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**Perceptions of Production Related
Stakeholders Towards Aarong and the
Ayesha Abed Foundation**Rehnuma Rahman
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ABSTRACT

Aarong and Ayesha Abed Foundation were established to support the artisans and rural women in Bangladesh. Thus, these production-related stakeholders are very important for Aarong and AAF. This study was initiated to investigate the perception of the stakeholders about Aarong and AAF. Data were collected from production workers (PW), independent producers (IP) and employees of Aarong and AAF using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. Findings show that female staff of Aarong were relatively more dissatisfied compared to male, and half of the IPs working with Aarong were also dissatisfied. IPs and PWs expressed many grievances about Aarong and AAF but their willingness to stay connected with the organization was evident under these circumstances, it would be better for the organization to address these alarming issues immediately to run the business smoothly in future.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To make the poor Bangladeshi artisans self-reliant Aarong was set up in 1978 by BRAC. Aarong works in collaboration with Ayesha Abed Foundation (AAF) a Trust initially set up to provide employment and income generation for rural women. It is an enclave for women, formed to uplift them economically and socially. As main reason behind Aarong's and foundation's establishment was to support the artisans and rural women, thus some of the important stakeholders of Aarong and foundation are: Independent Producer (IP) who comes to Aarong from all around Bangladesh to get marketing and support services, Production Workers (PW) who work under the foundation and sub-centres and the employees of Aarong/AAF. Aarong and Foundation wants to know the opinions of these stakeholders about the organization.

This study mainly focused on the IPs and PWs. As the IPs and PWs directly communicate with the employees of Aarong and AAF, these employees are the main influencers in their opinion about the organization. That is why we also tried to understand the employees' view of the organization. Broad objective of this study is to understand the level of perception of IPs and PWs on Aarong and Ayesha Abed Foundation. In order to explore and understand the stakeholders' opinions in more depth we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach containing focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interview and small questionnaire survey. The study was conducted at Aarong head office and in some selected production centres under the Foundation. We selected three centres: Manikganj, Jessore and Pabna, which were established at different times.

Levels of satisfaction of the IPs towards Aarong was measured on the basis of indicators like working relationship, quality of the service, and financial benefit. The overall satisfaction of the IPs towards Aarong show that less than half (46%) of the IPs are satisfied with the organization. A small number (7%) of the IPs are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with Aarong. According to 44% of the IPs, Aarong employees are unfriendly and impolite. Information sharing and communication with Aarong are considered as challenge for the IPs. Of the 207 IPs surveyed, 34% asserted that they had access to important information. Eighty percent of the IPs complained that they never got their asking price. As a result, they were unable to pay their workers proper wage, irregular work orders over 23.2% IPs complained about. IPs also complaint about complicated procedures, bureaucratic delays, lack of facilities, etc.

Majority of PWs are poor unskilled women with few alternatives and even fewer better employment opportunities. Mindsets of these workers are reinforced by weak bargaining power due to illiteracy and poverty. They were more or less content about working in the foundation. They found working at AAF more preferable for women than other factories, because of safety, prompt payment, and better environment. We found that PWs are not aware of important information about their work, like: rights, pension, wage rate and other organizational information. Moreover, they are reluctant to learn those information. They complaint about several issues like long working hours, low rates, absence of trainee allowance, etc.

Level of satisfaction of the employees towards Aarong and foundation were measured on the basis of some indicators that include Satisfaction with work, relationship with supervisor, workload, and salary. Findings show that about half (49%)

of the staff were less satisfied and almost similar proportion (48%) of them was more satisfied with the job. A small number (3.2%) of the staff were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. But a higher proportion of AAF staff was more satisfied than the staff of Aarong. However, there was no significant difference of the satisfaction level of both Aarong and AAF staff.

The study has showed that as a social enterprise Aarong and AAF have succeeded to make a significant impact in the lives of its stakeholders (IPs and PWs) by uplifting their social status, changing lifestyle, increasing confidence and decision-making power. However, it has also unveiled some of the complaints of these stakeholders about the organization. IPs and PWs expressed many grievances about Aarong and AAF but their willingness to stay connected with the organization is evident. For wellbeing of the PWs we suggest establishment of compliance monitoring unit. Many problems of the IPs would be solved through establishment of an information and complain desk.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Aarong started in 1978 with a sole objective to make the poor Bangladeshi artisans self-reliant so that they could save themselves and their families from poverty. The achievement of this objective is facilitated by bringing support services and marketing facilities within the reach of rural artisans, by expanding domestic markets and promoting the exports of traditional and non-traditional crafts through its nationwide network of nine lifestyle stores.¹

Aarong works in collaboration with AAF, a trust initially set up to create employment opportunities for rural women. It is an enclave for women, formed to uplift them economically and socially. The Foundation provides an appropriate working environment, financial and technical assistance, and training to develop women's skills in various crafts. The Foundation is treated as Aarong's production centre supplying all of its products to Aarong. There are 13 production centres under AAF along with 597 sub-centres in 2000 villages.¹

Women working in the production centres are called production worker (PW). Some of these women work at the production centres and others work at the sub centre close to their village. AAF has over 32,000 production workers who are paid on piece rate. AAF gives them on-the- job training in various skills such as embroidery, tailoring, block printing, etc.

Many other entrepreneurs or traditional family based artisans like potters, brass workers, jewelers, jute workers, basket weavers, handloom weaver, silk weavers and different other artisans who are identified as independent producers (IP) come from all over the country to Aarong for marketing and support services. Aarong has 1,272 IPs who are entrepreneurs/craftsmen and employ 5 to 500 workers themselves. Like PWs these IPs also gets paid on piece rate. In order to facilitate quality supply IPs get various support services such as design, marketing, warehousing, working capital loan, etc from Aarong. Besides these IPs and PWs, Aarong and AAF together, have more than 1100 regular employees to run the organization. Almost 80% of them deal with the IPs and PWs in regular basis.

However, Aarong feels that it is important to know the perception of its stakeholders to improve the quality of services the organization provides and to change its policies, if needed. This was the motivated to undertake the study.

Objective

This study aims to understand the level of perception of PWs and IPs on the Ayesha Abed Foundation and Aarong. To achieve this broad objective, we aimed

- to understand the level of satisfaction of IPs and PWs,
- to examine the nature of relationship between IPs/PWs and staff of Aarong/AAF,

¹ From Aarong documents and website information

- to explore the level of access by PWs and IPs to important information related to their rights and day-to-day activities,
- to find out grievances of IPs/PWs with regard to their daily operations, and
- to suggest scopes and areas for changes further improvement.

METHODS

To explore and understand the stakeholders' opinions in more depth we used a combination of qualitative and quantitative approach containing: focus group discussion (FGD), in-depth interview and survey. Twelve FGDs and 17 in-depth interviews were conducted. The participants were taken from a balanced mix of individuals within the stakeholder groups.

STUDY AREAS AND POPULATION

The study was conducted at Aarong head office and three selected production centres under the AAF. To capture the changes that has taken place overtime; centres established in three different time period such as Manikgonj (1983), Jessore (1996) and Pabna (2004), were selected purposively.

INDEPENDENT PRODUCERS (IP)

As mentioned the IPs come from all over Bangladesh are important part of the study. They are scattered and have diverse background in terms of education, social status, occupation, age, etc. For instances, some IPs are traditional family-based artisans, some are entrepreneurs. There are IPs who are completely illiterates, on the other hand, there are IPs with highest educational qualification such as Master Degree.

PRODUCTION WORKERS (PW)

Majority of the PWs working in the main centres are unmarried, widowed, separated or abandoned female with little or no education who belong to poor families. Majority of these workers are the sole earner of their family. On the other hand, majority of the sub-centre workers are married women who work to support their husbands' income. However all the PWs are poor and unskilled women who have few alternatives and even fewer better employment opportunities.

AARONG AND AAF EMPLOYEES

Aarong and AAFs have diverse employee base in terms of education, social status, job responsibility, age, etc. Their mentality, demand and motivation level varies according to their socioeconomic background.

DATA COLLECTION TOOLS AND TECHNIQUES

We captured the views of PWs through FGDs. We conducted four FGDs in each of the foundation. Three of these FGDs were conducted with the PWs working at the main centre and other at the sub-centre. The groups (6 participants in each group) for FGDs were homogenous all the participants we selected purposively based on their terms of attachment with the foundation and the products they were producing. Key issues discussed during FGDs were - working hours, relationship with supervisor, facility: bonus, pension, wage, perception about foundation, work, need for transportation, etc. Two people conducted the FGD and the conversations were tape-recorded. In the beginning, the participants were hesitant for a number of reasons. Firstly, they had no experience with anyone who expressed interest in their conditions, concerns and

needs. Secondly, they feared that the management had sent the research team and that they would lose their job. It took some time for them to understand that it was all right to talk to the team.

As IPs were scattered in various places of the country it was difficult to reach them. Thus, the survey of IPs was based on a combination of convenient and snowball sampling. Sample size of this survey was 207. Issues covered in the questionnaire were:

- Feelings about Aarong
- Perception about their role in the organization
- Expectations of IPs from the organization
- Level of motivation
- Knowledge about procedure and practices
- Access to information
- Grievances
- Relationship between the IPs and employees

All employees of Aarong who deals with IPs directly and all PIN holder employees from the selected Foundations were asked to participate in the survey. However, some of the employees were unavailable during the survey thus we were able to survey 167 employees of Aarong and 204 employees of Ayesha Abed Foundation. Issues covered by the questionnaire were almost similar to the IPs. In addition to the indicators used for IPs, there were others as follows:

- Expectations of employees from the organization
- Level of motivation
- Perception about the IP/PW and their role in the A/F
- Overtime change in relationship between the IP/PW and A/F Employees,
- Job satisfaction
- Workload
- Opinion about workplace environment

To supplement the survey findings 17 in-depth interviews were conducted. Three employees from Aarong, six from AAF and Eight IPs were taken as key informants. All the respondents were selected purposively.

DATA ANALYSIS

The FGD and in-depth interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed in full. Then they were translated in English and labeled according to the themes. Each of them was then thoroughly analyzed using a thematic indexing system.

The survey instrument developed by Spector (1985) was used to collect and analyze the data. This instrument had some of its items written in each direction – positive and negative. Each item scored from 1 to 6 was used. High scores on the scale represent job satisfaction, so the scores on the negatively worded are reversed before summing with the positively worded into total scores. A score of 6 representing strongest agreement with a negatively worded item is considered equivalent to a score of 1 representing strongest disagreement on a positively worded item, allowing them to be combined meaningfully.

Interpreting the scores on the satisfaction is rather challenging, according to the professor. There are no specific cut scores that determine whether an individual is satisfied or dissatisfied. In other words, it is difficult to conclude that there is a particular score that is the dividing line between satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Where there is a need to draw conclusions about satisfaction versus dissatisfaction for samples or individuals, two approaches can be used. One is the normative approach and the absolute as other. In this study the later is used to analyses scale. It is mentioned earlier that given 6-point agree-disagree response choices, it can be assumed that agreement with positively-worded items and disagreement with negatively-worded items would represent satisfaction, whereas disagreement with positive-worded items, and agreement with negative-worded items represents dissatisfaction. So, someone can express his/her 'completely satisfaction' or 'completely dissatisfaction' through answering each of the items. In this study median score was the cut-off point to measure the satisfaction level. Higher the score from median represented more satisfaction and lower the score from that represented less satisfaction of staff and independent IPs.

FINDINGS

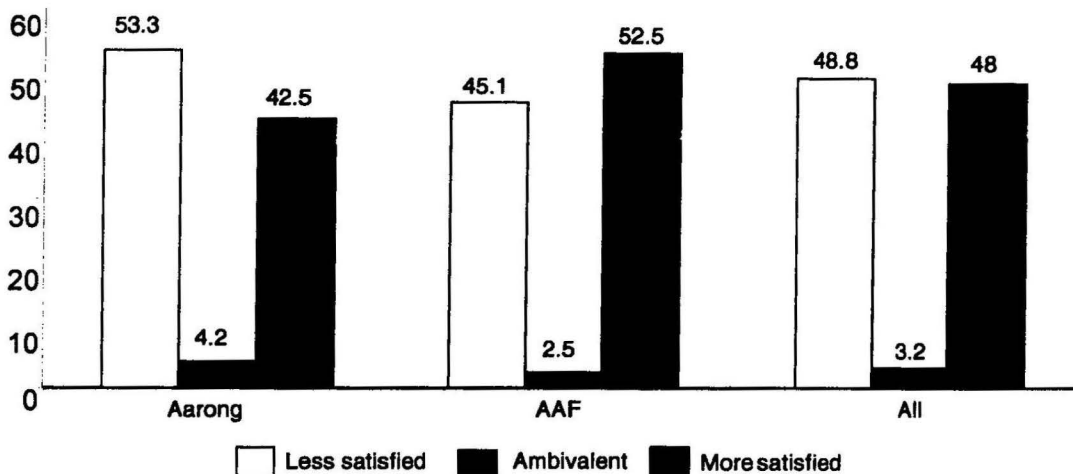
This section is divided into three parts, where each part refers to perception of a specific stakeholder about Aarong and their expectation and grievances against it.

PERCEPTION OF AARONG AND AAF STAFF

Job satisfaction of the staff depends on various factors. Spector has included the factors such as payment or salary, promotion, supervision, fringe benefits, contingent rewards, operating conditions, co-workers, nature of work, communication as indicators to measure the satisfaction level of the staff. Similar to Spector some selected factors which included salary, relationship with colleagues, assessment of the work, work load, esteem of the employees' work, satisfaction with the work of the employee, relationship with the supervisor, and overall satisfaction were used to assess the satisfaction level of Aarong and AAF staff.

Findings show that about half (49%) of the staff were less satisfied and almost similar proportion (48%) of them was more satisfied with the job (Fig.1). A small number of the staff (3.2%) were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied working with the organization. But a higher proportion of AAF staff was more satisfied than the staff of Aarong. However, there is no significant difference in there satisfaction level.

Figure 1. Satisfaction level of the staffs (n=371)



The satisfaction level was also elucidated based on different variables in which little more than half (51%) of the male staffs were more satisfied than the female but statistically there was no significant difference (Table 1). Higher proportions (56%) of the staff with secondary education were more satisfied with their job than the others with below secondary level of education. On the other hand, a trend was observed that the higher the length of service of the staff was the lower the proportion of the staff was more satisfied with the job.

Table 1. Level of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of staff with their job by selected variables (%) (n=371)

Stakeholders	Less satisfied	Ambivalent	More satisfied
Sex			
Male	45.9	3.3	50.7
Female	52.5	3.1	44.4
χ^2	ns		
Education			
Below SSC	55.0	00	45.0
SSC	40.9	3.2	55.9
HSC/Diploma	43.1	6.9	50.0
MA/MBA	54.2	2.4	43.4
χ^2	ns		
Length of service			
Less than one year	17.5	5.0	77.5
One to five years	50.5	2.7	46.7
Six to ten years	54.3	2.1	43.6
Eleven and more years	56.6	5.7	37.7
χ^2	.003		

ns=not significant at the 10% level

A slightly higher proportion (53.3%) of the female staff in AAF was more satisfied than male (Table 2). Satisfaction level of less and more educated staff were lower than the medium level of education and higher proportion of the staff whose length of service was less than one year was more satisfied with their jobs compared to others.

Table 2. Level of satisfaction of AAF staffs by selected variables (%) (n=204)

Sex	Less satisfied	Ambivalent	More satisfied
Male	46.5	1.6	51.9
Female	42.7	4.0	53.3
χ^2	ns		
Education			
Below SSC	60.0	0	40.0
SSC	35.4	1.5	63.1
HSC/Diploma	42.0	6.0	52.0
MA/MBA	50.0	1.9	48.1
χ^2	ns		
Length of services			
Less than one year	22.2	7.4	70.4
One to five years	46.9	2.7	50.4
Six to ten years	54.3	0	45.7
Eleven and more years	44.4	0	55.6
χ^2	ns		

ns=not significant at the 10% level

On the other hand, majority (60.9%) of the female staff in Aarong were less satisfied with their job (Table 3). Higher proportion (80%) of the staff with less education in Aarong was more satisfied compared to the staff with medium and higher level of education. Besides, most of the newly recruited staff (92.3) was more satisfied with their job compared to the staff having long length of service. There was a tendency observed among Aarong staff that with the length of service increased satisfaction level declined.

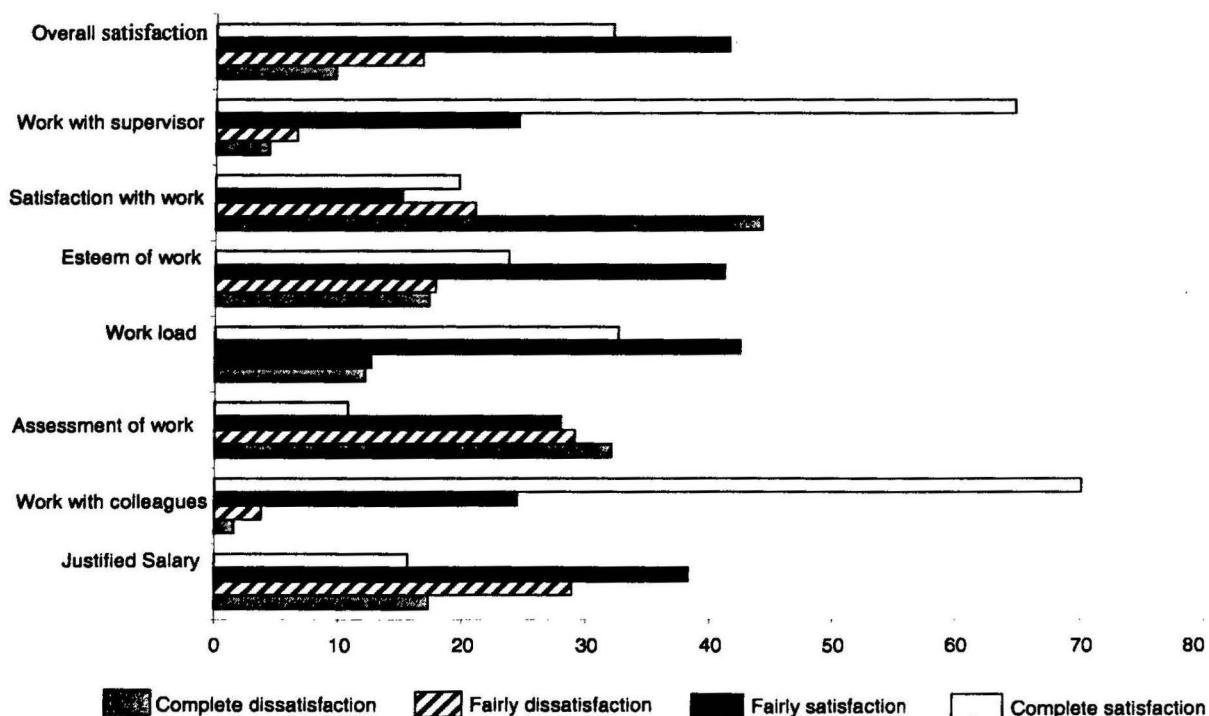
Table 3. Level of satisfaction of Aarong staff by selected variables (%) (n=167)

Sex	Less satisfied	Ambivalent	More satisfied
Male	45.0	6.3	48.8
Female	60.9	2.3	36.8
χ^2	ns		
Education			
Below SSC	20.0	0	80.0
SSC	53.6	7.1	39.3
HSC/Diploma	45.5	9.1	45.5
MA/MBA	56.3	2.7	41.1
χ^2	ns		
Length of services			
Less than one year	7.7	0	92.3
One to five years	56.3	2.8	40.8
Six to ten years	54.2	4.2	41.7
Eleven and more years	62.9	8.6	28.6
χ^2	.008		

ns=not significant at the 10% level

An analysis based on the individual indicator as mentioned earlier is also done for measuring the satisfaction level of the staff. The central indicator of staff satisfaction is the amount of their salary. To give as much salary as the staff demand is a challenge for the organization. Similar findings were observed in this study in which 15% of the staff were completely satisfied with the salary where majority of the staff (70%) had complete satisfaction in working with their colleagues (Fig. 2). Thirty-two percent of the staff mentioned that their work in this organization was properly appreciated but less than half (42.5%) of them moderately agreed that they were overburdened with work. However, nearly one-third (32.4%) of the staff completely and 41.5% moderately agreed that they were overall satisfied working with Aarong and AAF.

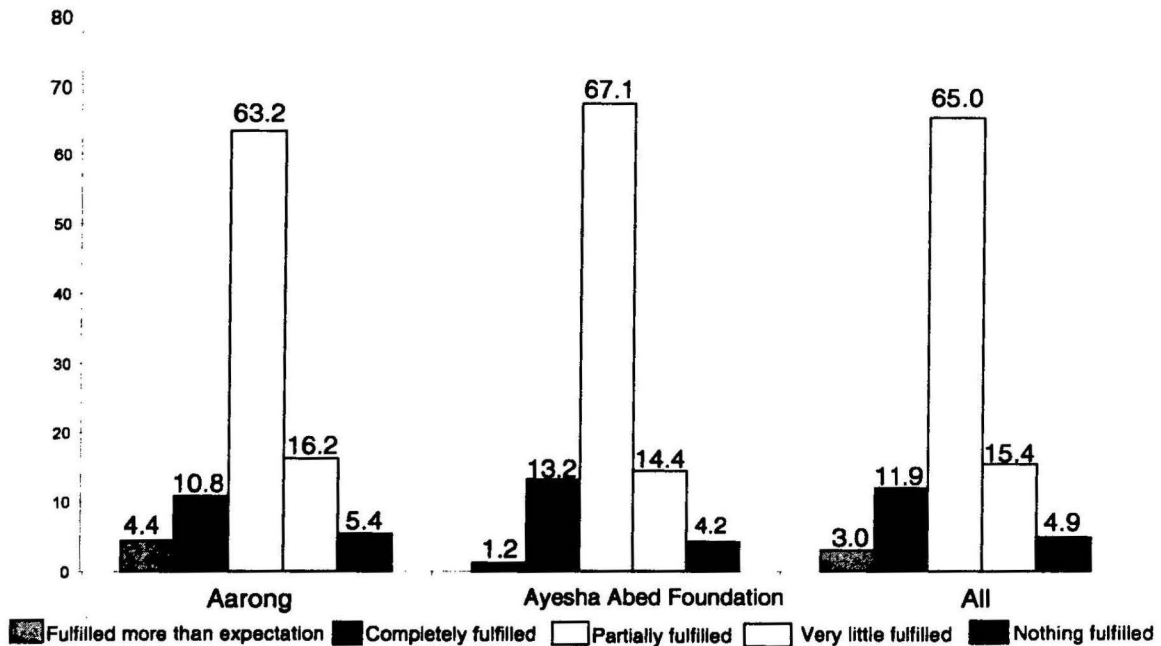
Figure 2. Satisfaction level of the staff to the different indicators of their job



FULFILMENT OF EXPECTATION OF STAFF

The fulfilment of the staff's expectation since joining Aarong and AAF is measured. A general five-point scale such as 'More fulfilled of the expectation', 'completely fulfilled', 'Partially fulfilled', 'Very little fulfilled', and 'Nothing fulfilled' was developed to measure the fulfilment level of the expectations. Sixty-five percent of the staff reported to have partially fulfilled their expectation since joining Aarong and AAF (Fig.3). A small proportion (3%) of the staffs mentioned that their fulfilment of the expectation was more than they anticipated. The level of achievement of the expectation of both Aarong and AAF staff was not so much different. Lesser proportion of Aarong staff expressed that their expectation was completely fulfilled than the staffs.

Figure 3. Fulfilment of expectation of the staff



The proportion of male and female staff was not statistically different in fulfilling the expectation meaning that slightly higher proportion of the female staff reported the expectation partially fulfilled than male (Table 4). Similar to sex, the length of services was also not associated with the fulfilment of expectation but the level of staff education appeared to be significantly associated with the level of fulfilment of the expectation.

Table 4. Fulfilment of expectation of the staff by selected variables

Variables	Level of fulfilment				
	Fulfilled more than expectation	Completely fulfilled	Partially fulfilled	Very little fulfilled	Nothing fulfilled
Sex					
Male	2.4	12.9	62.7	17.2	4.8
Female	3.7	10.5	67.9	13.0	4.9
χ^2	ns				
Education					
Below SSC	2.5	22.5	40.0	30.0	5.0
SSC	4.3	19.4	62.4	10.8	3.2
HSC/Diploma	4.2	6.9	76.4	8.3	4.2
MA/MBA	1.8	7.2	67.5	17.5	6.0
χ^2	.002				
Length of service					
Less than one year	5.0	15.0	70.0	0	10.0
One to five years	1.6	10.9	65.8	18.5	3.3
Six to ten years	5.3	10.6	59.6	18.1	6.4
Eleven and more	1.9	15.1	67.9	11.3	3.8
χ^2	ns				

ns=not significant at the 10% level

ATTITUDE OF AARONG AND AAF STAFF TOWARDS IPs AND PWs

There is a scrupulous business and working relationship between Aarong staff and IPs in Dhaka office and production workers and AAF staff in different districts. Attitudes of the staff towards IPs and production workers are measured on the basis of some indicators that included quality of work of IPs and production workers, their honesty, skills, behaviour, their impression on the organization, positive changes in IPs life, different constraints they faced, and the services of the organization.

Less than half (48%) of the staff of both Aarong and AAF were less satisfied and almost similar proportion were more satisfied with the IPs and PWs, while a negligible number of staff were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the IPs and PWs (Fig.4). Similar proportion of both male and female staff showed less satisfaction with the IPs and more satisfaction with the PWs (Table 5). Besides, higher proportions of highly educated staff have less satisfaction towards the IPs and PWs than other level of educated staff, at the same time, the more the length of service of the staff was the lesser number of staffs had lower satisfaction with the IPs and production workers.

Figure 4. Level of satisfaction of staff towards IPs and PWs

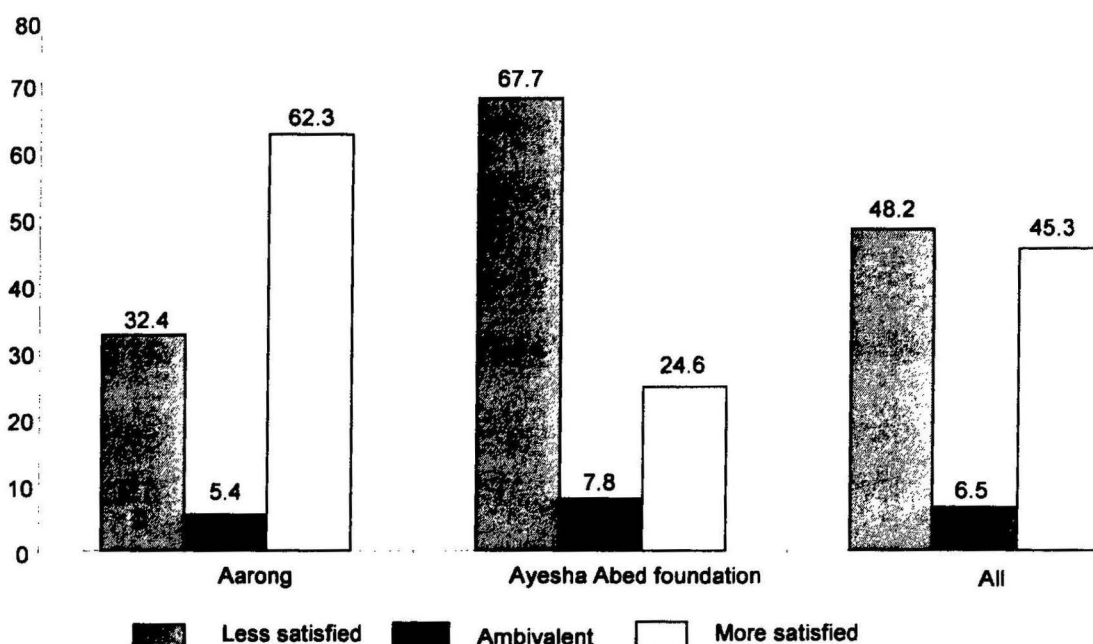


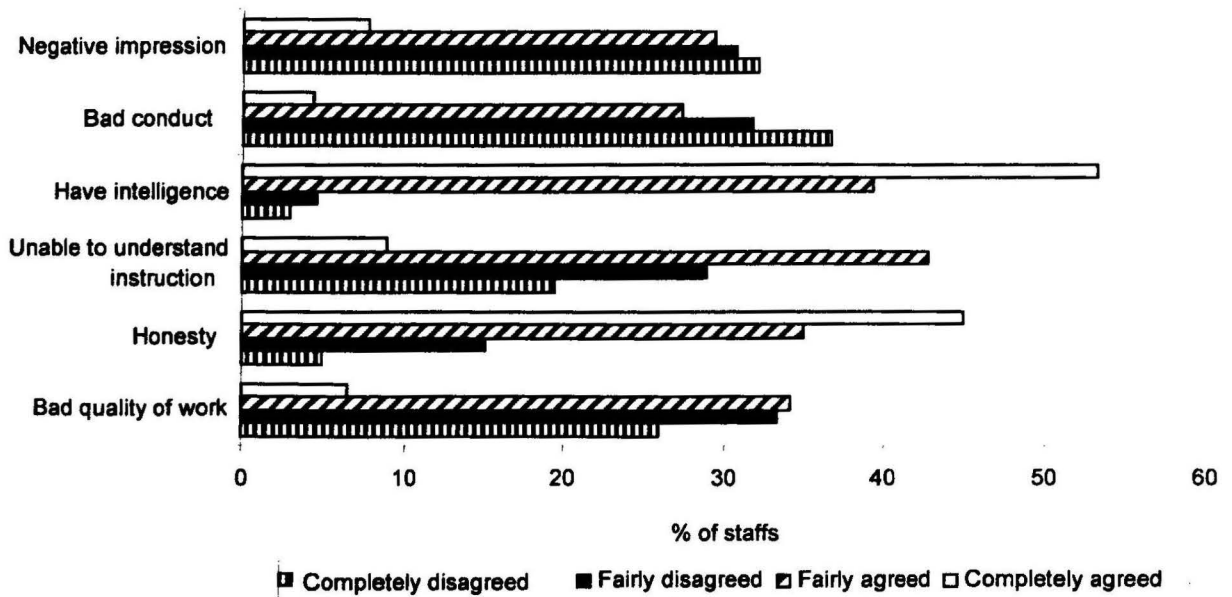
Table 5. Satisfaction level of staff towards IPs and PWs (%) (n=371)

Variables	Less satisfied	Neutral	More satisfied
Sex			
Male	47.4	7.2	45.5
Female	49.4	5.6	45.1
χ^2	ns		
Education			
Below SSC	35.0	2.5	62.5
SSC	43.0	3.2	53.8
HSC/Diploma	43.1	8.3	48.6
MA/MBA	56.6	8.4	34.9
χ^2	.01		
Length of services			
Less than one year	30.0	10.0	60.0
One to five years	48.9	6.0	45.1
Six to ten years	47.9	5.3	46.8
Eleven and more	60.4	7.5	32.1
χ^2	ns		

ns=not significant at the 10% level

Based on the individual indicators satisfaction level of the staff towards IPs and PWs was also determined in which more than one-third (34%) of the staff moderately agreed that the quality of work of the IPs and PWs was not as good as expected, while less than half (45%) of the staffs completely admitted about the honesty of the IPs and PWs (Fig. 5). Only 19.4% of the staff completely and one-third of them moderately agreed that IPs were able to understand the instructions of the staff relating to the work. More than half of the staff admired the intelligence of the IPs and PWs.

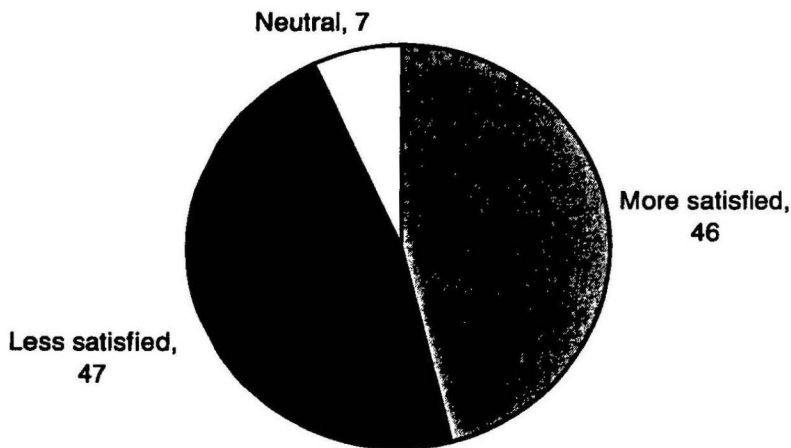
Figure 5. Attitude of the staff towards IPs and PWs by selected indicators



PERCEPTION OF IPs TOWARDS AARONG AND AAF

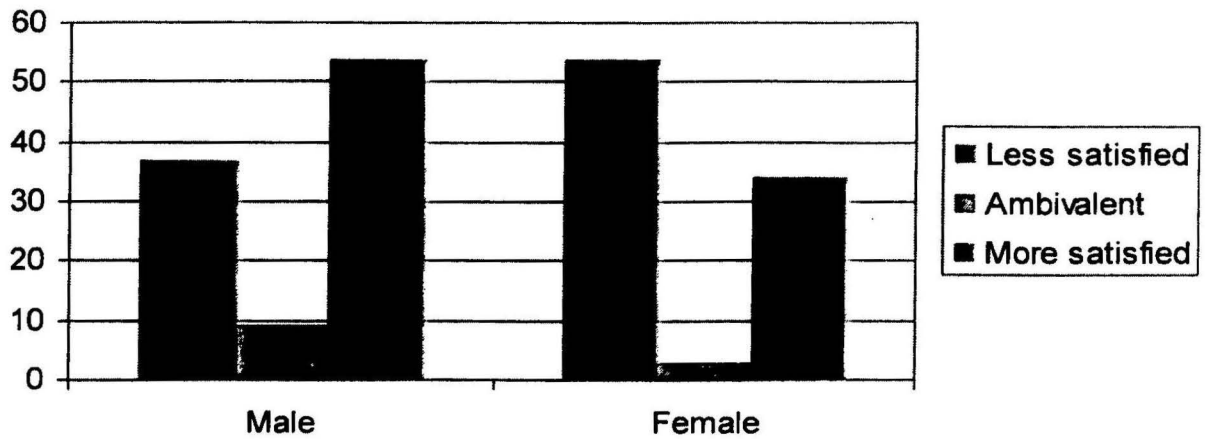
IPs perception about Aarong was explained based on different indicators. These are working relationship between IPs and Aarong staff, behaviour of the staff, attitudes of the staff towards their working quality, quality of service delivery, honesty of staff, payment and role in changing their livelihood by Aarong.

Figure 6. Level of satisfaction of the IPs to Aarong



In general nearly half (46%) of the respondents were found satisfied with Aarong. Seven percent of the IPs were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied (Fig.6).

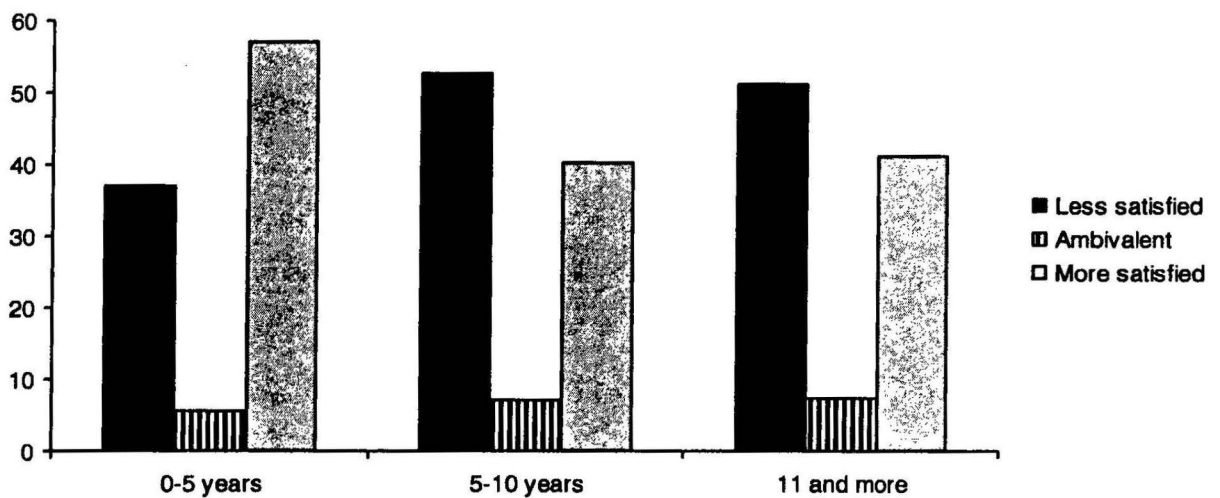
Figure 7. Satisfaction Level of male and female IPs



But the study reveal that female IPs were less satisfied with Aarong than male (Table 6). A female IPs stated, "The only good thing related to doing business with Aarong is it's prompt payment system. If there were another prompt paying organization all the IPs might have taken their business to them. IPs are unwilling to deal with Aarong's complicated procedure and practices."

Fifty percent of IPs with secondary and higher secondary level of education were found satisfied with Aarong. Moreover, higher proportion of highly educated IPs was less satisfied compared to those with bachelor degree and other educational qualification. IPs who are involved with Aarong for ≤ 5 years were more satisfied than those working for > 5 years (Fig. 7).

Figure 8. IPs level of satisfaction and length of involvement



However, satisfaction level of the different types of IPs supplied various products to Aarong was found dissimilar. Higher proportion of the IPs supplied household items were less satisfied while higher proportion of IPs involving with embroidery were more satisfied with Aarong (Table 6).

Table 6. Level of satisfaction of the IPs toward Aarong by selected variables (%) (n=207)

Characteristics	Less satisfied	Ambivalent	More satisfied
Sex			
Male	36.9	9.2	53.8
Female	63.6	2.6	33.8
χ^2	.001		
Education			
Below SSC	35.9	10.3	53.8
SSC	46.3	7.3	46.3
HSC	45.9	5.4	48.6
BA	57.6	3.0	39.4
MA	77.8	0	22.2
χ^2	ns		
Years of involvement			
0-5 years	37.1	5.7	57.1
5-10 years	52.6	7.0	40.4
11 and more	51.3	7.5	41.3
χ^2	ns		
Type of products			
Dress	58.2	6.3	35.4
Embroidery	39.1	4.3	56.5
Household items	56.5	0	43.5
Leather goods	30.0	15.0	55.0
Others	37.1	8.1	54.8
χ^2	ns		

ns=not significant at the 10% level

GRIEVANCES

IPs also shared some of their grievances about various problems they encountered during conducting business with Aarong head office. Most of their grievances resulted from behaviour of Aarong staff, irregular work order, not getting right price of the products, environment, etc. Fifty-nine percent of the IPs reported to have faced the challenges of not getting right price of their products that caused discontent against the organization.

Discontent of the IPs varied across sex, types of suppliers, years of involvement, and educational qualification. Higher proportion (71%) of female IPs reported not having the right price of their products than male (Table 7). Approximately similar proportion of the IPs producing household item were unhappy because of the lower price given by Aarong. Half of the highly educated IPs labeled bad conduct of the staff as the reason of their discontent. On the other hand, nearly one-third (30.4%) of the IPs who produced household items mentioned irregular order as the reason of their dissatisfaction.

Table 7. Reasons of discontent of the IPs by selected variables (%)

	Content	Bad conduct	Irregular order	Deprivation from right price
Type of supplier				
Dress	41.8	41.8	13.9	58.2
Embroidery	34.8	26.1	17.4	65.2
Household items	34.8	43.5	30.4	73.9
Leather goods	45.0	25.0	15.0	55.0
Others	40.3	21.0	16.1	53.2
Sex				
Male	43.1	26.9	17.7	51.5
Female	35.1	41.6	15.6	71.4
Years of involvement				
0-5	51.4	22.9	10.0	47.1
6-10	40.4	35.1	22.8	71.9
11 and more	30.0	38.8	18.8	60.0
Education				
Below SSC	44.9	20.5	12.8	57.7
SSC	39.0	37.1	19.5	63.4
HSC	45.9	40.5	13.5	56.8
BA	36.4	42.4	24.2	57.6
MA	16.7	50.0	22.2	61.1

Multiple responses have been considered

To carry on business with Aarong IPs have to pass through certain complicated, time consuming steps. IPs were annoyed by the layers of checkers, inspectors and signatories. According to them, the quality and costing sections were the most complicated ones among all the procedures. Generally less than half of the IPs considered costing and quality control as complex steps (Fig. 8). A tiny portion (8.2%) of them reported 'sample pass' as difficult step to be faced to carry on business. The level of satisfaction varied in different types of IPs. Satisfaction level was also found different in the IPs based on their duration of involvement with Aarong, their level of education including their sex. Higher proportion (52%) of female IPs considered costing as complicated step (Table 8). IPs complained that costing officers were not only arrogant but also lacked market knowledge; thereby in spite of exhaustive bargaining they were unable to get the right price of their products. As rates were not increasing they failed to increase their workers' wages.

Figure 9. Percentage of the IPs faced different steps of Aarong by selected variables

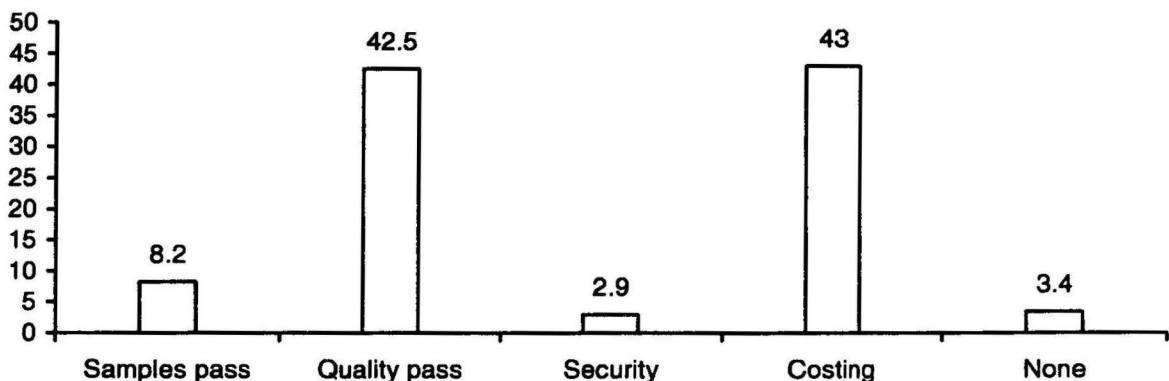


Table 8. Percentage of the IPs faced different steps of Aarong by selected variables (n=207)

	Sample	Quality	Security	Costing	None
Sex					
Male	11.5	40.8	4.6	37.7	5.4
Female	2.6	45.5	0	51.9	0
χ^2	.005				
Type of supplier					
Dress	1.3	63.3	1.3	34.2	0
Embroidery	0	39.1	0	60.9	0
Household items	8.7	17.4	0	65.2	8.7
Leather goods	30.0	20.0	5.0	35.0	10.0
Others	12.9	33.9	6.5	41.9	4.8
χ^2	.000				
Education					
Below SSC	11.5	44.9	5.1	35.9	2.6
SSC	9.8	36.6	0	53.7	0
HSC	2.7	51.4	2.7	35.1	8.1
BA	6.1	30.3	0	57.6	6.1
MA	5.6	50.0	5.6	38.9	0
χ^2	ns				
Years of involvement					
0-5	8.6	44.3	2.9	44.3	0
6-10	8.8	38.6	1.8	45.6	5.3
11 and more	7.5	43.8	3.8	40.0	5.0
χ^2	ns				

ns=not significant at the 10% level

IPs ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Information sharing and communication with Aarong were also considered as a challenge for the IPs. One-third (34%) of the IPs could have access to information from the organization, which was necessary and beneficial for their further business development. Female IPs were less aware of the information from the organization than male (Table 9). On the other hand, around more than one-third of different types of IPs were able to get information of the organization. Duration of involvement of the IPs was not associated with the access to information of the organization. Female IPs thought that the services of Aarong were neither transparent nor properly communicated. IPs didn't have any direct convenient access to the system to inquire expedite, or follow-up their orders. To avoid this problem most (94.7%) of the IPs felt necessity to establish a separate department which could be known as information desk (Table 9).

Table 9. Access to information and requirements of the IPs by selected variables (%) (n=207)

Variables	Opportunity to get information	Necessity of separate department
Sex		
Male	39.2	94.6
Female	26.0	94.8
χ^2	.05	ns
Type of supplier		
Dress	31.6	97.5
Embroidery	39.1	82.6
Household items	43.5	100
Leather goods	35.0	95.0
Others	32.3	93.5
χ^2	ns	.05
Education		
Below SSC	30.8	93.6
SSC	34.1	92.7
HSC	40.	97.3
BA	42.4	97.0
MA	22.2	94.4
χ^2	ns	ns
Years of involvement		
0-5	41.4	95.7
6-10	26.3	98.2
11 and more	33.8	91.3
χ^2	ns	ns

ns=not significant at the 10% level

PERCEPTION OF THE PWs ABOUT AAF

PWs of all the three centres of the foundations were found extremely satisfied with the overall working environment. According to them, working at AAF is better than working in over crowded, congested and poorly ventilated factories. Almost all of them asserted that they felt AAF as a very safe place for them to work. PWs mentioned that they heard from their friends and relatives that working condition in other factories was not favourable for women. Moreover, in other factories women got mistreated by men. PWs felt lucky that in AAF they didn't have to face such problems because of its strict rules and regulations. Another reason for workers satisfaction was the timely payment system. In AAF they get their wages before the end whereas in other factories workers would have to wait for two/three months. One of the PWs shared with us how working in the foundation changed her life (Box 1).

Box 1.

Shahina's Story

When Shahina's (not her real name) husband died; illiterate Shahina had no choice left but to move with her two children to her brothers' already overcrowded home. Relationship with her brother became strained due to the stressful living condition. This forced her to get out of the house in search of work. Luckily, Shahina heard from her neighbour about the Ayesha Abed Foundation and went to see if she could get work there. She got a job since then she never had to look back. She was able to move into a rented home and was able to provide education to her children. After joining as a sample maker in the foundation, Shahina gradually moved up the ladder to become the in-charge of a sub-centre under Jessore Foundation. She is grateful to the Foundation for changing her life. She said that she would always be thankful to Late Mrs. Ayesha Abed for establishing the Foundation to help the poor unfortunate women like her. She added that she always prays for Mrs. Abed and never misses any of her death anniversaries even if she does not get invited to the ceremony.

Despite of their satisfaction mentioned above, PWs have some complaints against the AAF management.

PWs had mixed feeling about their supervisors. Supervisors are very strict and are too conscious about maintaining discipline than about encouraging or motivating them in their work. PWs have to face financial penalties for damaging a particular product during production and other forms of disciplinary actions based on the level of damage caused by their oversight. From most of the comments of PWs it was understood that their supervisors gave a higher priority in meeting production deadline than any other issue. This made them fearful of their supervisors. They rarely receive any word of encouragement or praise for any well accomplished task. The supervisors rarely take an interest in the PWs current well-being or personal health. Hence, the distance between these two groups is growing constantly with ever increasing pressures about meeting deadlines and coping with hectic work schedules.

GRIEVANCES

Extensive Work Hours

The findings show that one of the most dominant complaints PWs have is long working hours. The standard working hour is 8:00 am to 5:00 pm for 6 days a week. However, the workers are regularly forced to work on Fridays. Majority of PWs said that they usually worked for 10 to 12 hours a day. Generally, they work for six days a week, even in low season. They have no holidays in high season which severely limit their time for leisure and sleep.

"We work at piece rate. Therefore, if we do not come to work, it's our loss. So if it's not an emergency, why would anyone ever want to take a leave? In addition, working for the whole week without any holiday is stressful for our health. In our section no one was given any weekend off in the last three months. We do not even get time to wash our clothes."

Rate

In AAF wages are calculated on a piece rate basis. Due to this PWs' income are unstable varying from season to season. Workers can earn more than average in the

high season, but their wages are terribly low in the lean season. Income of the workers also varies from section to section. For instance, the worker who works in Block section earns on an average TK.1,200-1,500 a month where as a workers of the tailoring section earns TK.2,500-3,000.

Approximately 70% of the workers were unhappy about the rate. According to them the rate did not increase that much. And it was not inflation-adjusted. Some of the workers complained that most of the time the supervisors did not declare the rate in advance. However, according to the rules of piece rate it is compulsory to declare the rate before the distribution of work. So, it is difficult for them to identify whether they are getting what they are supposed to.

Transport

Most of the AAF workers commute daily to work on foot by 8:00 am. This constitutes an average of 4-5 km journey on foot each day for most of the PWs to save commuting costs. For those PWs who live at a distance of more than 5-6 km, local transport costs them from Tk.300 to 600 per month. This form of commuting is alright during the day but for the women going back home at night over such long distances is quite risky due to various security reasons. Therefore, in addition to physical stress the workers also experience more and more mental stress worrying about going back home after dark. When asked about the issue of sexual harassment at workplace, the workers from Manikganj said that inside the Foundation they did not face any such harassment, but outside it was a different story. They were frequently subjected to harassment during commuting to work.

Workers from Manikganj and Jessore production centre recommended that AAF should provide transport for workers, at least from factory to the nearest point of their places of accommodation. Regular and secure transport would ensure that workers turned up on time, reduce PWs living cost, and thus will increase their motivation towards working in AAF.

Pension

AAF introduced a retirement benefit fund in 2000 to help their poor workers lead a decent life after retirement. However among the PWs there was a lot of confusion about the availability and calculation of the retirement fund. Most of the PWs in Manikganj were informed about this fund by the management, but they were not clear about the calculation of this fund. One of the PWs stated that the Foundation management told them that they will receive Tk.20,000 to 25,000 as pension upon their retirement, but it turned out that her sister who worked for 18 years in the Foundation received only Tk.8,000 after retirement. Sub-centre workers under Manikganj Foundation were also aware about these fund, but they have not heard of anyone getting it yet. Workers at Jessore production centre were not clear about the availability of retirement fund since no one in their production centre have received it yet either. They said that there was a woman in spot section who became old and could not work properly any longer, but she still continued driven by the hope that she would receive her pension. It's been two years since she has applied for it. Another elderly woman said that she had been working there for 16 years. She has become old now. It is really hard for her to continue working in AAF. She is only waiting to receive pension so that she can spend rest of her life in peace. Most of the workers in Pabna production centre thinks that the retirement fund only exists for salaried employees.

Other facilities

Some of the production workers of Jessore complained about bad sanitation and unhygienic canteen. Workers complained that every morning they pledged to use soap before washing their hands but soaps were rarely available in their toilet. On the other hand, the management claims that workers being illiterate often break the soap dispensers while attempting to use it. For this reason, the management removed the dispensers from the toilet and instead controls the supply of soap to reduce wastage.

Trainee allowance

AAF provides on-the-job training to workers on various skills like block printing, embroidery, etc. According to AAF procedure, a worker would receive Tk. 20 daily as trainee allowance. However, this procedure is not being followed by all foundation management. In Jessore PWs complained that during training period they had to work for free for months which were reason for drop out of many workers.

Conversely the management claims that they stopped providing trainee allowance to prevent drop out because the worker have a tendency of living the organization after developing the skills.

PWs access to information

"We need not to know these information about the procedures and practice. We have complete faith on our supervisors; if they deceive us Allah will punish them."

The above statement was asserted by a group of workers in Pabna production centre. Most of the workers were not aware of important information about their work like benefits, rights, etc. Moreover, they were reluctant to learn the procedure about pension, rate, bonus, etc. fearing that if they inquire for more information there is a possibility of losing their job.

CONCLUSION

The study shows that as a social enterprise Aarong and AAF have succeeded to make a significant impact in the lives of its stakeholders (IPs and PWs) by uplifting their social status, changing their lifestyle, and increasing confidence and decision-making power. However, it has also unveiled some of the complaints of these stakeholders about these organizations.

IPs are well aware of their problems and solutions. All the IPs we surveyed and interviewed were able to identify their problems and articulate their needs. They asked us to convey their suggestions to the management so that they can keep doing business with Aarong without any hassle. According to IPs many of their problems would be solved if there is an information desk and complain desk.

Though the PWs have some grievances their willingness to stay in the organization is evident. Because they know that they are somewhat better-off just by being employed at AAF. Women working under at AAF understand as they are earning their importance in the society has increased.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations can be drawn to improve the perception of IPs and PWs towards Aarong and AAF:

1. Sensitization

- i. AAF staff: Special steps should be taken to sensitize foundation staff towards PWs so that they appreciate PWs contribution to the organization and also treat them with respect.
- ii. Aarong staff: Employees who are always working with the IPs should be made more aware that IPs are the internal customers of Aarong and need appreciation. Therefore, it is necessary to treat them with respect and find ways to let them know how important they are to the organization.

2. Information desk

Since most of the IPs feel necessity an information desk can be established. This will enable their easy access to important organizational information, help them to follow-up their orders, and also help avoid costly mistakes.

3. Complain desk

Fifty percent of the IPs are dissatisfied with Aarong for various reason. Majority of their grievances were product of (Aarong) staffs' behavior, irregular work order, not getting the right price of their Establishment of a complaint desk would help them to report their problems. Effectively dealing with these complaints will not only benefit the IPs but also help the organization by increasing the loyalty of IPs towards it. Another benefit of dealing with complaints is that weaknesses or the loophole of the procedures can be rectified thus help to prevent possible future complaints down the line. It is important to address these grievances immediately for sustainability of the organization.

4. Compliance monitoring cell

Social compliance ensures working condition of the manufacturing unit from social, political and economic points of view. It is a code of conduct that includes minimum labour standards, occupational safety measures, and environmental concerns. Minimum labour standards cover wages, working hours, over time, safety, job security, right to form trade union, and also social security. It also ensures non-violation of human rights. Social benefits are socially responsible management which includes production bonus, cash incentive, working condition, maternity leave, medical facilities, arrangement for food including safe drinking water, prayer hall, transportation, festival bonus, etc (Rahman 2006).

For well-being of the PWs we suggest to establish a compliance monitoring cell to oversee issues like reasonable working hours, declaration of rate before work distribution, access to information, pension, grievances of workers and other facilities.

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