

S.OLIVER GROUP and Save The Children Expand Strategic Collaboration to Promote Children's Rights



Together with the children's organization Save the Children, the S.OLIVER GROUP has been offering young workers in Bangladesh vocational training in the clothing industry for around ten years. What began as a social commitment has now expanded into a project to protect the rights of children and prevent child labor more effectively. Along with training opportunities for minors, the expanded collaboration also includes initial measures to promote family-friendly workplaces. In tandem with the project, the S.OLIVER GROUP is revising its company guidelines with regard to responsible ways of dealing with child labor, in order to strengthen the company's approach to due diligence and social compliance.

"The S.OLIVER GROUP is a company with strong roots, whose interest is in people above all and the generations to come. It is therefore an essential goal of our sustainability program to ensure fair working conditions for people along the supply chain," explains Oliver Hein, who, as Chief Operating Officer of the S.OLIVER GROUP, is also responsible for sustainability.

The project in Bangladesh, which is the largest procurement market of the company, is an important building block along the way. "We are very proud that with Save the Children we continue to have a strong partner in this area who we can work with over the long term, and we are now able to take our collaboration to the next level," Hein continues.

Florian Westphal, CEO of Save the Children Germany, agrees: "The lack of safe workplaces for young employees between the ages of 15 and 17 is one of the main causes of child labor. Many young people worldwide have to work for a living or contribute to the household income of the family, yet the formal sector frequently fails to offer suitable earning opportunities. This means that many children have to work in precarious circumstances or in the informal economy, where children have less protection and face a greater risk of exploitation. With s.Oliver and the supplier companies in Bangladesh, we are committed to tackling precisely this issue and can work together to lay an important foundation stone to help disadvantaged young people find work in safe conditions, where they can develop themselves both personally and professionally."

Three project pillars to strengthen children's rights in Bangladesh

The "Young Workers Development Programme" enables disadvantaged young people to find skilled work in the clothing industry when they have finished school and achieve a higher income. 45 junior staff up to the age of 17 per training year receive six months of training in sewing or silkscreen printing. This culminates in an internship for at least three months in one of three supplier businesses of the S.OLIVER GROUP with the goal of the trainees being taken on permanently after successfully completing their training. Along with the classic hands-on training, the junior staff receive training to promote

their personal development further. This includes soft skills, financial basics and computer work. The training center is based approx. 18 miles from the capital Dhaka and has been appropriately fitted out for the collaboration by the S.OLIVER GROUP. Save the Children manages the program in collaboration with its subsidiary THE CENTRE (The Centre for Child Rights and Business) and UCEP (Underprivileged Children's Education Program). It is a particular challenge for young people in Bangladesh to find work in a safe environment in the period between leaving school and reaching the age of majority. To support their families, they are often already working in precarious conditions as children. This is exactly where the project comes in, by actively including the employer perspective and training the participating businesses in how to deal with young trainees. General conditions that must be guaranteed include shorter working hours, as well as suitable workplaces and management methods.

Complementing the commitment to young workers, the „WeCare“ module focuses on the needs of working parents. In concrete terms, a first factory is given support in becoming a family-friendly employer. It provides strategies, practices and programs to help employees balance their parenting role, personal development goals and workplace responsibilities. In both modules, the factories should be capable of continuing the measures in the long term and without the support of the organization.

The third module covers the company guidelines of the S.OLIVER GROUP for dealing with child labor. To anchor children's rights in further business processes of the S.OLIVER GROUP, the existing guidelines are examined in close collaboration with Save the Children and processes are developed with clear steps and responsibilities to uncover cases of child labor, prevent them from happening in the future and to make reparations. The latest trends show that the subject is still very relevant: According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the children's charity of the United Nations UNICEF, the number of children involved in child labor has risen again to around 160 million worldwide.



Predecessor project Work2Learn Advanced honored by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)

Both partners draw on the actual requirements of the textile industry and their extensive expertise from the predecessor model Work2Learn Advanced. As part of this project, between 2011 and 2020, more than 500 young textile workers were given the opportunity to receive specialist training. Supply businesses of the S.OLIVER GROUP also participated actively in the project by providing internships or taking on the new workforce – and benefited from the expertise of the new co-workers. In 2013, Work2Learn Advanced was awarded the Innovation Award for Vocational Training Projects in Developing Countries by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). Further information can be found at: <https://www.savethechildren.de/unterstuetzen/fuer-unternehmen/unsere-partner/soliver/>



Photo credit: Tonmoy Jaber

COMPANY INFORMATION

Since it was founded in 1969, the S.OLIVER GROUP has developed into a multi-brand group of companies. Alongside the brands s.Oliver and QS, the brand portfolio also includes comma, LIEBESKIND BERLIN and COPENHAGEN STUDIOS. The Group employs around 5,100 employees worldwide.

Sustainability in the S.OLIVER GROUP

As a company with strong roots, the S.OLIVER GROUP takes responsibility for human beings and nature. As part of an integrated sustainability program, the company defines clear goals for itself in the areas of people, the planet and the future (product). Further information can be found at www.soliver-group.com/responsibility.

About Save the Children

In 1919, the year after the First World War, the social reformer and children's rights activist Eglantyne Jebb founded Save the Children to save children in Germany and Austria from starvation. The biggest independent children's rights organization in the world, Save the Children is active today in around 120 countries. Save the Children is involved in helping children in wars, conflicts and catastrophes. For over 100 years, the organization has worked towards creating a world in which the rights of children are respected and all children have the opportunity to live healthy and secure lives, to grow up free and independent and to learn.

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