

**"New Voices At The Table For Textile Industry Workers
In Bangladesh And Sri Lanka."**

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The Multi-Fiber Arrangement (MFA), the system of quotas that governed much of the global market for textiles and apparel for more than thirty years, was phased out in 2005. Two prevalent theories to explain why countries like Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have done well post-MFA, low wage rates and international influences, only partly explain variations in success in the post-quota era.

In this presentation, I argue that these countries are witnessing the emergence of a domestic policy network in their garment industries, which explains the variations in competitiveness after the MFA phase-out. The literature on policy networks is vast, but this framework has rarely been applied to the developing country context. One of the most important aspects of this network is the dialogue among stakeholders, and countries with several effective mechanisms for facilitating this dialogue will have a stronger network of stakeholders influencing policy decisions.

In Bangladesh, I find that, post-MFA dialogue was increased among the different stakeholders through various means. The role of labor has also become increasingly important in the larger network. As these different stakeholders came together, they were able to create a consensus on the domestic policy agenda and begin to implement key policy reforms helpful to the industry.

In Sri Lanka, the policy network is weaker because of the limited role of labor in the larger domestic coalition. While there are several mechanisms for dialogue and interaction between the government and the private sector, there are few credible mechanisms to translate the concerns of labor into concrete policy changes. If labor continues to be excluded in Sri Lanka, the country will witness a less competitive garment and textiles industry as compared to Bangladesh.