

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers



Md. Mahabub ul alam khan¹, Amrin akter², Rupa nur³, Samir sourob chowdhury⁴

¹Ilm (professional) candidate, Jagannath University and legal associate, the lawyers & jurists.

²lecturer, department of law, daffodil international university.

^{3,4}llb (hon's), department of law, daffodil international university.

ABSTRACT: The research "Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestions for Policymakers" aims to explore the wage disparity and malpractice issues among tea garden workers in Bangladesh. Using a comparative analysis, the study examines the differences in wages among tea garden workers and identifies malfeasance in the sector. The study finds that wage disparity exists among tea garden workers, with women workers receiving lower wages compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, the study identifies malpractices such as bribery, illegal wage deductions, and the use of child labor in the tea garden sector. It provides policy suggestions such as increasing the minimum wage rate, ensuring transparency in wage payment, and enforcing laws to eradicate malfeasance in the sector. It also highlights the need for policymakers to address the wage disparity and malpractices in the tea garden sector to ensure the welfare of tea garden workers in Bangladesh. Study finds that tea garden workers who are members of trade unions receive higher wages compared to non-unionized workers. It further identifies the impact of climate change on the tea garden sector in Bangladesh. The research highlights the need for a gender-sensitive approach to address the wage disparity among tea garden workers. It recommends that policymakers adopt measures to promote gender equity in the sector, such as providing training and education opportunities for women workers.

KEYWORDS: Wages Divergence, Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers, Child Labor, Labor Laws and Regulations, Living conditions of tea garden workers

A. INTRODUCTION

The tea industry is one of the most significant sectors of the Bangladesh economy, employing thousands of workers and generating substantial export earnings. Despite the industry's importance, however, the tea garden workers in Bangladesh often experience low wages, poor working conditions, and malfeasance, which can result in significant economic and social vulnerabilities (Bangladesh Tea Board, 2015).

Wages divergence and malfeasance are pervasive issues in the tea industry in Bangladesh, affecting the livelihoods and well-being of tea garden workers and their families. Tea garden workers are often paid low wages and have little or no access to social protections, which can exacerbate poverty and food insecurity (Aljazeera, 2022). Moreover, malfeasance, such as forced labor, child labor, and discrimination against women, is prevalent in the tea industry in Bangladesh, creating further vulnerabilities for tea garden workers.

The issues of wages divergence and malfeasance in the tea industry in Bangladesh are complex and multi-faceted, requiring comprehensive and sustained efforts by multiple stakeholders to address them. In this context, it is crucial to prioritize the needs and rights of tea garden workers and to work towards building a more just and equitable tea industry for all stakeholders involved (Begum et al., 2022).

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

The aspects of the research primarily focuses on the untouched and neglected perspective on the Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in the context of Bangladesh. There are a number of research articles and proposals on

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

the very similar arena, nonetheless those articles are not completed in many aspects and there are also different gaps which should be brought into the light. This research paper has been designed to fulfill the existing gaps as much as possible.

Alam M. and Akter S., focused on Bangladesh's scenario in the tea industry and competitiveness of Bangladesh with other producers in their paper, titled "Tea Production and Trade Advances in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis in Global Market."

Ahmed N. and Kashem A., point out health, hygiene and sanitation of tea garden workers in the journal, titled "Health and Hygiene Practice of Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh." Begum N. et al. drew attention to a dire situation of Bangladesh's tea industry and tea garden workers in their paper, titled "Current Scenario of Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: Time Demands to Stop the Zero-sum Game."

Islam M. N. and Al-Amin M. focused on, the causes of the Bangladeshi tea garden workers' poverty, their vulnerability, and their strategies for surviving in their paper, titled "Life behind leaves: capability, poverty and social vulnerability of tea garden workers in Bangladesh."

Rahman M. M. identified the disparity in wages and negligence of the tea garden worker group in the Sylhet district of Bangladesh in his paper, titled, "Wages Diversity and Negligence: A Comparative Study of Tea Garden Workers in Sylhet Region, Bangladesh"

Hossain R. highlighted the cause of tea garden workers' marginalization and actual livelihood difficulty in the context of Sylhet in his paper, "SOCIAL EXCLUSION OF TEA PLANTATION WORKERS IN BANGLADESH." Vijesandiran P. S. explained about Living Wages for Sri Lankan tea estate employees in his paper, titled "LIVING WAGE FOR THE TEA ESTATEWORKERS IN SRI LANKA."

Biswas A. et al. point out issues regarding maternity, neonatal, and healthcare in Bangladesh's tea garden community in their paper, titled "Exploring the perceptions, practices and challenges to maternal and newborn health care among the underprivileged teagarden community in Bangladesh: a qualitative study."

Jegathesan M. highlighted unsatisfactory facts tea garden workers in Sri Lanka in his paper, titled "Deficient realities: expertise and uncertainty among tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka." Uddin I. et al. focused on the tea garden laborers' terrible income in their paper, "INCOME VULNERABILITY OF TEA GARDEN WORKERS IN BANGLADESH."

Siegmann K. A. et al. drew attention to the two countries India and Sri Lanka are greatest number of tea workers and plantations with Fairtrade certification in their paper, "FAIRTRADE CERTIFIED TEA IN THE HIRED LABOUR SECTOR IN INDIA AND SRI LANKA: IMPACT STUDY AND BASELINE DATA COLLECTION"

Majumder S. C. and Roy S. C. point out the present socio-economic conditions faced by the tea industry workers of Bangladesh in their paper, titled "Socio-economic Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in Bangladesh: A Case Study on Sreemangal." Zaman M. O. and Abir T. M. focused on the procedure of tea garden workers' social exclusion in their paper, "The Process of Social Exclusion of Tea Garden Workers: A Study on Sylhet City Corporation, Bangladesh."

Islam G. M. R. et al. highlighted the present condition and support required of tea industry in Bangladesh in their paper, titled "PRESENT STATUS AND FUTURE NEEDS OF TEA INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH." Mondal S. C. explained about Bangladesh's current tea producing situation, the socioeconomic circumstances of the employees, and practical problems related to tea production in his paper, titled "Tea Production, Processing, and Socio economic Status in Bangladesh."

Sumi R. S. highlighted the quantity of tea that will eventually be needed for domestic production in her paper, titled "Demand Analysis of Domestic Tea Market in Bangladesh: An Empirical Investigation." Begum S. and Islam D. Q. F. point out the condition of education of tea garden workers children in their paper, titled "Education of Children of Tea Garden Workers: Organizations, Provisions and Challenges"

C. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the researchers for writing this research paper is to make the citizens of the state aware of different laws and legal provisions regarding Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in the context of Bangladesh and to suggest to the policymakers the best way to eradicate this problem gradually. Different types of research articles have already been published on this particular topic but this article focuses on the concurrent situation of Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh and its laws. Wages Divergence and Malfeasance is becoming a national malaise which is increasing at an alarming rate. There are many risk factors arising from Wages Divergence and Malfeasance such as decreasing the production and tea plantation rate in the national context, which may diminish the export of tea over different countries of the world and national economy might have the impact of this situation at a large scale. Risk factors are deeply rooted by having injustices and inequalities, and not having the facilities that the other tea workers are having across the globe. Risk factors have transcended boundaries and occur in individual, social, and economic contexts.

D. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To investigate the issues of wages divergence and malfeasance in the tea industry in Bangladesh, a mixed-method research approach has been employed. Research question for the research has been clearly identified in this paper by the concerned researchers. The methodology of the research is followed by the quantitative method of research and all the relevant data and

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

information of this research paper shall be considered as the Secondary data. The researchers have tried to find out the problem and suggested some recommendations to eradicate the prime at some level.

E. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite the importance of the tea garden sector for the economy of Bangladesh, there exists a significant wage disparity among tea garden workers, with women workers receiving lower wages compared to their male counterparts. Moreover, malfeasance such as bribery, illegal wage deductions, and the use of child labor are prevalent in the sector (UNB, 2022). These issues have significant implications for the welfare of tea garden workers and the sustainability of the sector. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a comparative analysis of the wage divergence and malfeasance issues in the tea garden sector in Bangladesh and provide policy suggestions to address these issues (UN News Global perspective Human stories, 2021). Regardless of the existence of labor laws and regulations to protect the rights of tea garden workers, enforcement of these laws is often weak, which has contributed to the prevalence of malfeasance in the sector (Zaman & Abir, 2017). The living conditions of tea garden workers, including access to healthcare, education, and housing, are often substandard, which has significant implications for their health and wellbeing (Hossain, 2021). The impact of climate change on the tea garden sector in Bangladesh is a growing concern, as extreme weather events such as floods and droughts have the potential to significantly disrupt tea production and affect the livelihoods of tea garden workers (Pantha & Rezwan, 2022).

Low wages also contributes to a lack of incentives for workers to remain in the tea sector, resulting in high turnover rates and a labor shortage (Khisa & Iqbal, 2001). Tea is a low-margin sector, and there is little room for enterprises to boost wages without increasing tea prices, which can be challenged in a highly competitive market (Correspondent, 2022). However, tea business is a well growing sector for the economy of Bangladesh and for that reason lower wages for tea workers might result in a variety of issues and complications (THE HINDU, 2022), including:

- a. **Poverty and financial insecurity:** Frequently, low earnings cause workers and their households to live in poverty and find it difficult to survive.
- b. **Inadequate nutrition and housing:** Workers may be unable to afford adequate nutrition and housing, resulting in substandard health and living conditions.
- c. **Lack of knowledge and access to healthcare:** Low pay might make it impossible for employees to afford basic medical treatment, resulting in untreated diseases and injuries.
- d. **Problems enrolling children in school:** The inability of workers to pay for their children's education may result in intergenerational poverty.
- e. **High turnover rates:** Low wages can cause workers to leave the tea industry in pursuit of better-paying jobs, resulting in a skilled labor shortage.
- f. **Lack of improvement incentives:** As there is little financial incentive to do so, low wages can make it more difficult for employees to see the benefit in enhancing their skills or working hard.

There is a need for a gender-sensitive approach to address the wage disparity among tea garden workers, as women workers often face discrimination and are paid lower wages than their male counterparts (Mondal et al., 2021).

F. THE PRESENT SCENARIO OF TEA GARDEN WORKERS' EXPLOITATION IN BANGLADESH:

Bangladesh is one of the largest tea producing countries in the world, and the tea industry plays a significant role in the country's economy (Sumi, 2019). However, tea workers in Bangladesh face various challenges and issues. One of the primary challenges is low wages (Alam & Akter, n.d.). Tea workers in Bangladesh earn some of the lowest wages in the world, with many earning less than the minimum wage (Philip, 2022). This low wage makes it challenging for workers to meet their basic needs, such as food, housing, and healthcare (The Financial Express, 2022).

Another challenge faced by tea workers is poor working conditions. Many tea workers work long hours in the fields, often without proper safety equipment, which can lead to health problems such as respiratory diseases and skin infections (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2022). In addition, many workers are not provided with basic facilities such as clean drinking water and sanitation (Ahmed & Kashem, 2019). There have been some efforts to improve the situation for tea workers in Bangladesh, including efforts to increase wages and improve working conditions (Barkat et al., 2010). However, progress has been slow, and many workers still face significant challenges (Masum, 2022).

According to the Bangladesh Tea Board, there are around 4,000 tea gardens in the country, which employ around 4, 50, 000 workers. Around 55% of these workers are women, and many are from the indigenous communities who are historically

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

marginalized (Chandan & Deshwara, 2022). The majority of tea workers in Bangladesh work in the Sylhet, Chittagong, and Moulvibazar regions, which are known for their tea plantations (Society for Environment and Human Development, 2009). These workers typically work long hours, often in difficult conditions, and earn low wages (Star, 2022). In addition to the plantation workers, there are also many small-scale tea growers in Bangladesh, who typically own small plots of land and sell their tea to larger companies (Philip, 2023). It is estimated that there are around 130,000 small-scale tea growers in the country, many of whom face similar challenges to the plantation workers in terms of low wages and poor working conditions (Parvin, n.d.).

Research has shown that the lack of basic data on women and children working in tea gardens is holding back progress in the Sylhet division relative to other regions of the nation (Rahman, 2020). In the UN Women Bangladesh webinar (Partha, 2019), a study indicated that intensifying social security for female tea garden workers and their families in Sylhet Division, Bangladesh, Two workshops and surveys were organized by the ILO, UNFPA, and UNICEF, who were working together on this issue. Gender-responsive planning and budgeting (GRPB) and social protection of tea garden workers were two of the webinar's main topics of discussion (International Labor Organization, 2019).

Female tea garden employees encounter hygienic issues when they are in menstruation, pregnant, or raising children (Islam et al., 2005). Additionally, the program found that they had to work longer than eight hours a day in bad weather with little access to restrooms and other facilities. Tea garden employees were often experienced domestic violence, child marriage and dowries (Philip, 2020). The head of the Bangladesh Tea Association's Labor Health and Welfare subcommittee, Tahsin Ahmed Chowdhury, claimed that the BBS-UNICEF data has significant errors (UN Sustainable Development Group, 2021).

According to the Bangladesh Tea Board's annual report, In 159 tea garden areas around the country as of 2017, 4, 40, 743 workers and their families lived while only 25% were permanent employees and the rest were temporary or seasonal employees (SYFUL, 2022). Every industry has made significant progress, but tea plantation workers have fallen far behind (Huq, 2013). For many years, the sector was ignored due to different reasons. It is crucial time to provide healthy living conditions to the tea workers in Bangladesh in order to ensure the SDGs (Majumder & Roy, 2011). The most underdeveloped communities in Bangladesh are those who work in the tea industry and therefore, it is crucial to have an active union that will uphold their rights and work tirelessly on their behalf (Opu, 2021).

G. LAWS RELATED TO TEA WORKERS:

In Bangladesh, the rights of tea workers are protected by various laws and regulations. Some of the key laws that apply to tea workers in the country are as follows:

- a. **Labor Act, 2006:** This is the main law governing labor relations in Bangladesh. It provides for the rights of workers to form and join unions, bargain collectively, and strike. It also sets out the minimum wage, working hours, and other working conditions for workers in various industries, including the tea industry.
- b. **Tea Plantation Labor Ordinance, 1962:** This is a specific law that governs labor relations in the tea industry. It provides for the welfare of workers, including provisions for housing, medical facilities, and education for workers and their families. It also sets out the minimum wage and working hours for tea workers.
- c. **Bangladesh Labor Rules, 2015:** These rules were promulgated under the Labor Act, 2006, and provide detailed guidance on the implementation of labor laws in Bangladesh. They set out specific provisions for various aspects of labor relations, including employment contracts, termination of employment, and working conditions.
- d. **National Tripartite Plan of Action for the Ready-Made Garment Sector, 2013:** This is a voluntary agreement between the government of Bangladesh, employers, and workers' organizations, aimed at improving working conditions and ensuring workers' rights in the ready-made garment sector. Although the agreement does not specifically apply to the tea industry, it has set a precedent for collective action to improve working conditions in other sectors as well.
- e. **Child Labor (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 2006:** This law prohibits the employment of children under the age of 14 in any occupation, including the tea industry. It also provides for penalties for employers who violate the law.
- f. **Maternity Benefits Act, 1939:** This law provides for maternity benefits for women workers, including tea workers. It requires employers to provide paid leave for pregnant workers and to provide medical facilities for them and their children.
- g. **National Social Security Strategy, 2015:** This is a policy framework that aims to provide social protection to all citizens of Bangladesh, including tea workers. It includes provisions for cash transfers, health insurance, and other social security measures.
- h. **Export Processing Zones (EPZs) Labor Act, 2019:** This law provides for the rights of workers in export processing zones, which include some tea processing facilities. It sets out the minimum wage, working hours, and other working conditions for workers in EPZs, and provides for the establishment of grievance redress mechanisms (Correspondent, 2022).

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

i. **The Industrial Relations Act, 2018**, provides for the rights of workers and employers to form and join trade unions, and to engage in collective bargaining. The law also sets out the procedures for the settlement of industrial disputes, including through negotiation, conciliation, and arbitration. The law applies to all industries in Bangladesh, including the tea industry, and is aimed at promoting industrial peace and harmony by ensuring the rights of workers and employers are protected. The law also establishes a new Industrial Relations Council to oversee the implementation of the law and to facilitate the resolution of industrial disputes (Deshwara, 2022).

In addition to these laws and regulations, there are also several organizations and initiatives that work to promote the rights of tea workers in Bangladesh, including trade unions, civil society organizations, and international organizations like the International Labor Organization (ILO).

H. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

I. India

In India, the wages of tea workers are regulated by various labor laws and government policies. However, there has been a long-standing issue of wage divergence among tea workers, with some workers earning significantly less than others. This issue has been highlighted by various organizations and activists, who have called for better wages and working conditions for tea workers. One of the primary laws that regulate wages for tea workers in India is the Plantation Labour Act, 1951. This act applies to all plantations, including tea plantations, and lays down various provisions related to working conditions, wages, and benefits for workers. Under the act, tea workers are entitled to minimum wages, which are revised periodically by the government. However, there have been instances where tea workers have not been paid the minimum wages prescribed by the government (Rowlatt, 2016). This has led to protests and strikes by workers, demanding better wages and working conditions. In some cases, workers have also sought legal recourse to challenge the non-payment of minimum wages. Another issue that contributes to wage divergence among tea workers in India is the system of contract labor. Many tea plantations hire workers on a contractual basis, which often results in lower wages and fewer benefits compared to permanent workers. Contract workers also have less job security and are vulnerable to exploitation by employers. To address these issues, the government has introduced various policies and initiatives aimed at improving the wages and working conditions of tea workers. For example, the Tea Board of India has launched a welfare scheme for tea workers, which includes provisions for housing, healthcare, and education. The government has also set up committees to review the wages and working conditions of tea workers and make recommendations for improvement. In summary, while there are various labor laws and policies in place to regulate wages for tea workers in India, there is still a significant gap in wages among workers. This issue needs to be addressed through a combination of legal reforms, policy initiatives, and better enforcement of existing laws (Rajbangshi & Nambiar, 2020).

It is noteworthy to mention that India have executed the Minimum Wages Act of 1948, the Payment of Wages Act of 1936, the Plantations Labour Act of 1951, the Industrial Disputes Act of 1947, the Employees' State Insurance Act of 1948, , among others, govern the rights and working conditions of tea workers and to protect their rights. These statutes establish basic requirements for things like wages, health and safety on the job, benefits, and protections against discrimination in the workplace (Sarmah & Barooah, 2022). The Minimum Wages Act, 1948, is a process of the Indian Parliament that regulates minimum wage rates for a wide range of industries, including tea plantations. The act mandates the establishment of minimum wage rates for certain forms of employment and the enforcement of their payment. The Minimum Wage Act establishes minimum wages that employers are required to pay to employees, regardless of the worker's level of education or experience. The Act also stipulates that authorities will be responsible for ensuring that minimum wages are provided and adhered to. As a result of this law, the appropriate government now has the authority to establish and adjust minimum wages for various categories of workers and for various geographic regions.

II. Pakistan:

In Pakistan, the wages of tea workers are regulated by various labor laws and government policies. However, there has been a long-standing issue of wage divergence among tea workers, with some workers earning significantly less than others. This issue has been highlighted by various organizations and activists, who have called for better wages and working conditions for tea workers. One of the primary laws that regulate wages for tea workers in Pakistan is the Minimum Wages for Unskilled Workers Ordinance, 1969. This ordinance applies to all industries, including the tea industry, and sets minimum wages for unskilled workers. The minimum wage rate is revised periodically by the government. However, there have been instances where tea workers have not been paid the minimum wages prescribed by the government. This has led to protests and strikes by workers, demanding better wages and working conditions. In some cases, workers have also sought legal recourse to challenge the non-payment of

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

minimum wages. Another issue that contributes to wage divergence among tea workers in Pakistan is the system of contract labor. Many tea estates hire workers on a contractual basis, which often results in lower wages and fewer benefits compared to permanent workers. Contract workers also have less job security and are vulnerable to exploitation by employers. To address these issues, the government has introduced various policies and initiatives aimed at improving the wages and working conditions of tea workers. For example, the government has launched a program called "Prime Minister's Kamyab Jawan Programme" which aims to provide financial assistance to youth for entrepreneurship, skill development, and job creation. Additionally, the government has also set up committees to review the wages and working conditions of tea workers and make recommendations for improvement. In summary, while there are various labor laws and policies in place to regulate wages for tea workers in Pakistan, there is still a significant gap in wages among workers. This issue needs to be addressed through a combination of legal reforms, policy initiatives, and better enforcement of existing laws.

Notably, the Pakistani government has also enacted provisions for the tea workers in labor laws and regulations to safeguard their rights. The rights of tea workers on plantations in Pakistan are protected by labor laws and regulations. A list of key acts and laws related to tea workers in Pakistan are as follows:

- a. **The Industrial and Commercial Employment (Standing Orders) Ordinance, 1968:** This ordinance regulates the terms and conditions of employment in industrial and commercial establishments, including tea plantations.
- b. **The West Pakistan Shops and Establishment Ordinance, 1969:** This ordinance regulates the working conditions in shops and establishments, including tea plantations.
- c. **The Employment of Children Act, 1991:** This act prohibits the employment of children in hazardous occupations and sets minimum age requirements for employment in non-hazardous occupations.
- d. **The Bonded Labor System (Abolition) Act, 1992:** This act prohibits the practice of bonded labor and provides for the rehabilitation of bonded laborers.
- e. **The Minimum Wages for Unskilled Workers Act, 1966:** This act sets minimum wage rates for unskilled workers, including tea workers.
- f. **The Employees' Old-Age Benefits Act, 1976:** This act provides for the payment of old-age benefits to employees in industries, including tea plantations.
- g. **The Employees' Social Security Ordinance, 1965:** This ordinance provides for the establishment of social security schemes for employees in industries, including tea plantations.

These laws are intended to ensure that tea workers in Pakistan are treated fairly and have access to basic rights and benefits.

III. SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, the wages of tea workers are regulated by various labor laws and government policies. However, there has been a long-standing issue of wage divergence among tea workers, with some workers earning significantly less than others (Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 2019). This issue has been highlighted by various organizations and activists, who have called for better wages and working conditions for tea workers. One of the primary laws that regulate wages for tea workers in Sri Lanka is the Wages Boards Ordinance, 1941. This ordinance provides for the establishment of wages boards to regulate the wages and other conditions of employment of workers in various industries, including the tea industry. The wages boards determine minimum wages for different categories of workers in the industry, and the minimum wage rate is revised periodically by the government (Peoples, 2020). However, there have been instances where tea workers have not been paid the minimum wages prescribed by the government (Siegmann et al., 2019). This has led to protests and strikes by workers, demanding better wages and working conditions. In some cases, workers have also sought legal recourse to challenge the non-payment of minimum wages. Another issue that contributes to wage divergence among tea workers in Sri Lanka is the system of contract labor (Vijesandiran, 2022). Many tea estates hire workers on a contractual basis, which often results in lower wages and fewer benefits compared to permanent workers. Contract workers also have less job security and are vulnerable to exploitation by employers (CEIC, 2018). To address these issues, the government has introduced various policies and initiatives aimed at improving the wages and working conditions of tea workers. For example, the government has launched a program called "Plantation Social Welfare Fund" which provides financial assistance for housing, education, and healthcare to the estate community, including tea workers (The Borgen Project, 2021). Additionally, the government has also set up committees to review the wages and working conditions of tea workers and make recommendations for improvement (Jegathesan, 2015). In summary, while there are various labor laws and policies in place to regulate wages for tea workers in Sri Lanka, there is still a significant gap in wages among workers. This issue needs to be addressed through a combination of legal reforms, policy initiatives, and better enforcement of existing laws.

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

The situation of tea workers varies from country to country, depending on factors such as labor laws, working conditions, and the level of development of the tea industry. Overall, while the situation of tea workers varies from country to country, there are often common challenges such as low wages, poor working conditions, and exposure to pesticides and other chemicals. Efforts are being made to improve the situation for tea workers globally, including through fair trade certification programs and other initiatives to promote ethical and sustainable sourcing practices.

I. RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the issue of wage disparity and exploitation among Bangladesh's tea garden laborers, the following suggestions may be considered:

- a. **Improve transparency and accountability:** One of the root causes of wage divergence and malfeasance is the lack of transparency and accountability in the tea industry. There is a need to ensure that all tea garden workers receive fair and transparent wages, and that their working conditions are safe and healthy. This can be achieved through a range of measures, such as publishing wages, implementing independent audits, and improving access to information (Kamruzzaman et al., 2015).
- b. **Enforce labor laws:** The government should strictly enforce labor laws to prevent malfeasance and ensure that workers' rights are protected (BBC News, 2002). This includes cracking down on employers who violate labor laws, such as by paying below the minimum wage, withholding overtime pay, or denying workers their entitlements (Uddin et al., 2020).
- c. **Strengthen labor unions:** Labor unions play an important role in representing workers and advocating for their rights. The government should ensure that labor unions are allowed to operate freely and are not subject to harassment or intimidation. Employers should also be required to recognize and negotiate with labor unions representing their workers (Begum et al., 2022).
- d. **Improve working conditions:** Employers should be required to provide safe and healthy working conditions for their workers. This includes providing adequate protective gear, ensuring safe working practices, and providing access to medical care when needed.
- e. **Provide training and education:** Employers should provide training and education to workers to help them acquire the skills and knowledge needed to perform their jobs effectively. This includes training on safe working practices, financial literacy, and basic literacy and numeracy skills.
- f. **Promote responsible business practices:** Employers should be encouraged to adopt responsible business practices, such as fair labor practices, ethical sourcing, and environmental sustainability. This can be encouraged through certification programs, government incentives, and public awareness campaigns.
- g. **Collaborate with international organizations:** The Bangladeshi government should collaborate with international organizations, such as the International Labour Organization, to promote better working conditions and labor practices in the tea industry. This can include sharing best practices, providing technical assistance, and advocating for workers' rights at the international level (Islam & Al-Amin, 2019).
- h. **Conduct regular wage surveys:** The government should conduct regular surveys to assess the wages of tea garden workers and ensure that they are being paid a fair wage. This can help to identify any wage divergence and ensure that workers are being paid in line with their skills and experience.
- i. **Provide social protections:** Tea garden workers often lack access to social protections such as health care, insurance, and pension benefits. The government should work to expand social protections to cover all workers in the tea industry, including those who are employed informally.
- j. **Improve access to credit:** Tea garden workers often face financial challenges, including lack of access to credit. The government should work with financial institutions to provide access to affordable credit for workers, which can help them to start small businesses or make other investments.
- k. **Address gender inequality:** Women are often disproportionately affected by wage divergence and malfeasance in the tea industry. The government should work to address gender inequality in the industry by promoting equal pay for equal work, increasing access to education and training for women, and empowering women to participate in decision-making processes.
- l. **Address child labor:** Child labor is a serious problem in the tea industry, with many children working in hazardous conditions. The government should work to eliminate child labor in the industry by enforcing labor laws, providing education and training to children, and promoting alternative livelihoods for families.
- m. **Promote sustainable development:** The tea industry is often associated with environmental degradation and unsustainable practices. The government should work to promote sustainable development in the industry by encouraging sustainable agricultural practices, promoting renewable energy, and protecting natural resources.

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

n. **Increase consumer awareness:** Consumers have an important role to play in promoting better working conditions and labor practices in the tea industry. The government should work to increase consumer awareness of the issues facing tea garden workers and promote ethical and sustainable consumption. This can include labeling schemes, public awareness campaigns, and certification programs.

Moreover Workers in cooperatives have a vested interest in the success of their firms, which can lead to increased salaries if the government encourages the formation and expansion of such organizations. In sum, a range of governmental responses can help push tea workers out of poverty by increasing their earnings and other benefits (Nousheen, 2022).

J. SCOPES OF FURTHER RESEARCH

There is still a significant scope for research in the area of wages divergence and malfeasance with tea garden workers in Bangladesh. Some potential areas for future research include:

- a. **Wage-setting mechanisms:** Further research is needed to understand the wage-setting mechanisms in the tea industry and the factors that contribute to wage divergence. This can help to identify potential solutions to ensure that workers are paid a fair wage.
- b. **Labor market dynamics:** There is a need for more research on the labor market dynamics in the tea industry, including the factors that influence labor supply and demand and the impact of labor market policies and regulations on workers.
- c. **Gender and social inequality:** Further research is needed to understand the gender and social inequalities in the tea industry, including the ways in which these inequalities affect wages, working conditions, and opportunities for advancement.
- d. **Worker well-being:** Research is needed to understand the impact of working conditions on worker well-being, including physical and mental health outcomes. This can help to identify potential interventions to improve worker well-being.
- e. **Environmental sustainability:** There is a need for more research on the environmental sustainability of the tea industry, including the impact of agricultural practices on natural resources and the potential for sustainable development in the industry.
- f. **Consumer behavior:** Research is needed to understand consumer behavior and preferences related to tea consumption, including their willingness to pay for ethical and sustainable tea products. This can help to inform the development of certification schemes and other initiatives aimed at promoting ethical and sustainable tea production.
- g. **Policy interventions:** Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of policy interventions aimed at improving wages, working conditions, and labor practices in the tea industry. This can help to identify best practices and inform future policy decisions.

K. CONCLUDING REMARKS

In conclusion, the issues of wages divergence and malfeasance with tea garden workers in Bangladesh are significant and require comprehensive and sustained efforts by multiple stakeholders to address them. The recommendations to improve transparency and accountability, enhance social protection, strengthen collective bargaining, promote responsible investment, and encourage stakeholder engagement are key to achieving a more equitable and sustainable tea industry in Bangladesh. It is essential to prioritize the needs and rights of tea garden workers in this process and to work towards building a more just and fair industry for all stakeholders involved. By implementing these recommendations, we can make progress towards ensuring that tea garden workers in Bangladesh are able to receive fair and transparent wages, work in safe and healthy conditions, and enjoy the benefits of social protection, collective bargaining, responsible investment, and stakeholder engagement.

REFERENCES

- 1) Bangladesh Tea Board. (2015). *TEA JOURNAL OF BANGLADESH*. বাংলাদেশ চা বোর্ড-গণপ্রজাতন্ত্রী বাংলাদেশ সরকার. https://teaboard.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/teaboard.portal.gov.bd/publications/bf134ff6_a2c1_40ea_9701_3e43de69ec1a/BTRI_Journal_Vol._44_2015.pdf
- 2) Aljazeera. (2022, August 21). *Why are Bangladesh tea garden workers protesting?* Breaking News, World News and Video from Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/8/21/why-are-bangladesh-tea-workers-protesting>
- 3) Begum, N., Hashmi, N., & Ali, M. M. (2022, December). *Current Scenario of Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: Time Demands to Stop the Zero-sum Game*. ResearchGate | Find and share research. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/366514534_Current_Scenario_of_Tea_Garden_Workers_in_Bangladesh_Time_Demands_to_Stop_the_Zero-sum_Game

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

- 4) UN News Global perspective Human stories. (2021, March 23). *Exploited and marginalized, Bangladeshi tea workers speak up for their rights*. UN News. <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/03/1087622>
- 5) Pantha, R. R., & Rezwana. (2022, September 5). *How can tea workers in Bangladesh survive on a daily wage of less than 2 USD?* Global Voices. <https://globalvoices.org/2022/09/05/how-can-tea-workers-in-bangladesh-survive-on-a-daily-wage-of-less-than-2-usd/>
- 6) THE HINDU. (2022, August 13). *Bangladeshi tea workers strike against low wages*. The Hindu: Breaking News, India News, Sports News and Live Updates. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/bangladeshi-tea-workers-strike-against-low-wages/article65765582.ece>
- 7) Philip, G. (2022, August 22). *Fairer wages, or more broken promises for tea workers?* The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/fairer-wages-or-more-broken-promises-tea-workers-3100786>
- 8) The Financial Express. (2022, August 28). *Tea estates in Sylhet come alive as workers return after a wage hike*. <https://thefinancialexpress.com.bd/national/tea-estates-in-sylhet-come-alive-as-workers-return-after-a-wage-hike-1661677894>
- 9) Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (2022, August 16). *Bangladesh: Nearly 150,000 workers at 200+ tea plantations strike for pay rise*. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/bangladesh-nearly-150000-workers-at-200-bangladeshi-tea-plantations-strike-for-pay-rise/>
- 10) Ahmed, N., & Kashem, A. (2019). *Health and Hygiene Practice of Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh*. Global Journals Incorporated USA Research Publishing. https://globaljournals.org/GJHSS_Volume19/4-Health-and-Hygiene-Practice-of-Tea.pdf
- 11) Masum, B. (2022, August 23). *Shocked by tea workers' wages? Everyone else is not doing any better*. The Business Standard. <https://www.tbsnews.net/features/panorama/shocked-tea-workers-wages-everyone-else-not-doing-any-better-482190>
- 12) International Labour Organization. (2019, December 20). *Tea workers are underpaid, deprived and discriminated: Labour law should be amended*. https://www.ilo.org/dhaka/Informationresources/Publicinformation/features/WCMS_749580/lang--en/index.htm
- 13) Siegmann, K. M., Ananthakrishnan, S., Fernando, K., & Joseph, K. J. (2019, December). *Fairtrade certified Tea in the Hired Labour Sector in India and Sri Lanka: Impact Study and Baseline Data Collection*. ResearchGate | Find and share research. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346489083_Fairtrade_certified_Tea_in_the_Hired_Labour_Sector_in_India_and_Sri_Lanka_Impact_Study_and_Baseline_Data_Collection
- 14) Peoples, D. (2020, October 3). *Sri Lankan tea estate workers agitate for better pay*. NewsClick. <https://www.newsclick.in/Sri-Lankan-Tea-Estate-Workers-Agitate-Better-Pay>
- 15) Business & Human Rights Resource Centre. (2019, February 10). *Sri Lanka: Tea workers demand increased minimum daily wage*. <https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/latest-news/sri-lanka-tea-workers-demand-increased-minimum-daily-wage/>
- 16) Society for Environment and Human Development. (2009, August). *The story of tea workers in Bangladesh*. SEHD – Society for Environment and Human Development. <https://sehd.org/the-story-of-tea-workers-in-bangladesh/>
- 17) Star, R. (2022, August 28). *Tea workers' wages: PM sets it at Tk 170 a day*. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/tea-workers-wages-pm-sets-it-tk-170-day-3104596>
- 18) Philip, G. (2023, January 29). *No justice in paying tea workers' arrears*. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/no-justice-paying-tea-workers-arrears-3232926>
- 19) UN Sustainable Development Group. (2021, April 22). *UNSDG | Social protection for female tea garden workers and their families in the Sylhet Division*. United Nations Sustainable Development Group. <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/social-protection-female-tea-garden-workers-and-their-families-sylhet-division>
- 20) SYFUL, I. (2022, August 22). *Bangladesh tea strike spotlights poorest workers' inflation plight*. Nikkei Asia. <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Inflation/Bangladesh-tea-strike-spotlights-poorest-workers-inflation-plight>
- 21) Philip, G. (2020, September 9). *Time to pay just wages to tea workers*. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/news/time-pay-just-wages-tea-workers-1958161>
- 22) Majumder, S. C., & Roy, S. C. (2011, October). *Socio-economic Conditions of Tea Plantation Workers in Bangladesh: A Case Study on Sreemongal*. ResearchGate | Find and share research. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/274180936_Socio-economic_Conditions_of_Tea_Plantation_Workers_in_Bangladesh_A_Case_Study_on_Sreemongal
- 23) Opu, M. H. (2021, August 25). *Survey: 74% tea garden workers still living in poverty*. Dhaka Tribune.

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

- <https://archive.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2021/08/25/survey-74-tea-garden-workers-still-living-in-poverty>
- 24) Zaman, M. O., & Abir, T. M. (2017, January). *The Process of Social Exclusion of Tea Garden Workers: A Study on Sylhet City Corporation, Bangladesh*. ResearchGate | Find and share research.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/333339203_The_Process_of_Social_Exclusion_of_Tea_Garden_Workers_A_Study_on_Sylhet_City_Corporation_Bangladesh
- 25) Hossain, R. (2021, October). *Social exclusion of tea plantation workers in Bangladesh*. ResearchGate | Find and share research.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361456814_Social_exclusion_of_tea_plantation_workers_in_Bangladesh
- 26) Huq, C. (2013, November 8). *Mobilizing for tea garden workers in South Asia*. Law at the Margins.
<https://lawatthemargins.com/mobilizing-for-tea-garden-workers-in-south-asia/>
- 27) Deshwara, M. (2022, August 26). *Tea workers' strike: Owners of tea estates to meet PM tomorrow*. The Daily Star.
<https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/tea-workers-strike-no-headway-ending-deadlock-yet-3103286>
- 28) Correspondent, S. (2022, March 29). *'Social protection, education of women and children in tea gardens should be emphasised'*. Prothomalo. <https://en.prothomalo.com/bangladesh/social-protection-education-of-women-and-children-in-tea-gardens-should-be-emphasised>
- 29) Khisa, P., & Iqbal, M. (2001, December). *TEA MANUFACTURING IN BANGLADESH: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS*. Welcome to Department of Mechanical Engineering, BUET | Welcome.
[https://me.buet.ac.bd/icme/icme2001/cdfiles/Papers/Manufacturing/15_MP-26_final\(85-91\).pdf](https://me.buet.ac.bd/icme/icme2001/cdfiles/Papers/Manufacturing/15_MP-26_final(85-91).pdf)
- 30) Correspondent, S. (2022, August 28). *Tea estates in Sylhet come alive as workers return after a wage hike*. bdnews24.com.
<https://bdnews24.com/bangladesh/hicthg4g5o>
- 31) Barkat, A., Mahiyuddin, G., Shaheen, N., Poddar, A., Osman, A., Rahman, M., & A, R. (2010, September). *Assessment of the Situation of Children and Women in the Tea Gardens of Bangladesh*. HDRC – Human Development Research Centre.
<https://www.hdrc-bd.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/20.-Assessment-of-the-situation-of-children-and-women-in-the-tea-gardens-of-Bangladesh.pdf>
- 32) Islam, G. M., Iqbal, M., Quddus, K. G., & Ali, M. Y. (2005, January). *PRESENT STATUS AND FUTURE NEEDS OF TEA INDUSTRY IN BANGLADESH*. ResearchGate | Find and share research.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237278073_PRESENT_STATUS_AND_FUTURE_NEEDS_OF_TEA_INDUSTRY_IN_BANGLADESH
- 33) Alam, M., & Akter, S. (n.d.). *Tea Production and Trade Advances in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis in Global Market*. IOSR Journal. <https://www.iosrjournals.org/iosr-jbm/papers/Vol17-issue6/Version-3/B017631020.pdf>
- 34) BBC News. (2002, January 29). *BBC news | Business | Bangladesh tea exports fall*.
<https://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/business/1788816.stm>
- 35) Tribune, D. (2022, August 18). *BTA claims tea workers get Tk400 daily wages, other benefits*. Dhaka Tribune - Current & Breaking News Bangladesh & World. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2022/08/18/bta-claims-tea-workers-get-tk400-daily-wages-other-benefits>
- 36) UNB. (2022, August 25). *Tea workers continue strike for tk300-a-day wages*. Dhaka Tribune - Current & Breaking News Bangladesh & World. <https://www.dhakatribune.com/bangladesh/2022/08/25/tea-workers-continue-strike-for-tk-300-a-day-wages>
- 37) Mondal, S. C., Hwang, H., & Eun, J. (2021, March). *Tea Production, Processing, and Socio-economic Status in Bangladesh*. ResearchGate | Find and share research.
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/351550448_Tea_Production_Processing_and_Socio-economic_Status_in_Bangladesh
- 38) Sumi, R. S. (2019, May). *Demand Analysis of Domestic Tea Market in Bangladesh: An Empirical Investigation*. Repository Home. <https://repository.library.du.ac.bd:8080/bitstream/handle/123456789/1601/Razia%20Sultana%20Sumi.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- 39) Partha, K. (2019, February 23). *Story of tea garden workers*. The Asian Age.
<https://dailyasianage.com/news/164852/story-of-tea-garden-workers>
- 40) Parvin, D. R. (n.d.). *Health and Economic Conditions of Tea Garden Female Workers: A Study on Legal Rights*. Green University of Bangladesh. https://green.edu.bd/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Health-and-Economic-Conditions-of-Tea-Garden-Female-Workers_A-Study-on-Legal-Rights.pdf
- 41) Rowlatt, J. (2016, November 12). *Indian tea workers' conditions remain very poor*. BBC News.
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-37936349>

Wages Divergence and Malfeasance with Tea Garden Workers in Bangladesh: A Comparative Analysis with Suggestion for the Policymakers

- 42) Chandan, M. S., & Deshwara, M. (2022, August 27). *Plight and struggle of tea workers continue forever*. The Daily Star. <https://www.thedailystar.net/weekend-read/news/tears-tea-gardens-3104101>
- 43) Rahman, M. M. (2020). *Wages Diversity and Negligence: A Comparative Study of Tea Garden Workers in Sylhet Region, Bangladesh*. Sryahwa Publications | Open Access Journals. <https://www.sryahwapublications.com/open-journal-of-economics-and-commerce/pdf/v3-i1/4.pdf>
- 44) Begum, N., Hashmi, N., & Ali, M. M. (2022, December). *View of current scenario of tea garden workers in Bangladesh: Time demands to stop the zero-sum game*. Global Mainstream Journal. <https://globalmainstreamjournal.com/index.php/BEDPM/article/view/36/26>
- 45) Sarmah, M., & Barooah, B. C. (2022, November 4). *View of reproductive rights of women in India with focus on tea plantation workers of Sonitpur district of Assam, India*. Thai Journals Online (ThaiJO). <https://so02.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/hasss/article/view/259257/174022>
- 46) Vijesandiran, P. S. (2022, September). *LIVING WAGE FOR THE TEA ESTATE WORKERS IN SRI LANKA*. <https://www.isdkandy.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Rapid-estimation-LW-for-Plantion-workers-ISD-3rd-study-2022-1.pdf>
- 47) Islam, M. N., & Al-Amin, M. (2019, January 2). *Life behind leaves: Capability, poverty and social vulnerability of tea garden workers in Bangladesh*. Taylor & Francis. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0023656X.2019.1623868?journalCode=clah20>
- 48) Rajbangshi, P. R., & Nambiar, D. (2020, February 28). *“Who will stand up for us?” the social determinants of health of women tea plantation workers in India*. BioMed Central. <https://equityhealthj.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12939-020-1147-3>
- 49) Jegathesan, M. (2015, April 23). *Deficient realities: Expertise and uncertainty among tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka*. SpringerLink. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10624-015-9386-1>
- 50) Uddin, I., Haque, S., Huda, F. A., Zahir, A. A., & Sonia, J. F. (2020, January). *INCOME VULNERABILITY OF TEA GARDEN WORKERS IN BANGLADESH*. ResearchGate | Find and share research. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Abdullah-Al-Zabir/publication/338700797_INCOME_VULNERABILITY_OF_TEA_GARDEN_WORKERS_IN_BANGLADESH/links/5e25e2f9299bf1031e27ae8d/INCOME-VULNERABILITY-OF-TEA-GARDEN-WORKERS-IN-BANGLADESH.pdf
- 51) Kamruzzaman, M., Parveen, S., & Das, A. C. (2015, January). *Livelihood Improvement of Tea Garden Workers: A Scenario of Marginalized Women Group in Bangladesh*. ResearchGate | Find and share research. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Animesh-Das-8/publication/281507302_Livelihood_Improvement_of_Tea_Garden_Workers_A_Scenario_of_Marginalized_Women_Group_in_Bangladesh/links/596108ee0f7e9b81943f5598/Livelihood-Improvement-of-Tea-Garden-Workers-A-Scenario-of-Marginalized-Women-Group-in-Bangladesh.pdf
- 52) CEIC. (2018, December 5). *Sri Lanka average daily wage: Tea & rubber estate workers*. Global Economic Data, Indicators, Charts & Forecasts | CEIC. <https://www.ceicdata.com/en/sri-lanka/average-daily-wage/average-daily-wage-tea--rubber-estate-workers>
- 53) Nousheen, S. (2022, October 11). *Systematic Exploitation of the Tea Workers in Bangladesh: Within the Legal Framework and Beyond*. Dhaka Law Review. <https://www.dhakalawreview.org/blog/2022/10/systematic-exploitation-of-the-tea-workers-in-bangladesh-within-the-legal-framework-and-beyond-6124#:~:text=While%20employees%20in%20other%20businesses,of%20the%20Constitution%20of%20Bangladesh>
- 54) The Borgen Project. (2021, August 23). *The exploitation of tea plantation workers in Sri Lanka* -. <https://borgenproject.org/tea-plantation-workers-in-sri-lanka/>



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.