

Workers in the Textile and Garment sector in Nepal

General Condition of the industry

Textile industry is one of the oldest industries in Nepal established in the eve of World War II. But informally, textile industry was in existence from the time immemorial in the form of family based cottage industry, the clothes produced are still called *gharbuna*. Organized form of textile industry has become a sick industry with almost no possibility of revival because of easy & heavy import of textile from neighbourhood countries – India and China. Textile industry of the country has become extremely sick also because of the direct import of readymade garments at very cheap prices. It has become sick also because of no improvement in the quality of production. Fourthly, the government policy has been defective. Government even could not operate and ultimately decided in the year 2000 to close the only one Public Enterprise of textile sector – the Hetauda Textile Industries.

On the other hand garment industry is a newer one. The history of garment industry in Nepal starts basically from 1985. Its growth have been very fast and it has become the second largest item of export in Nepal after the woollen carpet as the first item of export with viewpoint of foreign exchange earning in Nepal.

Activities of GEFONT-ITGWUN

Union movement in textile industry has become weak because of the closures of the enterprises, but comparatively it is strong in Garment sector. ITGWUN has been the single organization in garment sector established from 1986 in underground existence. After 1990, when union movement became free as a result of restoration of democracy in the country, ITGWUN developed very fast. After 2,000 its growth has become static. Looking at the last one year, following activities have been carried out by the union:

- Organizing activities covering 10 districts of garment & textile production where 78 enterprises out of a total currently producing 140 have been covered. Large numbers of enterprises have been closed - most of the textile factories and many garment factories.
- Education work on Basic trade Union course developed by GEFONT
- Use of study circle Method for leadership development and Awareness
- Union Management training to the selected leaders of district level
- OSH Training in district level and 9 big enterprises
- Handling of 174 cases of disputes within 16 months including 2002 and 4 months of 2003
- Ideological campaign against the intervention of Maoist terrorism in enterprises
- 10 Gatherings of women workers 25 women in each to empower them against discrimination and harassment
- District level conference of the union – 3
- Enterprise level conference of the union - 10

Fundamental rights at work

The garment sector is an industry, which has very small permanent workforce. Mostly it uses workers in Piece rates and has started to convert workers into home-based workers recently. On the other hand, the vast majority of workforce is female workforce and from the very beginning, garment industry has been feminized. The ratio of female & male in the total workforce is 60: 40. Even in the 40 of the male workforce, proportion of foreign migrant workforce is significant. Therefore, fundamental rights at work have been frequently violated and cases of disputes are too many in our fold. Last year in 2002, ITGWUN handled 174 cases

Gender Issues at workplace

Basically in the garment sector, gender issues are very much important, which can be mentioned as follows:

- Harassment including sexual harassment
- Low paid
- Heavy discrimination in skill upgrading opportunities

- Issue of paid leave
- Absence of child care centre in most of the enterprises
- Issue of maternity protection

Key Events in past five year having impact on textile & garment sector in Nepal

- Threat to quota system in exports of ready-made garments
- Issue of Multi Fibre Agreement
- WTO created adversities
- Totally Declined competitiveness in textile production because of easy imports of textile from India and China
- Highly increased pattern of Piece rate, subcontracting of work and home based nature of employment
- More violation of labour law in garment sector
- Frequent Violation of Collective Bargaining Agreements
- Lack of good governance and political instability

Possible future trends in T-G Sector in Nepal

- Textile industry may not survive
- Extreme difficulties in market access for garment industry
- Heavy pressure on Labour cost by the employers as the easy way out
- Promotion to women workers and home-based work
- Chasing out the large number of workers from factory premises
- More reduction in the permanent workforce in the formal sector of employment

Major challenges to T-G sector workers in Nepal

- Implementation of labour laws
- Social protection
- Health & safety
- Anti union policies of employers and management
- Problem of protection of cadres & increasing Deunionization
- Workers Education and Militancy
- Financial problems
- Code of Conduct

Sub Regional, Regional and Global Agenda for workers in T-G Sector

- Exchange of views, ideas and solidarity
- Exchange of delegation and participation in conferences of each other
- Organizing Seminar on various issues
- Lobbying at various levels using all possible forums
- Collective action against MNCs
- National Activities based on Global campaigns
- Special campaigns in sub regional issues
- Case studies and publications

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