

# Advancing with SDG 5: Gender Equality – A Case Study of DBL Group

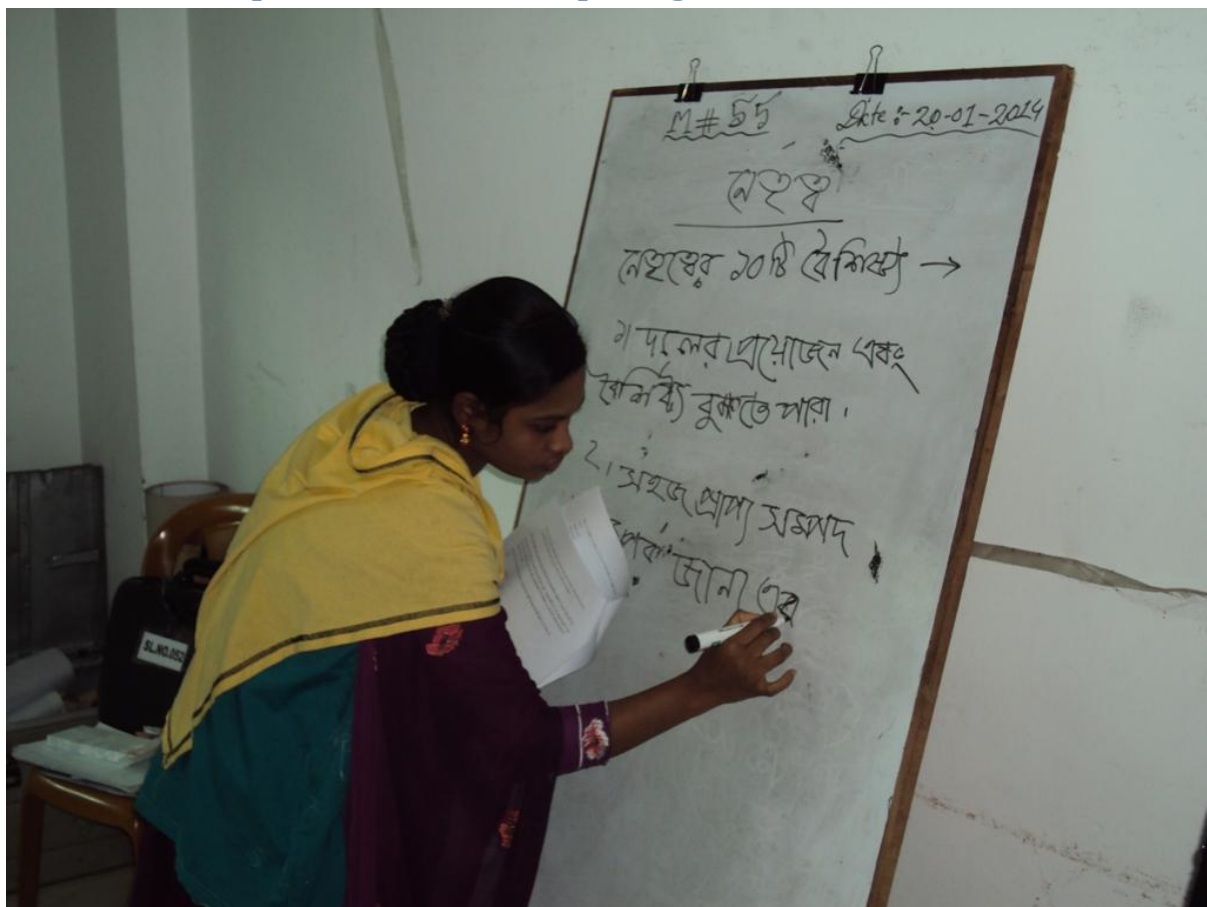
## DBL and the SDGs

A continuously growing industry, DBL Group is a diversified business entity which has vertically integrated textile and apparel manufacturing facilities. DBL started business in 1991 and today has 22,595 employees with a turnover of US\$ 320 million for 2014-15.

DBL's Sustainability is based on five pillars: **People, Process, Product, Community, and Environment**, thereby having a holistic approach towards Sustainability. Through multiple "knowledge partners", we are engaged with a variety of relevant Sustainability programs aligned with the SDGs.

DBL is well-respected within the industry and is already considered a benchmark for our Sustainability practices. The SDGs provide a good tool for measuring Sustainability performance and we believe we will be able to transform our knowledge and performance to different industries across Bangladesh.

## The Female Supervisor Leadership Program



It is a well-known fact that the garments industry in Bangladesh has undergone turbulent times, including labor unrests. The industry comprises of almost 80% female and 20% male workers. But during the unrests it is observed that it is the male workers who have been more active than their female counterparts. The percentage of female workers in the garments manufacturing units of DBL Group was only 35% in 2012. For risk minimization of labor unrest, focus was done to increase recruitment of female workers. Today in 2015, DBL has about 44% female workers in its garments manufacturing units.



Another major step taken towards risk minimization was to have Female Supervisors in the sewing lines. Over the years DBL has had good experience of working with Civil Service Organizations (CSOs) and Development Partners in implementing successfully pilot projects at its factories. Women Empowerment and Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) programs have built confidence, leadership, and belongingness among the female workers in DBL. Integrating the learning and experiences from different programs, DBL designed an in-house training program for its Female Supervisors. This comprises of 18-hour lessons covering areas of skill, counseling and general management. Over a period of 2 months training is provided to potential in-house female workers having worked in sewing or quality departments within DBL. After successful completion of training program they are promoted as Female Supervisors. DBL has 164 garments sewing lines which were led only by male supervisors. From the first and second training batches we have 22 female supervisors which cover 12% of the sewing lines. A third batch comprising of 8 workers are undergoing training which will be completed by May 2016. Beginning June 2016, at DBL we will be having 17% of our sewing lines led by female supervisors.

## Female Supervisor Cases Studies

### Case Study 1: Khadiza Begum



***“Female issues are best understood by a female.”***

When interviewed, this is what Ms. Khadiza Begum had to say. A former Junior Sewing Operator, Khadiza is now one of the 22 Female Supervisors of DBL Group.

Khadiza joined DBL in March 2014 and she got promoted as Supervisor in

February 2015 after the in-house Female Supervisor Leadership Program training completion. Her last earning as Junior Sewing Operator was BDT 8,144 including over time. On becoming supervisor her salary is BDT 12,000 which is an increase of 47.35%.

Sharing her experience as a Supervisor she said that she is enjoying her new role. She now has people working under her and this makes her feel well. On her achievement she said, ***“As a Female Supervisor I am able to address issues of female workers within the sewing lines, which previously were not attended by male supervisor. Female issues are best understood by a female.”*** She commented upon further career growth, ***“It is possible to become Production Floor In-Charge and move upward if the management is beside us.”***

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### Case Study 2: Halima Khatun

Ms. Halima Khatun joined DBL in September 2012 as a Quality Inspector. As she graduated from the training in February 2015, she was made a Supervisor. Her last earning as Quality Inspector was BDT 8,681. On becoming supervisor her salary is BDT 12,000 which is an increase of 38.31%.

Halima shares that she learnt a number of issues from the training. As per her comments, earlier she was disorganized and neat in her work. She also had communication problems: she simply stated that she was unaware of the etiquettes when talking to people. The training enabled her to be organized, which in turn made her more efficient. She applied the techniques of communication that

she had learnt: this includes having better behavior (which she was unaware of) as well as the courage to speak. Regarding behavior, she found out that improper behavior will not lead to self-identification. She also referred to the motto of **“Need to talk: cannot keep quiet”**, which motivated her in order to talk with people. In overall, she shared that she felt “empowered” after the training and promotion.

Halima also stated that the learning from her training program not only helped her professional life but her family life too. For instance, she altered her and her family’s food habit as she understood the importance of pursuing a healthy diet. The changes in her are visible to her husband. Her importance and respect have further increased in the eyes of her family.

As an advice to other female workers, she said: **“Learn the work: you can be like me. Explain others about the work and have courage as well as willingness. Behave well with others.”**

### Case Study 3: Taslima Akter

**“Try. You can do it.”**

**Ms. Taslima Akter**



Ms. Taslima Akter joined DBL in March 2007. She has had her education till Class 8. She received promotion to Supervisor in May 2015 after successful completion of training program. Her earning as Senior Sewing Operator prior to promotion was BDT 8,971. As a supervisor she is drawing salary of BDT 11,500: earning increased by 28.19%

She shared that she enjoyed the added activities and responsibilities that were given to her because of the promotion. She feels good especially due to the honor she had received. The training helped her gain knowledge of communication skills which allowed her to be more acceptable to her subordinates.

The interaction with people was possibly her greatest achievement. She shared that when she was a Sewing Operator, she did not interact much with others. After the promotion, she now has increased access to higher officials.

She inspires other women by simply saying: **“Try. You can do it.”**. Her advice to the future Supervisors is **“Teach by doing”**.



## Other programs contributing to the SDGs



There is no discrimination in DBL. DBL employs, pays, and promotes employees irrespective of personal characteristics or beliefs. As an example, DBL has 22 female security guards, an initiative which is very rare in the apparel industry of Bangladesh. Women are also present even in senior management (SDG Targets 10.2 and 10.4).

In partnership with CARE, financial literacy trainings are also provided to women workers enabling them to not only have control over their earnings but also making them self-reliant for doing their own businesses (SDG Target 1.2).

Furthermore, in order to provide access to ICT, our workers, both men and women, make use of electronic tabs to input production information and even extract relevant data for effective management (SDG Targets 5.1, 5.5, 5.a, and 5.b).

DBL is also involved in an upcoming program with the World Food Program (WFP) in providing fortified rice to 125 female garments workers and their families. Furthermore, in order to secure the health of the future generation, DBL has signed a MoU with UNICEF to promote breastfeeding in the workplace (SDG Targets 2.1 and 2.2).

DBL provides outdoor medical services to workers, their families, and also the community. Subsidized medicines are available in the in-house pharmacy. Through the Women Health Program Initiative, sanitary napkins are being provided to our female workers at subsidized price of only \$ 0.13 (up to 71% less than the retail markets) (SDG Target 3.8). Moreover, the program on sexual and reproductive health rights by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and Phulki help our workers have better knowledge on reproductive health (SDG Targets 3.7 and 5.6).



## Summary

The performance of Female Supervisors is commendable. It has been a value addition in many respects addressing issues like women empowerment, discrimination, gender equality, diversity, etc. Engagement of Female Supervisors in garments industry of Bangladesh will bring lots of benefits: the most important of which is leadership with caring for subordinates.

DBL's vision with regard to female workers is:

**“To be the most attractive employer for the female workers in the garments industry of Bangladesh.”**