



For workers' rights. For better business.

Adapting an international development project to tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

[Ethical Trading Initiative](#) (opens in a new window) (ETI) is a UK Aid Direct [Impact](#) (opens in a new tab) grant holder.

About the Ethical Trading Initiative

Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) brings corporate, trade union and voluntary sectors together to promote respect for workers' rights, to eliminate exploitation and discrimination.

Their UK Aid Direct project works with 125,000 female workers in the garments sector in Bangladesh and Pakistan. It aims to increase awareness and knowledge of workplace rights for employers and employees working in low paid jobs or doing flexible labour. Activities include improving channels of communications to allow the resolution of workplace issues, and health and safety training for managers to make them aware of worker rights.

What has been the impact of COVID-19 on the industry?

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic led to a country-wide lockdown in Bangladesh and Pakistan and the subsequent closure of all ready-made garment factories. Simultaneously, as much of Europe and the USA remain in lockdown and economies are dramatically impacted, orders have been cancelled by large European and American brands and retailers.

Although, the governments in Pakistan and Bangladesh have declared payment of wages as mandatory, many employers have not followed these guidelines. Moreover, many workers do not have contracts in these countries and are only paid on a piece-rate basis. They are now out of work.

How did Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) respond?

ETI have adapted their project approach, bringing together key stakeholders to create conversation on issues affecting the supply chain, and to outline appropriate action plans. They aim to make sure workers continue to be employed and receive a wage, and when safe to do so return to work with a low risk of infection.

In the longer term, ETI are working to influence national policy to forge post-COVID-19 policies which consider the interests of workers as well as industry.

To make sure workers have a safe environment to return to in Bangladesh, ETI have provided guidance for manufacturers and connected them with personal protective equipment suppliers. A remote needs assessment of 20 factories has also been conducted to check health and safety awareness in Bangladesh, while another assessment in Pakistan has focused on how vulnerable garment workers have been affected by the situation.

Ethical Trading Initiatives (ETI) have also developed some digital training so that awareness raising for workers' rights can continue to take place with managers and workers in Bangladesh. This has removed the need for in-person gatherings.

What can others learn from this approach?

A holistic approach has been taken by the organisation to address COVID-19, considering how the virus - and its economic ramifications - may impact their project and the beneficiaries they are working with.

They have engaged with both high-level national government stakeholders, unions, and beneficiaries, as well as with brands in the UK to make sure workers' rights are upheld and that factories are able to reopen with minimal disruption. This should allow the industry to respond in the short-term, protecting the immediate rights of the workers as well as in the longer-term, recognising and mitigating the risks of working in this sector during a pandemic.

Top tips for others facing project adaption in a COVID-19 landscape:

- Remember the importance of strong stakeholder engagement to maintain project progress and impact
- Consider project delivery at all levels when reviewing the impact of COVID-19
- Think outside the box when it comes to alternative solutions. For example, why not try a digital approach? This could include using social platforms or the creation of digital training courses.

For further guidance and resources to help your organisation and beneficiaries during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, why not visit the [UK Aid Direct learning page](#) (opens in a new tab).

Thank you to Ethical Trading Initiatives for your help in creating this case study.