

Forum: The Citizen forum on inequalities

Theme: How to reduce inequalities at different scales?

Name of citizen: Laxmi Beria

Marital status: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="radio"/> Married/in a relationship<input checked="" type="radio"/> Single<input type="radio"/> With children, if so, how many: 4	Level of education <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input checked="" type="radio"/> Primary<input type="radio"/> Secondary<input type="radio"/> University
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1. How does the theme of inequalities concern you?

My name is Laxmi Beria. I am 18 years old and live with my family in Dhaka, where I work as a textile worker at a garment factory. I am among the millions, who get up before dawn to provide labour for Bangladesh's renowned ready-made garment industry. My experience is mirrored by millions of girls and women whom I seek to represent in this forum.

Despite our work, our struggles are largely invisible. The recent increase in the minimum wage to BDT12,500 was only half of what our unions demanded, and inflation above 9% makes essentials like food and rent increasingly unaffordable. A majority of us must choose between medicine and meals, merely surviving on wages that are routinely stolen or withheld due to weak labor laws and wage theft—problems known but rarely acted upon. When we protest to correct this injustice pay, we are responded to with police brutality, criminalization, loss of employment, and even death. Recent campaigns have been met with violence, blacklisting, and a climate of fear.

There has been growing political instability in recent years. Suppression of protests—not least in response to wage injustice—has made the life of workers more difficult. Systematic human rights abuses have been denounced in Amnesty International's 2025 report, demanding accountability, justice, and the guarantee of a fair trial for those subject to state repression. Yet our freedom of expression is drastically limited, our voices being silenced in daily life and public discourse.

Climate change isn't theoretical for us: Floods recently displaced hundreds of thousands of people, adding misery to the already poor. Urbanization and automation have stolen

jobs; mechanization means less work, especially for young women. Technology has rendered many female jobs obsolete, adding to disparity.

2. What do you suggest at your level?

Inequality persists in Bangladesh because of policies and practices that can and must change. We are owed a decent wage, a safe working environment, equal access to education and promotional opportunities, and protection against exploitation and violence. The international community must do more than talk; it must put corporate accountability into practice, hold labor laws accountable, and invest in decent wages and working conditions.

I suggest the following: International support can significantly strengthen worker unions in Bangladesh's textile industry by providing vital resources, protection, and global advocacy that empower unions beyond local constraints.

Global NGOs and labor organizations can offer financial assistance and capacity development activities that strengthen the union's power to organize, educate employees, and bargain. These partnerships offer timely legal aid, training, and technology for enhanced communication and record-keeping.

Additionally, global institutions such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) or United Nations can put pressure on the Bangladeshi government to enact freedom of association, ease union registration, and enact labor rights by reporting and monitoring publicly, making it safer for the operations of unions. Foreign investment policy and trade policies can be made conditional on guarantees of labor rights and union protection and held accountable to multilateral partners' and buyers' pressure. Moreover, international brands and consumers play a pivotal role by committing to transparent, fair labor practices and binding agreements that respect union rights throughout supply chains.

Consumer advocacy and brand accountability campaigns amplify worker voices and enforce compliance with labor standards. Cross-border solidarity can help share knowledge, provide emergency assistance, and mobilize rapid response actions against anti-union repression. These networks offer moral support and legal aid and raise international awareness, increasing pressure on factory owners and policymakers to respect and protect worker unions.

Finally, I urge all the delegates to remember that behind every exported garment and every statistic is a young woman whose life chances and dreams depend on decisions made in rooms like this. This is not only my story, but that of thousands whose voices rarely reach decision-makers.