

**Session-3:** Enhancing Competitiveness for promoting trade, investment and private sector development

**Topic-3** "Improve **Social, safety and environmental standards** enforcement" in relation to

**Draft intervention by John Sinclair, Country Programme Director for Bangladesh, CIDA Headquarters**

**Minister Saifur Rahman, Hon. Ministers, Govt of the People's Republic of Bang officials, representatives from the private sector and civil society, visiting development partner delegates, ladies and gentlemen –**

On behalf of the Canadian Government/CIDA, I would like to congratulate and thank the Minister for his presentation. Further to the issues raised by my colleague, Mr. Erich Muller, I would like to add to the social issues he has raised and briefly touch on the gender dimensions of this sector in Bangladesh. It is important to remember as we address gender in particular, we are mindful not just of the lower-skilled women labourers, but also of the newer emerging entrepreneurial class of women which has evolved in large part to the presence of Bangladesh's strong micro-credit industry.

Women's employment in Bangladesh is concentrated in sectors with low returns on labour and is often temporary due to low-skill levels and discriminatory attitudes regarding "suitable work" for women. The gap in wages between women and men is significant in all sectors, both informal and formal. Addressing these disparities is important to achieving increased productivity and incomes, to strengthen women's economic position, enhancing family welfare and ultimately effective poverty reduction - - especially considering the research which suggests that when income and resources of women are increased within poor households, they are more likely than men to use them to benefit the entire household.

Among some of the interventions to support the increase of opportunities for women in the workplace, we support the PRSP highlighting the importance of childcare centers, provision of housing and safe transportation, as well as health and sanitation facilities. Regarding daycare centers and maternity leave (4 months), these are listed as actions already underway in the PRSP policy matrix in government institutions. An extension of this to the private sector would benefit a large number of children by improving the quality of their care. Some NGOs have begun to establish such day care centers in factories employing women. Provision of quality education to children in daycare centres (under 5) is another opportunity for the private sector to explore.

Further on the issue of youth, it is significant that 10% of the labour force is under 15 (7.7 million child labourers). There is therefore a need for decent work and

stronger regulations for factories employing children, since their release may leave them without work, forcing them into worse forms of labour. A possible measure to explore is to strengthen quality vocational training and building awareness in private sector companies of this critical issue.

Another set of gender issues relates to the RMG sector, which is now adjusting to the post MFA period. This sector has been an important source of formal sector employment for women, who form the majority of the work force, though they have been under-represented in the more skilled and management levels and in the more technologically advanced segments of the industry. The PRSP outlines investments to support restructuring. It will be important to also implement the measures envisaged to ensure equitable access by women to new opportunities created through these investments, particularly in developing the supply industry, and technology and skills upgrading.