Helpline Pilot Phase Will Soon Be Complete
Analysis, Consultation, Capacity Building and Improving Protocols are Next Steps

The introduction of the Alliance Worker Helpline was nearly complete by the end of October. In each of the nearly 50 pilot factories that have been launched, managers have participated in a comprehensive orientation session and workers have been trained on how and when to use the Helpline. These sessions were led by Phulki, often in collaboration with Alliance staff and member company representatives. Each worker receives a Helpline card with explicit contact information as part of the training.

In the coming months, the Helpline project team will be analyzing preliminary results, consulting with stakeholders, improving its call handling capacity, and making recommendations for refining operational protocols.

In addition to the pilot factories, the Helpline continued to be introduced in October to factories that are participating in a second wave of fire safety training. By the end of the year, the Alliance Worker Helpline will be available to workers in more than 250 ready-made-garment factories across Bangladesh.

AMADER KOTHA:
As Call Volume Increases, How Can Member Companies and Factories Use Helpline Information?

Structural integrity, blocked aisles, a locked exit and a fire that threatened a nearby chemical warehouse were among the safety issues we heard about from workers in October. In each case, Helpline staff reported these issues to factory management and the Alliance for prompt action (see This Month’s Findings).

A wide range of non-safety issues were reported as well. In one case, a female worker lost her way walking home after dark and became concerned for her safety. With the help of a nearby shopkeeper, we learned about her situation. We informed a factory manager who promptly sent someone to meet her and escort her home safely.

Now that the Amader Kotha Helpline is receiving calls every day, one important question to ask is: How can Helpline information be best used by factories, brands and retailers to drive change? At Amader Kotha, we are just beginning to answer to this question. Here are some early thoughts:

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KEY FINDINGS INCLUDE:

- 31 urgent issues were reported to the Helpline this month, most pertaining to worker safety. One incident involved unhealthy drinking water at a factory. Safety issues related to fire, structural integrity and blocked factory egress were also shared with Amader Kotha. These and other urgent issues were reported to the Alliance, who quickly investigated and mitigated each.

- Helpline access doubled in October to 165,000+ workers at 142 Alliance factories. Workers from factories where Amader Kotha has yet to be introduced are also hearing about and using the service.

- 1,652 calls were placed to the Helpline in October. This is Amader Kotha’s highest call volume to date, despite factories being closed during the Eid holiday.

- A total of 123 substantive issues were captured by the Helpline this month. The most common issue involved disciplinary actions at factories, such as verbal abuse. Complaints regarding workers’ compensation were also common.

- General inquiry calls continued to be the most common call received by Amader Kotha. Some of these calls included requests for information about the Helpline, Alliance or family-based items, such as health care access.

- Workers generally called Amader Kotha from outside their factory, with call volumes peaking at 12:00 pm and 4:00 pm. A higher percentage of callers this month were women (32%) than in September (22%).

NOTE: Detailed call data is provided to the Alliance for distribution to Alliance member companies after factories have had the opportunity to verify and respond to information provided by workers.

Please see the adjacent visualizations for further information on Helpline usage.
A CLOSER LOOK: Disciplinary Actions

Every month, we will take a closer look at a specific issue or interesting trend gleaned from workers’ discussions with Amader Kotha. This month: disciplinary actions.

A total of 33 issues related to disciplinary actions were shared to the Helpline in October. They fall into three broad categories, including:

EMPLOYMENT TERMINATION. Many workers returned from Eid to find they were no longer employed. Others took leave without giving notice to their factory (e.g., for family emergencies, illness, etc.) and also ended up losing their jobs. In some of these instances, Amader Kotha was able to connect workers with factory staff to resolve the issue and/or ensure proper payment of outstanding salary.

VERBAL ABUSE. Several callers reported instances where they or their colleagues were subject to offensive language while at work. In at least one case, it led to a worker leaving their job. Factory management often took immediate action after learning of these verbal abuse reports from Amader Kotha.

PHYSICAL ABUSE. Three cases of physical abuse were shared with the Helpline in October, each pertaining to workers being either slapped or beaten by their supervisors. In instances where callers shared their factory’s identities, the Alliance immediately contacted factory management for clarification and issue resolution.

No matter the issue, it is Amader Kotha’s protocol to keep confidential workers’ identities unless they explicitly waive that right. It is also Helpline protocol to provide workers with information regarding the result of investigations or conversations that happen on their behalf.
WHO ARE WE?

Amader Kotha, or "Our Voice" in Bangla, is a unique collaboration among three project partners–Clear Voice, a project of The Cahn Group that operates hotlines and builds effective grievance mechanisms in supply chains; Phulki, a respected civil society organization working to improve the lives of workers and their families in Bangladesh; and Good World Solutions (GWS), a non-profit organization whose flagship tool–Labor Link–has reached over 100,000 workers. Each partner brings years of experience building innovative, best-in-class labor compliance programs in supply chains.

UNDERSTAND PERSISTENT ISSUES. If aggregate Helpline data is showing similar issues each month, then factories and member companies may wish to consider proactive interventions to address the root cause. Helpline data may help to focus priorities for remediation or even capacity building over time.

ANTICIPATE ISSUES. Some issues may be seasonal, like concerns expressed around the time of Eid for bonus payments (see Volume 1, Issue 4). These can be anticipated and addressed in advance of the next Eid holiday.

SUPPORT HELPLINE USAGE. Member companies can communicate the value of Helpline data by expressing their appreciation to factories for their support and reminding them that they can benefit from this business intelligence tool in a variety of ways.

REVIEW HIGHLIGHTED ISSUES. Look for in-depth analysis in each newsletter on a single topic of importance (see: A Closer Look). By digging deeper into a single issue, it may be possible to gain insight into concerns of workers.

SUPPORT REMEDIATION. When called upon to support remediation, factories and member companies can respond promptly and with a view to both solving problems and preventing their reoccurrence.

UNDERSTAND CONTEXT. A positive resolution to one worker’s concern may not mean that the problem has been resolved for all workers in the factory. As an example, when a worker reported an overtime issue and it was resolved, we were grateful for that success. At the same time, practitioners familiar with factories will know that extended hours is rarely a problem that affects only a single worker. When excessive working hours are reported, factories and their buyers may wish to examine the wider range of causes of excessive work hours.

We expect the volume of information to increase as more workers have access to the Helpline. No doubt the ways that factories, brands and retailers can use the information will expand dramatically as well.

-Amader Kotha Helpline Project Team