

Green Social Dialogue: Promoting Climate Action Through Workforce Empowerment



Aman Sweaters Ltd., based in Savar in the Dhaka district of Bangladesh, stands out as a compelling success story from the workplace-based Green Social Dialogue (GSD) pilot initiative. This two-year worker-led project, launched by Ethical Trading Initiative Bangladesh in 2022, supported five factories across Bangladesh in fostering climate-conscious practices. The initiative was designed to include workers and empower them as change agents in climate actions—positioning them not just as participants, but as drivers of environmental change. Through structured dialogue and inclusive engagement, the project empowered factory workers to actively address climate and environment-related challenges within their workplaces. The initiative was designed to strengthen the capacity of factory management, workers, and worker representatives to identify climate risks in the workplace

and address them through workplace-based social dialogue. It also sought to raise awareness of climate change impacts and embed these discussions into everyday workplace practices. At the beginning, workers at Aman Sweaters had limited involvement in environment-related initiatives. Over time, however, the factory underwent a transformation, with its workforce becoming actively engaged in driving the green transition.

Introduction

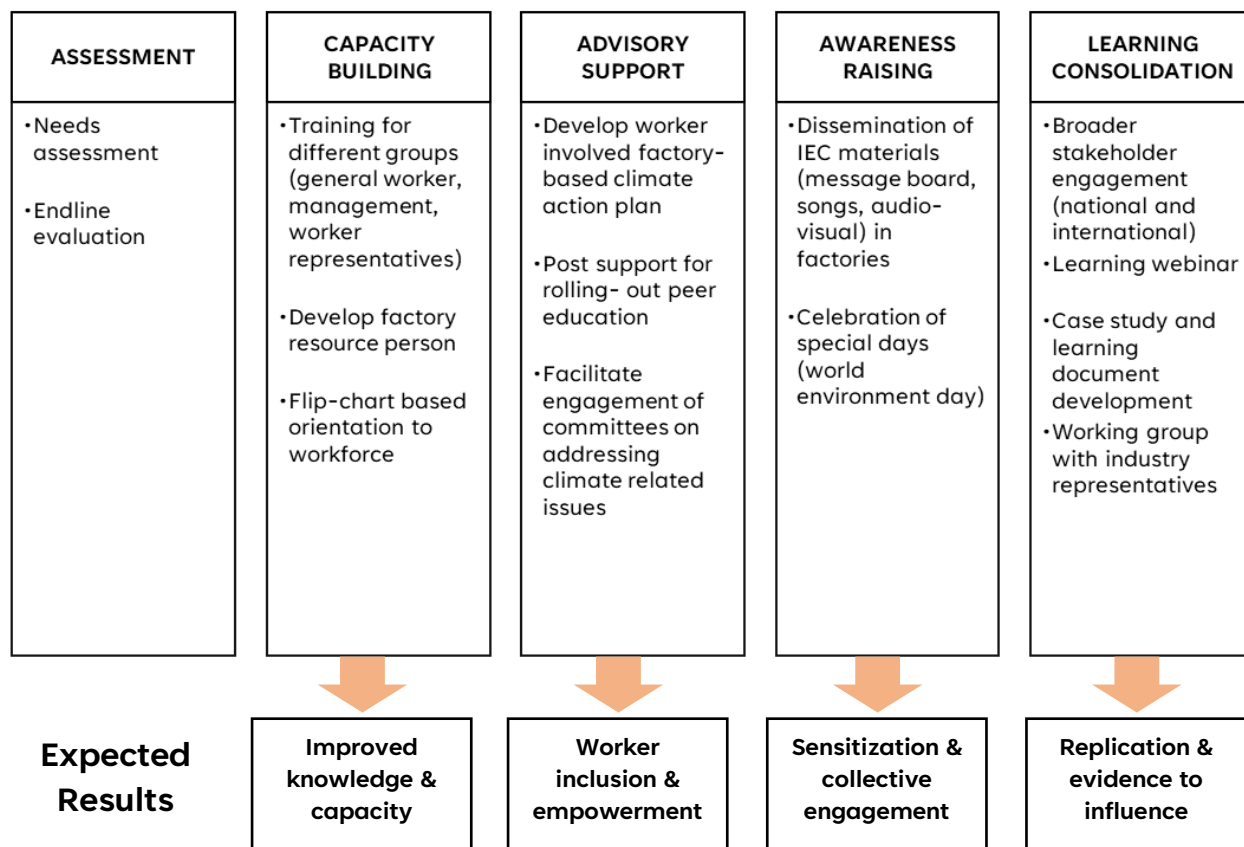
At the baseline stage, Aman Sweaters Ltd.— among the ten factories— demonstrated a significant gap in environmental awareness, practices, and strategic planning. Climate change and sustainability topics were notably absent from worker committee agendas, which focused primarily on labor rights, safety, and wages. Although Aman Group had outlined broad goals for energy efficiency and waste reduction, these remained aspirational, with no concrete actions or worker engagement.

Workers showed limited understanding of environmental issues: only 25.9% respondents had basic knowledge of climate change and its effects, and just 8.2% of worker respondents felt any personal responsibility for environmental concerns. Waste management practices were weak, with only 38.1% of workers familiar with proper procedures to handle waste, and while 56.9% were aware of energy-saving methods, their practical application was minimal. Everyday operations reflected this disconnect—water and energy were used inefficiently, and waste was poorly managed.

The factory lacked initiative to build worker capacity on climate resilience, renewable energy, or sustainable resource use. Public Awareness systems were narrowly focused on cleanliness and safety, with no communication on green issues. Management had not developed strategic plans for 3R (reduce, reuse, recycle), nor had they introduced energy-efficient technologies or renewable energy systems. Both management and committee members acknowledged the absence of environmental sustainability in formal discussions and factory operations.

Programme Interventions

Programme Outline & Expected Results



Capacity Building Sessions: The programme delivered tailored three-day training sessions for different groups within the factory: management and Trade Union members, as well as other committee representatives such as safety, maintenance, and security, received intensive 8-hour-per-day sessions. General workers participated in shorter sessions, with 4 hours of training each day over the same three-day period, ensuring inclusive capacity development across all levels.

Awareness Raising Activities: To foster environmental awareness, the factory celebrated World Environment Day in both 2023 and 2024 through rallies, meetings, and tree plantation events. Ten thematic message boards were installed on factory walls, while two folk audio songs addressing environmental issues were broadcast via the Public Announcement system.

Additionally, a climate change awareness video was shown using multimedia tools to reinforce key messages.

Resource Person Development & Flipchart Orientation: Selected participants underwent a two-day resource person training to lead peer education efforts. They were equipped with ten sets of pictorial flipcharts, each covering four thematic topics, and subsequently conducted orientation sessions for the broader workforce using these visual tools to ensure consistent messaging and engagement.



Action Plan Development & Advisory Support: During the training sessions, participants collaboratively identified environmental challenges within the factory and drafted a climate action plan featuring KPIs. With guidance from the programme team, senior management finalized the plan and proceeded to implement targeted activities aligned with each KPI, initiating several sustainability-focused improvements.

Sustainability Plan Development: Factories created sustainability plans to keep worker-led environmental efforts going even beyond the project period. These plans included regular awareness activities, adding green topics to committee discussions, and refresher training for staff. Trained resource persons continued their roles, and management agreed to monitor progress using KPIs to make sure the initiatives stayed active over time.

Interventions in Aman

Aman Sweaters Ltd employs around 660 people, 62% of whom are female. The factory has an active trade union. Through the pilot intervention, a total of 65 (54% female) management, trade union members, worker representatives and

general workers received capacity building session. A pool of 16 team members (43% female) was created as resource person, and they oriented 497 workers (63% female) using flipcharts. Factory regularly conducts awareness raising campaigns including celebrating world environment day, playing audio songs and messages in Public Announcement system with awareness messages, installed information message boards etc.

Climate Action Plan: Building on the increased awareness and capacity gained through the training sessions, the factory—supported by advisory input from the project team and collaborative dialogue—factory worker representatives and management co-developed a time-bound climate action plan, which includes the following issues:



- 2% reduction of production waste
- Establishment of a waste management committee with clearly defined roles for all members
- 10% decrease in black smoke emissions from generators
- 7% reduction in electricity consumption (from 650,000 KWh to 645,000 KWh)
- 15% decrease in water usage through optimized practices (from 600,000L to 510,000L)
- Completion of orientation and counselling for all workers by resource person, ensuring 100% participation
- Full workforce engagement through PA system announcements, audio songs, and visual materials
- Installation of climate-conscious information boards throughout the factory premises
- Plantation of at least 100 plants

Impact

Inclusion – Workers in the Decision-Making Process

Workers played a central role in shaping and implementing the factory's climate and environment initiatives, marking a shift toward inclusive decision-making. The worker representatives collaborated closely with management to develop the time bound action plan during the training. This ensured that the worker perspectives were heard and embedded into the strategic planning. This spirit of collaboration extended into regular committee meetings, where environmental topics such as energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste management became standing agenda items. Workers didn't just attend—they co-led discussions and proposed actionable solutions.



To deepen engagement, trained resource persons

from within the workforce facilitated flip chart-based learning sessions for all workers, fostering a shared understanding and sense of ownership around climate issues. These conversations didn't stop at formal settings; workers reported discussing climate change and training insights informally during breaks, helping to normalize sustainability dialogue across the factory floor. By the end of the programme, 65% of workers stated that they now actively raise environmental concerns at work, reflecting a growing confidence in their ability to influence decisions and shape the factory's sustainability journey.

Agency – Workers Taking Action and Influencing Change

Beyond participation, workers have demonstrated the ability to apply their knowledge, influence outcomes, and adopt sustainable behaviors both in the workplace and at home. Worker representatives played a pivotal role, as change agents, in advocating for energy and water conservation, raising awareness among their peers, and bringing environmental concerns into management discussions. They proposed alternative solutions such as energy-saving practices and tree plantation, helping to embed environmental priorities into the factory's agenda.



This learning extended beyond the factory walls. A notable percentage of workers applied their knowledge of tackling impacts of climate change at home: 38.3% planted trees, 23.3% practiced mindful resource use, and 26.7% adopted energy-efficient appliances. Water-saving knowledge at home rose to 95% workers, while 95% worker

respondents' awareness on wastewater reuse increased. Most significantly, the proportion of workers who felt personally responsible for environmental issues increased from 8.2% to 40%, marking a shift from passive awareness to active stewardship.

Workers applied their knowledge at home by planting trees (38.3%), using resources mindfully (23.3%), and adopted energy efficient appliances (26.7%). 95% of the workers implemented their water saving knowledge at their homes while 95% of the worker respondents increased. There was a significant rise in the proportion of workers who felt personally responsible for environmental issues from 8.2% to 40%.



Workers and management developed a series of long-term sustainability plans to continue this momentum. These include regular refresher trainings, monthly measurement and reporting of energy savings from solar panels, installation of rainwater harvesting systems, adoption of energy-efficient lighting, and the integration of

environmental content into worker induction programs. These efforts aim to institutionalize environmental responsibility and ensure that the progress made continues to evolve and deepen over time.

Previously, environmental initiatives within the factory were designed and implemented exclusively by management, with little to no input from workers. This top-down approach limited engagement and long-term impact.

However, a significant shift has occurred. Workers are now actively involved in both the planning and execution of sustainability efforts, fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. With strong support from factory leadership, including financial investment and a



commitment to building environmental awareness, this collaborative approach has led to measurable improvements in operational practices.

Energy Efficiency Improvements: A 40kW solar panel was installed, now supplying 7.1% of monthly energy needs and saving BDT 38,669 per month. 50% of conventional bulbs were replaced with LED bulbs, saving 274 kWh monthly. Workers contributed to energy-saving behaviors: 71.2% turned off machines/lights during breaks, 69.5% keen on using solar energy, and use of LED lights rose to 27.1%.

The factory showed heightened commitment in saving energy by installing a 40kW solar panel which supplies 7.1% of monthly energy and saving BDT 38,669 per month. LED bulbs took over conventional bulbs by 50% and it is now saving the factory 274 kWh monthly. This awareness was reflected in worker behavior. 71.2% of the workers began to turn off the machines/ lights during their breaks; 69.55 workers showed interest in using solar energy and 27.1% workers began to use LED lights.

Waste Reduction and Recycling: The factory now reuses over 400 kg of fabric scrap monthly, thanks to a new recycling machine. Workers helped implement a tri-colored bin system and reported strong awareness of 3R practices: 91.7% on reduction, 78.3% on reuse, and 50% on recycling.

The factory took the initiative in reusing over 400 kg of fabric soap monthly by installing a new recycling machine. Worker awareness in waste segregation was noteworthy as they helped to implement a tri-colored bin system. The workers also showed increased awareness on reduction (91.7%), reuse (78.3%) and recycling (50%).



Knowledge and Practice Growth: Knowledge on the concept of Climate change awareness rose from 63.9% workers to 100% and understanding of its effects jumped from 25.9% workers to 85%. Knowledge of energy-saving practices increased to 98.3% of workers, with 96.6% of workers offering suggestions to improve efficiency.

The workers showed a drastic increase on the knowledge on concept of climate change awareness; the percentage rose to 100% from 63.9%. the understanding of their effects also rose from 25.9% to 85%, which is a great success of the initiative. The workers also demonstrated a stark increase in energy saving practices (98.3%) and 96.6% of workers offered suggestions to improve efficiency.

Key Learnings

- Involving workers in planning and KPI development strengthened their commitment and sense of responsibility toward environmental improvements.
- Technical staff and management jointly set practical KPIs, focusing on achievable goals that are actually aligned with factory's long-term plan.
- Knowledge retention was ensured through consistent awareness raising by integrating environmental messages in daily operations through IEC materials, audio songs and training
- Senior leadership emphasized environmental priorities, creating a sense of urgency and helping staff focus on sustainability efforts.
- Workers prioritize wages as their immediate concern. Though they recognize climate change and environmental issues, these are often seen as distant rather than urgent. Sensitization efforts have raised awareness of green initiatives, yet daily survival needs still take precedence.
- A well-structured Environmental and Social Management System (ESMS) can improve programme effectiveness and long-term sustainability.
- Implementing environmental practices such as green energy, recycling, and energy conservation can be challenging, as they require significant additional investment.

“It's truly satisfying to witness workers stepping up and taking responsibility for water usage, energy conservation, and waste management after the training. They now conscientiously turn off faucets during handwashing and short breaks, switch off machines, lights, and fans when on breaks, and, diligently segregate waste.”

-A women Welfare Officer at the factory