



Asia Floor Wage Alliance - Bangladesh

International Women's Day: 30 Years After Beijing, Gender Justice Still Out of Reach

March 2025

This International Women's Day, Asia Floor Wage Alliance honors the resilience, leadership, and collective power of women garment workers and their unions across Asia. Rooted in garment workers' struggles, March 8th remains a day of working-class women rising against oppression—celebrating progress while confronting the fight ahead for gender justice.

Days ahead of the [69th UN Commission on the Status of Women's](#) review of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#), we reflect on our collective struggles to advance the Declaration's commitments to gender equality within the global garment industry – particularly in women's economic empowerment, decision-making participation, and ending violence against women. Governments made these commitments nearly three decades ago, yet fashion brands continue to profit from systemic gender inequality, exploiting weak protections and leaving garment workers to bear the cost. By avoiding responsibility to workers in their supply chains, global brands undermine progress towards the Declaration's bold vision for gender equality.

Global Garment Supply Chains Fuel Inequality, Not Economic Empowerment

The garment industry, structured through global supply chains, was expected to deliver economic development to global South countries. Instead, it has deepened inequality between countries. Brands drive a system that suppresses wages at or below poverty levels, keeping garment workers trapped in poverty while value created by a predominantly female workforce flows to brands' shareholders and executives in global North countries.



While growth of the sector has increased women's workforce participation, Asia continues to have the highest gender pay gap. The garment industry promised formal dignified employment but in reality, delivered low-wage, insecure jobs. Further, women's labor – be it discriminately low-paid as well as unpaid labor, including domestic and care work – remains undervalued and underpaid.

Achieving women's economic empowerment requires recognition of both paid and unpaid labor. It also demands fair redistribution of profits in supply chains starting with brands ensuring [living wages that factor in the cost of social reproduction](#).

Brands Exploit Conditions that Fuel GBVH, Undermining Gender Equality

Fashion brands claim to support gender equality while profiting from conditions that expose women workers to various forms of gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH). GBVH takes many forms, including physical and sexual abuse, psychological and economic harm. Brands' downward pressure on suppliers to meet high production targets at low costs creates a high-stress environment, where bullying, verbal abuse and harassment are used to discipline and control the predominantly female workforce.

Brands deepen economic insecurity among women garment workers by suppressing wages, leaving women with little choice but to endure violence. In Cambodia, piece-rate workers, denied essential overtime pay, are forced to work long hours to meet rising production targets while earning poverty-level wages. In Indonesia, factory closures driven by brands' sourcing decisions have led to illegal mass dismissals, leaving over 10,000 garment workers jobless. As the primary breadwinners in their households, women garment workers are especially impacted, with brands worsening their financial insecurity and preventing them from supporting their families.

In addition to economic pressures, garment workers face physical harm as a result of grueling working conditions. In India, a proposed law extending workdays to 10 hours



would disproportionately affect women in the labor-intensive garment industry, while in Pakistan, women garment workers already endure shifts of up to 20 hours to meet production targets. These long hours standing doing repetitive tasks results in physical harm including leg pain, ulcers, miscarriages, and other adverse health consequences.

Women Workers Demand Collective Power in Decision-making

Brands profit from patriarchal social norms that exclude women workers from decision-making, undermining their ability to participate in democratic processes that shape their lives. Workers' ability to collectivize and raise their voice is vital for women to organize, defend their rights, and influence decisions that impact them in their workplaces and communities. Widespread attacks on Freedom of Association (FOA) across Asia undermines gender equality and weakens the very foundation of democracy.

In Sri Lanka, AFWA partner unions led by women are reshaping decision-making and political processes, advancing gender equality – notwithstanding challenges related to inclusivity and broader representation. Women workers in Myanmar continue to resist, organizing for democracy in the face of the military junta's brutal repression.

Despite the widespread ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) across Asia, gendered violence remains a daily reality. In Bangladesh, political upheaval and impunity have fueled an alarming rise in physical and sexual violence – a major barrier to women's participation in democratic decision-making.

Gender-based Violence is a Collective Fight, Not an Individual Burden

Most Asian countries have yet to ratify Convention No. 190 on GBVH in the world of work. Fear of retaliation silences victims and prevents women from exercising their right to FOA.



GBVH is a systemic problem that requires collective action through trade unions and worker collectives. Women workers who report violence often face retaliation, but when they organize, they win. The groundbreaking Dindigul Agreement in India [demonstrates](#) that when workers have access to FOA and union-led grievance mechanisms, they can safely report GBVH and hold perpetrators accountable.

These victories prove that when women organize, change is possible. Yet, the fight is far from over. The global women's and labor movements must stand together to hold brands accountable under the commitments made in the Beijing Declaration. Brands must stop profiting from gender inequality and ensure the rights, dignity, and safety of the women who make their clothes.

This International Women's Day, we reaffirm: **Women Workers Will Not Wait. Gender Justice Now.**