

Bleak outlook for Bangladesh's non-member sites

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DHAKA – A ‘rapid survey’ conducted by the developers of the Mapped in Bangladesh transparency tool at BRAC University has assessed the impacts of COVID-19 on non-member garment producers across the country’s key manufacturing districts.

The team at BRAC, whose beta platform provides an overview of factory operations across Dhaka, Gazipur, Narayanganj and Chattogram, says this first-of-its-kind insight hones in on the operations of an often forgotten segment of its RMG industry, those not members of either the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) or Bangladesh Knitwear Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BKMEA).

Of the 448 factories which participated in the survey, 240 say they have no orders in the pipeline, whilst the remainder have on average just two to look ahead to.

The [Mapped in Bangladesh platform \(/2020073026451/materials-production-news/bangladeshi-platform-tipped-to-transform-transparency.html\)](https://2020073026451/materials-production-news/bangladeshi-platform-tipped-to-transform-transparency.html), created by Dhaka’s BRAC University, has been a work-in-progress for a number of years as a team of 40 researchers have walked street-by-street to identify manufacturers, both large and small, before on-boarding them onto an online system.

With this dataset, brands and retailers will be able to filter through criteria – such as the customers a factory has, the certifications they’ve attained, their manufacturing specialisms, and whether they’re a member organisation of either the BGMEA or BKMEA, respectively.

Medical face mask testing

Type I, Type II and Type II-R for European market
Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 for U.S. market



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An unreported portion of the country's vast RMG sector is that of the non-member sites, those which aren't affiliated with either the BGMEA or BKMEA. It's this group that BRAC has vied to shed new light on with its latest 'rapid survey'.



Rapid surveys were inceptioned by the institute after its work to visit factories was grounded due to COVID-19. Leveraging this unrivalled pool of data then, the research team trialled the concept of conducting surveys by questioning manufacturers on whether they turned to PPE production amidst the pandemic.

Having garnered successful, representative findings, it's second rapid survey focuses on the operations of non-member sites, with data collected via phone call between June 9-19.

555 factories which are listed as non-members are on the Mapped in Bangladesh platform, 448 of these took part. Questions addressed operational capacities, the number of workers in each site throughout the months March to May, and the number of days they worked each of these months.

Only 370 of the 448 sites are in operation at present. In Gazipur and Chattogram, 84 per cent of factories were operational – as of June – whilst Dhaka had the lowest in operation, 71 per cent. It signals that most factories recovered in some form since the entire RMG industry was temporarily stopped from operating on March 26.

With regards to worker numbers, manufacturers averaged 234 workers a day, though this fluctuated depending on specialism with woven fabric producers on average having 328 staff on-site. Relative to the capacity of these sites, factories worked at 65 per cent of their full potential, on average.

The number of days factories operated for per month slumped in April, as the effects of lockdown set in, before picking up again once more by May.

For comparison, during March (before lockdown on the 26th), manufacturers averaged 26 days on-site, compared to just 2.3 days in April, and 9.6 days in May.

The factories surveyed employed upwards of 88,000 workers before the pandemic struck, though BRAC's research signals that 58,000 have been laid off over recent months. On average, this equates to 226 dismissals per factory, either on a temporary or permanent basis.

Looking ahead, the prospects for this sample remain bleak, with 240 of the 448 factories signaling that they're yet to receive new orders since business resumed for brands and retailers.

Of the 208 which have registered interest, an average of two orders each is in the pipeline. 61 per cent of these sites say these orders are valid and in the books, whilst 36 per cent remain in negotiations, and 2.9 per cent have seen brands withdraw their interest.