Review Article

Potential Strategies to Address the Impact of COVID-19 on the Readymade Garments (RMG) Sector in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Over the last five decades, Bangladesh, a nation in South Asia and classified as a lower-middle- income country, has exhibited noteworthy progress and advancement. The Ready-made Garment (RMG) business has driven this advancement, garnering around 85% of foreign direct investment (FDI). The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in December 2019 precipitated a worldwide economic downturn, prompting nations throughout the globe to swiftly implement lockdown measures to contain the transmission of the virus and minimize the number of fatalities. Like other countries, Bangladesh also placed lockdown measures on all institutional activities, including the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sectors. This study investigates the present circumstances encountered by the RMG industry and its substantial influence on the sustenance of a considerable population of garment laborers. This study utilizes a qualitative research approach to examine the issues encountered by the RMG industry in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, it provides recommendations to mitigate these challenges and facilitate the industry's recovery.

Keywords: COVID-19 pandemic; RMG sector; Lockdown measures; Supply chain disruptions; Policy recommendations; Government and NGO support; Labor market shifts; Health and safety protocols; Financial assistance; Skill development

Introduction

The initial emergence of COVID-19 occurred in Wuhan, China, on December 29, 2019. The phenomenon exhibited a progressive dissemination throughout a total of 213 countries on a global scale. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially classified the ongoing global health crisis as a pandemic. This phenomenon was initially detected in Bangladesh on March 8, 2020. The Bangladesh government implemented a nationwide lockdown on March 25, 2020, in reaction to the prevailing circumstances [1]. Bangladesh's Ready-made Garment (RMG) and textile sectors encountered substantial difficulties with the ongoing COVID-19 conflict [2].

The Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector holds significant importance in Bangladesh's economy, as it contributes a substantial proportion (84%) of the country's foreign direct investment (FDI). Hence, the prolonged closure of this sector posed significant challenges. Despite the progressive reopening of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) factories and corporate offices by the Bangladesh government, the attainment of their goal to generate 50 billion dollars in exports by 2021 has encountered significant disruptions, rendering its realization seems unattainable [3].

The ready-made garment (RMG) industry in Bangladesh encountered several socioeconomic challenges, encompassing order cancellations, diminished growth in export revenues, a decline in foreign direct investment (FDI), and an adverse effect on the gross domestic product (GDP). Furthermore, demographic implications encompassed other aspects, including health-related challenges, unemployment rates, and safety concerns [3].

The global pandemic of Covid-19 has had a profound impact on Bangladesh's economy, posing a significant threat to the livelihoods of millions of individuals. The export sector, valued at US$ 45 billion, has seen significant challenges due to a decline in global demand, disruptions in the global supply chain, and subsequent production slowdown [4]. This sector is a significant employer, supporting approximately 6-8 million workers, with women comprising around 60 percent of the workforce. Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a significant decline in the performance of the labor-intensive export industry, namely the ready-made garment (RMG) sector. This decline can be attributed to the cancellation of export orders and decreased sales within the vital retail markets of the United States and Europe. The decline in exports has resulted in workforce reductions and temporary halts in production for some export-oriented businesses, impacting both entrepreneurs and employees [5].

Numerous enterprises encounter the formidable obstacles posed by substantial fluctuations in demand, supply chain dynamics, and the safeguarding of their workforce. Therefore, individuals who are employed in supply chains, including both contract and non-contract workers, temporary employees, and those lacking social protection coverage, are susceptible to the perils of poverty. Many of the individuals in question are female or belong to marginalized populations. In the current challenging circumstances, it is imperative to establish a robust and all-encompassing social security system to assist these vulnerable populations. The ongoing crisis has had significant repercussions for the country's key export industries, specifically the ready-made garments sector [6].

Consequently, numerous export-oriented companies have been compelled to implement workforce reductions, temporary suspensions, and output limitations. This has profoundly impacted both entrepreneurs and workers involved in these sectors. In the event of a temporary closure or reduced production at the facility, workers are entitled to receive compensation by the provisions outlined in the Labor Act of 2006 and the Labor Rules of 2015 [7].

Nevertheless, because of the contraction of long-term and alternative employment prospects, many workers endure substandard living conditions despite receiving remuneration. Moreover, many temporary workers are being deprived of remuneration due to their failure to fulfill all the requisite criteria for pay as stipulated by the legislation.

Moreover, suppose workers sustain physical disabilities as a result of workplace accidents or female workers are unable to resume work within the designated timeframe due to childbirth. In that case, their household income will diminish, leading to financial adversity. In this context, there is a pressing need for a robust and all-encompassing social security system to support these specific groups [8]. As a proactive measure, the government has undertaken the initiative to introduce social security programs aimed at delivering urgent humanitarian aid to vulnerable workers within these two crucial sectors that heavily rely on exports.

This article aims to analyze the gravity of the pandemic and its repercussions on ready-made garments (RMG). Additionally, it will provide recommendations and suggestions for policymakers, donors, and development practitioners.

Research questions

a) What are the primary obstacles the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector encounters considering the COVID-19 pandemic?

b) What measures can be employed to facilitate the healing and long-term viability of the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic?

c) How may these tactics be modified to suit various elements of the RMG supply chain, encompassing manufacturers, suppliers, and retailers?

Literature Review

This study aims to comprehensively examine the extant body of literature on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry. The primary objective is to gain a profound understanding of the repercussions faced by this sector and to discover viable strategies that industry professionals have proposed in response to these challenges.

Reviewing secondary documents entails a meticulous examination and study of materials that do not originate as primary sources of information but rather serve as supplementary sources offering analysis, interpretation, or commentary on primary sources. When examining secondary documents, several factors are taken into consideration, such as "Authorship and Credibility," "Context," "Argument and Analysis," "Use of Evidence," "Comparative Analysis," "Bias and Objectivity," "Contribution to Understanding" and "Relevance."

Case Studies

Case studies effectively examine and analyze the solutions employed by countries or firms to reduce the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sectors. The case studies mentioned above exemplify the many approaches implemented by various nations' Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industries to alleviate the detrimental impacts of the COVID-19 epidemic [9]. These initiatives exemplify the significance of adaptation, teamwork, innovation, and a concentration on addressing dynamic market demands when overcoming unparalleled challenges. To provide evidence supporting the research's conclusions, we will do an in-depth analysis of the relevant data. This analysis should consider industry statistics, employment numbers, and changes in consumer behavior.

Result

Effects on a global scale at the national level

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially influenced Bangladesh, including several domains like Public Health, the economy, and social dynamics. The following are a few salient aspects of the COVID-19 situation in Bangladesh:

Cases and spread: Bangladesh has witnessed a substantial surge in COVID-19 cases after the initial reported case in March 2020. The viral infection has disseminated over several regions of the nation, exhibiting a notable impact on urban centers, notably Dhaka. As of the knowledge cutoff in September 2021, Bangladesh has experienced multiple waves of the virus, characterized by varied intensity levels.

Public health response: The public health response in Bangladesh involved implementing a range of measures by the government to mitigate the transmission of the virus [10]. The measures implemented encompassed nationwide lockdowns, limitations on public meetings, travel prohibitions, and the cessation of educational establishments. The expansion of testing capacity and healthcare infrastructure was accompanied by initiatives aimed at increasing public awareness of preventive measures, including using masks, adherence to hand cleanliness, and implementing social distancing practices [11].

Healthcare system: The healthcare system in Bangladesh encountered substantial difficulties because of the pandemic. Hospitals and healthcare facilities encountered heightened strain, particularly during the zenith of the disease. The issues that arose included limited medical supplies, equipment, and adequately educated healthcare professionals [12]. Consequently, there were concerted attempts to enhance the healthcare infrastructure and bolster the capacity to manage the increased number of cases effectively.

Economic impact: The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant economic impact on Bangladesh, particularly on sectors such as the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry, agriculture, and remittances, which play a crucial role in the country's economy. The ready-made garment (RMG) business encountered many challenges, including supply chain delays, order cancellations, and diminished demand. Numerous organizations, particularly those of smaller and medium sizes, had significant challenges in sustaining operations, resulting in workforce reductions and business closures [13]. The nation also encountered decreased exports, remittances, and diminished economic activities.

Vaccination efforts: Bangladesh commenced its COVID-19 immunization campaign in January 2021, focusing on the efforts to administer vaccines to its population. In the initial stages, the administration of vaccines was primarily focused on priority populations, including frontline healthcare personnel and older adults [14]. The government has been engaged in efforts to broaden the scope of the immunization campaign to encompass the wider populace, notwithstanding the persistent obstacles to vaccine availability and delivery.

Social impacts: The COVID-19 pandemic has significant social ramifications in the country of Bangladesh. The closure of educational facilities significantly disrupted the learning process for many students, necessitating a transition to remote learning whenever feasible [15]. The economic crisis significantly impacted the livelihoods of vulnerable communities, such as individuals who rely daily wage labor and those engaged in informal sector activities. The government and numerous organizations made concerted efforts to give support and implement relief measures for persons and communities impacted by the situation [16].

The impact on the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector

Bangladesh's Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sectors experienced a substantial impact due to the COVID-19 outbreak. This industry is of utmost importance to the nation's economy and has encountered numerous obstacles due to the global health crisis. The following are a few significant effects:

Disrupted supply chains: The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant disruptions to global supply chains, impacting several aspects such as raw materials importation and finished goods export [17]. Implementing lockdown measures, transportation limitations, and the temporary shutdown of factories resulted in a notable deceleration in production and subsequent delays in order fulfillment.

Reduced demand and canceled orders: The COVID-19 pandemic led to a global economic depression, leading to decreased consumer expenditure and reduced demand for clothes and leather goods. A significant number of international purchasers opted to either cancel or delay their purchases, resulting in manufacturers in Bangladesh being burdened with surplus inventory and experiencing financial setbacks [18]. The worldwide value chain of the ready-made garment (RMG) industry has seen the phenomenon known as the "bull-whip effect," wherein disturbances become amplified as they propagate upwards from the downstream stages. The conventional approach to mitigating the 'bull-whip effect' involves redistributing the surplus inventory responsibility from lower echelons, such as retailers, to suppliers, and subsequently from suppliers to intermediate and raw material manufacturers [19]. Based on the findings of the CPD-CED Survey conducted in 2020, around 33% of manufacturing facilities reported instances where a portion of their orders were canceled, resulting in non-payment for essential expenses such as production costs, namely those associated with raw materials (Table 1). In many instances, suppliers (51%) said that purchasers had either postponed their orders or postponed them while making early payments [20]. A subset of suppliers, comprising 15.9% of the total, reported that orders had been resolved at a diminished cost.

Table 1: Status of Cancellation of Orders, in percentages.

Source: CPD-CED Survey, 2020.

Issues	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Orders cancelled and payment was not cleared by buyers	31.7	34	31.7	32.6
Orders cancelled and payment of raw materials and wage cost (both or one) will be cleared	2.7	0.8	0	1.8
Orders deferred by the buyers	24.4	35.3	36.6	29.5
Orders settled with deferred payment	21.7	19.1	19.5	20.5
Orders settled at reduced price	16.8	15.8	9.8	15.9

Trade volumes declined: Based on the Bangladesh Development Update report by the World Bank in April 2022, there was a decline of 16.8 percent in exports during FY20. This decrease can be attributed to disruptions in the supply chain and a decrease in external demand for ready-made garments (RMG).

Impacts on backward linkage industries of RMG: RMG industries' operations heavily rely on the supply chain of backward linkage sectors such as washing, printing, embroidery, and others. As per the records of the BTMA (Bangladesh Textile Mills Association), the membership register encompasses a collection of manufacturing mills, each falling within specific numerical counts and ranges (Table 2). The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on backward-linking factories. The RMG industries of Bangladesh encounter numerous challenges in procuring raw materials, such as dyes, chemicals, and fibers. Consequently, these sectors heavily rely on foreign suppliers to meet their sourcing needs. Due to the unavailability of imported material sources, there is a failure to adhere to the predetermined schedule of the existing supply chain [21].

Table 2: Textile-related industries in Bangladesh.

Yarn production	425
Woven fabric production	796
Dyeing production	240
Knit fabric production	2,800
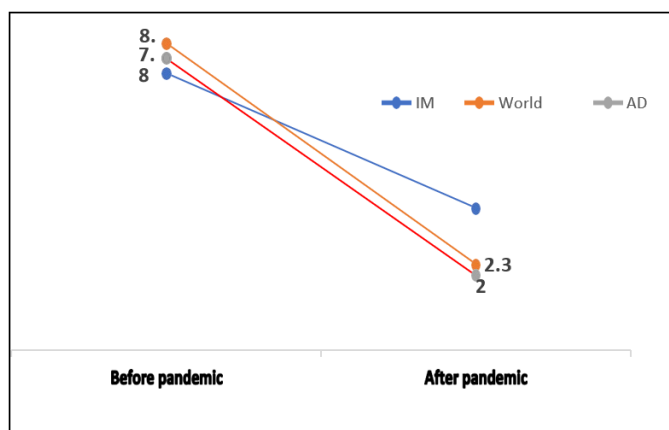
Figure 1: Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on RMG Sector [23].

GDP: According to a forecast published in the American Journal of Industrial and Business Management, the COVID-19 outbreak in Bangladesh is expected to impact the country's economic performance significantly. The study predicts a negative growth rate of -7.115% for the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2020. This negative growth trend is projected to persist in 2021, albeit at a reduced rate of -1.327% [22]. However, starting in 2022, the study anticipates a positive shift in the GDP growth rate, with an estimated increase of 2.438%. The export values are projected to see a negative growth rate of -10.078% in 2020. However, starting from 2021, an upward trend in export values is expected, with a growth rate of 3.764%. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) have collectively produced data indicating a significant decline in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) following the global epidemic [23] (Figure 1).

Economic impact: Three significant factors contribute to the current situation: nationwide extended lockdown measures, a worldwide economic downturn, and the disruption of supply chains and demand. The economic indicators about export, import, remittance, and growth percentages showed a progressive upward trend from fiscal year 2017 to fiscal year 2019. However, these indicators experienced a significant decline in fiscal year 2020 as a direct consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. This decline is visually represented in the subsequent table and graphs (Table 3&4). Based on the figures published by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), it is evident that the ready-made garment (RMG) industries in Bangladesh are confronted with significant financial losses amounting to more than 3.15 billion USD.

Table 3: Projected Exports, Imports, and Remittances outcomes from FY 2017 to FY 2020 (USD million).

Fiscal Years	FY'17	FY'18	FY'19	FY'20
Exports	34019	36668	40535	35086
Imports	43491	58865	59915	52845
Remittances	12769	14982	16420	17405

Table 4: Projected Exports, Imports and Remittances Growth %.

Fiscal Years	FY'17	FY'18	FY'19	FY'20
Exports	1.70%	7.80%	10.50%	-15.40%
Imports	9.50%	35.40%	1.80%	-11.80%
Remittance	-14.55%	17.30%	9.60%	6.00%

Factory closures and layoffs: In response to the imperative of adhering to social distancing protocols and safeguarding the

well-being of employees, some factories were compelled to enact temporary suspensions of their operations, resulting in closures and subsequent layoffs. Consequently, many ready-made garments (RMG) and leather industry employees experienced job cuts, temporary leaves of absence, and decreased working schedules [24]. The reduction in earnings significantly affects the sustenance of workers and their households.

Reduction of operational expenses by the decrease of workers: The study conducted by the CPD revealed that firms frequently sought to minimize operational expenses using various methods throughout the crisis period. Enterprises frequently view the reduction of salary costs as a tool to alleviate financial burdens. Nevertheless, the absence of a comprehensive social security system has resulted in a significant societal burden due to the termination of employees. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it was probable that organizations would use cost-cutting measures by reducing their workforce, hence adjusting their pay expenses [25].

This study examines the topic of fluctuations in overall employment at the organizational level, as well as variations in the ratio of male to female employment. When comparing the employment levels in RMG firms during the pre-COVID period (December 2019) and the COVID period (September 2020), it is observed that more than 50% of enterprises experienced a decrease in their workforce in September 2020 compared to the levels recorded in December 2019. In light of the magnitude of the firms, a more significant proportion of employees were subjected to layoffs in large-scale enterprises (22.6%), followed by small- scale enterprises (11.8%) and medium-sized enterprises (6.6%). The overall unemployment rate during this period was 13.9 percent for individuals who were displaced from their occupations. To clarify, among the total workforce of 25,62,383 individuals employed in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) factories, as recorded in the MiB database, a significant number of 357,450 people experienced job loss during the period of the pandemic, as indicated in Table-xxx. The phenomenon of reduction, when examined through the lens of gender categories, reveals a pattern wherein female workers experience a higher rate of decrease than their male counterparts. Various options are available; one can choose from various alternatives.

Out of the total number of retrenched workers, 61 percent were identified as female workers, while the remaining 39 percent were identified as male workers, as indicated in Table 4. However, when considering the primarily female gender makeup of the labor force in the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) sector, the rate of job loss among female workers was not much higher than that of male workers (14.2 percent against 13.8 percent).

According to the findings of expedited household surveys, economically disadvantaged households saw a decline in income ranging from 35 to 45 percent during the pandemic (PPRC and BIGD, 2020). Furthermore, there were significant reductions in

employment opportunities within the Ready-Made Garments (RMG) industry (CPD, 2021) (Table 5).

Table 5: Job loss in RMG enterprises by gender.
source: CPD-CED Survey, 2020.

Issues	Percentage of Total Retrenched Workers
Total Job Loss	13.96
Male Workers Lost Job	38.62
Female Workers Lost Job	61.38
Total	**100**

The Effect on the livelihood of garment workers: Garment workers receive a significantly low wage of approximately 95 US dollars per month, which proves insufficient to meet the daily necessities of their families. In this scenario, a group of individuals must occupy a confined space, accommodating a range of 3 to 4 persons. These individuals will share common facilities such as a kitchen and washroom. The task of obtaining salaries during the period of lockdown presented increased challenges. Occasionally, individuals may find themselves experiencing a financial crisis, necessitating their cohabitation with two or three families in a confined living space. Individuals are in danger of contracting the coronavirus, which threatens their Health [26]. Therefore, it may be inferred that the COVID-19 pandemic in Bangladesh poses a significant risk to a population of over 200 million individuals, considering an average of four members per family associated with the garment industry.

Safety and compliance challenges: Safety and compliance challenges have emerged as significant concerns for the ready-made garments (RMG) and leather industries, prompting a heightened focus on implementing health and safety measures. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, manufacturers were compelled to adopt various precautionary measures to safeguard their employees' well-being. These measures encompassed the provision of personal protective equipment, the establishment of sanitization facilities, and the reconfiguration of workspaces [27]. The adherence to these stipulations resulted in supplementary expenses and posed logistical complexities.

Financial Limitations: The convergence of diminished orders, withheld payments, and escalated expenses related to health and safety protocols placed significant pressure on the financial viability of numerous enterprises within the RMG industry. Small and medium-sized firms encountered specific challenges in terms of capital accessibility and cash flow management, resulting in instances of closures and bankruptcy.

Shift towards Online Channels: The transition towards online channels became more prominent due to the closure of brick-and-mortar retail locations and shifts in customer behavior, leading to a heightened emphasis on e-commerce and online sales. Certain enterprises operating in the RMG sector have undertaken measures

to enhance online visibility and explore novel avenues for client engagement.

Support (Government and Non-Government)

The government of Bangladesh has implemented a range of steps to help sectors adversely impacted by the current situation. These efforts include implementing stimulus packages, providing lending facilities, and the deferment of utility bill payments. Additionally, endeavors were undertaken to facilitate the expansion of product variety and investigate untapped export markets.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, the RMG sector in Bangladesh encountered substantial hurdles. The situation experienced a modest improvement as vaccination efforts continued and global markets resumed trading. However, the recovery process is ongoing, and the various sectors are continuously adjusting to the evolving terrain.

The Ready-Made Garment (RMG) factories were deemed eligible to get the subsidized credit facility as part of the stimulus package amounting to BDT 30,000 crore. However, the utilization of this service has been limited, primarily by large-scale firms (5%) and afterward by medium and small enterprises. A significant proportion of factories, precisely 51.6 percent, did not avail themselves of the opportunity to apply for the mentioned loan. Among these factories, 33.6 percent of firms acknowledged their eligibility for the loan but chose not to pursue the application process. Most firms are primarily medium-sized (47 percent) and large-scale (32 percent). During the COVID-19 epidemic, entrepreneurs' demand for term loans decreased due to reduced production-related activity (Table 6).

Table 6: Factories received any other loan under stimulus packages.

source: CPD-CED Survey, 2020.

Responses	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Yes	0.61	1.66	4.88	1.31
No	51.22	50.21	63.41	51.64
Eligible but did not apply	23.48	47.72	31.71	33.61
Not eligible	24.39	0	0	13.11
Others (e.g., pending)	0.3	o.41	0	0.33
Total	100	100	100	100

Social protection programmes for unemployed and distressed workers

A program was formulated based on a Concept Note that the Finance Division created in collaboration with relevant stakeholders, including the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and the Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA). On July 27, 2020, the Concept Note was presented to the European Union Delegation during a meeting held at the Finance Division. The initiative was designated as the "Social Protection Programs for Unemployed and Distressed Workers in the RMG, Leather goods, and Footwear Industries." The implementation of the Program was entrusted to the Department of Labor (DoL), which operates under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Labor and Employment (MoLE).

The objective of this cash transfer initiative is to offer a monthly cash transfer amounting to Taka 9,000 (sent in three installments) to individuals who formerly worked in the sector before the emergence of the Covid pandemic (specifically defined as those working in February 2020) and subsequently experienced job loss due to various factors.

Exploring new types of orders

Approximately 12% of companies experienced an influx of novel orders during the COVID-19 crisis. These orders encompassed the manufacturing of face masks (48%), Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and face masks (28%), as well as PPE alone (21%). The acquisition of these new product orders significantly enabled factories to sustain their business operations throughout the COVID-19 pandemic (Table 7).

Table 7: Factories received new product orders by the size of the factories.

source: CPD-CED Survey, 2020.

Product ordered	Small	Medium	Large	Total
Face Mask	44.44	56	0	47.89
Face Mask, PPE	31.11	20	100	28.17
Jacket	0	4	0	1.41
PPE	22.22	20	0	21.13
Tops	2.22	0	0	1.41
Total	100	100	100	100

Capacity utilization

Based on a study conducted by the Center for Policy and Development (CPD), there has been a notable improvement in the capacity utilization of firms over time, which can be attributed to the increase in production orders. Figure 2 observed increase in capacity utilization signifies a favorable trend in firms' recovery. As a result, the level of capacity utilization experienced a significant decline from 89 percent in April 2020 to a mere 1.3 percent in September 2020, as depicted in Figure 2. The rate at which zero capacity decreased was comparatively sluggish for small-scale manufacturers and factories in Narayanganj. Over time, there has been an increasing disparity in capacity utilization between large and small factories, resulting in a delayed recovery process for the latter.
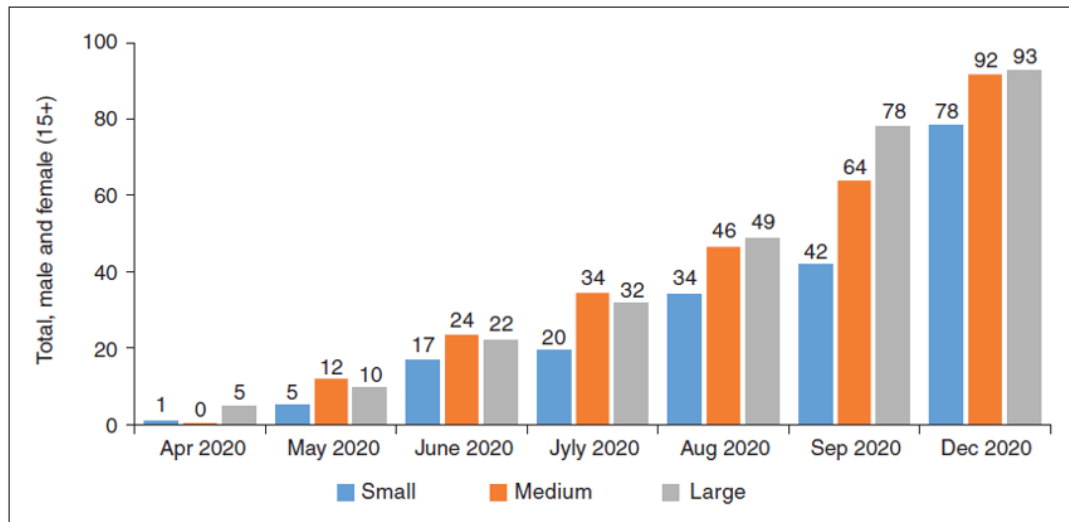
Source: CPD-CED Survey, 2020.

Figure 2: Capacity utilization of firms.

Participation in online sales

The factories' online sales performance has not shown significant improvement (1.64 percent) due to their previous poor track record in participating in online sales. Notably, factories located in Narayanganj and Chattogram have not engaged in the sale of items through online retail platforms. I apologize, but your text seems to be incomplete. Could you please provide more information It is important to acknowledge that the internet market effectively addresses the need for fast fashion by accommodating small-scale purchases that necessitate various types of raw materials. Furthermore, ensuring timely delivery of orders is crucial for engaging in this sector. Due to the deficiencies in the punctual delivery of items that rely on imported raw materials, suppliers frequently exhibit diminished enthusiasm for engaging in online sales.

Challenges

Assisting Ready-Made Garments (RMG) employees who have experienced adverse effects due to the COVID-19 epidemic presents several obstacles. The following are a few significant challenges:

Identifying and reaching out to workers

One of the foremost obstacles is in the identification and engagement of the workers who have been impacted. A significant proportion of individuals employed in these industries are engaged in informal economic activities, posing challenges in monitoring and delivering support to this population. It is imperative to establish efficient communication channels and collaborate with industry groups and trade unions to ascertain the identification and whereabouts of workers who have been impacted.

Financial resources

Ensuring sufficient financial resources to effectively serve workers impacted by the situation presents a significant issue. Numerous enterprises operating within the RMG sector encountered financial limitations due to order cancellations and diminished demand. The mobilization of funds by the government, in conjunction with international organizations and donors, is necessary to provide adequate assistance to impacted workers. This assistance should encompass pay subsidies, unemployment benefits, and emergency relief packages.

Targeting the most vulnerable

Specific segments of the workforce exhibit greater vulnerability and necessitate focused assistance. This encompasses female workers, migratory workers, and workers hailing from marginalized areas. It is imperative to undertake endeavors to develop support programs tailored to effectively tackle the unique requirements and obstacles encountered by these susceptible populations.

Social protection and health services

The provision of social protection measures, including but not limited to health insurance, sick leave, and disability compensation, plays a pivotal role in safeguarding the well-being of individuals impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential to bolster social protection programs and establish complete healthcare facilities encompassing examination and therapy. Effective resolution of these difficulties necessitates the collaboration of government, industry stakeholders, and healthcare practitioners.

Training and skill development

The COVID-19 epidemic has brought attention to the necessity of implementing reskilling and upskilling initiatives for ready-made garments (RMG) workers, as these industries have seen significant disruptions. It is imperative to prioritize providing training opportunities to enhance workers' abilities, fostering their adaptability to dynamic market demands. Possible academic rewrite: This may encompass educational initiatives focused on developing competencies in digital abilities, online marketing strategies, entrepreneurial skills, and sustainable business practices.

Access to credit and financial inclusion

Many people who have been impacted may find it necessary to obtain loans to reestablish their enterprises or pursue alternate means of earning a living. The promotion of financial inclusion through the implementation of microfinance initiatives and the facilitation of affordable loan accessibility can play a crucial role in assisting individuals in rebuilding their livelihoods and enterprises. The provision of financial support can be significantly enhanced through collaborations among financial institutions, government agencies, and industry stakeholders.

Social dialogue and stakeholder cooperation

Resolving the difficulties encountered by impacted workers necessitates the establishment of robust social discourse and collaboration among diverse entities, such as the government, industry associations, trade unions, and civil society organizations. Incorporating all pertinent stakeholders into the decision-making process helps identify efficacious solutions and guarantee the smooth execution of support initiatives.

The fixation of these challenges requires executing a comprehensive and multi-stakeholder strategy. Collaboration among governmental bodies, industry participants, and societal organizations is of utmost importance to establish and execute sustainable assistance mechanisms that prioritize the welfare and livelihoods of employees whom the COVID-19 crisis has impacted within the ready-made garments (RMG) sector.

Conclusion

Since the advent of the coronavirus crisis, the Government of Bangladesh has formulated and put into action a comprehensive strategy to mitigate the pandemic's potential adverse impacts on both the economy and the populace, with the ultimate objective of achieving complete economic recovery. Several recommendations can be considered in this regard. Firstly, the government should prioritize spending on initiatives to stimulate employment opportunities. Secondly, to aid industries and businesses affected by adverse circumstances, one potential measure is establishing loan facilities through commercial banks at reduced interest rates. Thirdly, monetary assistance should be provided to unemployed individuals in sectors such as ready-made garments (RMG) and export-oriented industries who have suffered income loss due to the Covid-19 epidemic. Fourthly, addressing the needs of highly impoverished and low-wage workers in the informal sector could involve expanding the coverage of government social safety net programs.

Additionally, implementing long-term social security measures for employees in sectors like RMG export is crucial. Furthermore, collaborative efforts should be made to establish a robust economic foundation by adopting effective and innovative methodologies, such as producing value-added goods. Lastly, it is essential to leverage sophisticated technological solutions and implement comprehensive training programs to tackle this global challenge of developing a highly skilled workforce.

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