

STOCKHOLM SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS

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# TRAINED BUT TRAPPED?

A case study on capacity building and female garment workers' well-being  
on and beyond the shop floor in Bangladesh

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The purpose of this thesis is to illustrate how capacity-building training impacts women's well-being. The study was carried out using a case-study approach on a women's training centre in Bangladesh and 25 women that had previously undergone training were interviewed. Their stories were analysed using the capability approach theorised from a critical realist stance. The results show that the training leads to paid garment work, which has mixed effects on women's well-being. However, the overall impacts appear to be predominantly positive compared to the women's prior situation. The women furthermore consider garment work only a temporary solution in their lives. Hence, our thesis raises the question whether training women to become garment workers can be considered sustainable. The study adds to the research on the impacts of corporations' social initiatives and on the well-being of garment workers both on and beyond the shop floor. Further, the thesis examines well-being through a bottom-up perspective, adding to the current social sustainability discourse. Lastly, this case study shows how capacity building and paid work can assume a social-welfare function in the women's lives, thus demonstrating how corporations' boundaries of responsibility may change depending on the context.

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Keywords: Social Sustainability, Capacity Building, Female Garment Workers, Well-Being, Capability Approach

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## THE TRAINING CENTRE

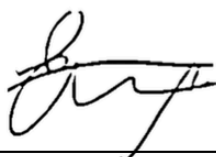
Thank you for giving us the opportunity to conduct this case study

## SUSANNE SWEET

Thank you for your support to guide us through this process

## THE WOMEN

Thank you for openly sharing your life stories



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Emma Nylöf



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## Glossary of terms and abbreviations

Top-down	Refers to the perspective of global and national actors that are not individuals (Prentice, De Neve, Mezzadri, & Ruwanpura, 2018)
Bottom-up	Refers to the perspective of the workers' lived experiences (Prentice et al., 2018)
Capacity building	The process through which individuals, organisations, and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capacities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time (Wignaraja, 2009)
Sweatshop	Describes the unsanitary, crowded and dreadfully hot conditions of garment factory work (Fenwick, 2008)
NGO	Non-governmental organisation (NGO) is a legally constituted organisation created with no participation or representation of any government. It is usually task oriented and focuses on specific issues such as human rights, environment, gender or health (Carlson, 2018)
RMG	Ready-made-garments (RMG) are mass-produced finished textile products of the apparel industry. The clothing is furthermore a highly labour-intensive, low-technology product (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2018)
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is a management idea in which enterprises give consideration to the impacts of their operations on society and affirm their principles and values both in their own internal methods and processes and in their interaction with other actors (Crane, Matten, & Spence, 2019).
BDT	The currency of Bangladesh, the Bangladeshi taka (BDT). USD1 equals BDT84.50 (Central Bank of Bangladesh, 2019)
CA	Capability approach, the theoretical framework used in this thesis
TC	Training centre, the case studied in this thesis

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The global ready-made-garment (RMG) sector is one of the world's most female-dominated industries (Rock, 2003) and the sector supplies major corporations, such as Wal-Mart, Sears, and Inditex (Anisul Huq, Stevenson, & Zorzini, 2014). The sector has employed unskilled, uneducated rural women because they can pay them low wages and ensure high administrative control (Sikhdar, Sarkar, & Sadeka, 2014). In Bangladesh, almost 90% of the RMG workforce is female (Sharmin, Hamid, & Muda, 2019) and Dey and Basak (2017) argue that this labour exploitation has both developed and sustained the sector. Contributing to the strong economic growth of Bangladesh, the sector now accounts for over 80% of the nation's export earnings (Akhter, Rutherford, & Chu, 2019). Although it has thereby contributed to the country's poverty reduction and increased women's income opportunities, the social development has not been on par with the economic progress (Khosla, 2009).

Instead, women in the RMG sector are the lowest paid workers in the world (Sharmin et al., 2019) and "[t]he unsanitary, crowded, and dreadfully hot conditions" of garment work have long been notorious (Fenwick, 2008, p. 110). The women in the sector face huge risks of negative effects to their well-being, they still lack basic education, and most of them have constrained rights in society (Akhter et al., 2019). Garment work has moreover been shown to increase the women's overall workload, their anxiety and stress levels, as well as the risk of facing stigma in society (Evertsen & van der Geest, 2019).

Consequently, the industry's reputation has for long been questioned and a more recent wave of scepticism was triggered by the 2013 collapse of the Bangladeshi garment factory Rana Plaza. The disastrous event caused the death of over a thousand, mainly female workers and it exposed the world to the brutal sweatshop conditions the women have to work under (Prentice & De Neve, 2017). Many questioned Western buyers' lack of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and indeed, the scale of tragedy galvanised many actors into coordinated efforts to address the industry's challenges (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2018). However, the impacts of these efforts have been questioned and only few times have the voices of the female workers been heard.

## 1.2 Problematisation

Over the past three decades, Western corporations have widely adopted labour codes on health and safety across their value chains in the RMG sector, but the collapse of Rana Plaza substantially intensified these initiatives (Prentice & De Neve, 2017). Consequently, the garment industry has

received much attention and many scholars have examined the impacts of imposing Western codes of conduct in a top-down fashion to improve safety in the sector (Anisul Huq et al., 2014; Bartley & Egels-Zandén, 2015). Others have also explored the general dynamics of female garment work and many show that increased income and decision-making authority are outcomes that may improve the female workers' well-being (Akhter et al., 2019; Esplen & Brody, 2007).

Yet, little is known from the perspective of developing countries regarding social sustainability (Anisul Huq et al., 2014) and few scholars have researched the bottom-up view of the garment sector's impacts on female workers' well-being (Prentice et al., 2018). Furthermore, despite many initiatives to improve the workplace, progress has been slow (Kabeer, Huq, & Sulaiman, 2019) and too often in their working lives, female garment workers still encounter distinctive vulnerabilities (Prentice & De Neve, 2017). This undermines not only the women's long-term health and well-being but also the sustainability of their employment (Prentice & De Neve, 2017). Thus, even though societal change through economic empowerment is critical in enabling socially-excluded populations to meet their basic needs (Werner, 2009), it cannot be assumed that increased income from garment work brings automatic benefits for women (Esplen & Brody, 2007).

Several scholars therefore suggest to focus on capacity-building initiatives and moving beyond outcome-based approaches (Sadeghi, Arezoumandan, & Nejati, 2015; Vallance, Perkins, & Dixon, 2011). Others also argue that the well-being of factory workers need to be studied beyond the shop floor and more emphasis must be given to the wider interactions of the workers' everyday life and well-being (Akhter et al., 2019; Prentice et al., 2018). We therefore find several reasons to be critical about the transformative potential of current initiatives that take a top-down approach rather than incorporating the perspective of the workers and their well-being (Akhter et al., 2019; Anisul Huq et al., 2014; Prentice et al., 2018).

Although there is an apparent need for research on women workers' well-being from a bottom-up perspective, most research within this sector and within the overall social sustainability discourse has been limited to quantitative methods and instrumental measurements (Munzel, Meyer-Waarden, & Galan, 2018; Vallance et al., 2011). Moreover, we have found only few capacity-building initiatives in this sector further limiting the potential to investigate this setting and Werner (2009) provides a similar view. Hence, given the problematisation of the current situation in the RMG sector, we find it necessary to research a social sustainability initiative that focuses on capacity building in the garment sector. We also find it necessary to gain access to the female workers' experiences that have participated in a capacity-building initiative in order to build a bottom-up understanding of potential impacts on their well-being.



### 1.3 Case studied

Given our problematisation and research gap (further elaborated in 2.1.3), we have studied a garment sewing training centre (TC) in the Dhaka district, Bangladesh, which is financed by a European apparel retailer (the Retailer) and run together with a local non-governmental organisation (NGO). The TC was established in 2011 with the aim to improve underprivileged women's well-being through training and subsequent work in the export-oriented RMG sector, see Appendix I. The women receive three months of full-time training on technical and theoretical skills, and thus far have over 600 women undergone the training, see Appendix II. In addition, the TC seeks to build the women's confidence by discussing empowerment and gender equality as well as by increasing the women's awareness of their rights. The TC also provides guidance on health and basic household economy. Moreover, the TC visits the women at their home and aims to build a women's network around them to strengthen them socially and in the workplace. In Table 1, the intended outcomes of the training are summarised. Altogether, they are aimed at increasing the women's well-being.

*Table 1: Intended outcomes of the TC*

Intended outcomes for the women:
1. To participate in the formal work sector
2. To be empowered
3. To be healthy
4. To be hopeful and optimistic about the future

*Source: Own illustration*

Furthermore, although having operated for little over eight years, there has not yet been any bottom-up assessment of the TC's impacts on the women's lives. Altogether, this setting therefore provides a valuable opportunity allowing us to explore the women's experiences and potential impacts of the TC on the women's well-being.

### 1.4 Research aim and contribution

By addressing the research gap, we aim to investigate whether a bottom-up perspective enhances the understanding of capacity-building initiatives. We thereby aim to enrich the academic field of social sustainability, more specifically, we aim to contribute to the current social sustainability discourse by taking a bottom-up perspective on well-being. Furthermore, by bringing forward the experiences of female garment workers, we seek to derive implications that may guide corporations' social sustainability efforts.

### 1.4.1 Research question

To specify the aim of this thesis, we will examine the following research question:

*How does capacity-building training impact the well-being of women?*

To answer the research question, we first need to gain an understanding of what factors may determine the women's well-being, and then we may assess how the TC's training impact these factors. Hence, we derive two additional research topics that will guide this research, see Figure 1:

Guiding topic 1: Factors that determine the women's well-being

Guiding topic 2: The training's impact on these factors

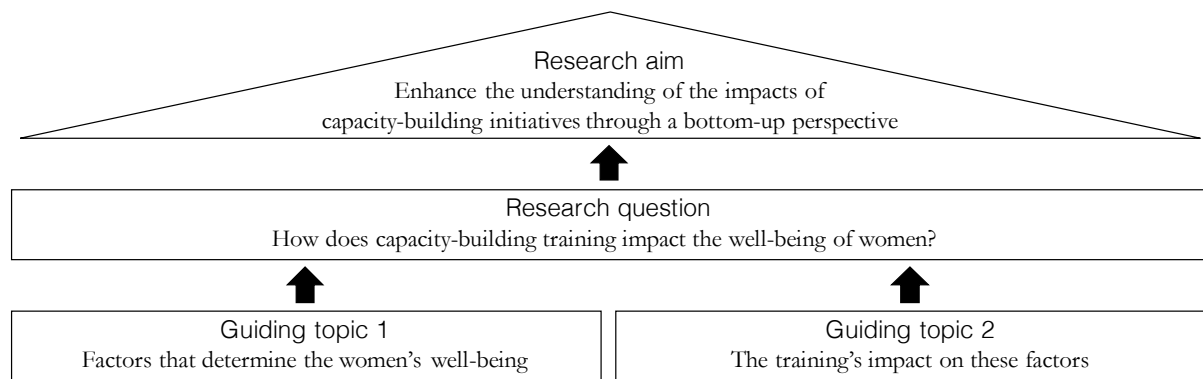


Figure 1: Research strategy  
Source: Own illustration

### 1.5 Delimitations

The case study of the TC gives a natural delimitation by focusing on its capacity-building training for women in Bangladesh. Accordingly, we limit the thesis to the well-being of women and also to the export-oriented RMG sector. Moreover, although the geographical region covered in our case is Bangladesh, the literature review also takes a wider scope of female factory workers within a South Asian context due to social and cultural commonalities (Gardner & Osella, 2003).

### 1.6 Research outline

The remainder of the thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 depicts previous research relevant to our study, which is then assessed to identify and motivate our research gap. We end Chapter 2 by presenting our theoretical framework, which we base on the capability approach from a critical realist perspective. In Chapter 3, we outline our research design and methodology. The empirical results are presented in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, we analyse the study's findings by using an explanation-building technique to match the patterns from the empirical data to the theoretical framework. In Chapter 6, we discuss our results and highlight limitations and areas of future research. Chapter 7 concludes the thesis.

## 2 Theory

We begin this chapter by presenting our literature review, which is then synthesised as our identified research gap. Based on the assessment of previous literature, we end the chapter by depicting the theoretical framework that is used in our research.

### 2.1 Literature review

The literature review begins with delineating relevant fields of key social sustainability literature in 2.1.1. We then build on this section by reviewing literature that has researched women's well-being in 2.1.2.

#### 2.1.1 The social dimension in sustainable development

In the contemporary global business setting, corporations are expected to achieve viable economic growth and increase competitiveness, and at the same time consider and contribute to the sustainable development of the environment and society (Krstović, Bakić, & Kostić, 2012). However, over the past decades, the environmental and economic issues have dominated the debates about sustainable development and the social perspective is largely ignored (Munzel et al., 2018). According to Anisul Huq et al. (2014), it is only recently that social sustainability has become part of mainstream management literature and some of its main key themes involve the notion of humans' basic needs and rights; access to education and skills; empowerment and social participation; and well-being (Colantonio, 2009).

Moreover, the attention of available literature on social sustainability remains focused on developed rather than developing countries, and contextual factors are considerably neglected in the ongoing academic discussion (Anisul Huq et al., 2014). Banerjee (2003) similarly argues that most management theories seldom question whose norms are used when assessing social sustainability. Consequently, most models of social sustainability are based on the conditions of Western countries (Fox, 2004) and Vallance et al. (2011) argue that this has led to the assumption that the criteria for basic development are already fulfilled. This overlooks the realities of many developing countries and hence there is only limited understanding of how socially sustainable practices should be constructed, diffused and assessed in these contexts (Anisul Huq et al., 2014).

To fully capture the theoretical field relevant to our thesis, we therefore find it necessary to first examine the implications of how the general social sustainability discourse is shaped in 2.1.1.1. In 2.1.1.2, we review research on current social sustainability initiatives and the implications of the findings are presented in 2.1.1.3.

#### 2.1.1.1 The social sustainability discourse

Evidently, there is a substantial lack of both theoretical and empirical studies within the social dimension of sustainable development (Åhman, 2013; Munzel et al., 2018). Two primary reasons can be found. Firstly, social aspects have often been discussed as simply the causes of, or possible solutions to, environmental problems (Åhman, 2013). Thus, it has been conceptually difficult to distinguish between social and ecological sustainability (Foladori, 2005). Secondly, economic sustainability raises more concerns than social aspects because it is usually used as a synonym for economic growth and productive efficiency (Foladori, 2005). Consequently, most measurements of sustainable development are supported and justified by utilitarian and instrumental notions (Banerjee, 2003; Foladori, 2005), hence limiting social sustainability to the theoretical and methodological constraints that are inherent in these views (Colantonio, 2009).

According to Banerjee (2003), this is problematic because imposing income-based metrics to measure social development may disempower the majority of the world's populations, and it can only render a partial picture of humans' well-being (Grasso & Di Giulio, 2003). Robeyns (2017) also argues that GDP or GNP are in fact too weak as determinants of for example the shortfall in health in developing countries, which thus makes them insignificant as yardsticks for the evaluation of social progress. Hence, although economic empowerment has been critical in driving social change for socially-excluded populations (Werner, 2009), attention should also be directed to other values such as individuals' well-being, freedom, and justice (Esplen & Brody, 2007). More specifically, Robeyns (2017) calls for research that take a bottom-up view of individuals' lives and which studies their capacities and opportunities beyond material means to well-being.

Be that as it may, Grasso and Di Giulio (2003) show that the critique towards traditional utilitarian measures is quite widely accepted by social scientists. Panda and Agarwal (2005) also argue that there is indeed a widespread acceptance in academia that development needs to be evaluated not only in terms of economic growth but also by understanding the advancement of humans and their capacities. Foladori (2005) likewise states that the concept of social development has evolved in this direction and Sadeghi, Arezoumandan and Nejati (2015) furthermore show that the notion of building particularly women's capacities is, in fact, one of the most central objectives to sustainable development today.

However, given the power of prevailing assumptions of how to measure social development, both Banerjee (2003) and Grasso and Di Giulio (2003) acknowledge that only a critical perspective may enable scholars to construct knowledge that can fill these gaps and holistically assess capacity-building efforts. This also goes in line with more contemporary research where for example Vallance et al. (2011) argue that future studies within social sustainability need to rely less on

quantitative data, and more on qualitative and critical research to stimulate new discussions around the distribution of power, employment and freedom. Like Sadeghi et al. (2015), they call for complementary discussions on capacity building among individuals, and similar to Banerjee (2003) and Robeyns (2017) they also imply a more intensive focus on the bottom-up perspective within social sustainability. Concluding, although some contributions from recent scholars to shift the focus towards individuals and their capacities, the general social sustainability discourse appears fundamentally limited in its ability to sufficiently capture these people's realities.

#### 2.1.1.2 Social sustainability initiatives

The collapse of the Bangladeshi garment factory Rana Plaza in 2013 is one of history's deadliest industrial disasters killing over 1,100 mainly female workers and injuring more than 2,500 (Anisul Huq et al., 2014). This accident followed shortly after two other factory fires in Bangladesh that had killed over a hundred workers and the three factories were supplying major Western brands such as Primark, Benetton, Sears, Wal-Mart, and Inditex, the world's largest clothing retailer (Anisul Huq et al., 2014). Following the tragic events, Western apparel corporations faced increased pressure to pursue voluntary CSR commitments for improving the physical work environment (Bartley & Egels-Zandén, 2015).

As a result, Bangladesh has seen a wide range of attempts to prevent future disasters, where both Western buyers and local actors are increasingly focusing on improving the labour conditions of the sector (Hossain, 2012). Consequently, there is a plethora of social auditing initiatives in the apparel industry, yet none guarantee decent factory conditions (Egels-Zandén & Lindholm, 2015). Anisul Huq et al. (2014) show that there are many barriers to implementing social auditing initiatives in a top-down fashion, and the main reason is a misalignment between the requirements of Western codes of conduct and the local cultural and socio-economic context. Thus, according to Egels-Zandén and Lindholm (2015, p. 21) "it is surprising that corporations continue their multi-billions of investments in codes and auditing" given their evidently limited effects.

Furthermore, Prentice et al. (2018) argue that despite the rise of new regulatory instruments, most approaches to safety and health seem almost exclusively concerned with securing basic standards across the garment factories. Thus, the more diffuse experiences of workers' everyday well-being have been ignored and only limited efforts have been made to improve "softer" workplace factors for women; such as decreasing stress, improving ill health, and tackling sexual assault (Prentice et al., 2018). Hence, although a top-down imposition of labour standards may be better than having no standards at all, it does not substitute for building the workers' awareness and promoting the workers' rights long-term (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004).

Given the discussions of Vallance et al. (2011) and Sadeghi et al. (2015) in 2.1.1.1, one strategy that could potentially meet these needs is a capacity-building approach. In fact, a recent study by Akhter et al. (2019) specifically calls for more interventions that aim at building women's capacities in the RMG sector. Indeed, Bangladesh has seen some efforts that build women's capacities through work training. Our case, the TC, is one example and the NARI Project conducted by the World Bank and the Government of Bangladesh is another. With similar objectives to the TC, the NARI project has between 2011-2018 trained 8,000 Bangladeshi women to adjust to formal sector employment and the project also aims at increasing women's control over their income and decision-making power and strengthening their self-esteem (The World Bank, 2019). A third initiative is the CARE Rural Sales Programme that builds the ability of poor women to earn an income from their social network and it trains the participants in sales and enterprise development (Werner, 2009). A final example is Hathay Bunano, a social manufacturing enterprise which aims at alleviating poverty through employing illiterate and disabled women in Bangladesh. For eight weeks, 15-30 women undertake free work training and the model is said to empower the women by earning an income and by taking on responsibility for manufacturing (Werner, 2009).

However, although "empowering women" has become a frequently cited goal of development interventions, few projects define empowerment in its context, let alone assess whether and to what extent they have succeeded (Mosedale, 2005), see also 2.1.2.3. Instead, traditional development goals such as health and increased income are overattributed as evidence of successful impacts (Mosedale, 2005). Espen and Brody (2007) moreover argue that earning an income cannot be assumed to bring automatic benefits for women since these measures cannot capture contextual factors that may prevent women from gaining from the increased income. Instead, they argue that we need to ask questions of how increased access to resources can be translated into changes in the choices that women are able to make and these questions can particularly help to tease out the social and gendered dimensions of "empowerment", which are often absent from the mainstream discussions on women's well-being (Espen & Brody, 2007).

Accordingly, both the CARE programme and Hathay Bunano's training are assessed solely based on the increased income for the participating women (Werner, 2009). Similarly, the NARI project shows that 70% of their trained women take up paid employment in the garment sector (The World Bank, 2019) but does not (yet) present any follow-up data on the impacts on the women's decision-making power, self-esteem, and control over their income although they are distinctive objectives of the project. The assessment of the impacts of these initiatives therefore neglects the women's bottom-up view of what the training may mean in their lives, which suggests that the drawn conclusions are insufficient in determining the overall impacts.

### 2.1.1.3 Implications for research within social sustainability

The review above indicates two aspects that add to our research gap. Firstly, there is a gap in the social sustainability discourse in which the bottom-up view of individuals, their opportunities and capacities within their own context remains neglected. Secondly, most sustainability initiatives take a top-down approach and there are thus few efforts aimed at building women's capacities, although called for in academia. The initiatives who do take a capacity-building approach, still potentially overestimate the impacts of increased income and do not further assess the outcomes from the women's bottom-up perspective.

### 2.1.2 Women's well-being in Bangladesh

In the following section, we will elaborate on several contextual factors that may affect women's well-being in Bangladesh. We end this section by presenting potential gaps within the otherwise much-examined RMG sector before depicting our overall research gap.

#### 2.1.2.1 The role of women

Literature shows that women in Bangladesh suffer from gender inequalities (Kabeer, Mahmud, & Tasneem, 2011) and gender influences the ideas about the work women can do, their wages and their relationship to employers (Ascoly & Finney, 2005). In the RMG sector, women play a great role since there is an almost endless availability of poor, unskilled women with few employment alternatives which the industry has long been capitalising on (Sikhdar et al., 2014). They furthermore show that employers prefer female workers, not only because they are cheaper and more accessible, but also because they are more vulnerable and docile than male workers (Sikhdar et al., 2014). Women therefore tend to have less skilled jobs than men, their wages are lower than men's and they often work in more unhealthy and exploitative conditions (Mezzadri, 2016; Randriamaro, 2006).

There is furthermore a body of literature that has specifically pointed to the gender dynamics of factory work, which has seemingly produced new conditions of gender oppression (Dutta, 2019; Mezzadri, 2016). For example, women in the RMG sector in South Asia have been found to increasingly shoulder traditional male gender roles as "breadwinners", which has led to an intensification of their overall responsibilities (Dutta, 2019). Dutta (2019, p. 12) explains that "young women recount their everyday micro-scale struggles to rework oppressive labour relations within the household while still taking on more responsibilities". Mezzadri (2016) moreover shows that men's superior position in the RMG factories to a high degree resembles the division of labour inside the household, and this gender differential reflects the status of women as secondary workers although women constitute almost 90% of the labour force in Bangladesh (Sharmin et al., 2019).

It is furthermore shown that these structures may to a large degree be explained by local gender norms, which reinforce and legitimise women's subordinate roles (Mezzadri, 2016). For example, *adat* in Indonesia and *purdah* in Bangladesh may give husbands the right to decide for their wives and make decisions based on the entire household income (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2019; Rammohan & Johar, 2009). This is usually referred to as "patrilineal kinship" and women's autonomy is often low under this system (Rammohan & Johar, 2009). Hence, the "complex social-economic relations of families and how it is perceived by the larger community" are central (McDowell, Anitha, & Pearson, 2012, p. 135), and the household becomes an important analytical site to understand the place of women's labour (Dutta, 2019).

Furthermore, when women engage in paid work the prevailing kinship may require them to hand over their income to other superior family members, which means that being paid does not necessarily allow women full control of their own income (Rammohan & Johar, 2009). In addition, it may mean risking social stigmatisation since the women leave their traditional housewife role (Dutta, 2019; Ruwanpura, 2011) and the women may endure longer working days than their male counterpart since the double burden of paid and unpaid work is mostly shouldered by women (Esplen & Brody, 2007).

#### 2.1.2.2 Garment work

Around 5,000 garment factories employ more than four million workers in Bangladesh (Crinis, 2019). Yet, research shows that the sector inherits characteristics of informal work and the workers' rights are often non-existent (Kabeer & Mahmud, 2004). This is moreover reflected by the inhumane working hours where women work more than eleven hours a day, on average 26 days a month (Sikhdar et al., 2014). Kabeer & Mahmud (2004) moreover argue that despite the sector's global export success, garment work has not enabled women to organise themselves to negotiate better conditions, at work or in society. Ruwanpura (2011, p. 203) also shows that the subordinate role of the women gives them a "[p]erennial [...] fear in speaking up and raising concerns about their working conditions."

The research by Akhter et al. (2019) is furthermore one of few qualitative explorations of female workers' health after starting work in a garment factory in Bangladesh. Although previous literature shows that paid work in the garment sector may improve women's empowerment, their families' economic position, and the overall stability in life (Kabeer et al., 2011; Nazneen, Hossain, & Sultan, 2011), Akhter et al. (2019) show how female workers in the sector also face a high risk of physical health problems. This is moreover similar to the findings of Sikhdar et al. (2014). The study also describes how women feel insecure discussing their health needs with their male supervisors (Akhter et al., 2019). In addition, they illustrate how the work is so demanding that most women



cannot work for more than ten years and most female workers quit factory work before they reach 40 (Akhter et al., 2019).

#### 2.1.2.3 Women's empowerment

“To bring about empowerment in all its dimensions, economic opportunity cannot be understood [...] in isolation.” (Esplen & Brody, 2007, p. 2). Rather, women's empowerment is a highly contextualised, multi-dimensional process that involves a realisation and an awareness about women's capacities, rights and opportunities to fully participate in social, political and economic spheres of life (Esplen & Brody, 2007; Singhal, 2014). Kabeer (2005) also argues that it must be understood in relation to the people who are yearning for empowerment, since the women themselves may have differing perspectives of what it means. Approaches to assessing empowerment should moreover take social structures and agency into account (Leder, 2016) in order to assess if the women are able to make self-determined choices (Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer (1999) argues that three interrelated dimensions need to be considered. Firstly, the women's access to and control of resources; secondly, agency as in the ability to use these resources to bring about new opportunities; and thirdly, achievements as in the attainment of new social outcomes.

Yet, most applied approaches to understanding women's empowerment disregard contextual factors and there is also a disproportionate focus on women's empowerment in the domestic domain and far less attention is given to the workplace and society at large (Kabeer, 2008). Esplen and Brody (2007) moreover show that most development research focuses on how paid employment and increased income improve women workers' empowerment, in which the limitations have been highlighted above. Concluding, Hossain (2012) argues that the process of empowering women through paid work should therefore be considered insufficient and the demands and needs of female factory workers have moved beyond the limits of economic resources.

#### 2.1.2.4 Implications for research in the RMG sector

With little attention spent on what garment work and increased income may mean for women workers, a new research agenda in the otherwise well-researched RMG sector has been proposed by Prentice et al (2018). They argue that this agenda needs to be concerned with the health and well-being centred on the female workers' own understandings. It also enfold different aspects of garment labour, including its impact on the long-term well-being of workers by looking at workers' experiences 'beyond' the shop floor and after they leave garment employment. They mention that for an empirical focus on well-being in the RMG sector, it is also necessary to draw attention to the temporalities of work in order to fully capture the essence of how garment work affects the

current and future lives of the workers. This is moreover similar to the findings of the recent studies by both Dutta (2019) and Akhter et al (2019).

### 2.1.3 Research gap

The literature review highlights a distinct gap in the general social sustainability discourse in which the bottom-up view of individuals remains neglected (Robeyns, 2017), primarily due to the current discourse having been strongly influenced by the prevailing economic paradigm and instrumentalist views of society (Banerjee, 2003; Foladori, 2005). Vallance et al. (2011) therefore argue that future studies on social sustainability need to rely less on quantitative, outcome-based metrics and more on qualitative research to stimulate new types of discussions. Like Sadeghi et al. (2015), they moreover argue for the need to research capacity-building initiatives since the long-term impacts of other more Western, top-down approaches have been found limited (Vallance et al., 2011). Furthermore, the initiatives in Bangladesh that do take a capacity-building approach, still potentially overestimate the impact of increased income while neglecting contextual factors, and do not further assess the outcomes from the women's perspective (Esplen & Brody, 2007; Hossain, 2012).

Subsequently, this section unpacks the need for investigating capacity-building initiatives from the women's bottom-up perspective. To further motivate our empirical setting we turn to Prentice et al (2018) who specifically call for examining garment workers' well-being both on and beyond the shop floor. This is moreover highlighted by Akhter et al (2019) and it is sought for "a way to understand how garment work fits into and shapes the prospects for an individual's life trajectory" (Prentice et al., 2018, p. 158). Concluding, our assessment of previous literature shows that there is a need for bottom-up research regarding the impacts of capacity-building initiatives in the RMG sector on the women workers' well-being, on and beyond the shop floor.

## 2.2 Theoretical framework

The underpinning theoretical framework of this research is based on the capability approach (CA), which conceptualises the notion of well-being and thereby aids to pursue our research question. We begin by giving a short introduction to the CA and outlining its suitability for this thesis in 2.2.1. Subsequently, we will theorise the CA from a critical realist's perspective and contextualise it to our empirical setting in 2.2.3. Finally, we will conclude this chapter by deriving two sub-questions to our overall research question and topics in 2.2.3.4, further specifying our research endeavour.

### 2.2.1 The capability approach

The previously identified research gap within social sustainability and the apparent need for a change in the research agenda towards the understanding of individuals (see Prentice et al., 2018; Vallance et al., 2011), resembles in part the overall discourse in welfare economics. Both criticise

utilitarian and resource-based approaches, which remain prevailing despite the questions whether these are capable of capturing an individual's well-being sufficiently and whether a more complex reality is ignored (Grasso & Di Giulio, 2003; Kleine, 2010). One approach that has gained significant prominence in welfare economics over the past two decades is the CA by Amartya Sen (Robeyns, 2006). Within this approach, the focus of well-being is shifted from utility and resources to what people are capable of doing and being (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). The main argument to motivate this shift is the simple fact that two people with the same resources may not be capable of either doing the same things nor of being the same things (Sen, 1992).

The role of women in Bangladesh is a fitting example of this argument. With the societal and economic development of Bangladesh progressing at different paces (Khosla, 2009), an accurate picture of a woman's well-being is likely not going to be drawn using GDP per capita as a sole indicator. Yet, the CA does not disregard the importance of income, rather it is considered a means and not an end in terms of well-being (Grasso & Di Giulio, 2003). Instead, it is argued that well-being refers to the opportunity to have different capabilities and the freedom to achieve those capabilities that enable us "to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being" (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993, p. 30). Stressing the importance of information not included in utilitarian approaches, such as a person's physical needs, and social and moral aspects, the CA seeks to factor in the diversity of human beings and acknowledges the relevance of their individual contexts (Robeyns, 2003; Sen, 1979). Concluding, the focus of the CA, as well as its general purpose, resonates clearly with our ambition to contribute to the previously identified research gap and hence we consider it to be a fitting lens.

#### 2.2.1.1 Functionings and capabilities

The two main constituents that are key to the CA are capabilities and functionings, both of which refer to their own form of well-being. Capabilities are the opportunities – freedoms – to be or to do certain things, given a distinct set of resources within a respective context (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). The well-being inherent in the notion of capabilities arises from having the opportunities and the freedom to choose which opportunities to pursue. Functionings refer to the capabilities that one chooses to pursue and then achieves (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). They can range from being very basic (e.g. being well-fed) to rather complex (e.g. being respected within the social environment) (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993). Here, well-being arises from the achievement of the respective functionings. As previously mentioned, the CA suggests additional determining factors that influence one's capabilities besides material resources. These are referred to as conversion factors, which can be clustered into social, environmental and personal factors (Robeyns, 2017).

## 2.2.2 Relating the research question to the CA

Given our research question, it is important to understand the structure underlying the process of achieving well-being, which raises the question of how capabilities are created and under what circumstances functionings are achieved. Within his approach however, Sen does not give a clear answer to these questions and the conception of capabilities and functionings, as well as the relationship between the individual and contextual factors, remain abstract (Smith & Seward, 2009). This has sparked debates about what individual freedom is and on the role of human agency (Gasper, 2002).

Within the CA, the utmost importance is commonly attached to capabilities and not functionings (Robeyns, 2003). By doing this, one is not imposing judgement of which functionings are better than others (Robeyns, 2006), thereby “reflect[ing] the agency aspect of a person” (Comim, 2001, p. 4). In this respect, the CA has been criticised for potentially entailing a too individualistic perspective, neglecting constraints of human agency such as societal structures (Hill, 2003). However, Robeyns (2003) argues that the individualistic nature of the CA refers to the ethical level and that no ontological notion of individualism is imposed. Rather, the CA should be considered a “framework of thought” (Robeyns, 2003, p. 8) or “ontological exercise” (Martins, 2011, p. 4). Hence, it assumes the role of a tool to conceptualise development issues and requires further theorising (Kleine, 2010; Robeyns, 2017).

## 2.2.3 Theorising the CA

### 2.2.3.1 Critical realist perspective

Given that the CA constitutes an ontological exercise, an appropriate first step is to define the research paradigm. In this thesis, we take a critical realist perspective, which not only reflects our view on reality but is also considered a relevant perspective concerning the CA (Martins, 2006; Smith & Seward, 2009). Critical realists assume that there is an independent reality, which for the most part is unobservable (Easton, 2010). Moreover, this reality is considered to be stratified along three dimensions reaching from unobservable to observable (Mingers, 2006). First, in the real dimension causal mechanisms and structures exist, causing events to happen or not happen (Fletcher, 2017). Second, these events represent the actual dimension, and third, the empirical dimension consists of those events that are observed and experienced by individuals (Fletcher, 2017). The aim of critical realism is to “explain social events through reference to [the] causal mechanisms and the effects they can have throughout the three-layered [...] reality”, making it suitable for research on social development (Fletcher, 2017, p. 183).

We developed our theoretical framework, see Figure 2, by largely building on the work of:

- I. Sharon Tao (2013), who has developed a framework linking the concepts of the CA to the theory of causation found within critical realism
- II. Matthew Smith and Carolina Seward (2009), who link the CA to the notion of a relational society, thereby specifying the role of human agency and contextual structures

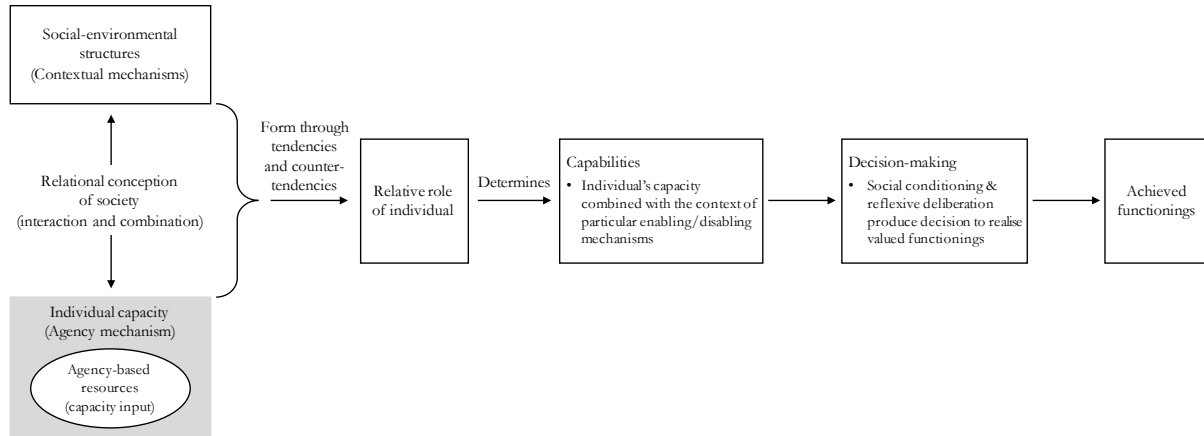


Figure 2: Theoretical framework

Source: Own illustration based on Smith & Seward (2009), Tao (2013)

The first issue that we address in our framework is the “structure-agency debate” regarding the relationship between individual and contextual factors (Smith & Seward, 2009, p. 221). Within this framework, the notion of a relational society is applied, implying that an individual must be considered within their relative position in the respective social-environmental structures (Smith & Seward, 2009). More specifically, individual capacities and social-environmental structures are seen as entities that act as causal mechanisms (i.e. agency and contextual mechanisms). Inputs influencing the individual capacity are interpreted as agency-based resources (Robeyns, 2003). Applying the notion of causality inherent in critical realism, these causal mechanisms are not deterministic but rather trigger tendencies, which interact in a continuous process through time (Bhaskar, 2013; Sayer, 2000). The notion of tendencies can be explained as:

*“[T]he world is highly complex and always determined by a multitude of factors. The notion of tendencies implies that causes are always a partial explanation of an outcome; that is, mechanisms are always acting and interacting in a context of other causes that generates the observed outcome (Dupré & Cartwright, 1988; Kincaid, 1996).”* (Smith & Seward, 2009, p. 217).

Moreover, these tendencies form a role that is assumed by an individual within the relational society and that determines what capabilities a person does or does not possess (Sayer, 2000). Deriving from this, capabilities will hereby be theorised as “the combination of an individual’s capacity to do something combined with the context of particular enabling (or disabling) mechanisms” (Smith & Seward, 2009, p. 218). Lastly, the formation of values is also considered to be conditioned by

the interaction of structure and agency (Tao, 2013). In her framework, Tao (2013, p. 8) describes this process as “social conditioning (structure) and reflexive deliberation (agency) interact to produce values.”. These values determine which capabilities the individual has reason to value, thereby influencing which capabilities are chosen to be achieved as functionings.

#### 2.2.3.2 Contextualisation

The theorisation in the previous paragraph has specified the conceptual understanding of the CA, yet it remains broad in its nature. This complicates the implementation in research (Comim, 2001; Grasso & Di Giulio, 2003), which has led to criticism by scholars about the practical value of the CA (e.g. Sugden, 1993). Sen acknowledges this and stresses the importance of adapting the approach to the respective context, thereby finding “a balance between its conceptual richness and its potential to be operationalised” (Kleine, 2010, p. 676). Robeyns (2017) suggests in this regard to flesh out concepts through a selection of specifications relevant to the context. This entails a strong simplification of the CA (Grasso & Di Giulio, 2003). However, it increases the observability of the sought-after aspects, facilitating the “translation of theoretical concepts into empirical ones” (Grasso & Di Giulio, 2003, p. 4).

Following the example of Kleine (2010), we enriched the concept of agency-based resources by incorporating a modified version of the livelihood asset classification as proposed by the UK’s ‘Department for International Development’ (DfID) (1999). Thereby, the definition of resources becomes more nuanced, highlighting the relevance of non-material resources such as psychological or educational resources. Table 2 provides an overview of the different types of resources considered in this thesis. Due to the non-material nature of the training, this facilitates the specification of the theoretical framework to the context of the TC.

*Table 2: Resource classification*

Type of resource	Description / Example
Educational resources (ER)	Education and skills
Financial resources (FR)	E.g. income, savings
Health (H)	Physical and mental health
Material resources (MR)	Material objects owned
Psychological resources (PR)	E.g. self-confidence, creativity

*Source: Kleine (2010) based on DfID (1999)*

### 2.2.3.3 Conceptualising the working of the TC

By using the theory of causation as well as the notion of a relational society, we specify both the concepts of the CA as well as their relationships more closely. This provides the structure required to pursue the explanatory nature of our thesis, allowing for a critical realist perspective. Moreover, we tailor the CA closely to our research setting. By doing this, the framework helps us to better understand and illustrate the intended workings of the TC, see Figure 3.

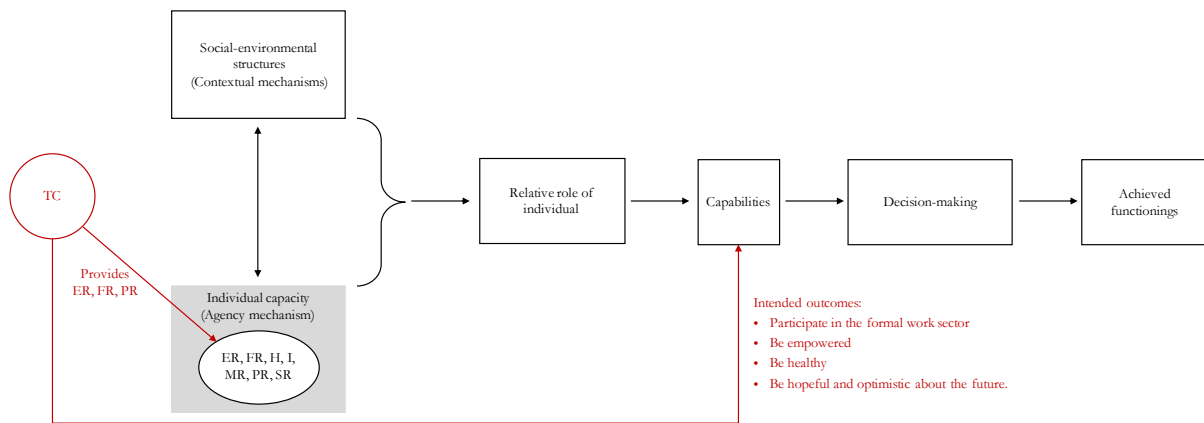


Figure 3: Contextualised theoretical framework

Source: Own illustration based on Smith & Seward (2009), Tao (2013)

The primary working of the training is to provide the women with resources. For this case study, the resources that represent inputs from the TC were specified in the following way, see also Appendix II:

- ER: Sewing skills, knowledge on working rights, health and nutrition, finances
- FR: Allowance during the traineeship
- PR: Self-confidence training, knowledge on empowerment and gender equality

These resources are meant to positively influence the women's well-being by expanding their capabilities through the achievement of intended outcomes, see Table 2. These outcomes serve as the starting point of our research endeavour.

### 2.2.3.4 Deriving contextualised sub-questions

The contextualised theoretical framework furthermore allows us to break down our initial research question by translating the guiding research topics into sub-questions that concretise and further facilitate our research, see Figure 4.

Firstly, the intended outcomes of the TC are defined a priori. This may potentially lead to a mismatch between the intended outcomes and the desired functionings that the trainees seek to achieve (Kleine, 2010). Moreover, it is assumed that the intended outcomes lead to increased well-

being and are thus of value to the trained women. However, capabilities in themselves are considered value-neutral since the value is attached by the respective individual and can vary from being positive to ambiguous to negative depending on the context (Robeyns, 2017). Therefore, it is important to assess whether the intended outcomes are valued by the trained women, giving rise to the first sub-question:

*Sub-question 1: “What are the underlying functionings the women seek to achieve and are these aligned with the intended outcomes of the TC?”*

Secondly, the resources provided by the TC are aimed at enhancing capabilities, thus providing real opportunities. However, the notion of a relational society and the derived definition of capabilities show the complexity of this matter, calling into question the actuality of these capabilities. Thus, Smith and Seward (2009) argue for the importance of understanding how capabilities are formed by the individual’s relative position in society.

Moreover, not only the existence but also the use of capabilities and the achievement of functionings need to be assessed. As mentioned above, the anticipated outcomes of the training are assumed to be value-positive. Given the value-neutral nature of capabilities, depending on the individual contexts of the women some of these capabilities may have a negative value to the respective individual. Together with the applied definition of value formation and decision-making within this thesis, this implies that under certain circumstances the women may not, or only to a limited extent, make use of existing capabilities. It is therefore important to understand under what circumstances certain functionings are chosen to be achieved (Smith & Seward, 2009). Accordingly, we pose the second sub-question in the following way:

*Sub-question 2: “Does the TC influence the achievement of the identified functionings and if so, how?”*

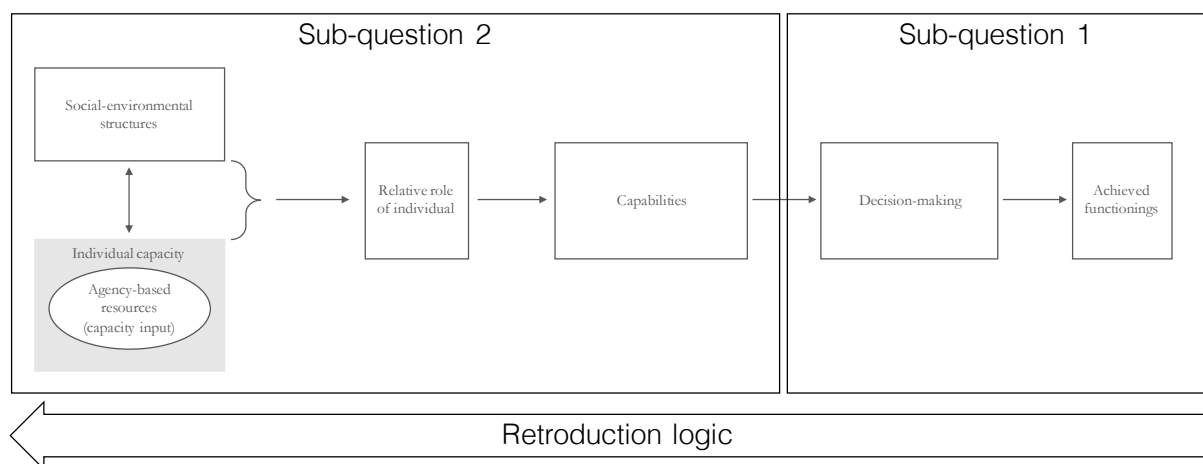


Figure 4: Retroduction logic of research approach  
Source: Own illustration



## 3 Research Design

### 3.1 Research Approach

The purpose of our thesis is of explanatory and descriptive nature. This is in line with the CA lens, for which both descriptive and explanatory analyses are considered suitable research strands (Robeyns, 2017). Moreover, given the critical realist's perspective, observations are considered to be theory-laden (Danermark, Ekstrom, & Jakobsen, 2005; Kuhn, 1970). In other words, knowledge is always socially constructed and critical realists recognise that this knowledge is fallible (Danermark et al., 2005). Theories are seen as a way to establish "truthlike" knowledge, which however will never be absolute (Danermark et al., 2005, p. 10). Knowledge is hence considered a continuous process and theories may always be replaced by other theories (Danermark et al., 2005).

These epistemological beliefs affected the methodological level of our research approach. For our thesis, we chose to conduct qualitative research; a decision that we substantiated with two arguments. Firstly, the notion of causality in critical realism can be advanced, according to which constant conjunctions of variables used in quantitative analyses are not considered to provide causal explanations (Easton, 2010). This highlights the relevance of qualitative research, which offered us the ability to gain in-depth knowledge and to reflect critically. The second argument concerns the CA, which in itself contains reasons for qualitative research. While scholars within the field of the CA have typically applied quantitative methods (Zimmermann, 2006), Robeyns (2017) points out the relevance of qualitative research in descriptive and explanatory analyses, acknowledging that certain complexities of the reality cannot be captured by quantitative methods. Additionally, Zimmermann (2006) calls for a stronger qualitative focus, arguing that freedom represents a dynamic process, which highlights a temporal dimension within the CA and requires qualitative assessment. This aspect is reflected in the framework, which displays the continuous interactions of the causal mechanisms.

Furthermore, our chosen research paradigm affected the modes of inference that we chose in our research approach. There are mainly two modes of inference used in critical realism, retrodution and abduction, which are often used in conjunction (Meyer & Lunnay, 2013). In this thesis, we thus applied both modes. Retrodution, meaning "moving backwards", is closely related to the ontological belief of a stratified reality (Easton, 2010, p. 123). Starting with the observations on the empirical level, one moves backwards seeking to understand why that observation happened in the way that it did. Hence, this logic was also in line with the derived sub-questions, starting with identifying functionings and moving backwards from there. The second mode of inference, abduction, tries to overcome the limitations that constrain deductive and inductive research

(Bryman & Bell, 2015). The basic logic applied is “to interpret and recontextualise individual phenomena within a conceptual framework or a set of ideas”, thereby iteratively moving back and forth between theory and empirics (Danermark et al., 2005, p. 80). This makes abductive reasoning particularly suitable for studies with explanatory purposes (Flick, 2011).

### 3.2 Case Study

In line with our research approach, we chose to do a case study, a common method in qualitative research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). There are two aspects of a case study, which made it an intriguing and suitable method for our thesis. First, there is commonly a large amount of qualitative data available, and second, the case study allows for a high degree of flexibility (Easton, 2010). These aspects make case studies not only suitable for qualitative research in general but also, more specifically, for “how” and “why” questions, i.e. explanatory purposes (Yin, 2003). Accordingly, critical realism is considered “particularly well suited as a companion to case research” (Easton, 2010, p. 119). The case study also matches the chosen abductive mode of inference, which is considered appropriate for case study research (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2008; Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

Furthermore, we chose a single case study since our explanatory approach required a deep understanding of the underlying structures and causal mechanisms, established in the real layer of reality (Danermark et al., 2005). In this case, the TC offered us the possibility to profoundly analyse the sought phenomena within the respective context. Although we saw the benefit of conducting further case studies within this field to bring an even more insightful perspective on the lives of the women, we considered the single case study as the most suitable method in order to gain the sought depth within the given time frame of this thesis.

### 3.3 Data collection

#### 3.3.1 Interview design

To obtain relevant data for our research, we conducted in-depth interviews with women who participated in the TC as well as with officials from the TC and the Retailer. The interviews with the trained women were conducted in a semi-structured way, see Appendix III. This allowed us to obtain broad, receptive input while ensuring consistency and comparability (Edmondson & Mcmanus, 2007; Fletcher, 2017). We aimed at giving the interviewees the freedom to answer elaborately and to provide further insights that they found to be of relevance. This was particularly important as the CA embraces the complexity of human diversity (Martins, 2011). Furthermore, given our critical realist perspective, the consistent structure inherent in the chosen interview design offered us the possibility to derive an understanding of the causal mechanisms by constructing a

“family of answers” (Pawson & Tilley, 1997, p. 152), which comprises the different perspectives of the interviewees on particular social phenomena (Healy & Perry, 2000).

The interviews with the officials from the TC and Retailer were conducted in a less structured design. Rather, they were formed as discussions around the interviews with the trained women to provide contextual information required to better understand the women’s answers.

### 3.3.2 Interview sampling

The sampling of interview participants was done in a purposive manner, thereby directly relating the sampling to the research question (Bryman & Bell, 2015). More specifically, the approach of maximum-variation sampling was applied, which is suitable when sampling individuals (Bryman & Bell, 2015). Concomitant with this, we sought to ensure variation across different parameters including the year of the training, marital status and number of children. By doing this, the interviewee sample reflects the importance of time as well as human diversity, both aspects inherent in the research question and theoretical framework.

In total, 25 women who had previously undergone the training were interviewed (including five pilot interviews). Despite the difficulty of determining the right number of interviews, we applied a heuristic by Warren (2001), thereby being within the proposed minimum range of 20-30 interviews. Moreover, we had in total of three interviews with the officials from the TC and the Retailer. An overview of the interviewee sample is provided in Appendix IV.

### 3.3.3 Interview setting

When conducting the interviews, we faced several challenges. Firstly, safety concerns and limited financial resources hindered us from being physically present in Bangladesh. Secondly, besides the geographical barrier, we also encountered a language barrier. Due to their fairly low level of education, the women’s English proficiency was not sufficient to conduct the interviews in English. To overcome this, the interviews were conducted in Bengali by a representative from the TC. This approach entailed certain limitations. One limitation was that the required translations may distort the original meaning, as “[d]ifferent languages construct different ways of seeing social life” (Larkin, Dierckx de Casterlé, & Schotsmans, 2007, p. 468). To mitigate this risk, we worked together with native Bengali speakers to formulate the questions in the interview guide as unambiguous as possible. Moreover, we used a third party for the translation to reduce the risk of potential bias. However, we acknowledge that a certain influence of the translator is unavoidable (Temple & Young, 2004).

Another cutback of this setting was our limited control over the course of the interviews. To gain a certain level of control and to obtain the best possible understanding of the data, we were closely

involved in the interview process (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006) and gave the interviewer clear instructions beforehand about the purpose and type of interview. Furthermore, the interview guide was adapted after conducting five pilot interviews to support the interviewer more effectively in achieving satisfactory interview results. Lastly, the existing affiliation with the TC might have biased the answers of the women. Hence, we applied a particularly critical perspective on the answers regarding issues directly related to the TC.

Nevertheless, this interview setting also entailed strong advantages. First, the interviews were conducted in person in the TC environment, which is known to the interviewed women. Second, the existing affiliation with the TC entailed a high level of trust between the interviewer and interviewee, which is especially relevant due to the sensitive nature of the interview topics (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson, & Wilkes, 2011). Third, conducting the interviews in the women's native language allowed the women to fully express themselves. Fourth, having a similar cultural background as the interviewees, the interviewer can be considered a "social insider" (Shah, 2004, p. 556), which averted issues that could otherwise arise in cross-cultural interview settings such as cultural misconceptions.

Concluding, all of these aspects created a comfortable setting for the interviewed women, in which they were willing to share their personal stories and grant us access to their perspectives. The interviews were only partially audio recorded, as some of the women felt uncomfortable being recorded and naturally this was respected. In these cases, extensive notes were taken. In the rest of the cases, the recordings were transcribed. Lastly, to respect the privacy of the interviewed women, the interview results were anonymised, and hence the names mentioned throughout this thesis have been changed.

### 3.4 Interview analysis and interpretation

The results of the interviews were analysed using the method of explanation building as proposed by Yin (2003). This technique is a sub-type of pattern matching, the general method of comparing theoretical and empirical patterns (Yin, 2003). As the case of critical realism however, the focus is on tendencies, not regularities (i.e. patterns). Thus, the patterns we sought to identify are considered "broken" or "demi-regularities" (Fletcher, 2017, p. 185), complicating the structuring of the findings. We set particular emphasis on the women's perspective to retain the actual meaning and did not force the empirical findings onto predefined structures too early in the process.

We started off by inductively identifying patterns in the interview results. These patterns were then subsequently analysed in regard to the two postulated sub-questions, abductively going back and forth between the interview results and the CA framework and thereby building the explanations.

We analysed our research question by investigating the two sub-questions consecutively, starting with the first and using the analysis to approach the second. As earlier stated, this procedure was following the retroduction logic.

### 3.5 Summary of the research process

In Figure 5, we present a summary of our research process. Starting by reviewing existing literature, we identified the research gap and derived our research aim. Discussing the TC and its context in an initial interview with the Retailer, we obtained information that helped us translate the research gap into our research question and research topics specific to our empirical setting. Guided by the research topics, we built our theoretical framework and derived the sub-questions based on which we formulated the first version of the interview guide. After conducting five pilot interviews with the trained women, we discussed the results in an interview with the TC and Retailer to identify improvements for the interview guide used in the main data collection. After conducting the remaining interviews with the trained women, we again discussed the results with the TC and Retailer to enrich the results with additional contextual information. Using the interview results, we inductively derived patterns, which were then abductively compared with the theoretical patterns as given from our framework building. Thereby we built the explanations required to answer our overall research question by analysing the two sub-questions.

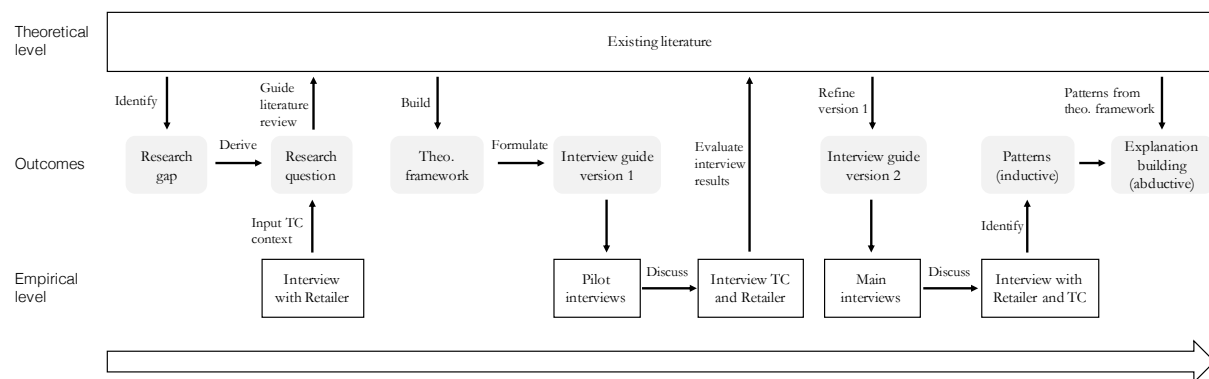


Figure 5: Research process  
Source: Own illustration

### 3.6 Quality considerations

Despite the general difficulty to evaluate the quality of qualitative research (Seale, 1999), we find it necessary to reflect upon certain quality considerations concerning our study. As the very foundational concept to quality within critical realism is understanding, the question is how we can evaluate the quality of our understanding (Maxwell, 1992). In this regard, we see particularly three aspects as relevant quality criteria to assess.

Firstly, given the interview setting, the accuracy of the transcription and interview notes must be scrutinised. Maxwell (1992, p. 285) refers to this as “descriptive validity”. Overall, we had a trusted relationship with the interviewer and clearly explained our purpose and intentions beforehand to avoid potential distrust towards us. Hence, we believe that the upsides of the setting explained in 3.3.3, outweigh the downsides and consider the obtained data to be credible.

Secondly, we see the aspect of having a “social insider” conduct the interviews as positive in regard to the “interpretative validity” (Maxwell, 1992, p. 288) of our study. Given our different social and cultural backgrounds compared to the empirical setting, the discussions with the Retailer and TC that followed the interviews with the women were of great help for us to obtain a better understanding of the women’s perspectives.

Thirdly, these discussions together with the variation within our interviewee sampling can be considered a form of triangulation, “a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information” (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 126). This triangulation increased our external validity for the reasons explained in 3.3.1. Yet, the validity of our study should generally be considered contingent as it needs to be seen within the context (Healy & Perry, 2000). This, by definition, makes it difficult to transfer the results on other contexts. However, we aimed at deriving broad causal mechanisms, which increases the applicability beyond the scope of the TC.

## 4 Empirical findings

In the following chapter, we present our empirical findings, which represent the experiences that are observable and thus lie within the empirical layer of reality. We have structured the findings along with the initial patterns that were derived inductively. By doing this, the stories of the interviewed women are preserved to the largest possible extent even though we are only presenting excerpts from the interviews. We consider this to be crucial as it aids in understanding the women's perspectives, entailing the bottom-up view that our research investigates. Furthermore, the cited quotes are translated and hence do not represent the exact original wording of the interviewees.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. In 4.1, we present our empirical findings in regard to the women's lives beyond the shop floor. In 4.2, we present the findings that adhere to RMG work.

### 4.1 The women's lives beyond the shop floor

In general, the individuality of the women made it difficult to identify clear patterns. However, we found one overarching distinction to be a determining factor in all investigated aspects of the women's lives. Whether the respective woman grew up in a family context (henceforth referred to as 'family background') or in an orphanage (henceforth referred to as 'orphan background') seemingly affected their lives. As women with a family background constituted the majority of the trained women, we focus the main part of the findings and analysis on this background. Still, due to the significant role of orphans in Bangladesh and our perceived duty to also illuminate the fate of these women, we cover the orphan background in a separate section but to a lesser extent.

#### 4.1.1 Values, aspirations and motivation to work

*"I want to be able to provide higher education for my son. My dream is that he becomes a highly ranked government officer." – Morzina, 35*

Morzina finished the training at the TC in June 2012. As a child, she and her family moved from a rural village to Tongi in the Dhaka district. At the age of 20, she got married and gave birth to her son shortly after. Given the seasonal and unsteady work of her husband, her family was not able to bear the increasing costs. Thus, inspired by other women in the neighbourhood, she decided to participate in the TC to increase her chances of obtaining work in the garment industry.

In the interviews, the women repeatedly articulated the importance of their families. The scope of family varied depending on whether the interviewee was married, but generally included the respective husbands, children, and parents. The families represent the focal point in their lives, and their health and overall well-being are highly valued. The women often highlighted the well-being

of their children, husbands, and parents but rarely mentioned their own well-being as a valued aspect in their lives. In addition to health and well-being, the education of their children is highly valued. The women's own education was considered to be of lesser importance. Lastly, the importance of the children being raised in a safe, family environment was mentioned.

Besides the main values, we identified commonalities in the women's aspirations. All women were considerably long-term oriented, mentioning the importance of being able to take care of their parents in old age as well as ensuring a good future for their children. Moreover, all of the interviewed women were born and spent at least part of their childhood in rural villages outside of the Dhaka area, where they were living in closely-knit communities and in cross-generational family constellations. Due to limited work opportunities in the villages however, many of the women's families experienced financial distress and consequently moved to the Dhaka area for work. Most women left the villages alone or with their husbands, and few were able to take the rest of their family with them. In the interviews, nearly all women stated that they were planning on moving back to the villages at a later stage in life to live with their families and to start a small business. The women mentioned their goals of wanting to start their own shop or buying agricultural land for farming.

The motivation to participate in the TC and to subsequently work in the garment sector was primarily financial. Additionally, some of the interviewed women also pointed out the influence of seeing other women working in the Dhaka area as a motivating factor. Most of the women came to hear about the TC through neighbouring women or through relatives, who had previously undergone the training.

#### 4.1.2 The role of garment work

When her husband suddenly left her after 12 years of marriage, Nazma, 36, was left with no financial means to support herself or her two daughters. Not seeing any other option, she moved to Tongi to find work while her daughters stayed in the village with her parents. She came to the TC after hearing about it from neighbouring women and finished the training in 2016. Since then, Nazma has been working in the garment industry. Living with relatives to whom she pays rent, her living expenses account for one-third of her income. Another third she sends to her parents to pay for her daughters' living expenses and education. The last third she saves. With the savings, she hopes to eventually be able to start a small shop in the village. Still, Nazma's life remains difficult; the garment work is demanding, and she is constantly worried about her daughters.



This story represents another commonality mentioned throughout the interviews. Most women experienced a certain kind of crisis or otherwise influential life event concerning either themselves or a family member. The women further described cases of serious health issues and deaths in the family and these events entailed psychological distress and severe financial consequences, either in the form of increased cost or of decreased income. Without the additional income from garment work, the women mentioned how it would have resulted in devastating consequences due to the lack of welfare- or insurance funds to support them:

*“My husband, I and our five-year-old son came to Tongi three years ago since it was too difficult to get by on my husband’s income in the village. My sister is an ex-trainee from the TC, she referred me there and I have been working in the garment sector since the training ended in 2016. A month ago, my husband passed and without my job, my son and I would not survive. We have not much savings and my relatives can only give me emotional support.” – Rupali, 30*

Koli, 33 also told a story of how sickness in the family affected her life:

*“Unlike many other garment workers, I came from a middle-class family and got married when I was 17. I moved into my husband’s home and within three years we had two kids. Then unfortunately it was detected that my son has aplastic anaemia and the treatment was very expensive costing my husband 40 thousand taka per treatment. For this reason, my husband and his family started misbehaving with me and my children, and after five years of marriage my kids and I were kicked out and we had to come back to my family. My brother took responsibility for us, but he has a family of his own and his wife and children do not like it. The only way I could bear the treatment costs of my son was to start working but my brother disagreed because I was the first woman in the family who wanted to work outside the home, and it is not a job consistent with our social class. My mother and I were later able to convince him.” – Koli, 33*

For most of the women, the garment work was their first paying job and hence their income cannot be compared to any previous income. The women who had worked before participating in the TC more than doubled their income. Overall, most women illustrated how the work has had a significant influence on their family life not only in terms of income but by also restricting them to take care of their children at home. Instead, the women’s parents or other relatives have undertaken this task, which often entailed that the children lived outside Dhaka in the rural villages:

*“My two daughters live far away from me and I feel very worried about them every day, but I can’t bring them here as there would be no one to look after them. But all I wish for is that I could be with my daughters.” – Nazma, 36*

Lastly, the spending patterns of the women reflected their future-oriented mindset, specifically in regard to financial planning. For example, the women with children spent significant portions of their income on their children's education. Moreover, "excess" income was either saved or spent on future-oriented investments such as the purchase or maintenance of property, which was used either for housing or agricultural purposes.

#### 4.1.3 Empowerment

*"Don't be a burden to anyone."*

We heard this sentence from several of the women when they were asked about what advice they would give to future participants of the TC. They mentioned how they had considered themselves as burdens to their families before they started working. Mala, 28 explains:

*"Without any income, no one values a person. Especially not a woman."* – Mala, 28

Despite being responsible for all housework and care-taking of their children, the women felt insecure and not entitled to make decisions in their families when they were not contributing financially. In addition, they were often helpless in the face of potential misuse of the family's income by their husbands. Although the decision for the women to participate in the TC might have been initiated by the women, for the majority of the women the final decision resided with the husband or the parents.

Nevertheless, the situation often changed when the women started earning an income. In cases where the women were married, decisions were often made jointly by the women and their husbands, however, several women said that decisions were still primarily made by their husbands. The TC in this regard pointed out that they deliberately do not challenge the basic gender roles as this may increase the risk of the women not being allowed to participate in the TC by their husbands. Furthermore, in cases where the women were separated or single, decisions were made by the women, yet often their parents were consulted. Independent of whether the women were participating in the decision-making, all women spoke proudly about the purchases that had been made with their money and mentioned that contributing made them feel relevant. Many said that being financially independent gave them a stronger feeling of confidence and security:

*"When first moving to Tongi, I was surprised to see so many women walking with confidence in the streets. Now I'm one of them."* – Kazol, 31

In the cases of married women, the change in the financial contribution and potentially in decision-making authority did however not impact the distribution of the remaining duties in the household. They were still expected to do all housework before and after their garment work:

*“The combination of family and work is tough to manage. I wake up early and cook for the family, after work I do all house chores and it is the same for every woman with a family in the garment sector. And when I’m at work, all I worry about is my three children. It is a difficult life, but I have no other option, it’s better than staying at home and not meeting the basic needs of my family.” – Johura, 34*

#### 4.1.4 Orphan background

The life situation for the women who grew up in an orphanage was different from those who came from a family background. Having no parents or relatives arrange a marriage for them, working was considered a necessity for survival once they had left the orphanage. Once they started working, they were fully responsible for themselves. For all orphan women, the participation in the TC was arranged by the orphanage, however, orphan women represent only a small share both in the TC as well as in the overall RMG sector.

To live alone in the Dhaka area entails many dangers, especially for women. Therefore, the interviewed women lived in women hostels together with other single women. Their outlook on their future can furthermore be described as dismal. In a country where the family is the centre of everyone’s life, these women have little chance of ever having one. The women mentioned how social status and the family of a person were critical factors in choosing a partner and as orphans are held in very low esteem, they are thus not considered worthy of marrying.

*“All I really want is to have a family and children.” – Sonali, 24*

This also influenced the role of garment work in their lives. On one hand, they described the work as a way of keeping their minds occupied:

*“When I am busy, I feel free from all my worries about the future.” – Shahina, 27*

Others also described it as a way to socialise:

*“I have a very good relationship with my co-workers and my supervisor. Although it was challenging at first, coming from an orphanage, now I consider them my family.” – Nilufa, 27*

On the other hand, seeing and interacting with women from a family background saddened them and acted as a reminder of their own fate:

*“I feel depressed that my colleagues have a family, and I don’t have anyone. The most challenging part of my life is to find the motivation to keep working.” – Shahina, 27*

In general, the interviewed women saw themselves in a better position compared to the orphan women who have jobs more common for orphans, such as saleswomen in shopping malls. Still,

many of the women perceived it at times difficult to find the whys and wherefores to keep working and to save up money for their future.

## 4.2 The RMG work

The following section presents our findings that concern the women's stories of RMG work. In 4.2.1 we present the findings on the sector's place within the overall work landscape and in 4.2.2 we depict the women's work environment.

### 4.2.1 The RMG industry within the work landscape

In order to better understand why the women chose to participate in the TC and subsequently started working in the RMG industry, it is important to understand the work options that they are presented with. Due to their relatively low level of education, much of the work available is of informal nature. Additionally, most of the jobs in the informal sector are considered to be undignified and the work thus entails a feeling of worthlessness for the women. The interviewees included working as housemaids, sales personnel in shopping malls, or general day labour as examples of informal work.

The RMG industry, however, offers different work characteristics to the women. Yet, this industry comprises two very distinct sectors. The first sector comprises export-oriented RMG factories directly serving the international fashion industry. This is the sector that the TC focuses on and in which all of the interviewed women work. Here, the work has a rather formal nature and it is regulated to a greater extent, making it attractive to the women, see Appendix V. There are wage laws in place and the work schedule is more regulated and predictable. Most women also told how they receive overtime pay and generally have the opportunity to take a leave of absence. The second sector comprises subcontractors to the export-oriented companies and this work is considered rather informal. In the following, we concentrate on the export-oriented RMG sector.

Overall, when asking the women what alternatives to garment work would have been, there was a difference in responses between the women from a family background to the women with an orphan background. Whereas most women with a family said that they would have most likely been a housemaid or remained a housewife, the women from an orphanage stated sales work in shopping malls as the most likely scenario. Generally, however, all alternatives were of informal nature.

### 4.2.2 Work environment

All of the interviewed women started working in the export-oriented RMG sector shortly after they had undergone the training. When applying for jobs, the women were supported by the TC, which

has established relationships with several garment factories. The women were however free to choose to work for any company they want, but all of the interviewed women started working in one of the factories associated with the TC.

#### 4.2.2.1 Working conditions

The working conditions were described similarly by all the interviewed women. In terms of safety issues, all women considered their working environment sufficiently safe:

*“After Rana Plaza, many of us felt afraid to work in the factories but I have overcome this fear and there are good fire drills in my factory and good firefighting arrangements”. – Morzina, 35*

However, the constant sitting and little physical movement during the workday were considered physically exhausting and several women complained about back pain at night. Moreover, the women had highly demanding production quotas and quality standards to comply with. These requirements entailed a high pressure at work which was said to cause psychological stress for many of the interviewed women.

There were different ways of raising concerns in the factories. The most common way was to first consult a supervisor or line chief. In the case that the supervisors did not listen, there are so-called welfare officers and worker participation committee members that the women could turn to with their respective issues. The welfare officers were considered to be the most effective way to solve issues. Yet, generally few concerns were raised by the interviewed women. They considered their working environment as good enough and saw the demanding requirements and harsh working conditions not as a reason for concern:

*“When I get my salary in hand I forget all pain and hardship.” – Asha, 30*

The relationships to co-workers were generally described as friendly. The high work requirements, however, create a busy atmosphere that allows only limited social interaction. Women with a family background saw the co-workers simply from a professional perspective, whereas women with an orphan background referred to their co-workers as their family. The relationships with supervisors and line chiefs were generally described as professional, however one woman mentioned that the behaviour is dependent on the women's performance:

*“I give my best at work, so that my supervisors treat me well.” – Morzina, 35*

None of the interviewees had experienced physical abuse at the workplace. Verbal abuse, however, occasionally occurred when the women's performance fell short of the expectations and the women were much more exposed than men of similar positions to this kind of abuse.

Furthermore, the total amount of working hours was judged differently. Including overtime, the daily working hours ranged between 10 and 14 hours in a six-day workweek. On average, the women worked eleven hours per day, which consisted of eight regular hours and three hours of overtime. During busy periods, the women may even be required to work seven-day weeks. For women with a family background, this was seen as a highly negative aspect in their daily lives, limiting the time they can spend with their family. The women with an orphan background seemed not as affected by the working hours as the women with a family background.

#### 4.2.2.2 Work mobility and work advancement

Among the interviewed women, many had changed their employer at least once. This change was always initiated by the women and was due to different reasons. The most frequently mentioned reason was the distance from their home to work. Having a shorter travel time for the women meant lower travel costs but more importantly more time to spend with their family. Other mentioned reasons were higher pay and less overtime.

Generally, the women were able to apply for short leaves of absences and these were usually granted unless the overall workload was too high at the particular moment. The most frequently mentioned reason was sickness of either the woman or a close relative. Other reasons included having guests at their house or assisting their children in a school activity. Leisure time was rarely mentioned as a reason, however, national and religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr were granted, during which most women visited their home village.

Moreover, the sewing work in the garment factories follows a strict career path. Generally, there are five non-supervisory positions starting with a helper position and four subsequent sewing operator positions. The sewing helper position entails supporting tasks such as bringing the fabrics to the sewing tables but no actual sewing work. The operator positions differ in the required production quota, the kind of sewing work that is done as well as the salary level. The higher the position, the more complex the sewing work and the higher the required production quota. The different positions are shown in Appendix VI.

After attending the TC, the women started as general sewing operators and therewith at a higher level than women who had not undergone training and who commonly start as sewing helpers. For the women who changed their workplace, the time until reaching the senior position took slightly longer compared to the women who stayed at one factory. After having undergone the training, the women were able to change factories relatively easily. The interviewed women were mostly in the position of junior or senior sewing operator earning on average US\$150 a month, including overtime.

None of the interviewed women considered a supervisory position in their future career. Most women named their lack of confidence in leading other people as a reason. Other reasons included the increased responsibility and longer working hours which would restrict the time available for the family. Some women also pointed out the problem of being insufficiently educated for this role as it requires strong literacy skills in Bengali and English, as well as extensive knowledge of the production processes. However, one of the interviewed women who was sufficiently educated was offered a supervisory position but did not pursue this option due to low confidence.

## 5 Analysis

The following analysis of the empirical findings is structured along the sub-questions derived in 2.2, which will help answer our overall research question. We start by analysing the empirical observations with the aim to identify the underlying functionings that the women strive to achieve in 5.1. We then investigate the causal mechanisms that lead to the observed outcomes in 5.2. Since the analysis implies the use of abstraction, the results must be considered with caution as they cannot account for all of the diversifying factors that shape the women's lives.

### 5.1 Sub-question 1: Identifying the underlying functionings

In the analysis of our first sub-question, we identify the underlying functionings that the trained women seek to achieve. We structure the analysis along on the four identified outcomes of the TC, thereby relating and comparing the functionings directly to the workings of the TC.

#### 5.1.1 Intended outcome #1: To participate in the RMG sector

As the empirical findings show, garment work is of high importance for the women and this can largely be attributed to the formal nature of this sector. It provides the women with a secure income that is in accordance with the national wage law and they are paid overtime. This also entails having a regular work schedule. Still, the women work on average 40% overtime and they complain about physical pain. This shows questionable working conditions despite the formality of the sector, similar to the findings of Sikhdar et al. (2014). However, given their otherwise available work options, the women see a better chance of living a stable life by working in the garment sector.

To understand why a stable life is of high importance, one must understand how the individual and contextual structures influence their lives (Dutta, 2019; Esplen & Brody, 2007). The different harsh life events that the women have either experienced or may experience in the future, can be considered external shocks to their lives. Overall, these shocks can abruptly deprive the women and her family of for example financial, health and psychological resources. Given the socio-political structures, there is no social-welfare net or insurance system that will absorb some of the shocks, and as explained by Rupali these may entail a battle for the very survival of the women and their families.

Hence, we find participation in the RMG sector to not be the actual functioning but rather a means to achieve stability in life. Concluding, we define the first functioning as:

**Functioning #1: “To provide stability in life for their family and themselves”**



### 5.1.2 Intended outcome #2: To be empowered

In order to analyse how the women value outcome #2, it is important to first decipher what empowerment means for the women (Hossain, 2012; Mosedale, 2005). As shown by the empirics, the women spoke about empowerment in regard to the control of their financial means and they said they value being financially independent. However, they did not talk about empowerment in terms of other power relations within the family. The data show that the women worry about their husbands' misuse of the family's income, and hence we relate the value of empowerment to Functioning #1, namely, to live a stable life. Since being able to decide on the spending increases their control in an otherwise unstable environment, we derive the following functioning:

#### **Functioning #2: "To be in control of their own destiny"**

Furthermore, similar to Leder (2016) the empirical findings indicate that the value of empowerment can also be related to the role that the women assume within their social context. When not contributing financially, the women perceived themselves as burdens to their husbands or families and did not feel entitled to make decisions. This perception seemingly changed when contributing financially. The women started to see their lives as meaningful and we observed a feeling of pride about this newly achieved meaning for themselves. Hence, we derive another functioning in regard to empowerment:

#### **Functioning #3: "To feel meaningful"**

Regarding the workplace, we did not observe a longing for empowerment beyond what is offered by existing societal structures. The women said that they value their careers, but they did not perceive being in a supervisory position a possible option and they did not wish for career advancements beyond senior sewing operators. Rather, their aspirations were always placed in a family context where their dreams are to eventually move back to the village and preserve local gender roles. This confirms the research by Dutta (2019) and McDowell et al. (2012) that the family- and societal context must be acknowledged in order to understand women's labour, and it is important to critically analyse why the women do not wish for a supervisory position. We see the embeddedness of the women's home-maker role (Dutta, 2019) as part of the explanation, and also their lack of confidence, which furthermore may be related to the prevailing dominance of men in supervisory positions (Jenkins, 2013; Sikhdar et al., 2014). Concluding, we do not derive any further empowerment-related functioning.

### 5.1.3 Intended outcome #3: To be healthy

We find health to be of great importance for the interviewed women, yet, with a significant distinction from the intended outcome. Every woman with a family referred almost exclusively to

the importance of their children's or their families' health, and not to their own. Indeed, in connection to the factory work, many women commented on the physical distress due to the constant sitting. This was considered to be a price that had to be paid for achieving the stability in life to provide a better future for their children. Therefore, we find the third intended outcome of the TC to not be directly in line with what the women value. Rather, they place the value on the health of particularly their children in order to fulfil their functioning of living a stable life. However, given that the majority of women quit factory work before they are 40 (Akhter et al., 2019), the worries of the health of their children may nonetheless be connected to the long-term health of themselves, which we further analyse in 5.1.4.

Consequently, we see health strongly connected to Functioning #1 and thus extend this by the health aspect:

**Functioning #1 (ext.): “To provide stability and health in life for their family and themselves”**

#### 5.1.4 Intended outcome #4: To be hopeful and optimistic about the future

By emphasising their possibility to save money, putting their kids in school and providing for their parents, the women highlighted how their future outlook is a motivating factor for their current doings. Analogous to the analysis above, the empirical findings furthermore highlight the cross-generational dependencies, shifting the women's focus towards the future and increasing its relevance today. These dependencies entail social obligations in the future but may also entail a kind of social-safety net in form of their respective children; both in regard to the children's health and to the children's education and future work opportunities.

Concluding, we see this intended outcome to be in line with the women's values and we further specify the identified functioning as:

**Functioning #4: “To be able to provide for their parents in old age and to ensure a secure future for their children and themselves”**

Furthermore, these findings also led us to identify another functioning. Throughout the interviews, most of the women who had children complained about having to leave them in the village with their parents, and not being able to be physically there to take care of them due to work. This sorrow, as well as the future plans to go back to the village, suggest another functioning:

**Functioning #5: “To be with their family and take care of their children”**

### 5.1.5 Orphan background

The orphan women described a different life than women with families prior to the TC. Due to the lack of a family and the related dependencies, the functioning underlying the motivation to work differs from the women with a family background. Despite the similar overall financial motivation, the focus of the orphan women is linked to their personal safety due to the difficulties and dangers of being a single woman in Dhaka. We thus define the functioning as the following:

#### **Functioning #1: “To live a safe life”**

Besides the lack of dependencies, the lack of a family furthermore emphasises that the women have no one to fall back on. Thus, being solely responsible for themselves, their own health is crucial and highly valued. The functioning deriving from this is:

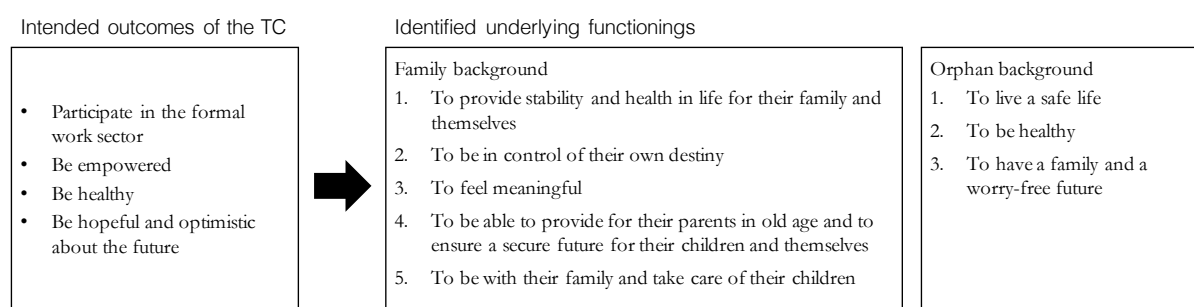
#### **Functioning #2: “To be healthy”**

Furthermore, the centrality of family as a social institution in Bangladesh (Dutta, 2019; McDowell et al., 2012) has a far-reaching influence on the women’s future-oriented functionings. In the case of orphan women, it means a strong wish to have a family, but the low chances of this wish coming true entails a constant worry about the future. Consequently, the underlying functioning regarding their future outlook is defined as:

#### **Functioning #3: “To have a family and a worry-free future”**

### 5.1.6 Overview of the identified functionings

We finish the analysis of the first sub-question by presenting an overview of the identified functionings in Figure 6:



*Figure 6: Overview identified functionings*  
*Source: Own illustration*

Concluding, the analysis shows that the intended outcomes of the TC are partially in line with what the women value, however they do not fully capture the women’s lives. It shows that the underlying functionings are interrelated and linked to a life with many uncertainties. Facing substantial risks and threats to their survival, the women seek to overcome these obstacles by achieving the

identified functionings. The functionings moreover highlight the centrality of the family, and essentially how both the stability and their future outlook are dependent on their children. This is furthermore highlighted by the orphan women's constant worry of the future since without a family they have no one to fall back on in the absence of a social-welfare system.

## 5.2 Sub-question 2: Analysing the training's impact

Using the explanation-building method, we match the empirical findings and the results from the analysis in 5.1 to the theoretical framework depicted in 2.2. By doing this, we seek to illuminate the causal mechanisms behind the identified functionings and the way these are impacted by participating in the TC. The structure will follow along the identified functionings, analysing both the situation prior to the TC (i.e. when the women are not working) as well as the situation post the TC. We focus the analysis to women with children and analyse the cases of the orphan women to a lesser extent.

### 5.2.1 Causal mechanisms behind Functioning #1: "To provide stability and health in life for their family and themselves"

In Figure 7, it can be seen how prior the TC the limited financial resources and the lack of a comprehensive social-welfare system in Bangladesh constituted tendencies constraining the capability to provide necessities to the family. It also constrained the capability to save money that could be used to cushion potential shocks to their lives. To increase their financial resources and thereby enhance these capabilities, the women sought work. However, insufficient skills and the informal nature of low-skilled labour in Bangladesh tended to constrain the capability of the women to have a regular job. Hence, despite efforts made by the women, their resources and the structural circumstances did not allow them to achieve a stable life.

The TC influences both the individual capacity of the women as well as the social-environmental structures. The training enhances the sewing skills of the women, which thereby enables them to work in the RMG sector. Moreover, the TC provides contacts to the RMG factories and the TC alumni act as a network that raised awareness of the TC's existence. These aspects trigger tendencies that increase the capability of the women to do the training as well as the capability to obtain a position in the RMG sector. The actual garment work subsequently increases the financial resources of the women, which enable tendencies that enhance the capability to provide not only necessities but also to save up money. However, the question must also be raised to what extent the women can access and control these financial resources (Esplen & Brody, 2007; Kabeer, 1991) and this analysis will be elaborated in 5.2.2.

Moreover, the formal features of the garment work tend to further enhance these capabilities. In general, the overall health of their family increases as healthcare costs can usually be covered. However, the physically demanding garment work lead to detrimental health effects, which constrains their capability to be healthy and therefore their ability to completely fulfil Functioning #1. This furthermore substantiates the research by Akhter et al. (2019) who show that participation in garment work increases their vulnerability to physical illness.

Nevertheless, a strong increase in the ability to achieve a stable life can be observed. This becomes apparent in the ability to live in secure housing, the purchasing of basic necessities as well as the ability to cover unexpected expenses. Concluding, this shows that the TC impacts this functioning in two subsequent steps. Firstly, by helping the women obtain work in the RMG sector and secondly, through the characteristics of the actual RMG work.

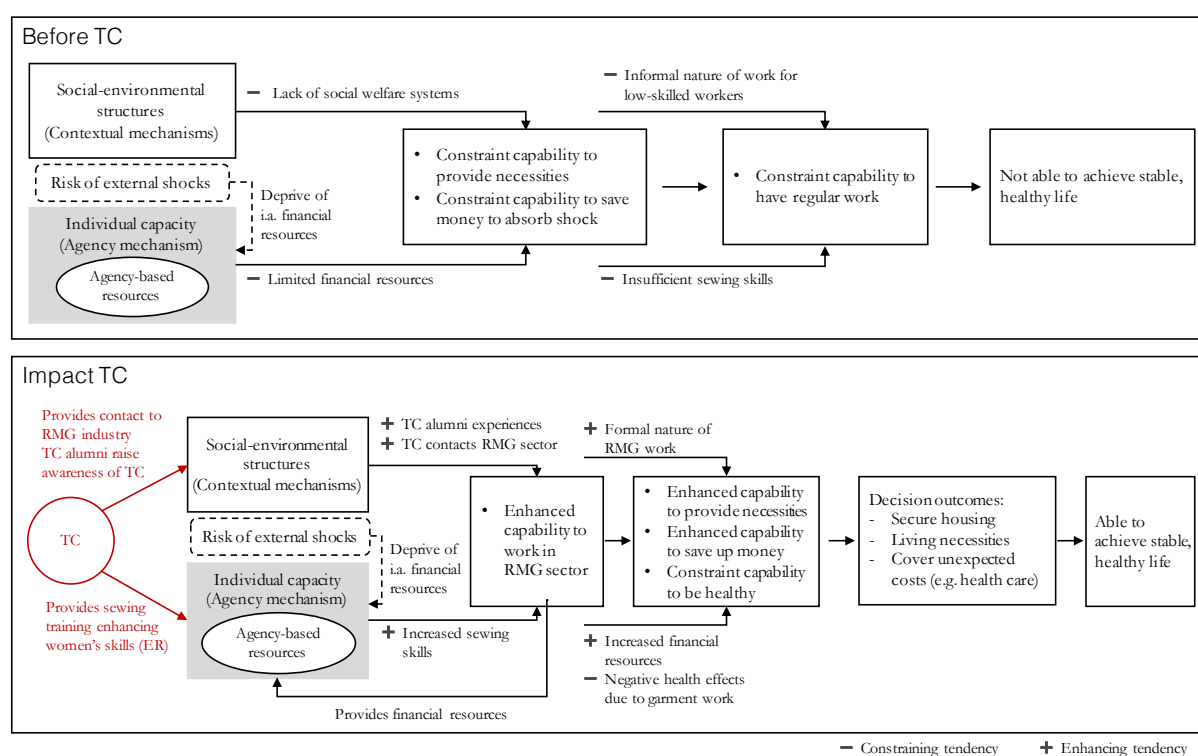


Figure 7: Causal mechanism behind Functioning #1  
Source: Own illustration

## 5.2.2 Causal mechanisms behind Functionings #2 and #3: To be in control of their own destiny and to feel meaningful

Central to Functionings #2 and #3 is the relative role that the women assume. In the situation prior the TC, the traditional perception of gender prevalent in the Bangladeshi society established a housewife role for the women where they were responsible for taking care of the children and household and their husbands were the breadwinners. This role seemed further reinforced by the limited education and working skills of the women, as well as low self-esteem. These agency

mechanisms (Kabeer, 1999) appear to have constrained the women's capability to actively change their role. In this traditional role, the women did not possess the capabilities to contribute financially and thus neither to participate in the decision-making within their home.

The impacts of the TC within these two functionings are mainly related to the women's individual capacities. Given the analysed mechanisms in Functioning #1, the women take on a breadwinner role and this aspect enhances the women's capability to participate in money-spending decisions. In all cases, we saw a clear increase in the participation by the women, yet the primary decision-making authority still resides with either the husband or a parent. Thus, this aspect in addition to the decreased instability in their lives lead to a greater sense of control for the women, see Figure 8. Furthermore, due to the increased capability to contribute financially, the women do not perceive themselves as burdens anymore. Instead, they perceive their role as meaningful and several mentioned how this increased their confidence. Noticeable however, is that the traditional housewife role remains unchanged and therefore we consider the women's roles augmented rather than changed. This is also highlighted by the women's wishes to go back to their former housewife roles later in their lives.

This analysis moreover points in the direction that the TC-provided knowledge is not creating strong enough tendencies to change the local gender norms. This weak effect of the training may partly be explained by that only 15% of the training is devoted to softer matters, and 85% is focused on technical sewing training. Most importantly however, is that the TC deliberately does not challenge these gender roles, although being part of the standard operating procedure, since they want to decrease the risk of the women not being allowed to participate in the TC. This moreover suggests that the main outcome of the TC is to get women into paid garment work, which may be based on the conventional belief that access to paid work will automatically empower women and increase their well-being (Esplen & Brody, 2007; Hossain, 2012). Still, the analysis shows that the TC aids the achievement of these functionings.

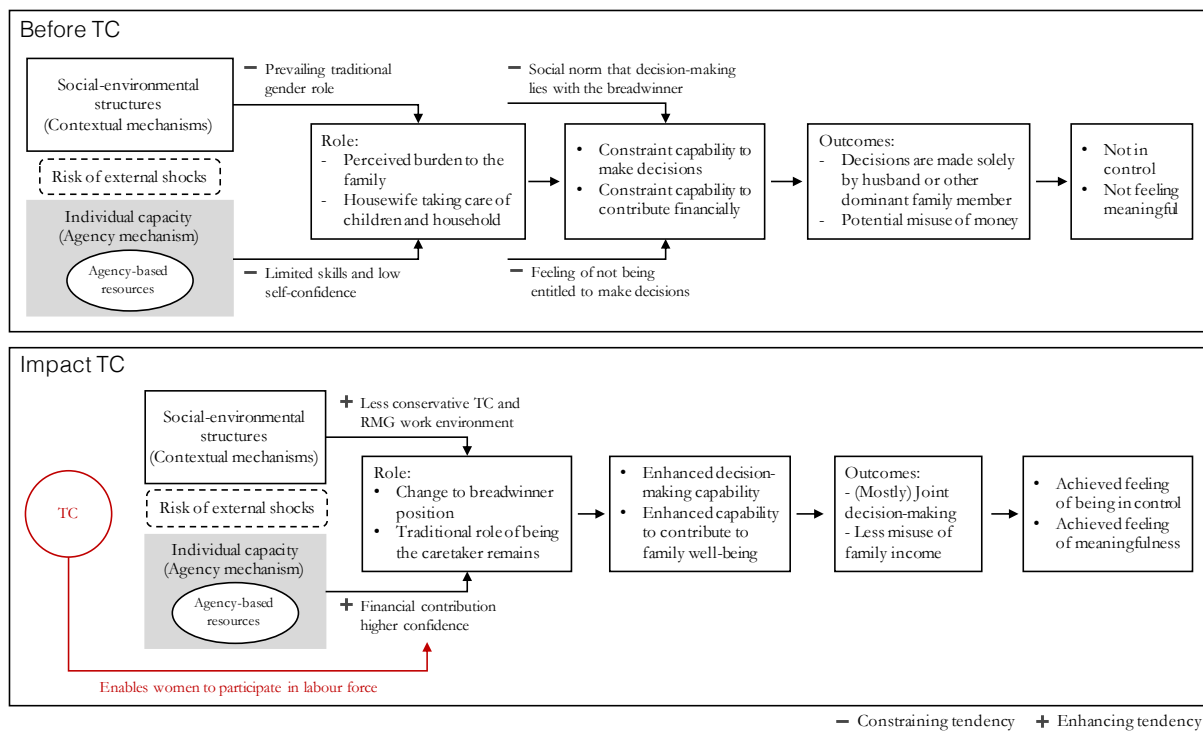


Figure 8: Causal mechanism behind Functioning #2 and #3  
Source: Own illustration

### 5.2.3 Causal mechanisms behind Functioning #4: To be able to provide for their parents in old age and to ensure a secure future for their children and themselves

The situation prior to the TC can be equated with the causal mechanisms analysed in the first functioning as the same tendencies constrain the capability to save up or invest money for future purposes.

The TC impacts this functioning in mainly two ways. Firstly, the increased financial resources due to garment work trigger tendencies that enhance the capability to save up money and invest for the future, as long as there are no counter tendencies triggered by external shocks, such as unexpected health issues in the family. Furthermore, there are also counter tendencies triggered by the garment work itself. Due to harsh working conditions, women are seldom able to work beyond the age of 40 (Akhter et al., 2019) and this questions the long-term sustainability of garment work as a source of income and thereby also as a means to provide a secure future. This is moreover supported by the women's aspirations to run their own business in the village.

Secondly, the TC provides training on future-oriented spending and on how to save money. This knowledge increases the women's educational resources, and together with the increased participation in the decision-making, this guides the spending decisions to be aimed at ensuring a secure future for themselves and their children. The outcomes of these decisions include the

purchase or lease of property, the accumulation of savings in a bank account and the provision of education to their children.

Concluding, we argue that although the functioning is per definition not fully achievable at the current moment as it refers to a future state, the probability of achieving it increases after participating in the TC compared to the situation prior the TC, see Figure 9. The women are aware of their capability to save and to invest their money in a future-oriented way, and also realise these capabilities to a large extent. However, the questionable sustainability of working in the garment sector should not be disregarded.

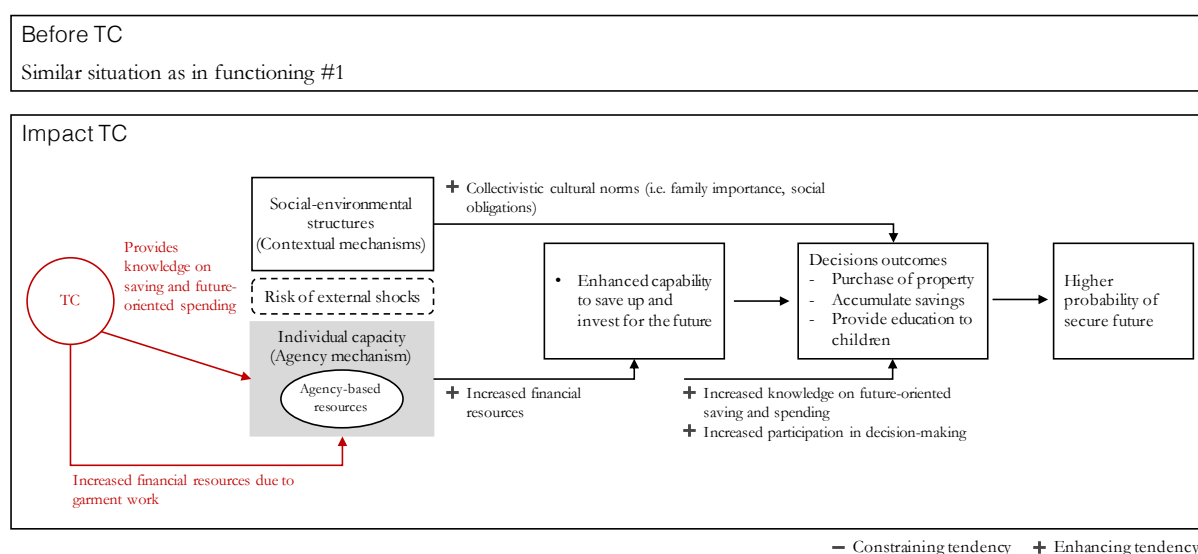


Figure 9: Causal mechanism behind Functioning #4  
Source: Own illustration

#### 5.2.4 Causal mechanisms behind Functioning #5: To be with their families and to take care of their children

Before the TC, the women primarily assumed a caretaker role of the children and the household. This role was created by enhancing tendencies partly triggered by cultural and social norms in Bangladesh, such as purdah (Asadullah & Wahhaj, 2019); and partly by agency-related tendencies, such as the affection of the women for their children as seen from the empirics. This shows the interaction between the contextual and agency mechanisms, hence the proposed notion of a relational society becomes apparent (Kabeer, 1999; Leder, 2016). Within the given role, the women were able to realise the functioning to spend time with their children and be there to take care of them. However, this state also needs to be seen in the context of the previously analysed instability and uncertainty of the women's lives, where the counter tendencies may lead to the non-achievement of the respective functioning, see Figure 10.



The new role of the women as breadwinners, substantially constrains the capability of being the caretaker of their children since the double burden of both garment and housework restricts their time. Furthermore, the lack of child-care facilities and the social norm to have the family take care of the children commonly lead to the children staying with other family members.

Due to garment work, the women are not able to achieve this functioning. Indeed, the women deliberately choose to not achieve this functioning because they see it as relatively more important to attain a stable life and be able to provide a secure future for themselves and their children. Thus, this example shows the reflexive process of decision-making since the financial urgency and the family's future well-being is prioritised. However, this negative impact of the functioning is seen compared to the prior state of not working and this comparison can, in fact, be seen as flawed. If the women would not have worked and been able to financially provide for the family, this would neither have been a sustainable solution. Thus, other outcomes would likely have resulted in similar constraints.

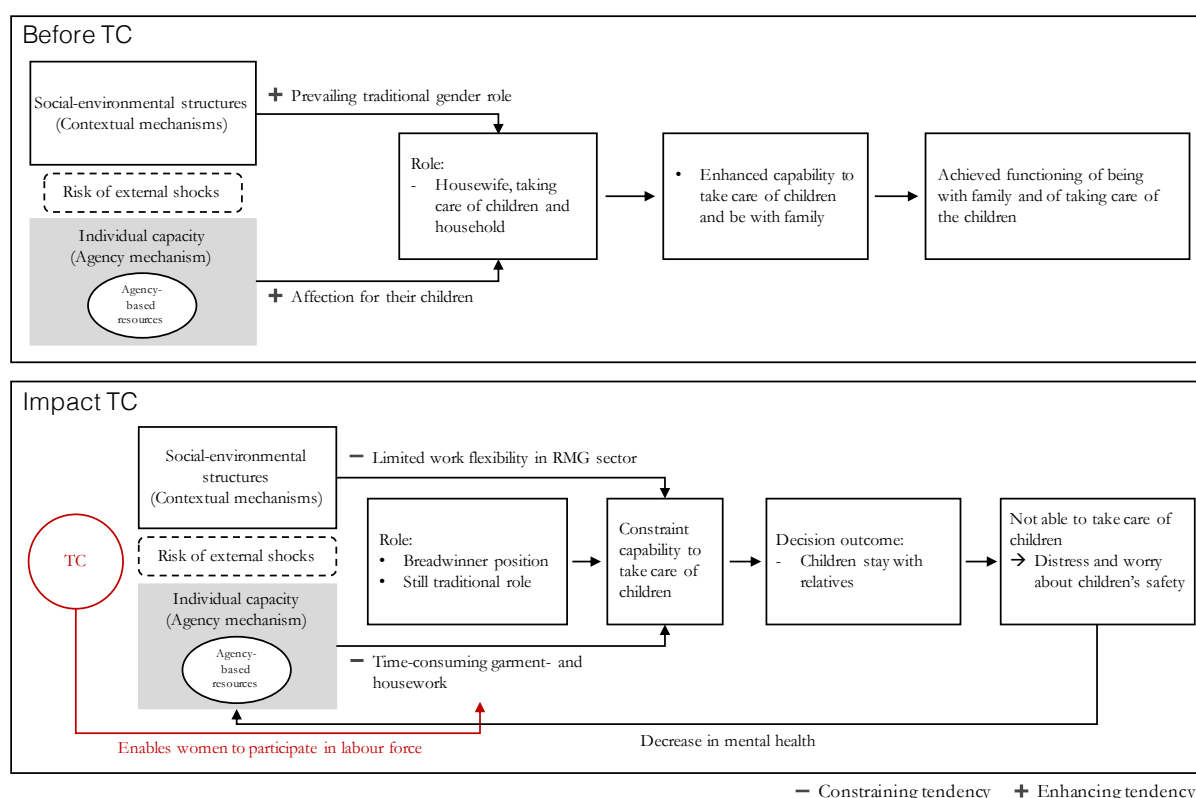


Figure 10: Causal mechanism behind Functioning #5  
Source: Own illustration

### 5.2.5 Orphan background

The influence of the TC on the orphan women differs from the influence on the women with a family background. The women have to provide for themselves and hence work in any case. Consequently, the training and the subsequent garment work trigger no change or augmentation

of their role. Yet, the type of work is influenced by the TC. The formal nature of the RMG work provides a higher income and higher job security compared to the work that the women would have done otherwise. Thereby their capability to save up money and to live in a secure dormitory facility is enhanced. Hence, the TC positively impacts their functioning to live a secure life. However, similar to the previous analysis, the conditions of garment work have detrimental health effects on the women, constraining their capability to be healthy.

Furthermore, as the co-workers represent the focal point of the orphan women's social life, the TC influences their social environment. In the garment sector, orphan women almost exclusively interact with women who have a family background. This represents a change from their previous orphanage environment, as well as from other jobs that are more common for orphan women. This new environment acts as a constant reminder for the women of their own fate and results in a feeling of misery. Hence, the RMG work decreases the women's psychological resources, constraining their motivation to continue working and at the same time leading to worries. Consequently, the women are not able to achieve the functioning of having a worry-free future. Lastly, the results do not indicate that the TC nor the garment work affect the women's chance of having a family.

## 5.2.6 Summary of TC impact

In Figure 11, we summarise the analyses of our two sub-questions. It is important to note that this summary comprises only the results of our analysis and that it should not be considered exhaustive.

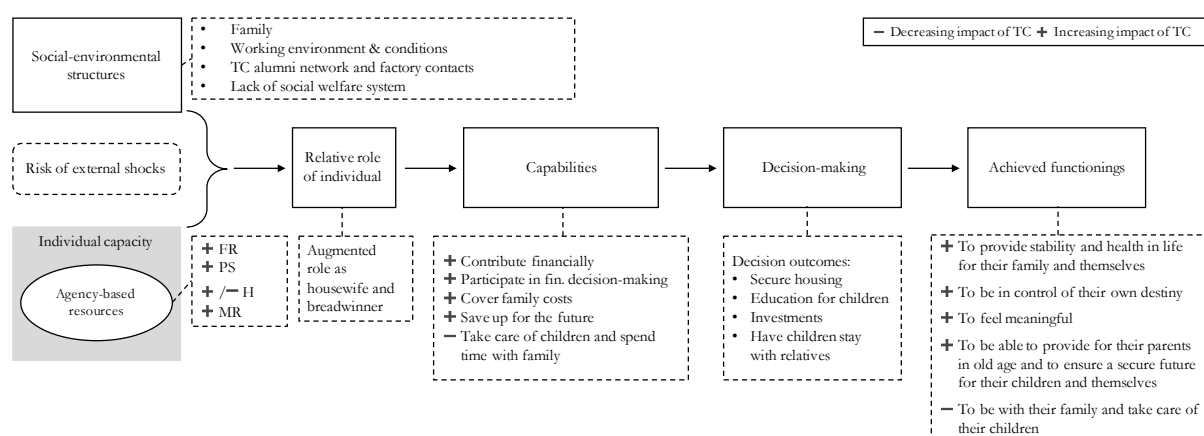


Figure 11: Summary impact of TC  
Source: Own illustration

## 6 Discussion

### 6.1 Empirical contributions

Stemming from our research gap, our research question “How does capacity-building training impact women’s well-being?” has guided this thesis. By using the CA, we add the women’s perspective to the contemporary discussions on the well-being of Bangladeshi women. Firstly, the capacity-building training clearly enhances the women’s well-being by providing greater stability in life. As this stability is closely linked to the financial resources of the women, this furthermore substantiates the general importance of financial resources to well-being as identified by Kabeer et al. (2011) and Nazneen et al. (2011). However, our analysis adds the dimension of *why* financial resources are important to the women’s well-being and it shows that access to paid work and increased income should rather be considered a means than an end to well-being. This is in line with the general criticism of outcome-based approaches (Esplen & Brody, 2007; Hossain, 2012; Vallance et al., 2011). Knowing what the women value to achieve opens up the possibility to identify further ways to reach the same end. The analysis of Functioning #1 depicts several destabilising factors, such as the lack of social welfare- and insurance systems. This substantiates that contextual structures are important levers to achieve well-being (Hossain, 2012).

Secondly, the training augments the women’s role in the household by increasing their access and control over financial resources. Noteworthy here is that this effect is mostly related to taking up garment work, rather than to the knowledge on empowerment provided by the TC. Whereas existing research relates this to increased overall empowerment (Esplen & Brody, 2007), our analysis shows that the women’s empowerment does not go beyond the spending dimension. Instead, the traditional role of the women remains unchanged. This is reflected in how the women do not question taking on the double burden of garment- and housework. Given that these findings demonstrate deeply embedded social and cultural norms, we thus agree with Leder (2016) who points out the importance of contextualising the notion of empowerment. This furthermore underscores the applicability of a bottom-up approach as it naturally factors in the context.

Thirdly, by looking beyond the factory floor and considering garment work within the context of the women’s lives, we find that garment work substantially decreases the women’s well-being by constraining their capability to be there for their children and to spend time with their families. Although research highlights the relevance of the family construct, it does so rather as a constraint of empowerment and not in terms of well-being (Dutta, 2019; Mezzadri, 2016). Hence, we add to this discussion by showing that the family construct can also be considered a source of well-being as it is highly valued by the women. In fact, the identified distinction between a family background

and an orphan background further stresses the aspect of the family as an integral part of the women's well-being. In the case of the orphans, the lack of a family results in a decrease of their well-being and their outlook in life is substantially changed for the worse. Consequently, this highlights the downside of limiting well-being to a material dimension as higher financial resources for the orphan women does not necessarily translate into overall higher well-being.

Lastly, we find it difficult to say whether capacity-building training with a focus on garment work can be considered a long-term solution to women's well-being. It cannot be denied that in comparison to their previous lives, the women's future outlook is indeed better and more secure. Most women are able to save up money and can also afford education for their children. However, the physically and psychologically draining working conditions can hardly be considered a sustainable solution to long-term well-being. This is further emphasised by the women's plans to eventually start their own businesses in the rural villages as this entails less physically demanding work and higher flexibility to combine work and family life. It shows that the women see garment work as a temporary solution; an aspect that is often disregarded in the discourse on garment work (Akhter et al., 2019; Prentice et al., 2018).

## 6.2 Theoretical contributions

Our overall aim is to contribute to the identified theoretical gap concerning a qualitative bottom-up perspective. Therefore, the question that needs to be discussed is as to whether this perspective is of value within social sustainability. Our analysis shows the importance of taking a holistic perspective and we see the CA as a fitting lens to explain the impacts of the training. We furthermore contribute to theory in several ways. Firstly, our results indicate the overall relevance of applying the CA in a qualitative setting. Secondly, the analysis shows the importance of a dynamic dimension within the CA as exemplified by the occurrence of external shocks, which can almost instantly change the contextual circumstances and shift prioritisation of functionings. This is in line with Zimmermann (2006) who considers well-being a process rather than a state.

Thirdly, the prioritisation of certain functionings shows a hierarchical nature, pointing towards the research done by Nussbaum and her notion of central human capabilities (Nussbaum, 2000). We see this notion as being similar to the identified functioning of having a stable life. In a state where this functioning is not fully achieved, other less basic functionings are deprioritised. Furthermore, our results show that functionings are often strongly interrelated and sometimes can even be mutually exclusive. Overall, our research thereby forges a link between the qualitative methodology, our empirical results, and the given theoretical stance.

Fourthly, however, there is in particular one aspect that needs to be scrutinised critically. By taking a bottom-up perspective, one assumes the frame of reference of the research subjects. Whereas this supports the understanding of the researched individuals, it may also bias the view on social sustainability issues. As the analysis shows, by using the CA, the impacts of the training on the lives of the women are largely positive. Moreover, from the women's perspective, one could reach the conclusion that well-being is high given the context. Yet, in this conclusion, we see the downside of a bottom-up perspective and potentially also generally of the CA. It entails the risk of downplaying the conditions under which the women still live despite the training and thus may lead to accepting the status quo.

Lastly, combining the work of different scholars, we developed a holistic framework based on the CA. The critical realist's viewpoint allowed us to map out the relationships between the different concepts of the CA and to emphasise the relational role of individuals within their respective contexts. This greatly facilitated the adaption of the CA to our research aim and empirical setting. We therefore agree with Martins (2006), who sees critical realism a suitable lens for the CA, and further remark its overall suitability for social sustainability issues.

### 6.3 Limitations

We see several limitations to our thesis. Firstly, the choice of a single case study can be considered a limiting factor since specific aspects of the TC, such as its focus and location, potentially restrict the transferability of our results to other capacity-building initiatives. Secondly, given that our theoretical framework entails investigating a wide bandwidth of factors, we did not gain an in-depth understanding of these. Thirdly, the interview setting also entailed limitations, which we discuss in chapter 3. Finally, since our sampling only included women who had participated in the TC, we were limited to comparing the TC's impacts to the women's previous lives and not to other women who had not undergone the training.

### 6.4 Suggestions for future research

To gain a better understanding of the impacts of capacity-building training, we see the need for further studies on initiatives with different training foci. This will widen the scope of training and help identify more general opportunities and challenges of this approach. In this regard, the use of multiple-case studies will also be useful. Moreover, we see further research with a more in-depth focus on certain causal mechanisms as critical if pursuing a normative purpose. Lastly, there is a need for research with different approaches concerning the interviewee sampling, for example, samples including both women who have undergone training and women who have not; and samplings specifically focusing on certain backgrounds, such as orphans.

## 7 Concluding remarks

### 7.1 Conclusion

The RMG sector has already been recognised as the main catalyst for the economic development of Bangladesh and it has created new income opportunities for women. Yet, women still encounter distinctive vulnerabilities both on and beyond the shop floor; aspects which capacity-building initiatives seek to improve. Given the limited understanding of these initiatives' impacts on women's well-being, we sought to answer the following research question:

*How does capacity-building training impact the women's well-being?*

We show that the TC impacts the women's well-being and we find the impacts to be predominantly positive in comparison to their previous lives. The training and the subsequent garment work provide higher stability and control, and augment the women's role in their family context, in which they perceive themselves as more meaningful and not as burdens. However, we demonstrate how garment work also has negative impacts on the women's well-being. Shouldering the double burden of paid and unpaid work entails long-term health effects and it decreases their time available to take care of their family. Although the TC seeks to empower the women, the effects of this particular knowledge appear to be limited. Furthermore, the discussion of our findings stresses the importance of critically scrutinising the overall impacts of the TC. Given the poor living conditions of the women, any change for the better may be perceived as disproportionately good and thus may divert the attention away from large inequalities and miseries that continue to persist in their lives. Although the RMG sector is deeply integrated into the global value chains of many Western corporations, women workers in Bangladesh are still required to work on average 40% over time in a six-day work week in order to provide a basic living. Their lives are still far from stable and despite improving tendencies by the training, the women remain trapped in an inferior role.

### 7.2 Implications for corporate social responsibility

The conclusion of our thesis further gives implications to the field of corporate social responsibility. It substantiates the relevance of corporations to address the social sustainability of their global value chains. The case of the TC not only shows that capacity-building initiatives may have significant impacts on women's well-being, but it furthermore indicates that depending on the context, the role of corporations changes. In the case of absent or weak social welfare- or insurance systems, capacity-building efforts may indeed assume a social-welfare function, which requires corporations to rethink the boundaries of their responsibilities. We thus see it as important for corporations to be aware of this, as it entails the necessity of adopting a long-term, holistic view towards their investments in corporate social responsibility.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Background to the TC

Project nature	<p>The TC is fully sponsored by the Retailer</p> <p>Implemented and run by a local NGO</p> <p>The surplus is used for development</p>
Selection of trainees	<p>Women from under-privileged background</p> <p>Age 18-35</p> <p>Should have basic education and physical health to receive training</p>
Selection procedure	<p>Verbal interviews to evaluate individual motivation, family conditions and educational background</p> <p>Verification of age through NID or birth certificate</p> <p>Verification of physical fitness</p>
Program details	<p>Number of trainees per batch: 15</p> <p>Number of batches per year: 6 batches</p> <p>Duration of batch: 3 months (2 batches run simultaneously)</p> <p>Operating hours: Full-time 5 days a week from 9.00 am to 5.00 pm with 1-hour lunch break</p> <p>Practical training: 85 % of the training, see Appendix II</p> <p>Theoretical training: 15% of the training, see Appendix II</p>
Benefits of the trainees	<p>Free of cost training during the 3 months</p> <p>Monthly allowance of BDT3,000</p> <p>Free medical exams and basic medication</p> <p>Conveyance allowance for the trainees who live within bus traveling distance</p>
Support provided by the Retailer	<p>Strategic support and allocation of financial resources</p> <p>Monitoring of program and arrangement of required machines</p> <p>Support the strategic relationship with the Retailer's suppliers</p>
Responsibilities by the NGO and TC	<p>To run and co-ordinate the daily activities</p> <p>To select trainees</p> <p>To arrange financial audit and provide regular program update to the Retailer by monthly report and bi-monthly meetings</p>
Stakeholder engagement	<p>Community: regular meetings with community representatives and ex-trainees</p> <p>Factory visits: regular visits to build professional relationships with the factories and get updates from ex-trainees</p> <p>Home visits: regular home visits to build a relationship with the family of the trainee in order to understand the socio-economic context</p> <p>Partnerships: collaboration with other NGOs to enhance quality of training</p> <p>Ethical compliance: TC is operated in accordance with local laws and trainees are treated equally</p> <p>Full compliance with corporate culture of the Retailer</p>

*Source: Excerpt from the Standard Operating Procedure from the Retailer*

## Appendix II: Outline of practical and theoretical training

Practical/sewing training (hard skills)	<p>Basic idea of machine operation</p> <p>Practice of different types of top stitch sewing</p> <p>Cuff making and pocket attaching</p> <p>Top stitching and collar-band making</p> <p>Caution and safety of machine operation</p> <p>Types of machines and fabric</p> <p>Sample sewing of both pants and t-shirts in a semi-production line</p>
Theoretical training (soft skills)	<p>Women's empowerment, gender equality, contribution and participation in family decision making</p> <p>Factory norms, cleanliness and discipline</p> <p>Self-confidence and proper communication</p> <p>Goal setting, future planning and savings</p> <p>National labour laws: minimum wage, wage calculation, reading payslips, working hours, health and safety, benefits, leave procedure</p> <p>Factory and fire safety, health hazards at the workplace and use of personal protective equipment</p> <p>Awareness about rights and responsibilities as workers</p> <p>Counselling for preparation for job interviews and preparation of required documents</p> <p>Basic tips of good health, food and nutrition, reproductive health</p>

*Source: Excerpt from the Standard Operating Procedure from the Retailer*



**Part 1: Individual context and motivation behind participating in the TC**

1. Why did you choose to participate in the training center?
  - 1.1. Explain the reasons
2. Was it your decision or someone else's?
3. Did your family support you participating in the training center? If not, why not? If not, how did you convince them?
4. What do you think you would have done if you had not participated in the training center?
  - 4.1. How would that have affected your life?
5. Are other women in your community working in the garment industry?
  - 5.1. Do you think your situation is different than to those not working in the industry?
    - 5.1.1. If so, why/why not?
  - 5.2. Do you think your situation is different than to those working in the industry?
    - 5.2.1. If so, why/why not?
6. Are employers looking for female workers in your community?
  - 6.1. If yes, what do people in the community think about women working?

**Part 2: Individual circumstances**

1. Please rate from Very important, important, neutral, not so important, not at all important
  - 1.1. How do you value your career?
  - 1.2. How do you value education for yourself?
  - 1.3. How do you value education for your family?
2. What else is important to you?
3. Please rate from Very good, good, neutral, bad, very bad
  - 3.1. How do you perceive your living conditions?
  - 3.2. How do you perceive your living conditions compared to your community?
  - 3.3. How do you perceive your own and your family's health?
  - 3.4. How do you perceive your own and your family's health compared to people in your community?
  - 3.5. How do you perceive your freedom to choose your career compared to people in your community?
  - 3.6. How do you perceive your freedom to decide over your health compared to people in your community?
  - 3.7. How do you perceive your overall freedom to choose in life compared to other women in your community?
4. Income
  - 4.1. How much of your family's total income are you contributing? How was it before the training?
    - 4.1.1. How does this make you feel?
  - 4.2. Who is deciding over how the money is spent?
  - 4.3. What are you spending the additional income from your work on?
    - 4.3.1. Please give examples of what this is and why you want to buy those things?

**Part 3: Transformation of knowledge in the workplace**

1. Job
  - 1.1. What is your work position and what responsibilities do you have?
    - 1.1.1. Do you have a supervisory role? If not, do you think you will have one in the future?
  - 1.2. Have your work position and/or responsibilities changed since you started working? If so, in what way?

- 1.3. Did you ask for a promotion? If not, why?
- 1.4. Have you changed the workplace since you started working? If so, why?
2. Wage: Do you earn minimum wage? If not, why?
3. Workplace safety: Are you exposed to any risks in the workplace and if so, how do you handle them?
4. Participation: Do you feel comfortable in raising concerns that you might have about your work? If so, how do you raise concerns? If not, why?
5. Leave: Have you been able to take days off work? If so, what were the reasons for taking the day off? If not, why?
6. Further challenges
  - 6.1. How do you combine your family life with work?
    - 6.1.1. How do you feel about it?
  - 6.2. Is there anything that you would want to change? Please explain
  - 6.3. What other challenges do you experience at the workplace? For example, are men and women treated differently?
  - 6.4. How is your relationship to your co-workers and supervisors?

#### **Part 4: Outlook**

1. Goals for the future
  - 1.1. What are your career goals?
    - 1.1.1. Is there anything else you would like to do except garment work? If so, please explain what and why?
  - 1.2. What are your life goals? Please explain
2. What advice would you give the women who are participating in the training?
3. What advice would you give to the TC?
  - 3.1. What could be improved?
  - 3.2. What could be added to the training?

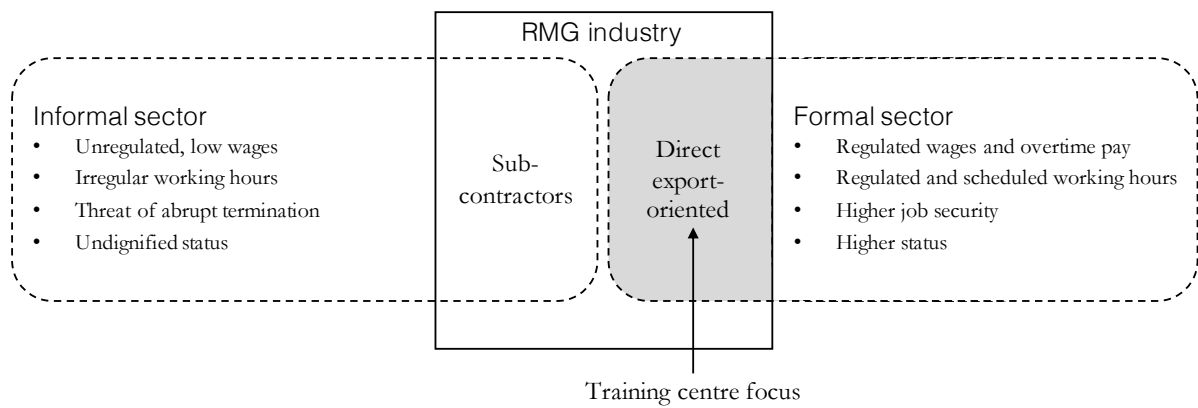
*Source: Own illustration*

#### Appendix IV: Interview sample

Interviewee	Age	Education (in years)	Marital status	Children (age)	Training year
Afruza	37	6	Married	1 daughter (19), 1 son (17)	2016
Asha	30	6	Married	1 daughter (6), 1 son (11)	2013
Asma	26	5	Unmarried	None	2010
Fatema	25	12	Married	None	2015
Hera	30	10	Married	1 son (12)	2014
Jesmin	22	10	Unmarried	None	2016
Johura	34	3	Married	2 daughters, 1 son	2015
Josna	31	3	Separated	1 son (12)	2011
Kazol	31	5	Married	1 son (12)	2016
Koli	33	8	Separated	1 daughter (13), 1 son (16)	2015
Laila	45	3	Married	2 daughters (20,12) and 1 son (25)	2014
Lata	27	8	Unmarried	None	2012
Mala	28	5	Separated	1 son (6)	2016
Maya	37	5	Married	2 sons (16,14)	2015
Moni	28	5	Married	1 son (5y)	2015
Morzina	35	5	Married	1 son (11)	2012
Nazma	36	5	Separated	2 daughters (18,10)	2016
Nilufa	27	12	Unmarried	None	2013
Nuri	29	4	Married	2 sons (8,3)	2011
Rani	32	9	Married	2 daughters (12,9)	2012
Rebeka	32	3	Separated	2 sons (17,11)	2015
Ripa	30	3	Separated	1 son (6)	2014
Rupali	30	3	Widowed	1 son (6)	2016
Shahina	27	6	Unmarried	None	2012
Sonali	24	9	Unmarried	None	2012
Interviewee TC	-	-	-	-	-
Interviewee Retailer 1	-	-	-	-	-
Interviewee Retailer 2	-	-	-	-	-

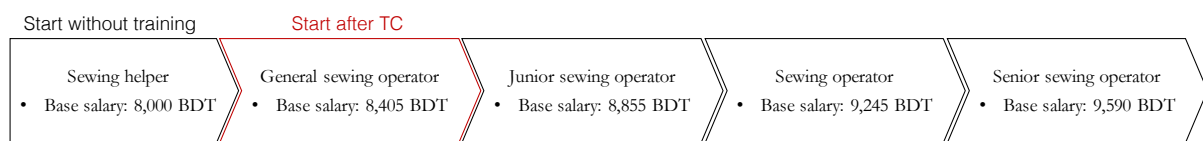
Source: Own illustration

## Appendix V: The RMG landscape in Bangladesh



*Source: Own illustration*

## Appendix VI: The career path in the RMG sector



*Source: Own illustration based on information received from the Retailer and TC*