



*“We need workers.
It’s essential that we work
in harmony, safeguard our
employees, and provide
mutual support to maintain
steady production.”*

**Ms. Huynh Thi Hen, HR
Manager, Xuan Hoang Garment
Factory**

The Threads That Bind:

Weaving Respect into Workplace Culture and Impact *in* Viet Nam’s Garment Sector

For Xuan Hoang—and thousands of garment factories across Viet Nam producing for global buyers—attracting and retaining workers is vital to sustaining productivity. Increasingly, factories are discovering that the hidden thread to a stronger workforce lies in creating respectful workplaces.



At a Glance

**IFC's Respectful Workplaces program:
2022-2024**

**15 factory owners
employing over 10,000 workers**

Tailored and localized training

An ecosystem of support: Sustainable
community of practice contact teams established

Mentorship and monitoring

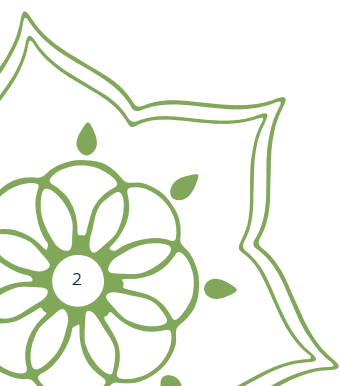
63 drama performances by ATH
in **15 factories over 2 years**

**By the end of the two-year program,
participating factories reported marked
reductions in workplace bullying and
sexual harassment.**

Viet Nam's garment industry is a significant economic driver, contributing billions of dollars in export revenue annually and employing nearly 2.5 million people across more than 6,000 factories.

In 2022, against a backdrop of evolving labor regulations, growing demand from global buyers for improved working conditions in supplier factories, and fierce competition for workers, 15 garment factory owners in Viet Nam took proactive steps to invest in their workforce and enhance their working environments. Collectively employing over 10,000 workers, these factories supply a global retailer, who is actively advancing the initiative as part of the company's broader sustainability commitments in the region.

The brand's publicly stated commitment to ensuring safer, more respectful, and productive working environments reflects its recognition that dignity at work is fundamental to both ethical responsibility and long-term business success. For businesses in global supply chains, like garment factories, addressing these issues is also critical to ensure compliance with international standards and maintain a competitive edge.



Key Findings

A two-year collaboration between IFC, the retailer, and 15 garment factories in Viet Nam led to clear, measurable improvements—revealing a significant shift in workplace culture and conditions. Reported rates of reductions in workplace bullying and sexual harassment were significant, as were improvements in well-being, alongside a noticeable decline in the negative impacts on productivity previously linked to these issues.

The share of employees considering exiting employment due to their bullying or harassment dropped. Instances of bullying decreased by 16 percentage points. The number of workers reporting feeling distracted, tired, or unwell due to these issues was halved and there was a shift in the awareness and mindset of factory management—to one of active leadership on the issue.



Over 3,000 employees from the 15 participating factories took part in diagnostic surveys, interviews, and workshops during program delivery. Staff reflections—captured through quotes in this case study—highlight shifts in awareness before and after the delivery period.



The journey to respectful workplaces

“At times, I thought they were just teasing each other, and I did not think deeper about it, nor the impact of it. 70 percent of our workforce is female, and female workers have the tendency to be harassed more. After joining the program, I feel my understanding has improved. This program is very helpful for us and our business.”

**Ms. Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc,
Deputy General Manager,
Viet My Garment**

A diagnostic study – and revelation for leadership

Early diagnostic surveys revealed that workplace violence and harassment were impacting productivity and employee engagement. On average, one in three respondents across 15 factories reported experiencing workplace bullying, sexual harassment, or online violence, and one in ten felt distracted, tired, late, or absent due to these issues. Additionally, a significant number of respondents, 15%, considered leaving their workplace as a result.

This was a wake-up call for participating factories. Some initially believed they had no evidence of workplace challenges of this type, while others sought answers to staff turnover, engagement, and absenteeism. The results highlighted the productivity costs of absenteeism and turnover, provided insight into employees' experiences, and showed that the factories' existing anti-sexual harassment policies were insufficient.

Building a shared understanding

Effective policies support workplaces by establishing clear guidelines and expectations for behavior, ensuring a safe and respectful environment, and providing mechanisms for addressing grievances.

By training a diverse representation of staff from across factory hierarchies and advocacy groups, participants were able to identify disrespectful workplace behaviors, understand the importance of a survivor-centered approach, and improve grievance mechanisms through the establishment of contact teams for reporting. By addressing common misconceptions about harassment, a common understanding was built among a diverse range of workers.

“If my confidence understanding and handling these issues was 5/10 before, it now becomes 9/10. I feel I understand more my workers, and their thinking. I feel more confident about communicating effectively with them.”

Ms. Le Thi Thao, HR staff and contact team member at Nam & Co

A shift in perspective

The training helped participants to recognize where their existing policies may have been letting staff down. Following the sessions, more than 92 percent of participants said they saw the need to update anti-sexual harassment policies to address workplace bullying and online violence, citing impacts on workers and business costs. Inspired by IFC’s sample policies, the updates reflected management’s commitment to reducing workplace violence and supporting affected employees.

To support the changes and build confidence in the new policies and processes, employees were guided to understand not only the procedures, but also who they could turn to with grievances—trusting that they would be treated with respect. With an emphasis on practical grievance mechanisms that reflect the cultural diversity of their workforce, all 15 factories established cross-functional teams to serve as the first point of contact for staff—a foundational element of the Respectful Workplaces program. These contact teams consisted of workers representing diverse backgrounds, roles, and levels of responsibility, trained using a survivor-centered approach to handle incidents, with real-life scenarios encouraging conversation and critical reflections. Participants in this training reported improved knowledge, skills, and confidence in handling cases upon returning to their factories.

“I realized from the training today that there are definitions that we thought we knew, but in fact, we fell quite short, particularly those related to sexual harassment and domestic violence. Together, with the factory’s core team, we will continue enhancing our policies and procedures to add meaningful values to the company.”

Mr. Tran Thai Duong, Compliance Officer, Vinatex Bac Lieu





“Before, if workers have concerns, they were unclear about who to talk to. Some might go straight to the leadership team to complain. The presence of the contact team makes it a lot easier for our workers.

The “distance” is shorter now. While contact team members are becoming more confident, workers should also feel safer. There is no more worry about who would support and protect me, or “my voice does not reach anywhere.”

Nguyen Thi Bich Ngoc, Deputy General Manager, Viet My Garment

Bridging awareness and action in the workplace

For a workplace transformation to succeed, it’s vital that all workers are fully engaged in the journey towards creating a respectful environment.

Alongside IFC’s support in establishing comprehensive policies, grievance mechanisms, and contact teams, the client also partnered with ATH Drama for Change to conduct drama-based workshops at the factories. The workshops helped to demystify some of the concepts related to bullying and workplace harassment, and to share information on the new workplace policies, grievance mechanisms and contact teams.

By the end of the project, 92 percent of end-line survey participants said they were aware of company’s policies and contact team and 99 percent indicated trust in the reporting process. Comfort in contacting the company’s representatives for help doubled from 48 percent to 98 percent.





“Awareness is very important. It helps us adjust our behaviors and know where to focus in supporting the factories and workers managing sexual harassment. Participating in the program helps us see how important respectful workplaces are for active employee engagement particularly in productivity and reducing accidents - for example injury by needles due to being distracted.”

**Ms. Nguyen Thi Lanh, HR Director,
New World Fashion Group**

“More than being proud, I am passionate about this topic and the program. It aligns to the values and objectives of the factories, which is to improve awareness and knowledge of workers as factories now have to rely on workers. I feel we can now be more in touch with the workers’ thinking.”

**Ms. Huynh Thi Hen,
HR Manager at Xuan Hoang**

Respectful workplaces weaving better pathways for connection

Cultivating a culture of awareness and respect among workers—supported by the introduction of new channels for raising grievances or concerns—led to staff feeling more engaged and empowered to report incidents and access essential company resources, such as safe transportation guidance, medical referrals, and time off for appointments.

Crucially for the garment factory businesses, the proportion of employees who contemplated leaving due to workplace bullying or harassment decreased, proving the effectiveness of the program as a technique to retain staff.

To thrive, Viet Nam’s garment factory industry needs to attract and retain workers that are supported to stay engaged, productive and safe at work. For the 15 participating factories, the combined impact of strengthened engagement and awareness, a measurable decline in workplace bullying and harassment, and the establishment of sustainable policies and team structures moved the needle beyond mere compliance—toward a more proactive and productive workplace culture.

Steps to creating respectful workplaces



1. ASSESS

Conduct an employee survey on the prevalence of workplace bullying, sexual harassment, online violence and the impact on work.

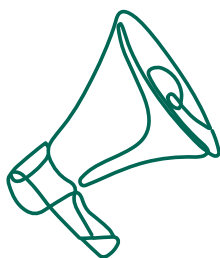


2. REFORM

Enhance company's policies and practices to reduce the risks of workplace violence and harassment.

3. EQUIP

Train contact teams at each workplace on handling reporting of incidents at the workplace.

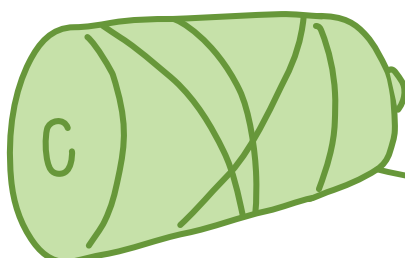
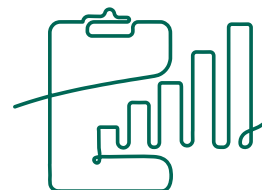


4. INFORM

Raise awareness among workers through communication initiatives led by contact teams and creative workshops.

5. EVALUATE

Conduct employee surveys and interviews to measure program impact.





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