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SMART Myanmar coordinates exchange between Myanmar & Bangladesh women garment workers

Yangon, 27th July 2016 -

Seven delegates, led by the European Union funded SMART Myanmar project, returned to Yangon today following a study mission in Dhaka, Bangladesh where the group met with women's community organizations and garment industry affiliates. The trip was organized in cooperation with Thone Pann Hla, a civil society organization of women garment workers in Yangon. The Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association, SMART Myanmar's local partner, facilitated the exchange, which was funded by the C&A Foundation.

The main objective of the study mission was for the group to visit women's centres in Dhaka, commonly called "women's cafes" to share experience and best practices on their outreach and educational programmes for garment workers. SMART Myanmar and Thone Pann Hla are currently in the process of up-scaling Thone Pann Hla's "Sunday Cafe" - a women's cafe in Yangon which has been operating since early 2014. Thone Pann Hla seeks to expand their approach to provide educational services and community support for a greater number of garment employees.

Joining the exchange trip were two garment factory employees, the manager of Yangon's Sunday Cafe and Ms. Than Dar Ko, the director of Thone Pann Hla. Three delegates from SMART Myanmar also joined, led by Ms. Su Tayar Lin, SMART Myanmar Project Manager.

In Dhaka, the group met with representatives of the Awaj Foundation, an organization that is operating more than half a dozen women's cafes in Bangladesh. Awaj Foundation hosted the study delegation and took them to three women's cafe locations and also provided opportunities to meet with a variety of support groups, such as legal advisors and medical support officers for the cafes. During the trip the group also took the time to tour a garment factory in Gazipur on the outskirts of Dhaka. The SMART staff met with various representatives of the Garment and Textile program called "Promotion of Social and Environmental Standards in the Industry", PSES, a program implemented by GIZ Bangladesh. The exchange of know how and experiences on Women Cafes and Compliance Awards was very useful for future implementation these activities because SMART can learn from the GIZ experiences.

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Ms. Khine Khine Nwe, Secretary General of MGMA said "MGMA and SMART Myanmar are very excited to have facilitated this valuable exchange trip. This is perfect timing. Together with Thone Pann Hla, we are already preparing to equip a second Sunday Café in October this year. Through this women garment workers club, we are expecting to promote the capacity of each and every women garment worker individual to upgrade their lifestyle. The experience they have gained from

Dhaka was immensely instructive as we seek to replicate and even strengthen the existing approach.”

Ms. Jill Tucker, Head of Supply Chain Innovation and Transformation, C&A Foundation commented: “We are delighted to provide support to two dynamic womens organizations – Thone Pann Hla from Myanmar, and Awaj Foundation from Bangladesh – to allow them to meet, share experiences and strategies. After representatives of Thone Pann Hla travel to Dhaka, and Awaj representatives travel to Yangon, we hope that the relationship will continue to grow as each organization continues to advocate for the rights of workers in the apparel industry.”

Ms. Than Dar Ko, the Director of Thone Pann Hla said “From this exchange trip we have learnt ways to improve our current and future Sunday Cafes. We believe this would lead to helping the women in the garment sector to be more efficient and healthier lifestyle. I hope they would also become supportive of more pleasant working relationships. With the endorsement and support of MGMA and SMART, Thone Pann Hla will continue to help the women garment workers to have a safer and more secure lifestyle.”

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Organisational Background

Thone Pann Hla Myanmar’s women garment workers association has been in operation since August 2013. Its mission is women garment workers supporting each other to advance themselves, their families and communities. Thone Pann Hla has 50 leaders that meet on Sundays at Thone Pann Hla House. They represent over 15,000 women workers. It is primarily educational and social in nature. They operate the Sunday Cafe in Yangon’s Hlaing Thayar township. Thone Pann Hla has 2 years of organizational experience managing a women’s community centre dedicated to delivering trainings and organizing activities.

SMART Myanmar (www.smartmyanmar.org) is a European Union funded project of which the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association (MGMA) is the local partner. SMART conducts garment factory consultancies and capacity building projects to improve occupational health and safety, workplace management systems, and environmental practices. Womens empowerment, including educating garment workers on labour laws and health & safety, is one of SMART’s objectives. SMART has over 3.5 years of organizational experience in capacity building within Myanmar’s garment industry and operates the largest team of social and environmental compliance experts in the country.

The aims and objectives of the study mission were:

- Increase knowledge on alternative ways to run a women's community center focused on improving the lives and livelihoods of garment factory workers.
- New ideas/approaches are fostered for the Myanmar group visiting Bangladesh
- Long-term connections are made with women's centers in Bangladesh for semi-regular exchange of ideas and approaches.
- A better concept on how a women's center can be self-supporting and less reliant on outside donors is developed.

For more information:

Website of SMART Myanmar project: www.smartmyanmar.org

Website of MGMA: www.myanmargarments.org

Link to Thone Pann Hla: www.businesskind.org/other-social-businesses/#thone-pan-hla

Delegates for the Study Mission to Germany

No.	Name	Position	Organisation/ Company.
1.	Su Tayar Lin	Project Manager	SMART Myanmar
2.	May Mi Kyaw	Social Compliance Expert	SMART Myanmar
3	Zar Chi Oo	Project Coordinator	SMART Myanmar
4.	Than Dar Ko	Director	Business Kind Myanmar Thone Pann Hla
5.	Hnin Malar Myint	Sunday Café Manager	Thone Pann Hla
6.	Aye Cho Khaing	Member and female garment worker	Thone Pann Hla
7.	Khin Thuzar Khine	Member and female garment worker	Thone Pann Hla