



## A Critical Analysis of Global Supply Chain Management in the RMG Sector and the Significance of Empowering Female Labor

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### Abstract

**Purpose of the study:** Sustainability has been extensively studied for its importance to long-term economic progress, achievement, and wealth. However, the social side of sustainability, particularly female labor and textile industry empowerment, has received little emphasis. This research paper examines the impact of RMG multinational corporations (MNCs) on the empowerment or exploitation of female workers inside the factory settings of global supply chains.

**Methodology:** The approach of critical discourse analysis is used to evaluate the findings from different textile MNCs and examine the issues of empowerment and sustainability.

**Findings:** This study finds the fundamental behaviors that contribute to the marginalization and exploitation of female employees within global corporate supply chains. Consequently, it highlights the necessity of investigating potential avenues explore the possibilities for genuine empowerment.

**Implications:** This study presents a policy framework that elucidates how various stakeholders can collectively pledge to ensure enduring empowerment for women. Additionally, the paper also recommends how fashion MNCs might establish sustainable supply chains, thereby fostering a mutually beneficial outcome.

**Limitations:** The paper requires further information and empirical data necessary to enhance the comprehensive understanding of genuine empowerment in the context of involving oppressed women in the global supply chains as subjects.



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## 1.0 Introduction

Sustainability is what ties the future with the present, and in the modern world it has become a prominent topic for long term growth, success and prosperity (Mohrman and Worley, 2010). The three pillars of sustainability, which are environmental, social, and economic (Hansmann et al, 2012), enable the fundamental transitioning of supply chains for more socially equitable and inclusive societies (Mohrman and Worley, 2010). While this transition is one of the most highlighted issues being tackled by organizations and researchers, integration of social aspects in sustainability programs have by far been the most challenging (Boström, 2012). Additionally, the social dimension has received less attention in both practice and literature due to its high expectations relating to social welfare, justice, cohesion, gender issues, democratic and workers' rights, quality of life, and many more. (Boström, 2012).

Consideration of the social dimension and positive transformation of social policies in recent years have highly involved the subject of gender equality and empowerment of women as central to sustainable development (unwomen, 2012). While this scheme has been recognized and confirmed by countries such as Brazil (unwomen, 2012), women empowerment is still at major struggle, especially for the women workforce who are parts of global supply chains residing in developing countries (globalcompact, 2018). The need for empowerment of such women workforce can be adequately epitomized by the numerous acts of subjugation that still prevail in the global fashion industry till this date (Hodal, 2018).

Fashion being a vessel that enables expression of creativity, diversity and personality, has been a culprit to having a dark side. It shadows inequality and oppression of women and girls in developing nations and across every step of the value chain. (Hodal, 2018) The sustainable development goal 5 (sustainabledevelopment.un.org, 2018), which is to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls, encourages the recognition and acknowledgement of numerous conscious and unconscious prejudices that are deeply ingrained within the existing societal framework. Additionally, it serves as a source of inspiration for individuals to actively pursue alternative avenues that promote equal opportunities and empowerment for individuals of all genders where 80% are women workers (waronwant, 2010). How is it then that a significant portion of these women continue to face oppression and discrimination in their daily lives?

This paper attempts to excavate this concern through addressing two research questions:

1. Is the use of abundant female labor in the RMG sector in developing countries like Bangladesh empowering them or exploiting their basic rights and principal needs?
2. How aware are the successful fashion MNCs regarding the issue of women empowerment and its significance towards sustainable supply chain management?

Responsible legislation is the first step towards achieving global health and wellbeing. It is the core system of fast fashion, that is considered faulty when for instance the workers legal minimum wage fails to provide them with three meals a day. Additionally there exists numerous issues within the system that entitles the workforce to lead a suffering life. While extensive and extended literature exist regarding how workers in general are exploited, this paper is constructed with motivation to discover root causes of exploitation, and goes one step further to filter the problems within the global supply chain to reflect how women pay the heavier price and are specifically are overpowered. We explore into the depths of the interpretation of empowerment, as well as the global apparel supply chain to understand how it functions and how women empowerment can be achieved in the form of positive liberty.

## 2.0 Literature review

The concern of women empowerment has been addressed in numerous literature; this section of the paper examines the literary texts to provide a structure best suitable for answering the research questions. I begin with the depiction of empowerment by various authors, and consider it beyond the spectrum of business to allow a study that is both broader and more in depth. I then present the situation of MNCs dealing with the subject, thus adding to the debate of empowerment or exploitation of female workforce. Research then turns towards

MNCs' awareness towards these problems; while evidence is sufficient to understand the level of awareness, it is also vital to learn how and why codes of conducts fail to do justice to the awareness or actions. Lastly, the case of Bangladesh is considered to represent a suffering nation and present a scenario where all issues exist.

### 2.1. Importance of empowerment, and why it is an issue

In every aspect of development for a society today (Perryman and Arcos, 2016). In the words of Amartya Sen, "it is one of the central issues in the process of development for many countries in the world today" (Stromquist, 2015). Ms. Migiro, in the International Women Leaders Global Security Summit in 2007 quoted in 2007 "Study after study has shown us that when women are fully empowered and engaged, all of society benefits", which is backed by research showing that the costs to woman's health and their families' future is a long term liability to the society (Prieto-carrón, M, 2008). Narayan, in a sourcebook for World Bank (2002) describes empowerment as "expansion of freedom of choice and action to shape one's life"; which for the underprivileged and poor, remains a battle for freedom scarred by voicelessness, powerless and gender inequalities. There exists no single institutional model for empowerment, however, Narayan (2002) with experience and examples state four key elements (Table 1) that must be present in the institutional reform.

Women empowerment has been acknowledged as a one of the fundamental elements of poverty reduction, economic growth and improved governance by the World Bank. The subject is therefore also affiliated with business strategies because intensifying globalization and international competition has made economic upgrading/downgrading crucial factors of buyer/supplier business strategies (Barrientos et al 2016). While social justice as an important part of social welfare is effectively pursued, the importance of women empowerment is often undermined, which is why World Bank has declared this as a development goal (Malhotra, Schuler and Boender, 2002). Malhotra et al (2002) mentions social inclusion among institutions as pathways to empowerment, while citing Bennett (2002) whose framework includes "empowerment" and "social inclusion" as closely related but different concepts. Inseparable from succeeding actions, female empowerment is not a concept of domination (men subordinate to women), but as an element of leverage that ensures gender equality to be initiated, respected, maintained and sustained (Stromquist, 2015).

Due to its complex nature, Women empowerment requires multifaceted attention in order to create a sustainable impact on it (Stromquist, 2015). It is fundamental to not only look into the feminist side of the literature, as advancement of gender equality is crucial to women empowerment (Onditi and Odera, 2016) but also why women specifically are in need of empowerment from a business as well as social perspective.

### 2.2. Women empowerment as an issue in sustainability practices of MNCs

Why women labor, participation and empowerment are of foremost concern today is because Multinational corporations have continuously been relocating their production firms to developing countries in search of cheap labor, the majority of which are women (Hossain, et. Al, 2013). For instance, companies like Marks & Spencer and Zara who once depended on domestic sourcing, have internationalized and developed outsourcing strategies to developing countries such as India, China, and Bangladesh, to find manufacturers that can keep up with new forms of flexibility, designs, demands and cost (Tokatli, 2008; Tokatli, Wrigley, & Kızılgüç n, 2008).

Turker and Altuntas (2014) mentions that the labor in developing countries compose of young and poorly educated people (mostly women), who agree to work on forceful lower wages since the basic needle work in the fashion industry does not require high skills. Women workers in Bangladesh for instance are highly illiterate, and although reports reveal that level of education are independent of wages, increased literacy will enrich access to information which is an important aspect of empowerment as well as sustainability (Carlson and Bitsch, 2017).

It is crucial to bring womens' needs into spotlight; compared to men, not only do women have a less favorable outlook towards the impact of MNCs on local businesses, they are prominently more likely to feel the harm caused to the domestic businesses (Daniels et al, 2016). Similarly, women are also preferred over men in the African horticulture for picking, packing, and value added processing activities; they are more productive and are able to perform work that is more delicate and tedious (Barrientos et al, 2003). Turker and Altuntas (2014)

mentions that the workforce in countries like Bangladesh are highly vulnerable to discrimination, long working hours and unfair treatment besides extremely low wages. This remains a prominent sustainability issue in the fast fashion supply chain. In Bangladesh (where RMG industry contributes to 80% of total export earnings (Rahman, Siddiqui, 2015), not only do women receive lower compensation benefits compared to men, but they are unfairly justified and rationalized by gender discourses of performance (Hossain et al, 2013). In the export of horticulture in Africa, women workers being 75% and the priority of production are also subjected to highly gendered and unfair work and domestic treatments (Barrientos et al, 2003). Employers are liberated from providing labor benefits thus increasing female vulnerability in the global work force, resulting in violation of labor rights and benefiting capitalists, proving that gendered discourse does matter in manufacturing industries.

### **3.0 Methodology**

This research examines the current scenario of female labor in the apparel industry, and how fashion MNCs frame their views and actions on the issue and representation of empowering female workers. The content that could relate to (a) empowerment and exploitation faced by the women workforce in the apparel industry and (b) women empowerment practices by dominant fashion MNCs, were filtered and further analyzed to provide appropriate discussions and conclusions based on the research questions. It is important to consider how these root issues trickle down the supply chain and hamper the overall brand image and sustainability of the successful fashion MNCs when the contents released by the brands are opposed by actual reports and research.

#### **3.1 An approach to Critical Discourse Analysis**

The approach of Critical Discourse analysis will be used to evaluate the findings from different MNCs and examine the issues of empowerment. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is an interdisciplinary method that critically examines conversation, positing that language functions as a manifestation of social practice. The subject matter primarily concerns the examination of both opaque and transparent structural relationships as they are evident in language. Discourse being an important component of social practices and emerging from critical linguistics (Janks, 1997), will enable the study of discourse in “female labor empowerment” by fashion multinational companies for sustainable supply chain strategies. This paper utilizes a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), showing how different MNCs contents including images, statistics, photographs, diagrams, videos and graphics can create meaning communicated by a text that are frequently more implicit or indirect than a language (Machin, David, 1966). By focusing on relations of power, dominance and inequality and ways in which they are reproduced or resisted, we aim to reveal or disclose what is implicit; in my case, the true level of empowerment female workforce in the Apparel industry are subjected to.

#### **4.0 Findings and analysis**

The large industry of RMG has for many years been credited to empowering millions of poor rural women who thanks to the garments industry are now considered financially independent, and contributors to the development of many third world nations. Women, who are yet to enter the world of garments often say and/or believe that the steady wage will provide a better future for perhaps her sick family member of daughter, and take pride into thinking their contribution caters to development. While the latter part is a fact, the question that echoes the former is, are women receiving the empowerment they deserve for their enormous communal contribution that empowers the very nation? This section examines the question by putting forth the interpretation of empowerment, and the fundamental behaviors that contribute to the exploitative scenarios at the apparel industry for women workers within its supply chains.

#### 4.1 Visualizing empowerment

Empowerment, meaning liberty, is defined according to Cambridge dictionary as “the process of gaining freedom and power to do what you want or to control what happens to you”. The process of empowerment can be associated with one individual, to political, economic, youth or in this case, women empowerment. Addressing the fact that no solitary definition of women empowerment exist, few reputed institutions have given this term a meaning. For instance, world bank (2007) defines it as “the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes.” According to the Gender Population Reference Bureau (2015), women empowerment is when women and girls have the power to act freely to exercise their rights to be full and equal members of the society; it is not an add-on to development, but exists at the very core of it.

The fact that women empowerment is not only important, but is needed for success in sustained macroeconomic growth is homogenous in all three quotes by the renowned individuals. Empowered women upon a survey when asked how they got empowered in the first place, majority reflected “self awareness”; a process of discovering who they are, followed by experience and then education (huffingtonpost, 2017). This revolutionary finding tells us that although education is extremely important, it is the self actualization of inner strength, and being able to use that strength to benefit herself, her family and her surroundings that caters to empowerment. It is that inner strength and power that needs attention and assistance to be discovered and used in a conventional manner. Only then will it shape a win win situation.

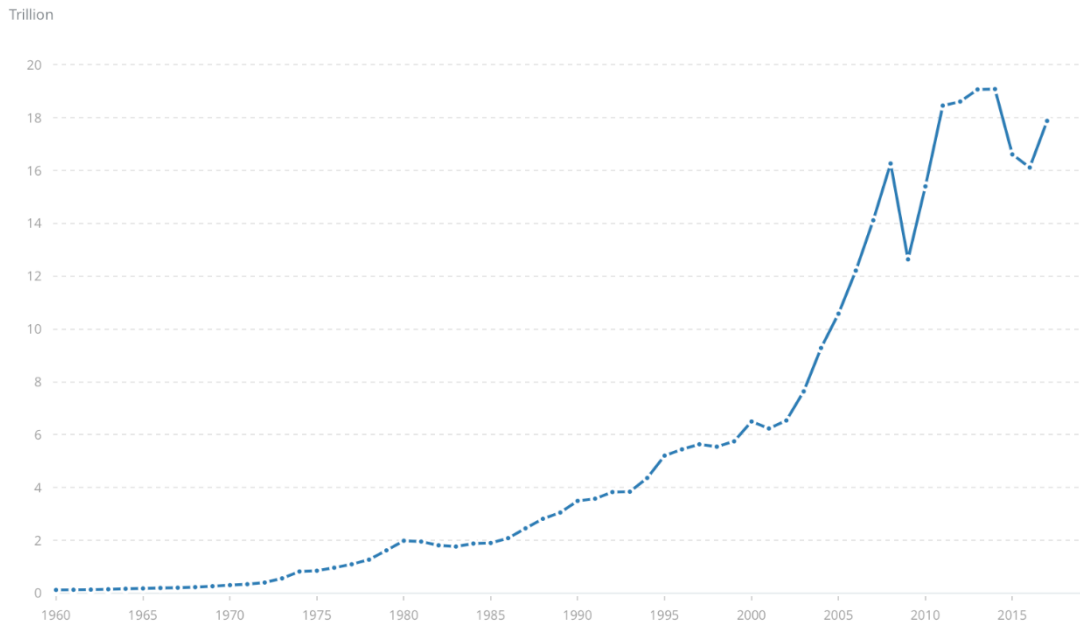
The garment sector has been doing great at providing women with critical jobs and capital that help elevate standards of living (Kaur, 2016). Northern areas in Bangladesh, for instance, is one of the poorest regions in the world, where women get recruited to formal garment sectors through the NARI project. While projects as such facilitate the vulnerable women by providing accommodation and help adjust to city life during training (worldbank, 2017), so that they can earn work and earn a salary, liberal writers like Leslie T. Chang may argue that the women are in fact empowered through the transition (Schultze, 2015). The argument of exploitation being the roadway towards empowerment is also advocated by economist Naila Kabeer who refers women in Bangladesh who have gained recognition for domestic and economic contributions as a garment worker; they are conscious towards their rights and have better decision making power (Schultze, 2015).

While these gains are facts and important to acknowledge, it is fundamental to understand the way women have been integrated into the industry. It is essential to understand what the industry aims to achieve, how the workers are empowered or exploited in the process of achieving that aim, and how sustainable the system actually is.

#### 4.2 The state of women in the Global Apparel Supply Chain: Scenario of the exploited

Fashion no longer has the essence of being timeless, thanks to the staggering growth in numbers and decrease in authenticity. A shift of choice and trend in consumers reflected willingness to pay less and sacrifice quality to an extent where the purchase of replica items at lower standards were accepted; this was where the world of fashion retail saw an opportunity. This led to a booming business of fast fashion, with astounding growth around the world, as shown in figure 1. Retailers’ goal to maximize profit by pinpointing on key components of the supply chain to decrease cost and increase speed was complimented by the favorable investments in labor abundant developing countries.

**Merchandise exports (current US\$)**



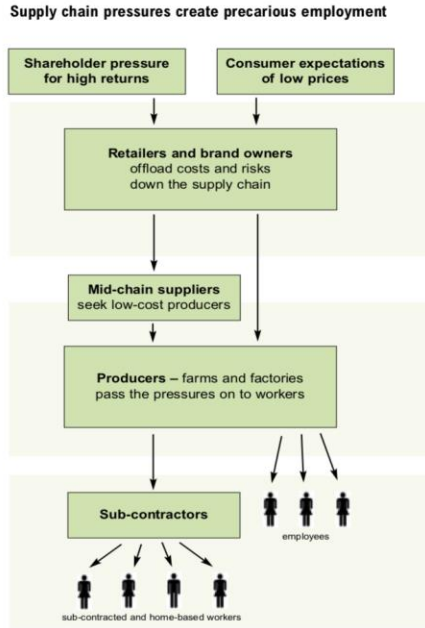
**Figure 1: Merchandise exports (current US\$)**

**Source: The World Bank**

A supply chain, which comprises of full collection and flow of activities, materials and information (SME, 2017), that an organization carries out to bring a product or service to customers can be both inbound and outbound. Inevitably there will be parts of the chain that are valued the least. Unfortunately in many parts of the world, mostly developing countries, the participation of women for instance is least valued and taken for granted; the RMG sector being one of the most notable value chains of them all.

In developing countries such as China, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Turkey, women are prime workers of the garments sector (WIEGO, 2018), which epitomize the challenges of unfair wages, contract violations and extreme sweatshop conditions in the global retail supply chain. The industry operates through economic and political relationships at individual levels, starting from global trade negotiations to the employment of homeworkers. They are aware of the markets (Hale and Wills, 2005) and according to Chan (2013), suppliers additionally rely on labor contractors, poor maintenance of labor contractors, increased access to suitable labor, financial incentives, low settlement costs, and power to limit collective bargaining.

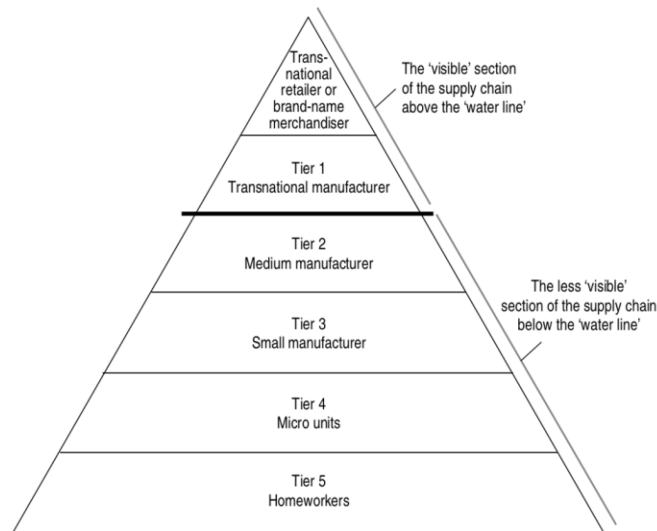
Raworth (2004) portrays how pressure at the top of the RMG Supply Chain trickles down to effect the women workers at the bottom. It begins with shareholders pressurizing for high returns and consumers expecting low prices. Brand owners and retailers unburden costs and risks downwards to the mid chain suppliers and producers, pushing for lower prices, fast production, flexibility, high standards, and labor conditions without long-term commitment. Producers pass on the pressure to the workers (employees) and subcontractors and home-based workers, who are mostly precariously employed women and migrants (figure 2).



**Figure 2: Supply chain pressures create precarious employment**

Source: **TRADING AWAY OUR RIGHTS - Women working in global supply chains**

Though the representation seems uncluttered, the reality is far complex, connecting hundreds of supply chains to different garment producers. The web of producers at the bottom of the supply chain are so intricate and complex that instead of a pyramid of tiers, an iceberg is a more accurate representation (Jane and Wills, 2005), as shown in figure 3. The less “visible” section below the water line is where the garment factories in developing countries fall, characterized by insecure, unstable, patriarchal and marginalized workforce. For example, in Bangladesh women workers reported how difficult it was for them to move into supervisory roles (Macchiavello et al, 2015).



**Figure 3: The pyramid/iceberg model of the supply chain**

Source: **Women Working Worldwide (2005)**

The model of globalization proves to be flawed; while investors' rights since the past 30 years have amplified and extended with international trade agreements, workers' rights have gone reverse, failing the women who are left poor, unprivileged and mistreated (Jane and Wills, 2005). Governments, for the benefit of flexibility, stand guilty of trading away the rights of women in law and practice, sacrificing employment safety, security, benefits protection, and sustainable labor practices. Both government, and MNCs' actions portray that perhaps they are failing to realize that their short term gain of this strategy comes at the price of a long-term liability for society, where women workers are paying the heaviest price (Raworth (2004).

While extensive and extended literature exist regarding how workers in general are exploited, this paper goes one step further and filters the problems within the "invisible" tiers to reflect how they are even more devastating to the women compared to men; how women specifically are overpowered. This is important to set a clear picture of why women need to be empowered, that empowerment for women is not a privilege but an immediate essential. We take into consideration that this list is endless if every problem were to be specifically pointed out.

#### **4.2.1. Exploiting Inequalities**

There exists a noticeable deficiency of women further up the hierarchy in the garments. Women dominated numbers and jobs of production that mostly relates to sewing and assembly, or subordinate roles of machine operator, helpers and checkers (globallaborjustice, 2018), while male were promoted up the ladder to administration, management and ownership (Uddin, 2018). In Bangladesh, only about 0.5% of the managers and about 9.3% of HR managers in RMG enterprises are female. On the production floor on the other hand, about 60.8% are females; 73.9% women are appointed in sewing jobs, while 22.7% women work in the cutting section (Uddin, 2018). Women workers rarely attain leadership positions in their factories and unions, and remain within a low skill level employment (globallaborjustice, 2018).

#### **4.2.2. Job insecurity**

"Women should not have to choose between motherhood and a career" quotes Ara (2017). This is one of the most prominent issue faced by women beyond the RMG sector; Guardian (2015) reveals 54,000 women worldwide lose their jobs every year due to maternity leave discrimination. Multiple studies revealed that workers are refrained from having children; with no permit of maternity leave, they fear of losing their garments job, which is possibly their only source of income. For instance, surveys in garments supplying to H&M disclosed that women were routinely fired from jobs in course of their pregnancies, and if they were to rejoin, they would lose all promotional ranks and benefits (Kale, 2016).

Ara (2007) further mentions that empowerment for them took a wrong turn; instead of being able to exercise decision making rights at home, it was negatively affecting their family lives.

Because the blue-collar women in the garment sector are so poor and uneducated (Uddin, 2015), their job seems to be their only chance of income; for which they are bound to accept unlawful structural conditions and are unable to fight for secured jobs.

#### **4.2.3. Violation of maternity leaves, and rights for childcare**

Picturing a woman who is able to survive in her job during the course of her pregnancy, the real hurdle for her begins after the child is born. This is because statutory maternity rights are hardly provided, and because of a certain number of days of absence during pregnancy, over-time becomes absolutely compulsory. Excessively long periods of working days further build on to the burden of domestic responsibilities, depriving women any rest periods or time with their children. What makes this worse is that although women are legally entitles to be paid for maternity leaves under the labor laws, most have little to no knowledge on their rights, neither any



form of certificate or contract to vouch for a maternity leave. Even if they did hypothetically, the factor of job insecurity would force them to be fired.

As wages are based on meeting production goals, mothers are obligated to work even longer hours to support their child financially. Women in Bangladesh are often even forced to work nightshifts and although this is legal, they commonly face punishments or are fired upon refusal. This leaves very little time to organize childcare or make any form of personal arrangements.

One of the biggest concerns for women in this case is the amount of time they are obliged to spend separated from their children. Despite Bangladesh labor law establishing that any organization with over 40 women working must provide a suitable room for children under six, hundreds of workers reported having no such facility in the garment factory they work in (waronwant, 2011).

#### **4.2.4. Harassment and violence**

The news that female workers have been subjected to more harassment and mistreatment compared to men is unfortunately of no surprise. Three different forms of harassment, according to Hale and Wills (2005) are verbal/psychological, physical and sexual. A report by waronwant (2011) in Bangladesh reveals 718 women reported being spoken to with obscene language, while 443 beaten and 427 hit on the face. Reports on sexual harassments were the most alarming; 297 women had been sexually taken advantage of and 290 being touched inappropriately. Furthermore, women were subjected to punishments and threats of losing jobs, sent to prison and as preposterous as getting undressed. Similar stories prevail in many other developing countries, yet these issues are often underreported (Hale and Wills, 2005) at main MNCs they work for, due to the invisibility of tiers in the supply chain. H&M and GAP for instance advocates anti-harassment throughout their supply chain; H&M quotes: “All forms of abuse or harassment are against everything that H&M group stands for”, but the current reality frames females in Asian factories experiencing abuse on a daily basis (Hodal, 2018). The director of Global Labour Justice further stated that gender-based violence is an consequence of the global supply chain structure and that it should be understood by all parties.

#### **4.2.5. Underpayment of wages and social welfare benefits**

While this particular obstacle is encountered by both male and female, both have different drawbacks attached. Women work more (Uddin, 2015), yet often earn significantly less than men and are only obtainable to the lowest paid jobs with extremely rare prospects of promotion (Schultze, 2015). This in particular is more unfavorable to women as they take up the primary role in providing for the family (Kaur, 2016); this includes all the unpaid work within a household for the members, including caring, house chores and voluntary social work as illustrated in figure 4 (Ospina and Tzvetkova, 2017). The ratio is significantly unbalanced, and the discriminating wages are insufficient to allow them to fulfill basic human necessities (Kaur, 2016). For instance, a women in Bulgaria mentioned receiving a salary of US\$62, from which US\$26 and US\$36 was spent on transport and family costs respectively, leaving no room for shopping, savings, medicine, healthcare and many more necessities (Hale and wills, 2005).

Although business case and welfare of wages are outlined in a multi-stakeholder perspective (Coulson and Bonner, 2014), MNCs have reportedly faced criticism for paying workers lesser than wages mentioned in the supply chains(Kaur, 2016). While feminist literature argues that nonmonetized domestic work for example child-care, cooking, and housework are necessary in functioning of a “productive economy” (Barreintos, et al, 2003), these additional roles should be ethically and lawfully acknowledged so that women are not paid less than what they deserve.

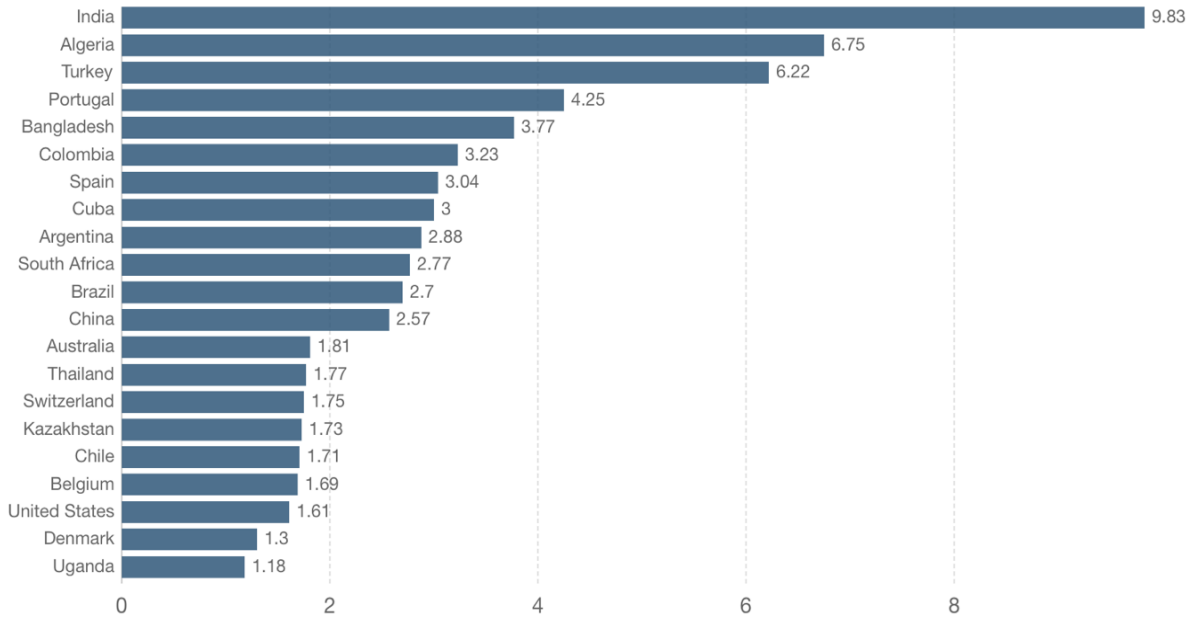


Figure 4: Female-to-male ratio of time devoted to unpaid care work, 2014

Source: Gender, Institutions and Development Database 2014 (ourworldindata, 2017)

Female to male ratio of time dedicated to unpaid household work. Includes all unpaid services contributed within a household for the members, including domestic work, care of persons, and voluntary social work.

#### 4.2.6. Health and safety issues

The list of injuries, illness and infections due to poor working conditions that exists in reality of the factories and in literature are almost as long as the list of health and safety violations. This is also a problem dealt with all the workers in factories regardless of gender, however, women pay a heavier price of suffering. Hale and Wills (2005) stated a report that concludes women spent 8% of their salary on health and safety issues while men spent only 4%. Not only is this because women are more likely to work where standards of health and safety are the lowest (Hale and Wills (2005), but also perhaps due to being physically weaker, being on their menstrual periods or being pregnant. Women are often absent from work due to lack of conventional or affordable sanitary system that meets the basic needs for menstrual hygiene. During pregnancy, besides the fear of losing jobs, health and safety fall at great risks. Women missing days of work lead to loss of income and health for them and loss in production and business, which is damaging to the whole economy.

Empowering initiatives for this particular problem does exist; SNV Bangladesh for instance promotes Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) and works with 15 garment factories to provide health products and services to women through inclusive businesses within the supply chain. However, while the project remains at the pilot stage, SNV mentions that most factories do not realize the importance of female workforces' health requirements, nor are they aware of the issues that must be addressed (Snbvd-ib-srhr.org, 2018).

Women at the bottom of Apparel industry's supply chain are the majority and are also easily available, for which factory owners are ignorant towards safety measures and workers' rights. Basic requirements and standards for buildings are voided for the greed for profit maximization (Uddin, 2015). The Rana plaza incident well mentioned in literature for instance, despite the permission to only be five story-building was build eight-story height, with unethical political affiliation involved. Events such as these paint a dark picture of the situation of women, which makes women empowerment seem like a myth.

### 4.3 Policy recommendation framework for long term empowerment

We come to the conclusion that multiple parties involved in a global supply chain must first recognize the true interpretation of empowerment, and must put the betterment of women as the first priority. Following the renowned consequential theories of egoism and utilitarianism, it is also evident that not only must women be subjected to empowerment, but it should be done in a way that all parties involved get benefited on the process of it. Figure 5 illustrates a recommendation of a policy framework which is developed to show how all parties can commit to providing long term empowerment for the women, though which fashion MNCs can also acquire sustainable supply chains, thus generating a win-win situation.

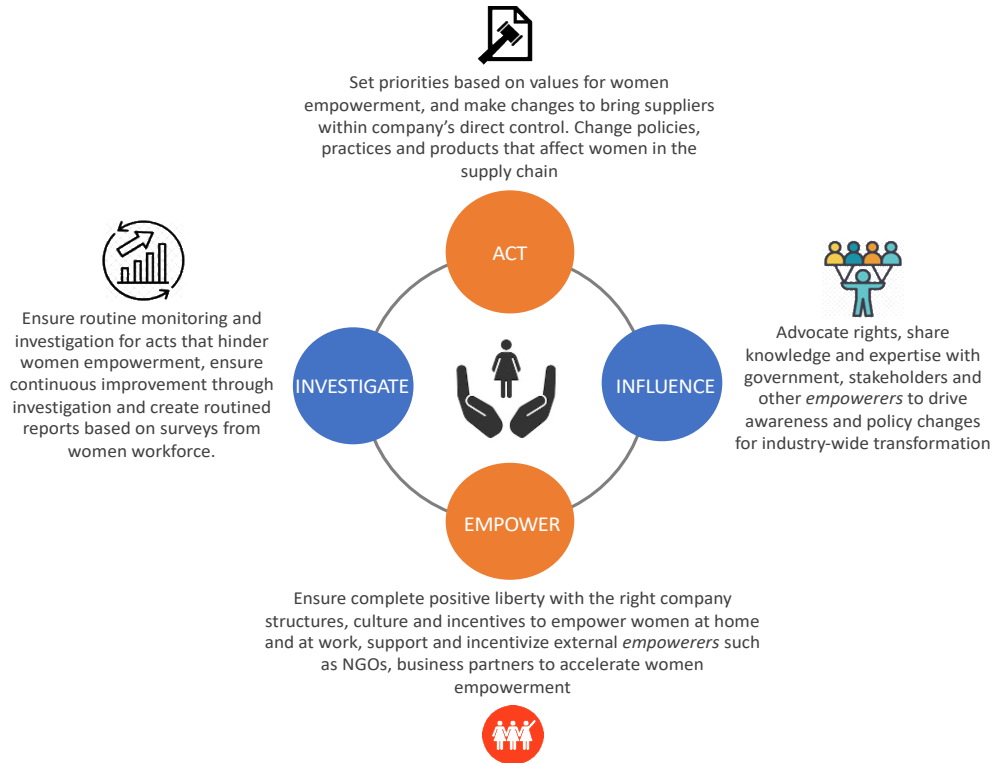


Figure 5: Framework for long term women empowerment

### 5.0 Conclusion

This paper engages with the social aspect of sustainable supply chain management, with the concern of women empowerment to be an important contributor towards social sustainability. Our analysis of the difficulties women face at factory level in the apparel industry is an initial step towards comprehending the way through which authoritative discourse creates restraints, in case of what is attainable and imaginable for a holistic sustainability scheme in the global supply chains of fashion MNCs. Utilizing the approach of critical discourse analysis this paper brings out the fundamental behaviors that contribute to exploitation of women at the bottom of the supply chain. This study has enabled us to explore and understand the construction of the paramount sustainability imaginary and disclose the underlying practices of the marginalization and oppression of women workers in global corporate supply chains. Our analysis of the exploited women and fabricated representation of empowerment has encouraged the need to explore the possibilities for genuine empowerment.

We come to the conclusion that multiple parties involved in a global supply chain must first recognize the true interpretation of empowerment, and must put the betterment of women as the first priority. Following the renowned consequential theories of egoism and utilitarianism, it is also evident that not only must women be subjected to empowerment, but it should be done in a way that all parties involved get benefited on the process of it. Finally, this study presents a policy framework that elucidates how various stakeholders can collectively pledge to ensure enduring empowerment for women. Additionally, the paper also recommends how fashion MNCs might establish sustainable supply chains, thereby fostering a mutually beneficial outcome.

## 5.1 Limitations

We recognize the need for more information and empirical evidence in order to broaden and deepen our understanding of what actual empowerment entails, particularly in the context of incorporating repressed women workforce members in global supply chains as research subjects.

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