

## **Women Readymade Garment Workers and Their Sustainable Empowerment: Reality or Illusion? An Empirical Study in Dhaka, Bangladesh**

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**Abstract:** Emergence of the RMG sector has enabled Bangladeshi women to take part in formal economic activities through which they have been able to attain empowerment that was previously denied to them. However, with lacking control over income and inadequate future planning, sustainability of this empowerment is questionable. This paper examines the sustainability of empowerment achieved by the female garment workers through a qualitative approach with Focus Group Discussions (two FGDs), In-depth Interviews (18 interviews) and Passive-Participant Observation methods since it provides a clear understanding and holistic image of the reality while incorporating Naila Kabeer's proposed three dimensions of empowerment- resource, agency and achievement. Three areas of Dhaka- Ashulia, Mirpur and Mohammadpur were chosen for this study as these are well known for their favorable garment infrastructure. The participants include- women currently employed (n=25) and former female apparel workers (n=3). Crucial themes emerged from this study are: trade unions are playing a vital role in awareness building among the workers; women, in general, still lack the control over their own income and have to bear the double burden that threaten their future; controlling the income is gradually emerging as a contested issue between the sexes due to their (women) enhanced awareness and self-esteem, that in turn, challenges the stern grip of patriarchy. Hence, sustainable empowerment for them is not a mere illusion; it has the very possibility to become a dazzling reality.

*Key words :* Empowerment, Control over Income, Readymade Garment Workers, Double Burden, Sustainable Empowerment.