

EMPOWERMENT

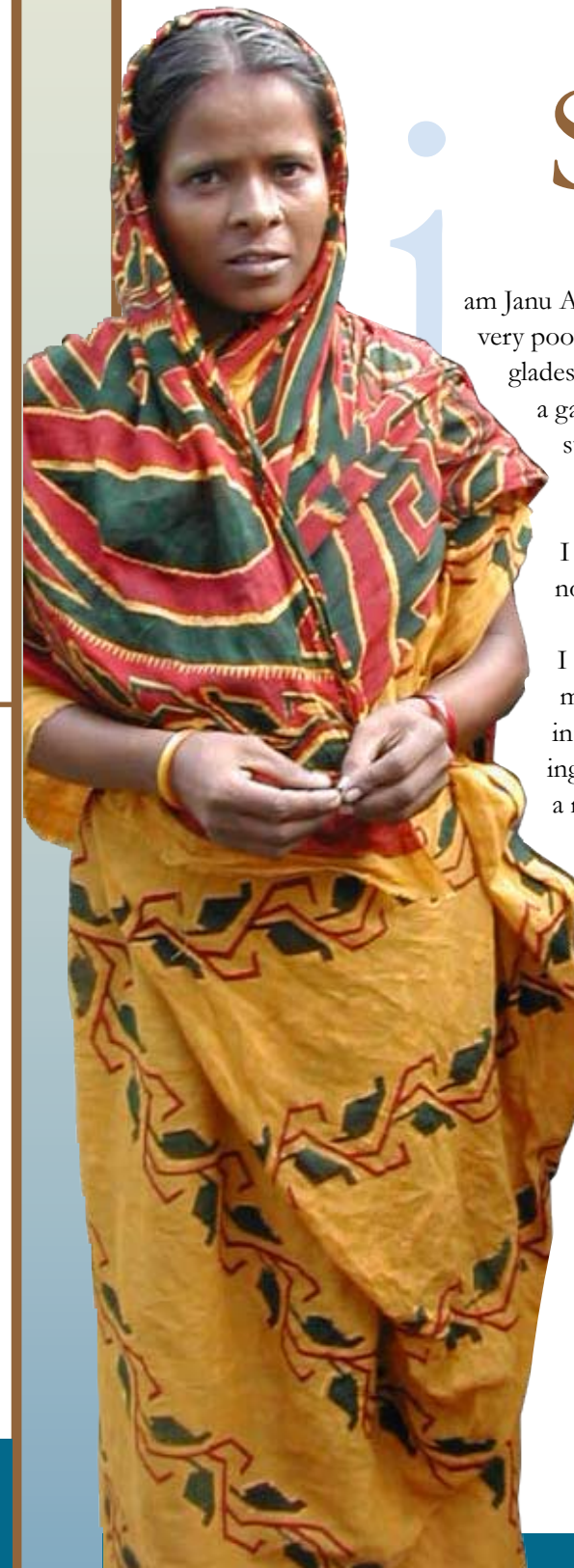


UPDATE

December 2006

IIRD: Empowering Bangladesh's Rural Poor to End Their Own Poverty

A SWEATSHOP WORKER SPEAKS



I am Janu Aktar. I am 22 years old from a very poor family in the south of Bangladesh. I went to Dhaka to work in a garment factory at age 12 to help support my family. For ten years I have worked 13 to 19 hours a day but still have no savings. If I die today, my family would have no money to bury me.

I am a sewing machine operator, making caps for many universities in the United States. I do the stitching on the visors of the caps. I earn a monthly wage of 965 taka working a standard shift from 8:00 am to 5 pm. They tell me that is \$14.10 a month or 7 cents an hour. When I learned that one of these caps costs \$17 or \$18 in the United States I cried. The most I have been able to earn, working the whole month between 14 and 20 hours a day everyday, with only two Fridays off, is 2,160 taka a month (\$ 31.57)

Usually I leave work at 10:00 pm. It takes me an hour to get home. The roads are not safe and I fear being robbed like so many others, especially when I am carrying my pay. When shipments have to go out to the U.S. or abroad I have to work 19 or 20 hours until 3:00 am or 4:00 am. There is no space to sleep so I have to curl up next to the machine to sleep for three or four hours, then I go home at 6:00 am to wash and eat breakfast, and hurry to be back at work by 8:00am.

Because I earn so little money, I have to share a tiny room with three co-workers. We have two beds and two of us share each bed. We have nothing else; no chair, no table, no cooking equipment, no radio, TV or clock.

Five families, with a total of 30 people in the row of rooms where I live, share one bathroom and one kitchen and one gas burner. In the morning, I have to stand in line to use the bathroom and to use the gas burner. Sometimes, I go to the factory without having breakfast. On a good day, I eat rice three times a day, usually with vegetables at night. At the end of the month, when I get paid, I can afford two small pieces of chicken.

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THANK YOU!



THANK YOU! for supporting 72 new schools for 2007! Because of your wonderful generosity 2,160 children will enter school for the first time this January.

IIRD's education system is its unique ability to integrate learning into village life in rural Bangladesh without disrupting the necessary routines which are dominated by the planting and harvesting seasons. To accommodate the need for children to work in the fields during these seasons, IIRD has set up half-day school programs that extend throughout the year. Depending on the season, children go to school either in the morning or afternoon, allowing them to continue to contribute to the well-being of their families. This balance between agriculture and education helps secure the approval and enthusiasm of

families, and allows them to realize the importance of a good education for their young.

Great value is put on community participation. The local community becomes actively involved with the schools, by selecting and donating the land where the school will be built, constructing the building, forming a school management committee to resolve problems that may arise in the school or community, maintaining the school building and providing discipline when needed.

Just as the IIRD takes pride in fostering a cooperative spirit among the rural poor to overcome their problems, we would like to thank you for coming together as one to support those truly in need of assistance.

YOUR GENEROSITY PROVIDES PROGRAMS AND HOPE TO THE RURAL POOR.
PLEASE CONSIDER SUPPORTING AND EXPANDING
FR. BILL'S WORK BY BECOMING A FRIEND OF IIRD.

INHUMANE WORKING CONDITIONS TRAP YOUNG GIRLS

On the production line, there are 30 machines with 30 operator's and 10 helpers. We are given a production target of 370 caps per hour, but we can barely complete 320 caps per hour, even though we work as fast as we can. But because of this we sometimes make mistakes and the supervisors shout at us, slap us, hit us with a stick or a cap, or jab us with scissors. If we cry because of this rough treatment, they threaten us if we don't stop.

If you make the same mistake more than once, the supervisor puts a red mark on your machine and you are docked four or five hours overtime – or, it is counted as a one day absence so you lose a whole day's pay.

I have to ask permission to use the bathroom and they give me only two minutes. The supervisor checks the time. We only have tap water to drink, which is filthy and makes us sick. The workers often have diarrhea, jaundice and kidney problems. Because we have to sit on stools with no backs working so many hours, most workers suffer from backaches.

The factory is cloudy with dust from the cloth. It is not well ventilated, without enough air or light. The dust goes into our noses and makes us sick with coughs and respiratory problems. Because of the constant pressure, long working




hours and dirty environment, we often suffer headaches, eye pain, coughs, gastric problems, and anemia.

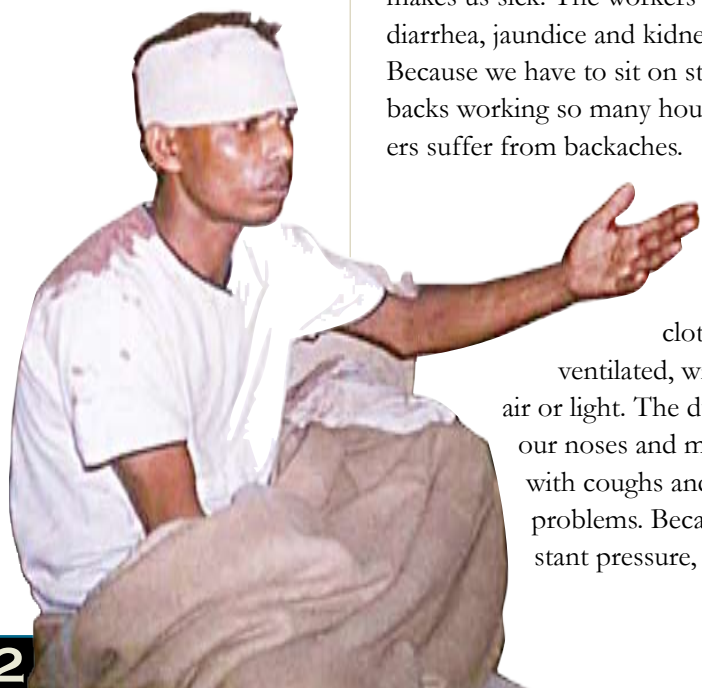
When a worker quits or gets fired, there is no severance, no provident fund, no savings, she leaves with nothing. If we try to make demands or argue, the supervisors threaten to fire us, or they fire us immediately. For this reason, we can't make any demands, we have no power, and we are unable to organize workers.

When U. S. buyers come we are instructed to lie and say that we are receiving our wages on time, receive the correct overtime, have one day off a week, and we never work after 8:00 pm at night. They tell us to use make-up so that we will look healthy. We are told that the buying companies have demanded Codes of Conduct to protect our rights which are supposed to be hung on the walls but we have not seen them.

Many people have asked me how much I would need to earn so as not to live in misery. I think that if we could earn 4,000-5,000 taka a month (\$58.45 to \$73.07 which would be 29-36 cents an hour), we could live in decency.

We need these jobs because we have no alternative for employment in Bangladesh. We need others to help us win our struggle to protect our rights and to be treated as human beings. 

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IIRD PIONEERS FIRST WORKER-OWNED GARMENT FACTORY

The garment industry employs 2.2 million people and is a critical part of the Bangladesh economy, accounting for 76% of annual exports, but its success is at the expense of its workers, who are mostly young rural women with little education or knowledge of their rights. Factory owners and management take advantage of their ignorance and use it to exploit them. Factories typically operate in unsafe buildings, workers are locked in preventing escape in case of fires, 18 hour work days six or seven days a week are common and working conditions are unhealthy. Insufficient monitoring from government inspectors and industry coordinating bodies allow these conditions to continue. Management personnel are rewarded for extracting maximum production, through over-working and under-paying their workers, even beating and abusing them in other ways.



Objectives of the Project:

- To organize and operate a 4-line woven garment factory to employ 543 personnel.
- To set up the factory under the Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) model, existing in many countries in the world, with 75% ownership by the factory employees and 15% by management personnel.
- To structure the project as a private limited company under the laws of the government, with a Worker Shareholder's Association (WSA)/ (WWC) as the legal trustee of the workers shares.
- To operate the factory according to the principles of Justice Based Management (JBM), whereby all the worker-owners participate in decision making as well as in the production process.
- To operate the factory as a successful, economically viable concern.
- To promote marketing of the produced items through the JBM Logo, obtaining JBM certification from the international board responsible for such certification.
- To assist other woven garment producers in the country and elsewhere to avail of the JBM social technology for impacting positively the international economic globalization process. 



In the spring of 2007, IIRD will open JBM Garments, Ltd. as an international model of worker-ownership, operated on principles of justice. This worker-owned factory, which will open initially as a sub-contracting unit, will be the first of its kind in Bangladesh and will be competitive in quality, cost, and time of delivery to the existing 4220 sweatshop system.

Getting Started!

Working with the Human Rights Commissions of Bangladesh, the National Labor Committee in New York, the Centers for Economic and Social Justice in Washington, DC and Bangladesh, and supported by generous grants from The Public Welfare Foundation, The Marianist Social Justice Collaborative, the Government of Spain and with the commitment of Wal-Mart USA to provide the market for the purchase of all production, IIRD is initiating steps to begin the "JBM Garments Ltd." as a sub-contracting unit to open in the spring 2007. We are deeply grateful. When the remaining needed fund is arranged, the factory would later become an independent factory.

