

Post Event Report



# \_ SUSTAINABLE \_ APPAREL FORUM

5th Edition

March 5, 2024 | Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Shaping a Sustainable Tomorrow:**

**Our Collective Journey**

Organized By



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Bangladesh Apparel  
Exchange (BAE)



## Background

# The Urgent Need for Apparel Sustainability

## Bangladesh's Pioneering March Towards Apparel Sustainability.

The apparel industry, historically associated with rapid production cycles and resource-intensive practices, has faced mounting challenges concerning environmental degradation, social responsibility, and ethical concerns.

Bangladesh, as a key player in the global apparel supply chain, has been at the forefront of recognizing the environmental and social challenges inherent in traditional apparel production. The need for sustainability in the industry arises from the acknowledgment of the impact on local ecosystems, the importance of fair labor practices, and the urgency to address climate change. As consumers increasingly demand ethically produced, eco-friendly products, the apparel sector has been compelled to reevaluate its traditional methods and embrace a more sustainable approach.



## Background

# Emergence of the Sustainable Apparel Forum

## Empowering Bangladesh for Global Leadership in Sustainability.

In pursuit of elevating Bangladesh as a global leader in responsible sourcing, the Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF) emerged with a definitive mission—to accelerate sustainability within the apparel industry. Established in 2017, SAF has evolved into a prestigious platform, facilitating crucial dialogues on innovation, technology, education, and awareness to bridge knowledge gaps.

Tailored specifically for apparel and textile stakeholders, the forum facilitates insightful discussions on sustainability issues. By bringing together industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and policymakers, SAF strives to chart a course toward a more sustainable and responsible future for Bangladesh and the entire global apparel industry.

Today, SAF boasts an international reputation, fostering an environment where fresh perspectives on sustainability and innovation are not just encouraged but celebrated.





## Founder's Message

# Bangladesh's Leap in Sustainable Fashion

Dear Friends,

Bangladesh has embraced sustainability in manufacturing, aligning with environmental needs and the contemporary landscape. The 5th edition of the Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF) on March 5, 2024, marked a pivotal moment as we spearheaded the dialogue surrounding sustainability. The enthusiastic response from esteemed delegates, manufacturers, brands, and professionals reaffirms the profound significance of sustainable manufacturing.

Our collective goal is clear: to propel the apparel and textile industry forward, fostering a thriving, sustainable ecosystem. This commitment resonates with the essence of SAF, where ideas flourish and innovations take root. This year, we elevated our impact by collaborating with Cascale for the Manufacturer Forum in Dhaka, adding a new layer to our success and a fresh dimension to the sustainability conversation.

Your unwavering support remains the cornerstone of our success. Together, let's continue shaping a future where sustainability is woven into the fabric of our industry.

With heartfelt appreciation,

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**Mostafiz Uddin**  
Founder & CEO,  
Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE)



**Our collective goal is clear: to propel the apparel and textile industry forward, fostering a thriving, sustainable ecosystem.**



5th Edition

# Sustainable Apparel Forum 2024

## Promoting the Sustainable Agenda with Apparel and Textile Value Chain

The impact of the 5th Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF), held on March 5, 2024, resonated across the apparel industry in Bangladesh and beyond.

This dynamic event facilitated a robust exchange of insights, enriching participants' understanding of evolving trends and sustainable practices. Beyond discourse, the 5th edition of SAF catalyzed collaborations, bringing together industry leaders, entrepreneurs, and policymakers, laying the groundwork for collective initiatives that transcend borders.

The insights garnered at SAF played a pivotal role in shaping a more robust regulatory framework for sustainable manufacturing. Emphasizing innovation, the forum acted as a catalyst for advancements in sustainable technology, material development, and green solutions within the industry.



## Impact Numbers

# SAF 2024: Highlights and Key Insights

620+

attendees, both national and international, graced the event.

45+

world-class speakers took the stage at the event.

22+

countries were represented by attendees at the event.

04

dynamic sessions unfolded at the event.

01

keynote on achievements and competitiveness.

02

presentation on supply chain resilience and innovation.

06+

exhibitors showcased their innovations.

01

breakout session on circular design.

06

partners contributed to the event's success.

55+

national and international media covered the event.

## Event Impact

Showcasing our success and global reach, these impact numbers highlight broad international participation, diverse expertise, and extensive media coverage, reflecting the event's significant influence.





Event Highlights

# Glimpses of the Gathering





Opening Plenary

# Inaugural Conversations: Core Themes Unveiled



**Salman Fazlur  
Rahman, MP**

Private Industry &  
Investment Adviser to  
Prime Minister



**H.E. Charles  
Whiteley**

Ambassador & Head of  
Delegation, Delegation of  
the European Union to  
Bangladesh



**Tuomo  
Poutiainen**

Country Director,  
ILO Bangladesh



**Werner  
Lange**

Coordinator GIZ  
Textile Cluster  
Bangladesh, GIZ



**Mostafiz  
Uddin**

Founder & CEO,  
Bangladesh Apparel  
Exchange (BAE)





**Mostafiz  
Uddin**

**Founder & CEO,  
Bangladesh Apparel  
Exchange (BAE)**

In his opening address, Mr. Mostafiz Uddin extended gratitude to all attendees, especially those who traveled from abroad, acknowledging their commitment to sustainability. He emphasized the importance of collaboration and partnership in achieving sustainability goals within the Bangladesh apparel industry.

Mr. Mostafiz Uddin stressed the significance of promoting sustainability, circularity, innovation, technology, worker well-being, and human rights diligence. He called for stakeholder unity on a shared platform to amplify impact and foster industry change.



**Tuomo  
Poutiainen**

**Country Director,  
ILO Bangladesh**

Mr. Poutiainen commenced by expressing appreciation for the energetic atmosphere of the event and highlighting its significance as a platform for sharing lessons learned and best practices within the sustainable apparel industry. He underscored the necessity of continuity and active exchange among stakeholders for sustainable change, emphasizing the ambition for positive transformation within the industry.

Mr. Poutiainen recognized the progress made over the past decade while acknowledging persistent challenges and the ongoing efforts required for further improvements.



**Werner  
Lange**

**Coordinator GIZ  
Textile Cluster  
Bangladesh, GIZ**

Mr. Lange began by affirming the German government's commitment to sustainable development and international cooperation with Bangladesh. He emphasized the importance of sustainability and circularity in economic development, advocating for a global transformation towards more environmentally friendly and socially sustainable practices.

Mr. Lange highlighted the role of dialogue between decision-makers from various sectors in achieving a sustainable economic transition. He provided an example of successful development cooperation in the garment industry and emphasizing the importance of gender equality.



**This is a clear commitment from all of you towards the sustainability vision Bangladesh has.**

Mostafiz Uddin, Founder & CEO, Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE)



**This unique platform fosters exchange of best practices and partnerships for sustainable apparel in Bangladesh.**

Tuomo Poutiainen, Country Director, ILO Bangladesh



**We share the duty to advance sustainability and circularity with the finest technologies and innovations.**

Werner Lange, Coordinator GIZ Textile Cluster Bangladesh, GIZ





**H.E. Charles Whiteley**

**Ambassador & Head of Delegation, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh**

Mr. Whiteley emphasized promoting sustainable business practices in Bangladesh's crucial garment sector for economic development. He acknowledged industry challenges like decarbonization, labor standards, and global supply chains, stressing ongoing improvements.

Whiteley noted the EU's law for social and environmental compliance, the rise of ethical consumption in Europe, and a market shift driven by youth ready to invest in sustainability, affirming the EU's support for Bangladesh's sustainable garment sector.



**Salman Fazlur Rahman, MP**

**Private Industry & Investment Adviser to Prime Minister**

Mr. Rahman addressed critical challenges in Bangladesh's apparel industry: transitioning to man-made fabric exports, sustainability, circularity, and waste recycling.

He touched on solar energy adoption and its industrial waste concerns. Topics of labor rights, pricing pressures, consumer trends, and climate change were also discussed.

He called for joint efforts in tackling global conflicts and stressed the need for peaceful dialogue.

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I think we need to find a balance so that it's a win-win situation for both the suppliers and the consumers. Everybody is concerned about sustainability. But how much is a consumer willing to pay extra for a sustainable product? As you saw, it's not very much. And that again is an issue that needs to be resolved.

Salman Fazlur Rahman, MP  
Private Industry & Investment Adviser to Prime Minister

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**Sustainability has become a global imperative, affecting all players in the apparel industry. And Bangladesh's garment sector has made remarkable progress in recent years.**

H.E. Charles Whiteley,  
Ambassador & Head of Delegation, Delegation of the European Union to Bangladesh





## Introduction: Plenary Session 01

# Bangladesh Apparel Sector 2024: Achievements & Global Competitiveness, Learning & Opportunities

**Tuomo Poutiainen,**  
Country Director,  
ILO Bangladesh

In his address, Mr. Poutiainen outlined two key discussion segments: social and labor issues, and environmental concerns. He highlighted ongoing labor reforms in Bangladesh, stressing the importance of aligning labor laws with international standards and implementing better wage policies for garment industry competitiveness.

Additionally, he emphasized the growing global focus on human rights diligence in supply chains and the significance of adopting good labor practices and risk management strategies. Mr. Poutiainen also highlighted initiatives like the Better Work program and the Employment Insurance system, urging brands and buyers to support these efforts for sustainable development in Bangladesh.



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**There is a very active labor reform process going on in Bangladesh, and that labor reform process is generally intended to modernize the institutions that govern work.**



## Plenary Session 01

# Vision Bangladesh 2024 & Beyond: Sustaining Achievements & Competitiveness

The panel discussion revolved around the challenges and strategies for achieving sustainability and economic growth in Bangladesh's garment industry. Key themes included improving social discourse within factories, decarbonization efforts, compliance with safety standards and worker welfare, economic diversification beyond the garment sector, and the role of government initiatives in promoting sustainable practices.

Speakers emphasized the importance of balancing economic growth with social responsibility, environmental stewardship, and ethical governance. The discussion underscored the need for a holistic approach to address sustainability challenges while ensuring the industry's competitiveness and the well-being of its workers.



**Tuomo Poutiainen**

Country Director,  
ILO Bangladesh



**Amirul Haque Amin**

President,  
IndustriALL  
Bangladesh  
Council (IBC)



**Avijit Chowdhury**

Executive Member  
(Additional  
Secretary), BIDA



**Fazlee Shamim Ehsan**

Vice President,  
BKMEA & Member,  
Governance Team,  
BEF



**Hazera Khatun**

Joint Secretary,  
Ministry of Labour  
and Employment



**Md. Khorshid Alam**

Executive Director  
(Enterprise Services),  
BEPZA



**Mesbahuddin Ahmed**

Chairman,  
NCCWE



**Miran Ali**

Vice President,  
BGMEA





### Miran Ali

#### Vice President, BGMEA

Mr. Miran Ali discussed the garment industry's sustainability challenges and vision, stressing its economic significance and the imperative to marry growth with social, environmental, and ethical responsibility. He pointed out the need for enhanced social discourse in factories and a focus on decarbonization.

Furthermore, he underscored the Employment Injury Insurance scheme's role in ensuring justice for injured workers, expressing faith in the industry's dedication to sustainability and the necessity for ongoing stakeholder collaboration to ensure enduring advancements.



### Avijit Chowdhury

#### Executive Member (Additional Secretary), BIDA

Mr. Chowdhury outlined Bangladesh's goal to join the ranks of the world's 25 largest economies by 2035, addressing the post-LDC graduation challenges and opportunities. He stressed the need

for export diversification beyond garments, while upholding compliance and quality standards.

He introduced the TSC model, which hinges on technology, skill enhancement, and strict compliance to tackle upcoming challenges, particularly in the apparel sector. Mr. Chowdhury reinforced that the garment industry's success lays the groundwork for Bangladesh's broader economic ambitions, suggesting that strategic initiatives could elevate the nation's global economic stature.



### Amirul Haque Amin

#### President, IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC)

Mr. Amin emphasized the critical importance of addressing issues related to worker well-being, fair wages, healthy industrial relations, and respecting workers' voices and representation in the garment industry.

He argued that without these factors, sustainability in the industry would be lacking.

He stressed the necessity of including workers' organizations and employers in decision-making processes on equal footing, highlighting the importance of dialogue and tripartism.

Mr. Amin underscored that decisions impacting workers should not be made unilaterally, emphasizing the significance of considering workers' rights and trade unions as equal partners in the industry's journey towards sustainability.



**Under our current leadership, we're fostering closer dialogue with worker representatives to address issues internally before escalating them externally, aiming to build trust and prevent misunderstandings.**

Miran Ali,  
Vice President, BGMEA



**We continuously improve our business environment to attract investors, especially SMEs, through collaborations with the UNDP. Our initiatives include workshops, seminars, and factory inspections, ensuring compliance and fostering investor confidence in Bangladesh's potential.**

Avijit Chowdhury,  
Executive Member (Additional  
Secretary), BIDA



**Sustainable businesses should be profitable, have good market demand, and fulfill all labor requirements. Bangladesh has progressed to become one of the safest workplaces. If we want to move towards sustainability, we now want to see healthy workers and good industrial relations.**

Amirul Haque Amin,  
President, IndustriALL Bangladesh  
Council (IBC)







**Fazlee Shamim Ehsan**

Vice President,  
BKMEA

Mr. Ehsan addressed the goal of growing the garment industry to \$32 billion by 2050, noting challenges but remaining optimistic due to Bangladesh's advancements in worker safety, sustainability, and labor standards compliance. He stressed the importance of promoting Bangladesh's responsible practices to buyers and consumers.

He underscored the necessity for sustainable fashion throughout the supply chain, highlighting Circular Economy initiatives and upcoming EU chemical regulations. Ehsan emphasized marketing Bangladesh's progress and embracing sustainable practices as essential steps to meet the ambitious target.



**Md. Khorshid Alam**

Executive Director  
(Enterprise Services), BEPZA

Md. Khorshid Alam underscored the benefits of responsible business practices in EPZs for attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), emphasizing the importance of compliance with safety and worker welfare standards. These practices not only enhance workplace positivity and productivity but also improve shipment punctuality and product quality.

Furthermore, Alam highlighted that adhering to responsible practices boosts a company's global competitiveness and attractiveness to foreign buyers, facilitating FDI attraction. This approach contributes significantly to national economic growth by promoting industrialization, boosting exports, and creating employment opportunities.



Despite challenges, Bangladesh has emerged as a top sourcing hub, boasting the highest number of eco-friendly LEED-certified factories globally. Our commitment to ILO conventions signals our dedication to progress.

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan,  
Vice President, BKMEA



Responsible business practices, including compliance with safety regulations and worker welfare, are vital for industrial units. Prioritizing these aspects not only ensures a safe and productive workplace but also enhances partnerships and fosters economic development.

Md. Khorshid Alam,  
Executive Director (Enterprise Services),  
BEPZA





**Mesbahuddin Ahmed**

**Chairman,  
NCCWE**

Mesbahuddin Ahmed, discussed the lessons that other sectors can learn from the garment industry. He emphasized the need to diversify employment opportunities beyond the garment industry. Mr. Ahmed emphasized the importance of worker safety, fair wages, and healthy industrial relations, citing these as priorities that other sectors should adopt. He stressed that trade unions are not impediments to productivity but instead cooperate with production and help boost industries.

He argued that good industrial relations increase productivity and that workers are not only contributors to production but also consumers, whose purchasing power is vital for economic growth.



**Hazera Khatun**

**Joint Secretary, Ministry of  
Labour and Employment**

Ms. Hazera Khatun highlighted the ministry's priorities and initiatives, underscoring the RMG sector's success factors: global economic trends, investments, ethical practices, and technological diversification.

She focused on worker health and industry health through compliance with labor standards and fair wages, mentioning inspections, training, and awareness efforts.

She also addressed challenges such as ensuring compliance, fostering social responsibility, driving technological innovation, diversifying products, and enhancing environmental sustainability.



**Prioritizing worker safety, fair wages, and healthy industrial relations not only boosts productivity but also ensures a better quality of life for workers, ultimately benefiting both production and consumption.**

Mesbahuddin Ahmed,  
Chairman, NCCWE



**We want both healthy workers and healthy workplaces. We are actively ensuring compliance through thorough inspection, training, and awareness programs, with a primary focus on safeguarding workers' welfare.**

Hazera Khatun,  
Joint Secretary, Ministry of Labour  
and Employment









## Plenary Session 02

# Behind the Seams: Decent Work Conditions and Livelihood in the RMG Industry – Perspectives on the Roles of Women Workers and Supervisory Practices

The panel discussion focused on gender equality and women's empowerment in the garment industry in Bangladesh. Speakers highlighted various challenges faced by women workers, including limited opportunities for career advancement, the gender pay gap, balancing work and home responsibilities, and systemic barriers to leadership roles.

They emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts among stakeholders to address these challenges effectively, advocating for a holistic approach that goes beyond traditional vertical promotion paths. Additionally, there was a call for inclusive industry practices, recognition of workers' contributions, and investment in workforce development to retain talent and remain competitive.

Moderator					
					
<b>Steffen Siegle</b>	<b>Abil Bin Amin</b>	<b>Hans Docter</b>	<b>Shahidur Rahman</b>	<b>Smita Nimilita</b>	<b>Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmmed</b>
Advisor Programme for Sustainability in the Textile and Leather Sector (STILE), GIZ	Country Manager, ETI Bangladesh	Supply Chain Innovation Lead, Fair Wear Foundation	Professor of Sociology in The Department of Economics & Social Sciences, BRAC University	Bangladesh Country Lead & Global Foundations Lead, Reimaging Industry to Support Equality (RISE)	Executive Director, Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies – BILS







### Steffen Siegle

#### Advisor Programme for Sustainability in the Textile and Leather Sector (STILE), GIZ

In his introduction, Steffen emphasized the importance of shedding light on the perspectives of women workers through evidence-based knowledge. He outlined the challenging living and working conditions faced by women in Bangladesh, despite economic growth and formal employment opportunities.

The discussion also touched upon the potential for further career advancement beyond line supervision.



### Shahidur Rahman

#### Professor Of Sociology In The Department Of Economics And Social Sciences, BRAC University

Shahidur Rahman presented findings from two studies on gender dynamics in the labor market. The 2022 study revealed that traditional gender roles and the evolving

demands of work, favoring skills typically associated with men, are leading to a decline in women's participation in the RMG sector. The 2024 study on female supervisors underscored the motivations for and challenges of their roles, including long work hours, home duties, and a gender pay gap.



### Smita Nimilita

#### Bangladesh Country Lead & Global Foundations Lead, RISE

Smita shares insights gained from her extensive experience working with brands, suppliers, and workers, particularly focusing on financial inclusion, gender equality, and women's empowerment.

She emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach to women's advancement and leadership, which goes beyond traditional vertical promotion paths and addresses systemic barriers faced by women in the manufacturing industry.

She discussed a study conducted to redesign their program, focusing on redefining leadership and advancement, which highlighted the need to address systemic barriers before pressuring women to perform unrealistic job roles.

Smita stresses the importance of engaging the industry in a dialogue to redefine advancement, advocating for both vertical and horizontal progression paths.



**Contrary to past claims of 70-80%, only 53% of the RMG workforce are women, a decline influenced by working conditions.**

Steffen Siegle,  
STILE Programme Advisor, GIZ



**Garment industry women face role limitations, pay gaps, and balance challenges. Urgent fairness action is required.**

Shahidur Rahman, Professor of Sociology,  
BRAC University



**Garment industry women face role limitations, pay gaps, and balance challenges. Urgent fairness action is required.**

Shahidur Rahman, Professor of Sociology,  
BRAC University





### Abil Bin Amin

Country Manager,  
ETI Bangladesh

Mr. Abil recognized women's empowerment as a critical focus for ETI and its affiliates, highlighting the need for brand collaboration over solitary efforts. He announced the initiation of a worldwide "community of practice" to assist brands in developing policies and conducting human rights due diligence with a gender perspective, tackling fundamental issues, and crafting and executing workplace strategies.

He stressed the necessity of re-engaging member dialogue, bolstering capacity building, and verifying the enactment of strategies for genuine women's empowerment.



### Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed

Executive Director,  
BILS

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed criticized the 2015 amendment excluding supervisors from worker definitions, deeming it contrary to labor law principles.

He elucidates the amendment's background, citing a prior deadlock, and stresses the nuanced nature of supervisory roles. Ahmmed advocates for empowerment beyond titles or salaries, emphasizing inclusivity for sustainable and equitable treatment. He asserts the necessity of organized labor for individual empowerment and calls for industry inclusivity in Bangladesh's apparel sector. Economic sustainability, he contends, must intertwine with inclusivity for holistic industry development and fair stakeholder recognition.



### Hans Docter

Supply Chain Innovation  
Lead, Fair Wear Foundation

Hans emphasizes the importance of evaluating member brands against industry standards and principles, highlighting both positive and negative reasons for women leaving or not joining the industry. He also underscores the need for employers to invest in their workforce to retain talent and remain competitive, particularly in the changing labor market in Bangladesh.

Hans expresses concern and hopes for rectifying the situation of supervisors, highlighting their vulnerability and the need for career development opportunities, especially for women. He suggests that these issues are not unique to Bangladesh but are present in other countries. He emphasizes the importance of innovation, staying ahead of the curve, and using new legislation like the EU to compete on sustainability.

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The key is to work collaboratively, aligning with each other, not in isolation, to ensure that interventions are implemented effectively at the supplier level.

Abil Bin Amin,  
Country Manager,  
ETI Bangladesh

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We need an inclusive industry in Bangladesh for our development, and we need that each and everybody should get their fair share and recognition.

Syed Sultan Uddin Ahmed,  
Executive Director, Bangladesh  
Institute of Labour Studies – BILS

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Employers should think about the long term and also if they want to innovate and add new products, it's important to invest in your workforce and make sure that you retain talent and that you are an attractive employer.

Hans Docter,  
Supply Chain Innovation Lead,  
Fair Wear Foundation





## Event Highlights

# Glimpses of the Gathering





## Plenary Session 03

# Sustainable Use of Water in Apparel Sector: Challenges, Opportunities & Ways Forward

The panel discussion focused on the critical issue of water management in Bangladesh's apparel sector.

They emphasized the urgent need for effective strategies to address groundwater depletion, environmental sustainability, and surface water contamination to ensure the long-term viability of the apparel sector and public well-being. Solutions proposed included resource mapping, wastewater management, the adoption of water-efficient technologies like ZLD systems, and collaboration among stakeholders to promote sustainable water practices.

Additionally, the importance of regulatory enforcement, advocacy with the government, and standardized procedures for water usage and wastewater discharge were stressed as essential steps towards addressing water challenges in the apparel industry.



Moderator



**Emma Clarke**

Senior Private Sector Advisor, WaterAid UK



**Ashna Huq**

Director, Incredible Fashions Ltd.



**Kazy Mohammad Iqbal Hossain**

Climate Actions Lead-Global Supply Chain, Lindex



**Mostafizur Rahman**

Climate and Environment Portfolio Manager, Embassy of Sweden



**Prof. Dr. Prosun Bhattacharya**

Professor, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm





**Emma Clarke**

**Senior Private Sector  
Advisor, WaterAid UK**

Emma Clarke emphasized the critical need for sustainable water management in Bangladesh's apparel sector due to escalating challenges to water resources. She highlighted excessive groundwater extraction by the industry, surpassing natural replenishment rates and causing a rapid decline in groundwater levels.

Clarke urged immediate action on groundwater conservation and pollution control, advocating collaborative strategies for the industry's and public's future.



**Ashna Huq**

**Director, Incredible  
Fashions Ltd.**

Ashna Huq highlighted the significant water consumption in Bangladesh's apparel sector, primarily sourced from groundwater, posing challenges such as groundwater depletion.

She emphasized the necessity of resource mapping to address this issue & the hurdles in implementing

effective wastewater management due to high costs. Huq stressed integrating sustainability into business strategies, driven by consumer demand and stricter legislation.

She advocated for investing in water-efficient machinery and adopting Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) systems for sustainable water management. However, she noted financial barriers and the need for policy interventions to facilitate widespread adoption of ZLD systems in the industry.



**Kazy Mohammad  
Iqbal Hossain**

**Climate Actions Lead-  
Global Supply Chain,  
Lindex**

Kazy Mohammad Iqbal Hossain addressed the business risks associated with water-related disruptions in the supply chain. He emphasized the importance of systematically analyzing these risks, including water scarcity, regulatory issues, and reputational risks.

He mentioned ongoing research to find innovative solutions for water-efficient processes, such as waterless dyeing and printing and the recycling of wastewater. Hossain emphasized the importance of collaboration among clothing brands, factory owners, and technology providers to encourage sustainable water usage. He underscored the need for partnerships to identify and validate innovative technologies, piloting them on a small scale before scaling them up.

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**The apparel sector in Bangladesh currently extracts 1.5 billion meter cubes per year, which is at a cost of 4 billion pounds to extract. That's about 25% over extraction. Means that the groundwater is falling by 2 and a half meters a year.**

Emma Clarke  
Senior Private Sector Advisor,  
WaterAid UK

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**According to the IFC, the textile wet processing industry in Bangladesh consumes around 1,500 billion liters of water annually to process around 5 million tons of fabric, and much of this, of course, is extracted from groundwater sources.**

Ashna Huq  
Director,  
Incredible Fashions Ltd.

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**We, as a brand, systematically analyze the risks of water or water-related risks, and we identified several key areas. One most critical ones is the scarcity of water. Our goal is to address and mitigate these risks proactively.**

Kazy Mohammad Iqbal Hossain,  
Climate Actions Lead-Global Supply  
Chain, Lindex





**Prof. Dr. Prosun Bhattacharya**

Professor, KTH Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm

Kazy Mohammad Iqbal Hossain pointed out the paradox of Bangladesh's rich water resources against the backdrop of clean water scarcity, with the apparel industry placing a significant demand on groundwater. He urged a deeper understanding of water quality, particularly in dyeing processes, to ensure sustainable practices and best product quality.

Hossain advocated for a collaborative approach involving academia, industry, and tech sectors to address water issues, emphasizing the need to bridge research and application. He championed circular water practices, like recycling, to cut waste and boost sustainability in production.



**Mostafizur Rahman**

Climate and Environment Portfolio Manager, Embassy of Sweden

Mostafizur Rahman highlighted the pressing need for sustainable water management in the face of climate change and falling groundwater levels. He called for the creation of uniform water usage regulations that enforce sustainability and efficiency.

He also pressed for stringent wastewater regulations and treatment before disposal, advocating for collective action to endorse sustainable practices. Rahman pointed to the Swedish Embassy's bilateral strategies on water issues, recommending their adoption for industry support through initiatives like water pricing models and stakeholder engagement.



As challenges evolve, emerging technologies and approaches must be deployed at scale and speed to have a measurable impact on water resources. The focus should also be on recycling and reusing water, aiming for circularity to maximize water retention and minimize waste.

Fazlee Shamim Ehsan,  
Vice President, BKMEA



I think there is some regulation, but there is no proper enforcement of the regulation on how the apparel sector can discharge wastewater. There should be advocacy with the government and other stakeholders so that everybody has a common understanding.

Mostafizur Rahman, Climate and Environment Portfolio Manager, Embassy of Sweden





Event Highlights

# Glimpses of the Gathering



## Plenary Session 04

# Energy Sustainability: Navigating the Transition for Apparel & Textile Manufacturing in Bangladesh

The panel discussed the urgent need for energy efficiency and sustainability in the apparel industry, particularly in Bangladesh.

Key points included the pressure on multinational corporations to achieve carbon-neutral status, Bangladesh's aim to increase renewable energy to 40% by 2041, the necessity for structural reforms and government collaboration to promote renewable energy adoption, challenges and proposed solutions for decarbonization, and insights into Bangladesh's energy landscape emphasizing the importance of renewable energy and efficiency measures.

Overall, the discussion highlighted the critical role of renewable energy adoption, energy efficiency, and collaboration in ensuring sustainability and competitiveness in the apparel industry.



Moderator



**Michael  
Klode**

Project Manager, the  
Sustainability in the  
Textile and Leather  
Industries (STILE), GIZ



**Laxmikant  
Jawale**

Regional Lead,  
South Asia &  
Southeast Asia,  
Apparel Impact  
Institute



**Nirod Chandra  
Mandal**

Honorable Joint  
Secretary,  
Renewable Energy,  
Power Division,  
Government of the  
People's Republic of  
Bangladesh



**Sarah  
Negro**

Vice President,  
PublicAffairs,  
H&M Group



**Shafiqul  
Alam**

Lead Energy Analyst,  
The Institute for  
Energy Economics  
and Financial  
Analysis (IEEFA)







### Michael Klode

Project Manager,  
STILE Programme, GIZ

Michael Klode highlighted the crucial role of energy efficiency and sustainability in the global competitiveness of the apparel industry. He pointed to the government's duty to provide a stable grid and shift towards a more climate-neutral energy mix, while the industry must focus on energy-efficient practices.

Klode highlighted Bangladesh's reliance on non-renewables and the barriers to energy efficiency, stressing the need for a comprehensive strategy to achieve carbon neutrality and maintain competitiveness by 2025.



### Nirod Chandra Mandal

Honorable Joint Secretary,  
Renewable Energy, Power  
Division, Government of the  
People's Republic of  
Bangladesh

Nirod Chandra Mandal began by commending Bangladesh's accomplishment of 100% electrification in 2022, aligning with

SDG 7. He stressed the imperative to enhance renewable energy generation in the country's energy mix, which is currently reliant on gas and coal.

Mandal highlighted Bangladesh's goal for 40% renewable energy by 2041, noting policies to support this transition and projects underway, including solar and wind potential assessments with global aid. Despite grid and private sector challenges, he remained hopeful about meeting these objectives through substantial investments and international partnerships.



### Sarah Negro

Vice President for Public  
Affairs, H&M Group

Sarah Negro highlighted the impact of EU legislation on international firms, stressing the need for renewable energy adoption to maintain competitiveness, particularly for countries like Bangladesh. She called for more than just promoting energy efficiency and solar panels, advocating for foundational changes to address the energy challenge.

Negro stressed the need for policy reforms and government partnerships to increase renewable energy output. She highlighted corporate power purchase agreements as essential, facilitating private renewable energy for manufacturers.

She also advocated for a transparent tracking system of renewable energy use to enhance accountability and competitiveness.

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**78% of the multinational corporations might remove suppliers that will impede carbon transition plans. So, there is pressure from the system, but it's also from a business perspective and a horizon of competitiveness where a proper strategy to work on carbon transition, including energy, is to be addressed.**

Michael Klode,  
Project Manager, theSustainabilityin the  
Textile and Leather Industries (STILE), GIZ

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**If we want to make the power system sustainable, we have to include more renewable energy in our energy mix. We have huge renewable energy potential.**

Nirod Chandra Mandal  
Honorable Joint Secretary, Renewable  
Energy, Power Division, Government of  
the People's Republic of Bangladesh

“

**To solve Bangladesh's energy issues, we need major structural reforms. While dialogue and negotiations with suppliers helped, they were not enough. We must reform corporate power procurement for real change.**

Sarah Negro,  
Vice President for Public Affairs,  
H&M Group







### Shafiqul Alam

Lead Energy Analyst, The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA)

Shafiqul Alam analyzed Bangladesh's industrial energy efficiency, noting its growth without a corresponding increase in grid electricity use, attributed to gas limitations. He acknowledged efficiency improvements but raised concerns over recent price hikes affecting competitiveness.

Alam proposed solutions like rooftop solar and corporate PPAs to address these challenges, underlining the need for a balanced focus on renewable energy and efficiency, including waste heat recovery. He concluded that a comprehensive strategy is crucial for maintaining the sector's competitiveness and sustainability amid escalating energy expenses.



### Laxmikant Jawale

Regional Lead, South Asia & Southeast Asia, Apparel Impact Institute

Laxmikant Jawale addressed the decarbonization of the apparel sector, emphasizing the significance of energy efficiency and renewable energy adoption in Bangladesh. He stressed the foundational role of energy efficiency measures while acknowledging the increasing importance of solar energy due to its accessibility.

Jawale highlighted challenges in rooftop solar adoption, advocating for off-site renewable energy through PPAs. He emphasized a balanced approach for grid stability and minimal energy loss. His proposal includes establishing a comprehensive renewable energy ecosystem in the apparel sector to reach decarbonization goals.



I think renewable energy and energy efficiency are both crucial in addressing our energy challenges. Options like rooftop solar and corporate power purchase agreements offer promising avenues for progress.

Shafiqul Alam, Lead Energy Analyst, The Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis (IEEFA)



We need to address grid stability, transmission, distribution, and connection issues. Developing the entire ecosystem is crucial, not just focusing on one area. We must work on generating renewable energy and ensuring it flows efficiently to facilities.

Laxmikant Jawale, Regional Lead, South Asia & Southeast Asia, Apparel Impact Institute



## Event Highlights

# Glimpses of the Gathering





## Keynote

# Environment & Climate Challenges of the Sector & the Upcoming EU Regulation

**Lars Mortensen,**  
Expert on Textiles & Circular  
Economy, European  
Environmental Agency

In his keynote presentation, Mortensen highlighted the significant textile consumption in Europe, with each person using around 15 kilograms of predominantly synthetic fibers annually. He underscored the sector's substantial environmental impact, ranking fourth highest in greenhouse gas emissions.

He discussed the complexities of exporting used textiles to regions like Asia and Africa, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices. EU policies aim to promote sustainability through design requirements, digital product passports, and extended producer responsibility. Efforts to restrict textile waste exports and promote circular business models were also mentioned.

Mortensen stressed collaboration between the EU and countries like Bangladesh to transform the textile sector sustainably.



**European consumption of textiles has the fourth highest impacts on the environment climate change after food, housing, and Mobility. This is the reason why textiles are now being more regulated.**





## Presentations 01

### Future Opportunities in Sustainable Innovation

**Buddhi Paranamana,**  
Director Sustainability & Innovation,  
PDS Limited

Mr. Buddhi's presentation highlighted low-impact products through Everloop, a collection of six sustainable materials, and give-back programs via Yellow Octopus and Upcycle Labs, focusing on upcycling and recycling technologies. He showcased their efforts in combining sustainability with profitability, citing recycling facilities in the UK and Poland and expansion plans.

He called for collaborative efforts to amplify sustainable practices in the fashion industry, stressing the necessity of partnerships for significant and transformative change. Buddhi underscored the potential for sustainability to drive both ecological and commercial success.



**We truly believe that to see results of solutions, we have to scale, and for that, we are to collaborate and work together, so that's something that we are hoping that we can work on with everyone.**

## Presentations 02

### Harmonized Social Assessments As Win-Win for Supply Chain Resilience and Sustainable Work Environments

**Janet Mensink,**  
Chief Executive Officer (CEO),  
SLCP

Janet Mensink emphasized the importance of collective action in addressing issues related to supply chain resilience and sustainability, particularly in the context of the Paris OECD meeting on due diligence.

Mensink highlighted the progress made in recent years, citing concrete changes observed at the global and Bangladeshi factory levels, with over 900 factories successfully utilizing SLCP. However, she acknowledged that there is still work in progress, especially concerning working hours, wages, and safety. Mensink also noted promising data from Bangladesh, such as the significant representation of women in factory ownership (17%), surpassing the global average.

Mensink encouraged fruitful discussions among participants and expressed readiness to collaborate further to implement solutions.



**We see concrete changes at the work floor globally, but also in Bangladesh, where more than 900 factories are now using SLCP successfully, and we would like to increase that.**



Breakout Session

# Circular Design

## A Model Textile Waste Sorting Center in Bangladesh

The breakout session underscored the pressing need for sustainability in the fashion industry, emphasizing recycling materials and aligning with European Ecodesign regulations. Product clones made from recycled fibers and designed for recyclability were highlighted as a step towards improving sustainability in garment production.

Discussions centered on the EU's Circular Economy policies and their implications, particularly for countries like Bangladesh. Stakeholders in Bangladesh are recognizing circularity and sustainability as crucial for industry survival, especially with impending GSP+ requirements. Initiatives like formalizing waste collection and investing in recycling technologies were proposed. Challenges include the complexity of production processes, pricing concerns, and maintaining comfort and aesthetics. Compliance with upcoming regulations emphasizes traceability, durability, and recyclability, posing challenges for manufacturers. Balancing sustainability with competitiveness and addressing challenges in recycling processes were also discussed.



**Katja Moch**

Sustainable Products & Material Flows Senior Researcher, Oeko-Institut e.V.



**Prof. Maïke Rabe**

Professor, Textile Finishing & Ecology, Niederrhein University of Applied Sciences, Mönchengladbach, Germany



**Mumit Hasan**

Director: Business & Operations, Reverse Resources, Bangladesh



**Rannveig van Iterson**

Public Affairs Lead, H&M



**Sonya Parenti**

Product Specialist and Sustainable Development Expert, Sonya Parenti Ltd.



**Nishat Hamid**

Director, Shasha Garments & EOS Textile Mills



## Launching Ceremony

# Recycle Exchange

## A Model Textile Waste Sorting Center in Bangladesh

Recycle Exchange is a textile post-production sorting center in Dhaka aimed at promoting circularity and sustainability in the garment sector. It operates as a collaboration between Uptex and the Bangladesh Apparel Exchange.

The Recycle Exchange aims to formalize the sorting of textile waste, provide dignified jobs with fair wages, and ensure a good working environment for workers. The goal is to close the loop in the recycling industry by transforming waste back into garments, preferably locally in Bangladesh. The initiative encourages the recycling of textile waste to reduce reliance on virgin materials, with a focus on traceability and transparency in waste management.

The aim is to promote circular fashion and responsible consumption by redirecting textile waste from landfills to new productions. It emphasizes collaboration with manufacturers, recyclers, brands, and other stakeholders to establish a sustainable value chain. The initiative invites stakeholders to collaborate and visit their facilities to work together towards a circular shift in the apparel industry for a better world.





## Closing Remarks

# Act for Apparel's Future

**Dr. Vidhura Ralapanwe,**  
Executive Vice President,  
Epic Group & Member -  
Board of Director, Cascale

Dr. Vidhura Ralapanwe, in his closing remarks, lauded Bangladesh's apparel industry as a paradigm of transformation and women's empowerment. However, he underscored the imperative to address sustainability challenges such as resource depletion and climate change.

Ralapanwe emphasized collective action, rejecting the notion of placing the sustainability burden solely on manufacturers. He advocated for on-the-ground solutions tailored to local contexts and proposed innovative financing, like monetizing climate debt, to fund sustainability efforts.

Urging shared responsibility and a departure from outdated approaches, Ralapanwe stressed the urgent need for collaboration to avert global consequences. His call to action emphasized the imperative of moving beyond rhetoric to effect real change in the apparel industry's sustainability journey.



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In my understanding, a lot of the solutions at the high level fail at execution because we don't go into the ground and talk about what's happening on the ground and how it matters to people.

Implementing a gender program requires a very good understanding of culture and context, and if you do that outside that domain, it will fail.



## Exhibition Highlights

# Spotlight on Exhibitions



## Media Outreach

# Print, Electronic, TV & Social Media Outreach

## 80+

national and international  
electronic media engagement.

## 45+

national print  
media engagement.

## 1.3M+

impressions across Sustainable Apparel  
Forum social media channels.

## 4K+

shares in Facebook  
and LinkedIn.

## 75+

countries viewed our  
social media content.

## 10+

TV networks covered  
the event.

## 65+

journalists covered  
the event.





## Bangladesh Apparel Exchange

# Pioneering Sustainable Transformation in the Apparel Industry

As the visionary organizer behind the Sustainable Apparel Forum (SAF), the Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE) stands at the forefront of championing sustainability, innovation, and progress in Bangladesh's apparel industry. Established to bridge the knowledge gap and foster sustainable practices within the sector, BAE has played a crucial role in steering the national apparel industry towards a more eco-conscious and responsible future.

Under the leadership of Mr. Mostafiz Uddin, BAE has not only hosted the transformative SAF event but has also engaged in numerous initiatives aimed at promoting circularity, climate action, and the overall advancement of the apparel sector. These efforts underscore BAE's commitment to not just the economic but also the environmental and social pillars of sustainability. By orchestrating the SAF, BAE has provided a platform for dialogue, collaboration, and innovation among global and local stakeholders, thereby reinforcing Bangladesh's position as a leading sustainable sourcing destination.

This unwavering dedication to sustainability is reflected in BAE's holistic approach, encompassing everything from fostering knowledge and skill development to advocating for policy and industrial reforms. As BAE continues to drive the conversation and actions towards sustainable apparel production, its role as the organizer of the Sustainable Apparel Forum marks a pivotal chapter in the industry's journey towards a greener, more equitable future.

## Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE) Initiatives



## Event Highlights

# Glimpses of the Gathering





Event Highlights

# Glimpses of the Gathering







# \_ SUSTAINABLE \_ APPAREL FORUM

5th Edition

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## Organized By



## In Partnership With



## In Collaboration With



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