulated debt, retention of identity papers, or threats of denunciation to immigration authorities.

Supply Chain Transparency



The practice of companies disclosing information about their supply chain operations, including the source of materials, labor conditions, and environmental impact, to ensure accountability and ethical practices.

Fair Trade

A movement and certification system aiming to ensure that producers in developing countries get a fair price for their products, with fair labor conditions and sustainable farming practices.

Sweatshop

A workplace where workers are employed at very low wages for long hours under poor and often unsafe working conditions.

Ethical Sourcing

The process of ensuring that products are obtained in a responsible and sustainable way, considering the working conditions, environmental impact, and fair-trade practices.

Labor Rights

The rights of workers to fair treatment, safe working conditions, fair wages, and the ability to organize and bargain collectively.

Global Supply Chain

The worldwide network of production and distribution processes involved in producing goods and services, from raw materials to finished products delivered to consumers.

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