

Assessing NGO influence on unethical labour conditions

The effect and changes of NGO strategies, lobbying and collaboration, to improve labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar



Master Thesis

Tamar Endeman

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Author

Name: Tamar Endeman
Programme: European Studies, MSc
Behavioural, Management and Social sciences
Institute: University of Twente
Enschede, the Netherlands
E-mail: t.endeman@student.utwente.nl

Graduation Committee

University of Twente

First supervisor: dr. G. Jansen
Second supervisor: dr. C. Matera
Department: Public Administration

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Abstract

The fast fashion industry is driven by a high demand of Western consumers. The labour conditions in the fast fashion industry are unethical, garment workers are dealing with low wages, long working hours, dangers and unhealthy conditions. NGOs can try to improve these conditions by means of their strategies. The central question in this research is: *to what extent have the strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry changed under the social and political circumstances of two sudden shocks in Bangladesh and Myanmar, since 2013?* The studied strategies are collaboration and inside and outside lobbying. To answer the research question qualitative research has been conducted, through the analysis of data from three NGOs: Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, and Oxfam International. This document analysis involves the process of coding. The results are presented through two case studies, on the situation in Bangladesh before and after the Rana Plaza collapse of 2013, and on the situation in Myanmar before and after the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016. In Bangladesh the Accord on Fire and Building Safety was established after the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013, which led to more collaboration between NGOs and other organizations. In Myanmar, the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016, which led to more brands sourcing from garment factories located in Myanmar. In both countries NGOs were already active before the two sudden shocks to improve the labour conditions. The NGOs combine different strategies, or use the strategies that are best suited to their environmental, political or social influences, which can change over a period of time, as well as their strategies. Therefore, this study shows that the strategies of NGOs to improve labour conditions in the fast fashion industry did not change to a great extent under the social and political circumstances of the two sudden shocks in Bangladesh and Myanmar. For future research it would be interesting to analyse the experiences of garment workers more in depth, by focusing on local trade unions active in Bangladesh and Myanmar by combining qualitative methods with quantitative methods.

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❖ The image on the front page is retrieved from <https://www.sarahbeekmans.com/key-issues-in-the-fast-fashion/>

1. Introduction

The labour conditions in the fast fashion industry are unethical. Western countries have a large demand for fashion that is produced in large numbers, and in a cheap and fast way, this trend is called fast fashion. In order to achieve this form of fast fashion, a lot of European fashion companies, for example H&M or Inditex, have outsourced their work to developing countries, such as China, India, Bangladesh, and Myanmar (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). The garment workers that work in factories in developing countries are most of the time young, underpaid, and are working under unhealthy and dangerous conditions (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). There are different actors that will try to safeguard and improve the labour conditions and human rights in these countries, for example non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and trade unions. NGOs can be described as non-profit organisations, which operate independently from governments. NGOs can be organised on a local, national or international level, and address issues and problems that support the well-being of the public. When it comes to delivering services to the disadvantaged public, NGOs are very effective and efficient (Miraftab, 1997). Resulting in NGOs taking on important roles in international economic development, and trade policy (Nelson, 2002).

The Western society is, to some extent, aware of the unethical labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, however, the problems are not yet acknowledged and dealt with by Western consumers and brands. The unethical labour conditions in the fast fashion industry is seen as a pressing social issue, which requires action of the fashion industry, as well as legal and public action (Garcia-Torres, Rey-Garcia, & Albareda-Vivo, 2017). NGOs can play an important role in improving these labour conditions. This research will analyse different strategies of NGOs, and identify the extent to which these strategies have contributed to the improvement of labour conditions in developing countries in the fast fashion industry. The organisational actions and behaviour of NGOs are influenced and shaped by the social environments of institutions, as well as the political environment NGOs operate in (Pache & Santos, 2010; Nelson, 2002). These influences are exercised onto NGOs through rules and regulations, normative prescriptions, and social expectations (Pache & Santos, 2010). The NGOs analysed in this study all focus on the social issues surrounding the fast fashion industry. NGOs target private and public individuals, by using all the strategies they have in achieving their goals. The studied strategies of NGOs in this research are collaboration and lobbying; the latter can take on two forms, inside vs. outside lobbying. NGOs are able to target different actors within their lobby, the actors targeted in this research are; the brands or companies, the consumers, and the managers of the garment factories. This study will identify the changes of NGO strategies after two sudden shocks; the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh, and the uplifted economic sanctions by the United States (US) in Myanmar.

Within this study two cases are being analysed; the first case regarding Bangladesh, and second case regarding Myanmar. Both countries have experienced shocking events that could have had an impact on the strategies of NGOs to improve labour conditions in the fast fashion industry. In Bangladesh, the Rana Plaza collapse happened in 2013, and became one of the deadliest accidents in the fashion industry. The case of Myanmar regards the uplifted economic sanctions in 2016, which led to a rise in investment by international brands, such as H&M. More brands were starting to source work from garment factories in Myanmar (Oxfam International, 2015). This research tries to understand how strategies of NGOs are affected by the two sudden shocks. In order to understand this change, the cases of Bangladesh and Myanmar are relevant. Four hypotheses have been postulated, which will be corroborated or falsified through addressing the following research question: *To what extent have the strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry changed under the social or political circumstances of two sudden shocks that happened in Bangladesh and Myanmar, since 2013?* First, the strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions regarding the situation in Bangladesh will be analysed. Sub question one will explore the strategies of NGOs in Bangladesh before 2013, and the third sub question explores the NGO strategies after 2013. Thereafter, the situation of Myanmar will be analysed, through answering sub questions two and four. The answers of these sub questions will provide new and additional insights that can contribute to the formulation of the main research question. These situations will be presented as a two separate case studies. Finally, this research will explore to what extent the strategies changed to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Research question

To what extent have the strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry changed under the social or political circumstances of two sudden shocks that happened in Bangladesh and Myanmar, since 2013?

Sub questions

1. What were the strategies of NGOs active in Bangladesh to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry before the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013?
2. What were the strategies of NGOs active in Myanmar to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry before the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016?
3. What are the current strategies of NGOs active in Bangladesh to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013?
4. What are the current strategies of NGOs active in Myanmar to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry after the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016?

2. Theory

The theory section forms the literary basis of this study. This chapter provides a literature review on the problems regarding the labour conditions, on the different types of NGOs, and on the strategies that NGOs can use to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry.

2.1 Literature Review

2.1.1 Problems regarding labour conditions in the fast fashion industry

Theodore Levitt was one of the first researchers that made the term of globalisation popular under researchers. Levitt (1983) described globalisation as a process driven by technology. *“It has proletarianized communication, transport, and travel (Levitt, 1983, p. 1).”* Meaning that technology has made people curious for the charms of modernity. Now, everyone wants the things or products that they have heard about, seen, or experienced through the use of technology. Which has led to the emergence of global markets that meet the requirements of the people (Levitt, 1983). In addition, the United Nations (2017) state that due to the fast changes in technology, and the growing mobility of goods, services, capital and labour, globalization has changed economies, societies, and the environment over the past years. Which has resulted in a world that has never been so interconnected, also globalisation has led to an increased market competition (United Nations, 2017). As a result, globalisation has made it possible for companies to outsource their work to developing countries that offered the lowest wages, and countries where companies had to deal with little to no restrictions on human and workers’ rights. (Fashion Revolution, 2015; Lipschutz, 2004). Furthermore, globalisation has contributed to the disappearance of national or regional preferences of the consumers, which led to a world’s preference that is standardized (Levitt, 1983). To illustrate this, Levitt (1983) states that McDonalds restaurants are everywhere, the same food is being sold all over the world, just as Coca-Cola. Additionally, Levi Jeans as well; jeans that are being made in a few garment factories, but that are being sold, online and in stores, all over the world, from the Netherlands to Japan to the US, all to meet the people’s requirements.

The production and consumption of fashion has changed rapidly in the last 20 to 30 years. Formerly, garments would be produced on a small scale by local tailors, and sold in local stores. Around the 1970’s, it became cheaper to outsource the production of garments to developing countries, where the garments could be produced faster, and in much larger scales. Throughout the 1980’s fast fashion was born (Fashion Revolution, 2015). Therefore, it can be said that globalisation had an effect on the fashion industry. Fast fashion is characterised by the transformation of fashionable designs into products which can be bought by consumers, and can

be found in stores such as H&M and Zara. The availability of fashionable designs is achieved through low costs and low priced fashion, which remains in stores for a shorter period of time than clothing in the standard fashion industry (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). In order to keep the production of garments as fast, and as cheap as possible, the production continually moves towards the countries where the costs are the lowest, where the regulation is weak or non-existing, as well as the protection for garment workers and the environment. This globalisation of sourcing and distribution has led the garment manufacturing industry to become the world's third-largest industrial industry (Fashion Revolution, 2015). While the garment workers are earning minimum wages, the companies in the fashion industry keep growing, and continue to earn a lot of money (Oxfam Australia, 2017). An anti-globalisation movement, as described by Fogarty (2011), emerged in the late 1980s, this movement of NGOs targeted institutions such as the World Bank, IMF, and WTO. These institutions were, according to the NGOs, associated with powerful states and corporations of which the NGOs believed that these institutions disregarded global social justice, environmental protection, and other goals. Eventually, this movement included a various amount of NGOs active in different fields, such as; labour, environment, and human rights (Fogarty, 2011).

It can be stated that the trend of fast fashion is partly driven by the high order of consumers' demand (Barnes & Lea-Greenwood 2006; Turker & Altuntas, 2014). The society we live in can be described as a material-oriented society (Joung, 2013), which has been influenced by globalisation (Levitt, 1983). Bauer, Wilkie, Kim, and Bodenhausen (2012) describe materialism as *"a value system that is preoccupied with possessions and the social image they project"*. Acquiring these possessions, material products such as clothing, should contribute to the social status of many people. Therefore, clothing is used by these materialistic consumers as a way to represent their social status, and their success (Joung, 2013; Bauer et al., 2012). Additionally, Yang et al. (2017) state that shopping has become more of a leisure activity, it is done more out of luxury than out of necessity. Furthermore, Joung (2013) points out that materialistic consumers are more likely to show compulsive buying behaviour, meaning that compulsive buyers are more focused on the process of acquiring a product, than on the actual use of the product. Moreover, the young consumers of our society are firmly associated with materialism, meaning that they think that the clothes and the brands they wear describe, and define their social status. These young consumers are seen as a generation that is materialistic, and buys a lot more than older generations (Joung, 2013). Additionally, Joung (2013) states that materialistic consumers are profoundly involved with the fashion industry. Therefore, this high demand of consumers' can be closely related to materialism.

Turker and Altuntas (2014) state that fast fashion, and its time pressure have led to employee abuse, and other unethical working practices in garment factories. Most of the garment workers are low educated women and children, because the work carried out in the garment factories does not require high skills. The employees in these labour environments are facing discrimination, bad treatment, low wages, and long working hours (Turker & Altuntas, 2014; Lipschutz, 2004). The wages in the fashion industry cannot provide a worker with the fundamentals such as hygiene or health benefits (Oxfam Australia, 2017). According to Oxfam Australia (2017) the minimum wage of a garment worker in Bangladesh is 0.39\$ per hour. Additionally, in a lot of these developing countries international standards are not implemented, and national legislation on labour conditions is weak or non-existing. Oxfam Australia (2017) states that global supply chains and brands are able to change the wages garment workers earn to a sufficient amount, by increasing their prices with 1%. However, according to Turker and Altuntas (2014) it is difficult for European fashion companies to manage and monitor the supply chain activities, and to ensure the quality standards in developing countries. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), a United Nations agency, has set up the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, in 1998. This Declaration includes core labour standards, which should be respected by all UN Member States (Oxfam International, 2004), and preferably be advocated by NGOs. The minimum labour standards include the following (Oxfam International, 2004):

- *“Freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining are respected*
- *Employment is freely chosen*
- *Child labour is not used*
- *No discrimination is practised*
- *Working conditions are safe and hygienic*
- *Living wages are paid*
- *Working hours are not excessive*
- *Regular employment is provided*
- *No harsh or inhumane treatment is allowed”*

The ILO distinguishes the following core elements of the employment relationship, economic performance, and workers' protection: *“wages, working time, work organization and conditions of work, arrangements to balance working life and the demands of family and life outside work, non-discrimination and protection from harassment and violence at work”* (ILO, 2019). Garment workers that work in factories in developing countries are young, underpaid, and are working under unhealthy and dangerous conditions, most of the garment workers are women, and can therefore be paid lower wages than men (Turker & Altuntas, 2014). In this research poor labour conditions are characterised by wages that are too low, employees that are underage, and working conditions that are unhealthy and dangerous for the employees in the fast fashion industry.

2.1.2. Types of NGOs

There are a lot of NGOs focus on the social issues surrounding the fast fashion industry, by influencing the political agenda, and the decision-making process of political institutions or companies. Fogarty (2011) states that some NGOs are highly decentralised and grass root-oriented, and that other NGOs are more bureaucratic and professional. The NGOs analysed in this study all focus on the social issues surrounding the fast fashion industry. These are NGOs with a more bureaucratic and professional structure. Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, and Oxfam International are the NGOs analysed in this study. The work and actions carried out by trade unions will be analysed as well, trade unions represent and protect the interests and rights of its members, which are in this study referred to as garment workers. Gillan (2000) states that when achieving satisfaction of basic human needs, cooperation between trade unions and NGOs is necessary and possible, if they have a shared objective and a common approach. Objectives of trade unions consist of more basic common features than NGOs objectives, also there can be differences in political traditions, and in the culture of the organisation. Often the concerns of trade unions are human rights issues, e.g. labour conditions (Gillan, 2000). An example of a NGO that works in close cooperation with trade unions is Amnesty International. Amnesty International (2018) states that trade unions are first in line in dealing with the fight for human rights. Amnesty International has been cooperating with trade unions for 30 years, to deal with challenges of labour exploitations, and to tackle restrictions on fundamental freedoms of assembly, association, and expression (Amnesty International, 2018).

A lot of the NGOs active in the fast fashion industry are part of the global movement, Fashion Revolution. For example; Centre for Sustainable Fashion, Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, International Labour Rights Forum. The vision of Fashion Revolution (n.d.) is: *“we believe in a fashion industry that values people, the environment, creativity and profit in equal measure”*. Fashion Revolution strives for clothes that are produced in a safe, clean and fair way. Furthermore, Fashion Revolution raises awareness for the pressing social issues in the fast fashion industry, by showing that it is possible to change, and to support sustainable fashion organisations (Fashion Revolution, n.d.). The structure and strategies NGOs take on can be explained through the institutional theory. The institutional theory considers how organizations pursue legitimacy within their environment, and in what way they try to correspond with these different environments (Doh & Guay, 2006). The organisational actions and behaviour of NGOs are influenced and shaped by the social environments of institutions, as well as the political environment NGOs operate in (Pache & Santos, 2010; Nelson, 2002). These influences are exercised onto NGOs through rules and regulations, normative prescriptions, and social expectations (Pache & Santos, 2010). The culture, history, and policies of a country or region also

influences the structure of NGOs (Doh & Guay, 2006). NGOs target private and public individuals, by using all the strategies they have in achieving their goals. Herewith, NGOs are focussing their strategies of persuasion more and more on firms, resulting in companies becoming more responsive to the strategies of NGOs (Spar & La Mure, 2003). Two of the NGOs that are being analysed in this research are part of the Fashion Revolution; Fair Wear Foundation, and Clean Clothes Campaign, which advocates for improving the working conditions and empowering workers in the global garment and sportswear industries. This is done through the use of different activities, such as educating, informing, and lobbying (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2012).

2.1.3. Strategies of NGOs

NGOs are able to influence the political agenda, and the decision-making process by means of their strategies and activities. NGOs also conduct research and publish reports on their findings, regarding topics such as the labour conditions, workers' and human rights in Bangladesh or Myanmar. Within this research two types of strategies are being studied, lobbying and collaboration. The lobby strategy can take on two forms; inside vs. outside lobbying. Momin (2013) states that NGOs represent public citizens who are frequently affected by actions of companies, and who are isolated by society, meaning their voices are less often heard. However, Fogarty (2011) states that NGOs can vary in their choices of strategies due to several reasons; their organisational structure, the nature of the institutional targets, the available resources, and their ideology.

A lot of work conducted by NGOs and trade unions is carried out by means of lobbying. Through the use of lobbying important information, regarding labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, will reach the global level of governance, e.g. the European Union and the United Nations. Van Esch and Princen (2012) describe lobbying as lobbyists and interest groups that try to influence the decision-making process, in this case global governance. Lobbying happens most of the time through lobbyists trying to get in touch with politicians, or other officials that make political decisions (Van Esch & Princen, 2012). NGOs are able to target different actors in their lobby. The actors in the West; brands, companies, and consumers, and the actors in the low wage countries; the owners, and managers of the garment factories. Within this research all types of actors are being studied, due to the possibility that NGOs will use various lobby strategies to target different actors. Inside lobbying means that political decisions are being influenced by consulting with the decision-makers (Van Esch & Princen, 2012). This happens, for example, when a NGO seeks accreditation from multilateral institutions, and the institution gives the NGO a formal consultative status. Or when the NGOs lobby with policy-makers in the secretariats or national delegations of international organisations (Fogarty, 2011). In other words: lobbyists try to

influence the legislation or decision-making in a direct way, through contacting the politicians and legislators. Therefore, lobbyists have to develop and maintain contacts, and provide them with information and policy proposals. An example of an inside lobby strategy was used during the Fashion Revolution Week, a platform, Fashion Question Time, was established in which the future of the fashion industry is debated by a panel of powerful people of government and the fashion industry (Fashion Revolution, n.d.b). Outside lobbying happens in a more active way, where the public opinion is turned against the status quo (Fogarty, 2011). Lobbyists, interest groups or NGOs that use the outside lobby strategy are putting pressure on the decision-makers, by attempts to mobilize citizens to speak out, which can happen through protests and demonstrations (Van Esch & Princen, 2012). During the Fashion Revolution Week an outside lobby strategy is performed, this is the #whomademyclothes campaign. The goal of this campaign is to raise awareness for the unknown sides of the fashion industry, and to make a shift in focus from the consumers to brands, which is done by asking consumers to ask brands on social media the question “*who made my clothes?*”, by using #whomademyclothes (Fashion Revolution, n.d.b). A second example of an outside lobby strategy is the protest carried out by the NGO Labour Behind the Label in November 2018. On Black Friday the NGO called for public action outside of the H&M store at Oxford Circus in London, United Kingdom, where they asked people to sign a petition demanding H&M to keep their promises of paying living wages and guarantee fair labour conditions for their supply chain (Labour Behind the Label, 2018). When it comes to lobbying it is important to know when to shift between the outside and inside strategies. Besides, the combination of using an outside lobby strategy together with an inside strategy, is proven to be a complementary method (Fair, Green & Global alliance, 2014).

The use of collaboration as a strategy between different international organizations, active in fields such as; development, human rights, environment, and women’s rights, emerged in the 1990s. These organisations joined in several collaborative efforts to protect civil and political rights (Nelson & Dorsey, 2003), for example labour conditions. Organisations that NGOs collaborate with can be the European Union, the United Nations, other NGOs, or local trade unions. With these collaborations, NGOs are able to develop common strategies to influence actors, and they have developed environmental policies in line with civil and political standards. This form of strategy includes active involvement of NGOs in advocacy campaigns (Nelson & Dorsey, 2003). This study will analyse if the collaboration between NGOs and other institutions has broadened and deepened after the two sudden shocks Bangladesh and Myanmar experienced. An example of a collaboration is the, close cooperation between Amnesty International and trade unions. Another NGO that works in close collaboration with trade unions and other actors is the Clean Clothes Campaign (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2012), several of the studies conducted by Clean

Clothes Campaign are financially supported by the European Union for example. In addition, the European Union works in cooperation with NGOs. NGOs engage with the European Union to ensure better implementation of EU initiatives and policies within EU countries (European Commission, n.d.).

As mentioned before, the institutional theory influences the structure and organisation of NGOs. To illustrate, the environmental, political or social impacts exert a major influence on the structure and strategies of NGOs. NGOs that emerged in Europe and the US have been influenced by the social, and political history of the countries (Doh & Guay, 2006). Doh and Guay (2006) state that the structure of NGOs in Europe are focused on the achievement of political and social assimilation with other (European) countries. Clean Clothes Campaign and Fair Wear Foundation are both European based organisations. Accordingly, Clean Clothes Campaign has established national coalitions with other organisations, e.g. trade unions, human and woman rights organisations, researchers, and activists. Fair Wear Foundation also believes strongly in cooperation with other countries and organisations, therefore, their structure consists of a multi-stakeholder approach (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017e). Moreover, institutions and organizations are fundamentally reflective and revolutionary (Doh & Guay, 2006), NGOs are able to reflect and can create new norms within a society. In addition, Doh and Guay (2006) suggest that the strategies of NGOs should be created and adjusted to particular issues of the environment. In order for NGOs to carry out their work, and to help citizens regarding human and labour rights, they have to comply with different actors in different environments. For example, with the government of a country, and to influence the decision-making process NGOs have to maintain in good contact with politicians and decision-makers. As well as brands and employers, NGOs also have to listen to the citizens for which they are fighting. All these actors operate in different environments, which can make it difficult for NGOs to collaborate with them. Therefore, NGO behaviour and their strategies can differ between the different actors and their environment. Accordingly, the social and political impact of the two sudden events should seriously be taken into account by the NGOs when choosing their strategies.

Furthermore, the sudden shocks in Bangladesh and Myanmar could have had an impact on the political, and social environment of Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, and Oxfam International. The Rana Plaza collapse is the worst disaster in the fashion industry, which killed more than 1.100 people (Ashraf & Prentice, 2019). This disaster attracted world-wide attention for the unethical working conditions in Bangladesh and in other sourcing countries. After this disaster plenty of local initiatives emerged to help the victims, these local initiatives worked together with NGOs active in Bangladesh (Hossain & Luthfa, 2014). The world-wide (media)

attention for labour conditions in Bangladesh can be seen as a mechanism that contributed to NGOs collecting more data on the environmental impact and human safety conditions of the fashion industry (Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016; Anner, 2018). Besides, this world-wide attention could have provided a platform for NGOs to inform consumers and decision-makers about the poor labour conditions in Bangladesh and other sourcing countries. NGOs started publishing reports on the activities of brands and companies sourcing in low-wage countries, which can be seen as an inside lobby strategy. On the contrary, these reports also put pressure on the brands and companies by exposing information on their production process. Eventually, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety (hereafter, the Accord) was established for garment factories in Bangladesh, a five-year programme which includes factory inspections and safety upgrades. It is a legal binding agreement between NGOs, trade unions and multinational companies that outsource their work to Bangladesh, to improve the labour standards. This is done by making retailers and international brands responsible for the safety of the garment factories (Prentice et al., 2017). The uplifted US economic sanctions in Myanmar has led to a rise in investment by international brands, such as H&M, more brands were starting to source work from garment factories in Myanmar (Oxfam, 2015). Which led to a grow of the industrial population that increased the interest of NGOs to improve the labour conditions in Myanmar. This rise in investment by international brands and companies contributed to the change of NGO behaviour in Myanmar. NGOs become more concerned about the labour conditions in garment factories, which could have led to more research and established programmes to improve labour conditions.

2.2 Expectations and hypotheses

As a result of the Rana Plaza collapse, NGOs and International Organisations conducted a lot more research in the field of safety and labour conditions in the fast fashion industry (Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016; Anner, 2018). The sudden shocks analysed in this study include two different events that took place in Bangladesh and Myanmar. The first event is the Rana Plaza disaster, that happened in Bangladesh, on the 24th of April 2013. (Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016). The second event can be seen as a political event that happened in Myanmar. In 2016 the US economic sanctions of Myanmar have been lifted (BBC News, 2016), resulting in a lot of fashion companies outsourcing their work to Myanmar. These fashion companies are attracted to the low wages, and the beneficial trade conditions of Myanmar (Oxfam, 2015). Both of these sudden shocks could have had a social, and political impact on the strategies of NGOs active in the fast fashion industry. By looking at these two different countries and events, various situations can occur.

The NGOs that are being studied within this research are Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, and Oxfam International. Clean Clothes Campaign, and Fair Wear Foundation are both located in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, a Western country. The headquarters of Oxfam International is located in Nairobi, Kenya, however, this is an international NGO that is active worldwide, resulting in a lot of Western influences. Although, these NGOs are not located in Bangladesh or Myanmar, they are all active worldwide, including the two developing countries Bangladesh and Myanmar. Fair Wear Foundation even has staff in Bangladesh representing the organisation (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017e). These three NGOs are being analysed in this study because of their overlapping objectives. Their common objective can be best described as improving the labour conditions, the rights of garment workers, and ending poverty worldwide. This study will also focus on the achievement of the NGOs objective in Bangladesh and Myanmar in the fast fashion industry.

Four hypotheses have been postulated on the use of strategies by NGOs to improve labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar:

- **Hypothesis 1:** In order to contribute to the improvement of the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, NGOs in Bangladesh will rely on inside strategies more often, such as discussions and meetings, in comparison to the situation before Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 and after 2013.
- **Hypothesis 2:** After the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 in Bangladesh, NGOs will focus more on collaboration, with other international organisations or institutions, as a strategy, than they did before 2013.
- **Hypothesis 3:** In order to contribute to the improvement of the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, NGOs in Myanmar will rely on outside strategies more often, such as protests and demonstrations, in comparison to the situation before the lift of US economic sanctions in 2016 and after 2016.
- **Hypothesis 4:** After the lift of US economic sanctions in Myanmar in 2016, NGOs will focus more on collaboration, with other international organisations or institutions, as a strategy, than they did before 2016.

3. Methodology

The methodology section focuses on the strategy and design, the sampling cases, the data selection and analysis of the study.

3.1 Strategy and Design

In order to explore to what extent the strategies of NGOs in both situations have changed to improve the labour conditions in Bangladesh and Myanmar, qualitative research will be conducted. Within this research the unit of analysis are the NGOs. The dependent variable of this research are the strategies of NGOs, and the independent variable are the two sudden shocks. An advantage of qualitative research is the possibility to explore the material more in depth, as well as information on expectations, needs, and future developments regarding a possible change of NGO strategies to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, will be provided (Fischer & Julsing, 2014). To find out how the strategies of NGOs active in the fast fashion industry might have changed, the data of three different international NGOs will be analysed. These NGOs are: Clean Clothes Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, and Oxfam International.

3.2 Sample and Sampling

This research will analyse two different situations. According to Seawright and Gerring (2008) the selection of choosing good cases for sampling is seen as a challenging process. It is important that the chosen cases consist over a variation of relevant measurements (Seawright & Gerring, 2008), in this research the measurements are the strategies used by NGOs. In Bangladesh the Rana Plaza garment factory collapsed in 2013, which called for a lot more action of the fashion industry, institutions, and NGOs. In 2016 a lot of the US economic sanctions in Myanmar have been lifted, which led to an increase of garment factories in Myanmar. The table below provides information on the setting of this research, which differs among the two countries. Accordingly, this study looks at the situation regarding the strategies of NGOs before the sudden shocks took place ($t=0$), and at the situation of NGO strategies after these sudden shocks ($t=1$). Eventually, these two situations will be analysed and compared from which a possible change in strategies of NGOs can be observed and concluded.

Table 1 – Setting

Clean Clothes Campaign Fair Wear Foundation	Bangladesh	< 2013	T = 0
		> 2013	T = 1
Oxfam International	Myanmar	< 2016	T = 0
		> 2016	T = 1

Bangladesh is chosen as a sample due to the disaster that happened on the 24th of April 2013; the collapse of the Rana Plaza building, a garment factory located in Savar, Bangladesh (Shen, 2014; Siddiqui & Uddin, 2016). This disaster is seen as the deadliest garment accidents in history, which killed 1.134 people (Ashraf & Prentice, 2019). Shen (2014) states that after this disaster the attitude of the fashion industry towards building and fire safety might have changed, which could result in more sustainable manufacturing. After this disaster a lot more research has been conducted on policies, and conditions in the garment factories in Bangladesh, but also in other developing countries. Consequently, a lot more data on garment factories and its conditions concerning Bangladesh can be found. Myanmar is chosen as the second sample due to the political and economic regime changes in this country. The borders of Myanmar have only been open for foreigners since a few years. In 2003, the US invoked economic sanctions on Myanmar that restricted the commercial relationship of Myanmar with other countries. Before these sanctions were implemented, the US was the largest export market for textiles and garments deriving from Myanmar (Ajmani, Joshi, Kishore, & Roy, 2018). These economic sanctions led to a decrease of export products to the US. However, in 2016, the economic sanctions by the US were lifted (BBC News, 2016), resulting in a lot of fashion companies outsourcing their work to Myanmar, and in an increasing export market. These fashion companies are attracted to the low wages, and to the beneficial trade conditions Myanmar has (Oxfam, 2015). Many European companies have (re-) located their garment factories to Myanmar, leading to more data available on the labour conditions in Myanmar, which can be of important value.

These two sampling cases, Bangladesh and Myanmar, consist over similar and different characteristics (Seawright & Gerring, 2008). Similar characteristics of the cases are that they both focus on the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, such as: low wages, under age employees, and unhealthy and dangerous working conditions. Also, that both countries are seen as developing countries, meaning that the economy of both countries is slowly growing, and that the degree of human well-being is also lower in comparison to developed countries, e.g. Western countries. On the contrary, a different characteristic of the cases is the political situation of the countries, both countries have been ruled under different regimes.

3.3 Data Collection

Qualitative research includes the use of desk research, for this literature study official reports of the three international NGOs are analysed, together with scientific articles regarding strategies of NGOs and labour conditions. These documents have been selected due to the information provided on strategies of NGOs, and labour conditions in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Accordingly, documents have been selected under the following criteria: language, year, country, and topic. Fortunately, most of the NGO publications are written in English, due to the fact that the NGOs operate worldwide. The year of publication is also an important criterion, there have been a lot of changes in the fashion industry in the last decade. Consequently, only documents published between the period of 2005–2019 have been selected, not all the information provided in documents before 2005 is still up to date. Another criterion is that the reports should mostly be focused on the situation in Bangladesh or Myanmar. Finally, the main topic of the research and reports is important, the research should include, for example, labour conditions, human rights, or labour law and regulation. The following search tools have been used: the library database of the University of Twente, Google Scholar, and the available databases of the three international NGOs, to select these reports, documents, and articles. Within the databases of the NGOs the following filters have been applied: Bangladesh, Myanmar, labour conditions, and garment/fashion industry. Table 2 shows an overview of the selected literature, including the year of publication, sequence, and setting.

Table 2 – Source list

	NGO / author	Year	Report / article	Time	Setting
1	Clean Clothes Campaign	2005	Made by Women	t=0	Bangladesh + Myanmar
2	Clean Clothes Campaign	2008	Full Package Approach to Labour codes of Conduct	t=0	Bangladesh + Myanmar
3	Clean Clothes Campaign	2013	Solidarity Action - Making a Difference for Workers	t=0	Bangladesh + Myanmar
4	Clean Clothes Campaign	2013	Still Waiting: six months after Rana Plaza	t=1	Bangladesh
5	Clean Clothes Campaign	2016	Rana Plaza 3 years on	t=1	Bangladesh
6	Clean Clothes Campaign	2018	Five years since the Rana Plaza collapse	t=1	Bangladesh
7	Oxfam International	2015	Made in Myanmar	t=0	Myanmar
8	Oxfam International	2015	In Work But Trapped in Poverty	t=1	Myanmar

9	Oxfam International	2017	What She Makes	t=1	Bangladesh + Myanmar
10	Fair Wear Foundation	2013	FWF Position Paper on Myanmar	t=0	Myanmar
11	Fair Wear Foundation	2015	Bangladesh Country Study 2015	t=1	Bangladesh
12	Fair Wear Foundation	2017	Guidance Age Verification at Garment Factories in Myanmar	t=1	Myanmar
13	Fair Wear Foundation	2018	Enhanced monitoring programme Myanmar	t=1	Myanmar
14	Fair, Green & Global Alliance	2014	The strength of lobbying and advocacy	n.a.	n.a.
15	SOMO, ALR & LRDP	2017	The Myanmar Dilemma. Can the garment industry deliver decent jobs for workers in Myanmar?	t=1	Myanmar
16	Chowdhury	2017	The Rana Plaza disaster and the complicit behavior of elite NGOs.	t=1	Bangladesh
17	Anner	2018	Binding Power: The Sourcing Squeeze, Workers' Rights, and Building Safety in Bangladesh Since Rana Plaza.	t=1	Bangladesh
18	Fashion Revolution	2019	Fashion Transparency Index 2019 Edition	t=1	Bangladesh + Myanmar
19	Ahmad	2019	Wage Indicator. Decent Work Check 2019	t=1	Myanmar
20	International Labour Organisation	2017	NORMLEX, Ratifications of fundamental Conventions by country	t=0, t=1	Bangladesh + Myanmar

3.4 Data Analysis

For this research a document analysis is conducted, to find out if there are patterns between the data that will help understand the main research question. The first sub question: “What were the strategies of NGOs active in Bangladesh to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry before the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013?”, and the second sub question: “What were the strategies of NGOs active in Myanmar to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry before the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016??”, will be answered by means of a literature study on data found before 2013 and 2016. The third sub question: “What are the current strategies of NGOs active in Bangladesh to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry after the collapse of the Rana Plaza building in 2013?” and the fourth sub question: “What are the current strategies of NGOs active in Myanmar to improve the labour

conditions in the fast fashion industry after the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016?”, will be answered as well through a literature study, but now with the focus on activities after 2013 and 2016. This data will be presented in the form of two case studies; one on Bangladesh and one on Myanmar. Sub questions one and three will form the analysis for the case study on Bangladesh. The second and the fourth sub question will form the analysis for the case study on Myanmar. The main research question will be answered through the findings of the two case studies.

Documents that are analysed within a document analysis involve the process of coding. The process of coding starts with reading all the selected data and theory. Then, all the relevant words, sentences, and paragraphs found in the data will be labelled. Following, the most important labels will be selected and categories will be created, and thereafter labelled. Through the process of coding in a qualitative document analyses, the units applicable to a certain document can differ, also the lengths of the code categories can differ (Babbie, 2016). The following codes have been set up for the analysis, under these codes different information was labelled: labour conditions, NGO strategies, countries, sequence, social and political impact. To structure the analysis three key parameters are defined. These parameters are included in the coding scheme, these are: security and safety, wages, and social dialogue. Safety and security covers all aspects related to the safety and security of garment workers in the fast fashion industry. Wages includes information and developments related to the minimum wages in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Social dialogue includes the negotiations between government and trade unions or NGOs on labour law, policies, ILO conventions, and freedom of association.

Appendix 1 shows the coding scheme, which provides information on how the documents have been read and analysed. This is supported by examples from the literature, such as sentences, statements, and activities. It shows which sentences provide which sort of information, and under which code category these sentences, statements, and activities can be recognized. From the coding scheme it becomes clear that there are different units applicable to the codes. Words that relate to labour conditions are: minimum wage, working hours, issues, and violence. Words such as aftermath, before, after, and continue illustrate events in sequence to the sudden shocks. The coding category social and political impact is illustrated with words like activism, suppression, and freedom. Examples of words that illustrate a NGO strategy are: challenge, understanding, tools, important role, steps, and pressure. In table 3 these variables of NGO strategies are further explained; these are linked to the key elements of activities, and examples of these activities deriving from the reports are given. Words that can illustrate a certain strategy are marked bold in the coding scheme in appendix 1.

Table 3 – Codes

Strategies of NGOs	Activities	Examples
Inside lobby strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Informing the public, industry, and decision-makers - Meetings with politicians and legislators - Discussion panels - Conduct research and publish reports 	<p>“embraced the role of informing the public and industry”</p> <p>Informing, communicate, warning, discussions, pressure, negotiations, to present, documents, and findings.</p>
Outside lobby strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Protests - Demonstrations - Social media campaigns - Mobilize citizens 	<p>“pressure from consumer and trade union campaigns”</p> <p>Pressure, activism, strikes of protest, actively inform, to promote, and encourage.</p>
Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close cooperation with other NGOs or institutions - Establishment of agreements - Develop common strategies - Conduct joint research 	<p>“pressure from the European Union, the United States, and international organizations”</p> <p>Works together with, forming, commitment, together.</p>

4. Analysis

This chapter shows the analysis of the research, by means of two case studies. First the results of the case study on Bangladesh are presented, thereafter, case study on Myanmar is presented. In both case studies the strategies of NGOs have been structured under the key parameters of the coding scheme. In the end, the postulated hypotheses are falsified or corroborated.

4.1 Case study Bangladesh

4.1.1 Strategies of NGOs before 2013

- *Safety and Security*

Before the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 NGOs and trade unions were already active in Bangladesh, and trying to deal with the poor labour conditions in the country. Clean Clothes Campaign (2013a) states that trade unions and labour rights activists have been warning for almost ten years that a disaster like the Rana Plaza collapse was going to take place. Clean Clothes Campaign was founded around 1990, and began with raising awareness for the fact that all over the world almost all clothing is made by underpaid women, and under bad conditions. In their first years, Clean Clothes Campaign took on an informative role by informing the public and the industry of the positions they could, and should take on to support the female workers in the fashion industry (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2005). A strategy that Clean Clothes Campaign used was outside lobbying, by making the public aware of the exploited labour in this industry, and telling them that action was needed (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2005). After the collapse of a building in 2005 in Bangladesh (Mustafa, 2013), Clean Clothes Campaign changed their campaigning approach. From that moment on, they started putting pressure on all actors active in the fashion industry, including the European brands and retailers, the brands and retailers sourcing in Bangladesh, and the government and industry associations (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b). Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b) states that as a result of their '*urgent action campaigning*' health and safety standards improved, and that efforts towards monitoring working conditions strengthened. Additionally, in 2008 Clean Clothes Campaign established steps for garment factories, which factory managers could follow to ensure that their products would be made under humane conditions. These steps are the so-called 'Labour Codes of Conduct'. These codes of conduct consist of guidelines regarding what companies can do to improve compliance with labour standards in their supply chains (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2008). As a result, a lot of Western companies and brands have developed codes of conduct for their sourcing factories (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b).

Oxfam International (2019) strives to fight poverty all over the world, their involvement in Bangladesh already began in 1970. In Bangladesh the strategy of Oxfam International is focused on working together with international and local civil society organisations, other NGOs, and different levels of government. Through this collaboration and influencing, Oxfam International is able to increase its impact on poverty and inequality, and can provide social change at different levels (Oxfam International, 2019). When NGOs use collaboration as a strategy to achieve certain goals, they will join together in several collaborative efforts to protect civil and political rights; as Oxfam International did. It came to light that before the Rana Plaza collapse none of the fashion brands or retailers were incorporating building inspections or checking building certificates (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013a). More transparency of brands and retailers could counteract these acts. Furthermore, Fashion Revolution (2019) states that more transparency can help brands engage and collaborate with trade unions in order to identify and resolve certain problems in the fashion industry. In addition, Clean Clothes Campaign used collaboration as a strategy, Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b, p. 4) explains this strategy as following: *“The CCC works together with other organisations to simultaneously push all those responsible for improving workplace conditions (for example, factory owners, buying agents, brand name companies and retailers) to actively work to solve problems”*. This collaboration was achieved through a so-called ‘triangle solidarity’ strategy. Clean Clothes Campaign would campaign (outside lobbying) in three different places: first, the country where violations are exceeded, second, countries where the garments are sold and where the buyers are based, and third, in the home country of the owner of the garment factory (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b). Therewith, Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b) states that this strategy has led to an increase in sharing expertise and experiences between activists all over the world. Clean Clothes Campaign’s development of joint strategies increased as well. The collaboration strategy used by Oxfam International and Clean Clothes Campaign influenced various levels of government, and different actors active in the fast fashion industry. Herewith, a large public has actively been informed about the negative sides of the fashion industry in Bangladesh.

- Wages

According to Clean Clothes Campaign (2013a), the minimum wage of garment workers in Bangladesh was, at the time of the collapse, 38 USD per month. This only covers 12% of a standard living wage. Anner (2018) confirms this minimum wage by stating that the minimum wage before the Rana Plaza collapse was 39 USD per month. Which was in 2013 approximately 29 EUR per month (Wisselkoers.nl, 2019). Fair Wear Foundation (2011) describes a living wage as a wage that meets the basic needs of a garment worker, such as food, clothing, housing, healthcare, and education. It can be stated that the minimum wage of Bangladeshi garment workers before the

collapse did not meet the standards of a living wage. A strategy or tool that can be used to estimate a living wage for a certain region or country is the Wage Ladder. The wages are estimated for each country or region, and compared to wage benchmarks set up by local trade unions, NGOs and government institutions. According to Fair Wear Foundation (2011) the Wage Ladder includes three main purposes. First of all, the Wage Ladder shows the monetary values in relation to the applicable and available wage standards in a country or region. Second, the factory wages are shown relatively, age and gender are taken into account. Third, the Wage Ladder is able to show the progress in improving wages over time. The Wage Ladder is free of access, and can, therefore, be used by anyone to find information on wages in certain regions or countries regarding the fashion industry. The Wage Ladder was first established by Rut Tufts in the Jo-In project in Turkey (Fair Wear Foundation, 2011). This tool has been further developed by the Fair Wear Foundation to provide companies and brands with a tool through which they can monitor the wage levels in their supplier factories. An advantage of the Wage Ladder is that brands and companies are able use the tool in negotiations to strive for a living wage. The Wage Ladder only estimates and displays the wages of garment workers in the fashion industry, it does not actively inform different actors, e.g. trade unions or NGOs, about the current situation. However, NGOs can use the Wage Ladder to see in which country or region action is needed regarding the living wages of garment workers. Furthermore, the tool helps trade unions and NGOs understand how increasing wages of garment workers will affect the product costs in a way that companies and brands can still compete in the fashion industry (Fair Wear Foundation, n.d.). Therefore, NGOs and trade unions can inform brands and companies about the positive consequences of increasing the wages to an amount that covers the basic needs of a garment worker, a living wage.

- *Social Dialogue*

The ILO works in close cooperation with NGOs. This cooperation is maintained through integration of non-governmental social partners by promoting social dialogue, providing NGOs with a consultative status within the ILO, and by collaboration at the operational level (ILO, n.d.). Within the ILO it is possible for trade unions, next to states, to negotiate and participate in the development of labour standards, policies, and programmes to promote decent work for all men and women. The conventions established by the ILO have to be ratified by the national government of the applicable country. A convention comes into force approximately one year after the date of ratification, as the ratifying countries have to apply the convention in their national law and practice (ILO, 2017). Before the Rana Plaza collapse, the government of Bangladesh ratified the following fundamental conventions of ILO:

- The Freedom of Association and Protection of the right to organise (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining (No. 98)

- Forced Labour Convention (no. 29)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 181)
- Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, (No. 111), (ILO, 2017).

All these conventions were ratified before 2013, and were in force at time of the Rana Plaza collapse. Unfortunately, the rights to organise are still weak in Bangladesh, whereas the prohibition on unionisation has been lifted. After all, existing trade unions in Bangladesh are dealing with low numbers of membership and with lack of recognition (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017a). Besides, the Rana Plaza disaster could have been avoided: the day before the collapse, cracks were showing in the walls of the building. Which led to protests of garment workers, workers were saying that they would not return to work until the building was restored and safe. However, the workers were threatened by the factory managers and owners; they would lose their monthly salary if they would not return to work (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013a).

According to Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b) the statements of men and women, that have spoken out about their situation, had a positive impact on the fashion industry. Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b, p. 2) states: *“Speaking out in solidarity with the women and men who produce the world’s clothes has had a positive impact.”* As a result, more demands regarding labour conditions of garment workers in the industry were met. Most importantly, the voices of these workers in the industry were heard, and the labour conditions of the fast fashion industry are no longer ‘secret’ for Western countries (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b). Both Clean Clothes Campaign and the Fair Wear Foundation have been providing the garment workers with a platform through which they can file complaints regarding labour conditions in the garment factories. Since 2012, Fair Wear Foundation has received 62 complaints regarding labour conditions, from which they have solved and closed 22 complaints, in collaboration with factories, companies and brands (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017a). NGOs dealing with these complaints have to work together with garment factory managers, and with sourcing brands, therefore, the collaboration strategy is applied. Together, the NGOs, factories, and brands develop a plan to deal with the complaints of the garment workers.

It can be said that all three of the NGOs used of collaboration as a strategy; they all worked together with other organisations, to improve labour conditions in Bangladesh before 2013. Clean Clothes Campaign and Fair Wear Foundation worked closely together with factory owners, companies or retailers. However, Oxfam International focused more on the active social change at different levels, which is achieved by working together with the government of Bangladesh

(Oxfam International, 2019). Striking is the change in strategy of Clean Clothes Campaign already in 2005. Their strategy changed from being more quiet in the beginning, to becoming more active and outspoken in the end (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b), their campaign changed from consisting of an inside strategy to a more outside strategy. Furthermore, Fair Wear Foundation is focused on collaboration and inside lobby strategies, such as setting up different projects, and supporting the ratification of ILO conventions (Fair Wear Foundation, 2011). In the end, NGOs were already active in Bangladesh before 2013 to improve the labour conditions by means of lobbying and collaboration. The strategies were mainly focused on making the Western countries aware of the unethical labour conditions garment workers in Bangladesh were facing.

4.1.2 Strategies of NGOs after 2013

- Safety and Security

After the Rana Plaza disaster, NGOs focused on the establishment of the Accord, which can be considered as a positive action that was taken after the Rana Plaza disaster. The Accord can be seen as a collaboration strategy used by NGOs; NGOs worked together with other organisations in order to establish and implement the Accord. The Accord was supposed to be executed for five years, from 2013 till 2018, however, in 2017, the signatories of the Accord announced that the deadline would be extended with three extra years (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2017). Thereafter, brands and retailers, multiple-stakeholder initiatives, government representatives, international institutions, trade unions, and NGOs announced their support for the Accord with several statements. On June 25, 2018, H&M stated (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2019a, p. 1): *“We want to complete the remediation [at our factories] because we recognise there is no adequate structure in place to regulate safety in Bangladesh.”* H&M believes that garment workers have the right to a safe workplace, and to refuse unsafe work. Therefore, H&M recognizes that there is no sufficient structure implemented which regulates safety in Bangladesh (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2019a). In November 2018 multiple-stakeholder initiatives, e.g. Ethical Trading Initiative and the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile stated that companies, brands, and retailers active in Western export markets of the Bangladesh fashion industry, have taken on their responsibility for decent labour conditions. In January 2019, NGOs, e.g. Clean Clothes Campaign, and Oxfam International, stated that they encourage the government of Bangladesh to allow the Accord to independently continue operations in Bangladesh until 2021 (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2019a). Clean Clothes Campaign still calls upon brands and retailers sourcing from garment factories located in Bangladesh to sign the (new) agreement, all Bangladeshi garment workers should share the protection the Accord can offer them (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2017). Accordingly, the Accord has played an important role in improving the labour conditions of

garment workers in Bangladesh, by motivating brands and retailers to think about the circumstances in their garment factories, and encouraging them to act on this.

After the Rana Plaza collapse, Fair Wear Foundation focused its strategies mainly on building and fire safety, due to the fact that after the collapse unauthorised subcontracting continued to be a problem in Bangladesh (Fair Wear Foundation, 2016a). In January 2019 Clean Clothes Campaign (2019a, p. 9) stated the following: *“a genuine transition plan for factory inspections, safety trainings, and a worker complaint mechanism will need much more time and genuine engagement by the government”*. However, Fair Wear Foundation has set up a Workplace Education Programme. This programme provides onsite training for managers, supervisors, and workers of garment factories. The goal of the training is to raise awareness about the labour standards in the industry, also it provides the managers, supervisors, and workers with effective methods they can use when communicating problems, and dealing with disputes regarding the working environment of the garment factory (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017d). Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b) states six concrete ways that have contributed so far to the improvement of labour conditions garment workers are facing. All these ways are part of a collaboration between Clean Clothes Campaign and other organisations, such as brands or companies, and different levels of government. These ways include: providing information on brands, and on multi-stakeholder initiatives; making contact with managers of the workplace, public authorities, and industry associations to communicate workers’ demands; helping to facilitate communications between trade unions and companies; preparing and distributing public materials and events to raise awareness for workers’ demands; coordinating communications among campaigning organizations working on cases (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b). These ways can be characterised as strategies used by NGOs to improve labour conditions. Providing information, making contact with different actors, and facilitating communications are forms of inside lobbying. Raising awareness through events is a form of outside lobbying. After the Rana Plaza collapse the strategies of NGOs regarding safety and security changed, there was more focus on the building safety of the garment factories. More building inspections were incorporated, therewith the communication with factory managers improved.

- *Wages*

Fair Wear Foundation (2017c) states the following: *“labour conditions have been improved significantly after the Rana Plaza tragedy”*. However, what is meant here with *‘significantly’*? The labour conditions in Bangladesh have indeed improved, but with little progress. For example, in 2013 the minimum wage of garment workers increased with 79% (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017a). To illustrate this, Anner (2018) states that the minimum wage of garment workers in Bangladesh

increased after the Rana Plaza collapse to a minimum of 68 USD/50 EUR per month in 2013. In February 2018, the minimum wage of garment workers in Bangladesh was estimated at 63.60 USD a month, a decline since 2013. Reckoning with all the other labour related circumstances, e.g. work hours, the minimum wage per hour was estimated at 0.31 USD/0.26 EUR (Anner, 2018). Fair Wear Foundation (2016b) states the following: *"We need to raise wages for garment workers. Despite more than a decade of discussions about raising wages in the global garment industry, we have seen little progress."* In addition, Fair Wear Foundation (2017) states that the current minimum wage in Bangladesh is one of the lowest minimum wages in the world. Therefrom, it can, unfortunately, be concluded that the minimum wage in Bangladesh can still not provide a garment worker with living needs, such as food, hygiene, and proper housing. Despite all the discussions, actions, and published reports, such as the Wage Ladder of Fair Wear Foundation. Additionally, it can be said that the strategies of NGOs with regards to wages have not changed. Furthermore, Fair Wear Foundation (2017a) states that the age verification has been improved in most of the factories, however, there are still factories where the age verification has not improved. On the other hand, there have been fewer cases of child labour found in the garment factories of the fashion industry (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017a).

- *Social Dialogue*

Clean Clothes Campaign (2013a) published a report in which they analysed the actions taken by the involved parties, such as the retailers and factory managers, six months after the Rana Plaza collapse. First, the report showed that there was still little compensation given to the victims of the collapse by the involved parties. A research conducted by Chowdhury (2017) included the following quote of Rahima, a garment worker in the Rana Plaza building during the collapse: *"We do not know what NGOs do. Whoever works for NGOs, they are becoming rich. While NGOs receive money to help many victims, they distribute such fund only to two, three or five victims. Rest of the fund go to their pocket (Chowdhury, 2017, p. 938)."* This statement refers to the compensation victims of the collapse received. There were different institutions in control of the distribution of compensation funds, including several NGOs (Chowdhury, 2017). In September 2013, NGOs, trade unions, brands, the government of Bangladesh, the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association developed the Rana Plaza Agreement (RPA). The RPA was set up to provide payments for the losses suffered by the victims of Rana Plaza, these payments are based upon several principles established by the RPA (RPA, n.d.). Therewith the Rana Plaza Coordination Committee (RPCC) was founded. The RPCC oversaw all the payments regarding the Rana Plaza victims (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2016). The RPCC set up a formula which calculated a full and fair compensation for the victims of disasters like the Rana Plaza collapse (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013a; ILO, 2015). The compensation payments the victims of Rana Plaza received

were funded by contributions made to the Rana Plaza Donors Trust Fund, set up by the ILO (RPA, n.d.). The development of the RPA and the RPCC can be seen as an inside lobby strategy, because the NGOs were looking for accreditation from the ILO, and from the government of Bangladesh. These institutions have eventually provided the NGOs with a formal status in the RPCC; together they oversaw the compensation for the victims. The strategy tool of collaboration has been applied here as well. Chowdhury (2017) states that if such a disaster would have happened in a Western country the compensation process would have probably been dealt with by lawyers, instead of NGOs. This can be explained by the fact that Bangladesh did not have a national employment injury insurance system, hence, NGOs set up the compensation fund (ILO, 2015). It has been argued that the activities carried out by NGOs could have reduced the influence of the Bangladesh government. However, the main responsibility of the Rana Plaza collapse and its aftermath should lie with the government of Bangladesh (Chowdhury, 2017).

Currently, the country of Bangladesh has ratified 35 conventions, of which 30 are in force (ILO, 2017b). There is one fundamental convention of the ILO that remains unratified in Bangladesh, the Minimum Age Convention (No. 138). The rights of garment workers regarding their freedom of association have improved to a certain extent since the prohibition on trade unions was lifted. For example, in 2016, the ILO launched the Social Dialogue project, a collaboration between the ILO, trade unions, and the government of Bangladesh. This project will help trade unions operate in a more effective way, to provide better services to their members regarding the labour conditions in the country (ILO, 2018). Nevertheless, garment workers are still facing unpleasant consequences if they speak or act out regarding their labour conditions. In December 2018, garment workers in Bangladesh went on strike and organised protests to fight for a living wage. During a protest, which took place in January 2019, the police of Dhaka fired rubber bullets, and used tear gas to stop the garment workers. Numerous of garment workers were fired by the factory managers as a consequence of their participation in the protest. Therewith, union representatives and garment workers that were arrested are now facing charges that could resolve in long prison sentences, e.g. life imprisonment (Clean Clothes Campaign, n.d.). Clean Clothes Campaign (n.d.) states that the brands and companies sourcing from Bangladesh have to inquiry their supply chain regarding these charges, if there are charges against union representatives or garment workers, these will have to be dropped. Even though the ILO convention on Freedom of Association has been ratified and is in force, and the prohibition on trade unions is lifted, the rights of garment workers regarding freedom of association are still not respected by the factory owners, and by the government of Bangladesh.

It can be said that the labour conditions in Bangladesh have improved in some respects since the Rana Plaza collapse. However, the minimum wage a Bangladeshi garment worker earns does still not cover their living standard. With the establishment of the Accord and the RPCC, several NGOs took over some of the responsibilities and tasks that the government of Bangladesh should have provided. However, the establishment of the Accord has had a positive impact on the labour conditions in Bangladesh, and continues to do so. The Accord can be described as a collaboration and an inside lobby strategy, NGOs were looking for accreditation from other institutions, such as brands and retailers, and stakeholder initiatives, to achieve a formal consultative status to deal with issues surrounding the fashion industry. Additionally, Fair Wear Foundation continued to focus mostly on inside lobby strategies, through the establishment of several programmes. To summarise, the strategies used by NGOs after 2013 were mainly focused on collaboration and on inside lobbying.

4.1.3 Hypotheses

The first hypothesis stated: *“In order to contribute to the improvement of the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, NGOs active in Bangladesh will rely on inside strategies more often, such as discussions and meetings, in comparison to the situation before Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 and after 2013.”* Before the Rana Plaza collapse, the collaboration strategy was used by Oxfam International and Clean Clothes Campaign to improve labour conditions in Bangladesh. Clean Clothes Campaign had already changed its strategy, before the Rana Plaza collapse, as a consequence of a building collapse in 2005. Their strategy changed from being more focused on inside lobbying towards more focused on outside lobby strategies. Therefore, this hypothesis does not corroborate with the strategies of Clean Clothes Campaign. The strategy applied by Fair Wear Foundation before the Rana Plaza collapse was also an inside lobby strategy. Fair Wear Foundation established several programmes to improve the poor labour conditions in Bangladesh. However, Fair Wear Foundation continued to rely on inside lobby strategies. On the other hand, it can be said that this hypothesis is partly corroborating, due to the Accord that was established by several of the involved parties. After the Rana Plaza collapse the involved parties relied more on the establishment of the Accord, an inside lobby strategy. The NGOs were looking for accreditation from other institutions in order to achieve a formal consultative status to deal with issues surrounding the fashion industry.

The second hypothesis stated: *“After the Rana Plaza collapse in 2013 in Bangladesh, NGOs will focus more on collaboration, with other international organisations or institutions, as a strategy, than they did before 2013.”* In the end, this hypothesis is partly corroborating, the Rana Plaza collapse led to the establishment of the Accord. Next to an inside strategy, the Accord was also a collaboration

between NGOs and other organisations or institutions, such as the government of Bangladesh, brands, retailers, and other stakeholder initiatives. NGOs joined in a collaborative effort to protect the victims, garments workers, brands and companies, in the aftermath of the collapse. Together common strategies were developed, for example gathering signatories of brands and retailers to influence other actors in the supply chain. Therefrom, it can be said that NGO strategies to improve the labour conditions in Bangladesh after 2013 did focus more on collaboration with other international organisations or institutions. It was clear that the collaboration strategy focused on joined effort to protect civil and political rights. However, from the analyses it can be argued that the collaboration strategies and common developments were particularly established in line with the objectives of the Accord. Governments, retailers and NGOs only collaborated because of the common objectives of the agreement. On the contrary, NGOs also focused on lobbying as a strategy, by informing the public about the consequences of the Rana Plaza collapse, and by providing an education programme to raise awareness about the labour standards in the industry.

4.2 Case study Myanmar

4.2.1 Strategies of NGOs before 2016

- Safety and Security

Fair Wear Foundation works together with brands and influencers of the fashion industry to improve the labour conditions. Therefore, Fair Wear Foundation (2017c) distinguishes different labour standards for garment workers in Myanmar: *“low wages, long working hours, repression of union members and strike leaders, poor working conditions, child labour, and the lack of a healthy social dialogue among both employers and unions.”* Through the establishment of different projects and campaigning, Fair Wear Foundation tries to improve the labour conditions in the fashion industry. During 2014, Fair Wear Foundation actively informed companies on why production in Myanmar relates to high risk for garment workers and factory managers. Furthermore, Fair Wear Foundation will implement additional requirements for the companies that do decide to produce garments in Myanmar, these requirements must be followed by the sourcing companies (Fair Wear Foundation, 2013).

Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b) has been using different strategies to improve the labour conditions in Myanmar. One of these strategies is the so-called *Direct Solidarity Action*; Clean Clothes Campaign and its allies respond directly to urgent request of garment workers that call for action from the NGOs (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b). This is a request, e.g. a letter or email, from garment workers or their organisations which states that people take action to demonstrate their support for workers’ demands in a position where workers’ rights are not respected. Clean

Clothes Campaign only actively responds to the requests in cases of rights violations, mostly on freedom of association and on the right to organize and collectively bargain, where it is clear that it is what the workers want (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2019b). Furthermore, Clean Clothes Campaign (2013b) states several lessons they have learned from, and about their urgent action campaigning, an outside lobby strategy. Clean Clothes Campaign has analysed the impact of their work, and found out that several characteristics contributed to their campaign. First, it helps if the workers are well organised, usually into unions. Second, in the countries where violations occur strong campaigns can contribute. Third, facilitation is important for the information flow. Fourth, it helps when more than one pressure point is targeted internationally to support workers' demands. Last, the national and international campaigns consist of various tactics and tools which can be directed at several pressure points (Clean Clothes Campaign, 2013b). Oxfam International has been fighting poverty and inequality all over the world, this includes ensuring decent wages and working conditions. In Myanmar, Oxfam International fights poverty through the promotion of the power of women and men by developing their ability to influence companies and decision-makers, in order for policies to protect the rights of women and men, and to reduce poverty (Oxfam International, 2019). The strategy of Oxfam International can be considered as an inside lobby strategy, due to the way of influencing the companies and decision-makers.

- *Wages*

Before the US economic sanctions were lifted in Myanmar, there was no existing minimum wage for garment workers (Oxfam International, 2015a). According to Oxfam International (2015a) some of the garment workers were working for an amount of 0.60 USD a day, which converts to 0.46 EUR. In 2015, Oxfam International (2015b) conducted a study on garment stitching in Myanmar, and found that the average wage was 1.50 USD a day, 40 USD a month, which is approximately 30 EUR a month (Wisselkoers.nl, 2019). In addition, an average worker in Myanmar spends 50% of their wage on accommodation, moreover, a lot of the workers have to support their family members with their low income (Oxfam International, 2015b). The garment workers were also facing (forced) unpaid overtime, which resulted in major strikes and protests, led by the garment workers of Myanmar. The workers were protesting against the low wages, unpaid overtime, and other poor labour conditions. These outside lobby strategies have led to two years of negotiations between the garment workers, and the Myanmar government; inside lobby strategies. Eventually, on September 1, 2015, the government announced a new minimum wage of 0.35 USD/0.31 EUR per hour, and 85 USD/75 EUR per month (Oxfam International, 2015a). Therefrom, it can be concluded that the new minimum wage is still not enough for garment workers to cover their living expenses (Ahmad, 2019). After their research on the living wage in Myanmar, Oxfam International organised an event during which they presented and discussed

their findings with other representatives from international sourcing companies, e.g. trade unions in Myanmar, the Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Security, and the Myanmar Garment Manufacturers Association (Oxfam International, 2015a). This can be seen as an inside lobby strategy, through which Oxfam International shared and discussed their findings with other representatives, to raise awareness, and possibly come up with solutions for the low wages and other poor labour conditions garment workers face.

- *Social Dialogue*

A lot of the garment workers in Myanmar are not informed about the length of their contracts, which means they have no control over the security of their employment. Oxfam International (2015a) states that companies should ensure secure employment for the garment workers, which can be done by telling suppliers to severely limit the use of short-term contracts. Furthermore, Oxfam International (2015a) believes that trade unions play an important role in the improvement of negotiations, and in securing national legislation regarding labour conditions. At a global level, trade unions are important to inform and educate garment workers about their rights (Oxfam International, 2015). Freedom of association, the possibility for garment workers to join a trade union, is part of the fundamental human rights. It is not allowed to put garment workers at a disadvantage once they have joined a trade union, that is active outside working hours (Ahmed, 2019). Trade unions were prohibited for more than 50 years in Myanmar. However, in 2011, the Myanmar government ratified the convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (No. 87) in their national law. This means garment workers are allowed and able to form trade unions, and to speak out regarding their rights (Oxfam International, 2015a). Next to Convention No. 87, two other fundamental ILO conventions were ratified and in force in Myanmar before 2016, these are the Convention on Forced Labour (No. 29), and the Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour (No. 182) (ILO, 2017c). Unfortunately, trade unions are still limited in Myanmar, and there are still a lot of workers uninformed about their freedom of association, and about their right to collective bargaining (SOMO, ALR & LRDP, 2017).

It can be concluded that all three of the NGOs used different strategies to improve the labour conditions in Myanmar before the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016. Oxfam International used inside lobbying as a strategy, they influenced the sourcing companies and the decision-makers. Fair Wear Foundation has been focused mostly on establishing collaboration with other organisations, such as Western brands and companies, to achieve change. On the contrary, Clean Clothes Campaign has been campaigning in a very active way, by using outside lobby strategies. In addition, after the ILO convention on Freedom of Association was implemented, trade unions

became more active and contributed to the implementation of the minimum wage in 2015. In conclusion, the strategies of NGOs were mostly driven by influencing the decision-makers and informing the garment workers on workers' rights.

4.2.2 Strategies of NGOs after 2016

- Safety and Security

Myanmar has shown some progress on its civil and political rights since 2016. However, Fair Wear Foundation still believes that Myanmar is a high-risk country, due to the challenges the country faces regarding the implementation of labour standards (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017c). Oxfam International (2015a) states that since the US economic sanctions have been lifted, the garment industry of Myanmar has entered the '*race to the bottom*'. To illustrate, Myanmar is a country that is very attractive for companies that seek to maximize their profits. This resulted in the following (negative) change; before 2016 there were 130 garment factories located in Myanmar, after 2016 the amount of garment factories increased to 400, with an estimated amount of 35.000 garment workers (SOMO et al., 2017). The challenges Myanmar faces comply with the labour standards of Fair Wear Foundation. Due to the lifted US economic sanctions, Fair Wear Foundation established a set of requirements for brands sourcing to Myanmar, these requirements concern the following topics: "*Transparency, Due Diligence, Auditing suppliers in Myanmar, Promote processes to ensure Freedom of Association and enhance social dialogue at suppliers, Payment of at least the legal minimum and work towards the payment of a living wage, Child Labour*" (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017c). Furthermore, Fair Wear Foundation publishes a list of factories that are transparent about their sourcing activities and countries, this publication can be seen as an outside lobby strategy.

Fair Wear Foundation has been carrying out different actions to improve the poor labour conditions. In 2016, Fair Wear Foundation published a country study on Myanmar, in which an overview was given of the industry, labour conditions, labour law, and of the industrial relations within the fashion industry (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017c). In 2017, Fair Wear Foundation has established a Guidance Document which should provide garment factories in Myanmar, that supply member companies of Fair Wear Foundation, with practical information on how to set up an Age Verification System. The Age Verification System consist of six steps; child labour policy, documents check, interview with the candidate worker, medical check, checklist to document all HR steps for age verification, and training for HR Staff (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017b). The management of the factories can follow these steps to prevent child labour. Additionally, Fair Wear Foundation established the Enhanced Monitoring Programme, this programme guarantees a set of requirements for brands, the members of the Fair Wear Foundation, that source in Myanmar. These requirements for Myanmar are additional to the set of general requirements Fair

Wear Foundation sets up for other countries, like Bangladesh (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017c). NGO strategies regarding security are seen as an inside lobby, the strategies are more focused on guiding garment factory managers by providing them with practical information and general requirements.

- *Wages*

The legal minimum wage in Myanmar is 3,600 Kyat per day, 2.64 USD/2.48 EUR. It often happens that owners and managers of garment factories in Myanmar try to avoid to pay the minimum wage. This is done through abusing the apprenticeship and prohibition provisions of the minimum wage law (SOMO et al., 2017). Oxfam International (2015a) confirms this by stating that some factory managers in Myanmar stopped overtime hours, food and transport allowances, and bonuses after the minimum wage was implemented. Consequently, some garment workers are now earning less than they did before the minimum wage was introduced. Therefrom, it can be concluded that also in Myanmar, the minimum wage is still not enough for garment workers to cover their living standards. Oxfam International (2015b) states that a living wage also allows workers to participate in a social and cultural life, and it helps them afford a lifestyle that is accepted by the current level of development of society. Low wages are driven by three factors; an unfair share of value in chain, the absence of collective bargaining, and an inadequate minimum wage (Oxfam International, 2015b). These three factors need to be addressed in order to ensure a fair living wage for garment workers. Furthermore, Oxfam International (2015b) provided recommendations for governments, companies, workers, and consumers. The government of Myanmar should change the minimum wage towards a living wage. The companies and brands should do more to ensure the garments workers are paid a living wage. The garment workers should be informed and trained about their rights, and consumers should ask companies more questions regarding the living wage of garment workers (Oxfam International, 2015b). All these actors should not just focus on creating work for the people in Myanmar, but this work should also be decent work, with decent pay (SOMO et al., 2017).

- *Social Dialogue*

The labour law in Myanmar is still weak, a lot of times labour laws were introduced without having a process of social consensus or open discussion (SOMO et al., 2017). Some of the ratified legislation in Myanmar has been revised since 2016, these are the Factory Act (1951), the Shops and Establishments Acts (1951), and the Child Law (1993) (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017b). These laws have been altered or corrected to the current standards and circumstances. Currently, Myanmar has ratified 24 ILO conventions on labour standards, of which 18 are in force (ILO, 2017c). Unfortunately, there are still five fundamental ILO conventions not ratified, these are:

- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98)

- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105)
- Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, (No. 111)
- Minimum Age Convention (No. 138), (ILO, 2017).

The implementation of labour laws and regulation is still a challenge in Myanmar (Oxfam International, 2015a). Ahmad (2019) states that not all garment workers in Myanmar are fully aware of the aspects and advantages of the labour law. When workers are aware of the labour law, they will ask more questions regarding their rights, and will be more active in complying and enforcing these rules (Ahmad, 2019). For example, there are a lot of garment workers that did not sign a labour contract (SOMO et al., 2017). Without a signed contract, garment workers are not entirely protected under the labour law. Unsigned contracts can be seen as an advantage for factory managers and owners; without a contract factory owners have to comply with fewer restrictions. Furthermore, not all garment workers are brave enough to speak out, only the workers that are, file complaints, which is a minority of garment workers (SOMO et al., 2017). Fair Wear Foundation (2017c) states that the number of complaints they received from workers increased, however, Fair Wear Foundation experiences this as positive. Workers are becoming more aware of their rights, and more comfortable with speaking up about their rights (Fair Wear Foundation, 2017c).

In conclusion, Myanmar is still seen as a high-risk country, however, this does not withhold companies from sourcing from Myanmar. The garment factories located in Myanmar have increased rapidly over the last few years. Fair Wear Foundation uses both inside and outside lobby strategies to contribute to the improvement of labour conditions in Myanmar. The outside strategy is used in the publication list of transparent companies; this list can pressure companies and brands to become more transparent regarding their sourcing activities. Oxfam International applies collaboration as a strategy, by complying with government, and companies to improve the poor labour conditions. Moreover, a minimum wage has been introduced, however, this wage is still far from a living wage.

4.2.3 Hypotheses

The third hypothesis stated: *“in order to contribute to the improvement of the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry, NGOs in Myanmar will rely on outside strategies more often, such as protests and demonstrations, following the lift of US economic sanctions in 2016”*. Before the sanctions were lifted in 2016 the NGOs all used different strategies to improve labour conditions in Myanmar. Oxfam International used inside strategies, whereas Fair Wear Foundation focused on collaboration. Clean Clothes Campaign was the only NGO that mainly focused on outside lobby

strategies, by means of their active campaigning. After the lift of the sanctions in 2016, Oxfam international also focused on collaboration as a strategy. Only Fair Wear Foundation focused on outside lobby strategies; by pressuring companies through their publications of reports on transparency, next to this, they continued to focus on inside lobby strategies. In conclusion, the strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in Myanmar did not rely more on outside lobbying after the lift of US economic sanctions in 2016.

The fourth hypothesis stated: *“following the lift of US economic sanctions in Myanmar in 2016, NGOs will focus more on collaboration, with other international organisations or institutions, as a strategy”*. Before 2016, Fair Wear Foundation already focused its strategies on collaboration with other international organisations to improve poor labour conditions in the fast fashion industry. The analysis showed that Oxfam international did focus on the collaboration strategy after 2016, however, Oxfam International already worked together with other organisations before 2016 to improve the labour conditions. Therefore, the lift of the US economic sanctions did not lead to more focus on collaboration as a strategy of NGOs to improve labour conditions in Myanmar.

The social and political impact of the sudden shocks could have exerted an influence on the structure and strategies used by NGOs in the fast fashion industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar. According to Fair et al. (2014), an effective lobby strategy consists of more than just a campaign, it requires constant action by keeping the business sector and governments sharp and accurate to ensure they are really keeping their promises. From the hypothesis it can be concluded that NGOs do not only focus on one strategy; the NGOs analysed in this paper combine different strategies, or use the strategies which are best suited to their environmental, political or social influences, which can change over a period of time, as well as their strategies. This can be supported by the table in appendix 2, which shows the relation between the strategies of NGOs and the three key parameters, as observed in the coding scheme. There are no large differences observed when a certain strategy was used to deal with issues of one of the key parameters. Therefore, there is no causal relation between the strategies and the parameters, the strategies used by NGOs were most suitable to their environment and situation. The sudden shocks influenced the use of NGO strategies, but these strategies did not change drastically after the shocks took place. Therefore, the analysis confirmed that strategies of NGOs can differ among various situations and environments.

5. Conclusion

In 2019 the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in developing countries are not much better than the labour conditions ten years ago. However, the developing countries have experienced different social and political circumstances. Ten years ago China and India were the low wage sourcing countries experiencing unethical working conditions in their garment factories. Nowadays, a shift has been made to the developing countries that offer the lowest wages, and have weak restrictions on human, and workers' rights. Bangladesh and Myanmar have now taken the place of China and India being the low wage sourcing countries. These countries are still dealing and coping with employee abuse, low wages, long working hours, and with human rights violations of the garment workers. The strategies of NGOs have played an important role in the improvement of these conditions.

In 2013 the Rana Plaza building collapsed, which became the biggest accident in the fast fashion industry. Before 2013, all three of the NGOs were active in Bangladesh to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry. They all used collaboration with other organisations as a strategy. Already in 2005, the strategy of Clean Clothes Campaign drastically changed, from an inside lobby strategy towards an outside lobby strategy. After the Rana Plaza collapse, the NGOs took over some of the responsibilities and tasks of the government of Bangladesh. The government did not complete certain tasks, such as providing compensation for the victims of Rana Plaza. The Accord had a great influence on the fast fashion industry, and continues to do so. It can be seen as a positive agreement or collaboration deriving from the disaster. However, the common developments deriving from the Accord were only established because of the shared objectives. In some respects, the labour conditions in Bangladesh improved after the Rana Plaza collapse; fewer cases of child labour were found, and a legal minimum wage was introduced. However, before 2013 the NGOs were as active in Bangladesh as they were after 2013. Particularly, the Rana Plaza collapse had a great impact on the media, companies, and government, which led to worldwide attention. This worldwide attention gave the NGOs more possibilities to conduct certain strategies to improve the labour conditions in Bangladesh. The two hypotheses on the situation in Bangladesh are both partly true. The Accord can be seen as an inside lobby strategy as well as a collaboration strategy. Therefore, it is partly true that the NGOs relied more on the inside lobby, and collaboration strategy. Before the US economic sanctions were lifted in 2016, all of the NGOs used different strategies to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in Myanmar. The lift of the US economic sanctions resulted in more investments of companies, and in more garment factories sourcing from Myanmar. Nonetheless, the strategies of NGOs after 2016 remained diverse. To summarise, the NGOs combined different strategies to

achieve their goals in the fast fashion industry. Oxfam International continued with its inside lobby strategy, which eventually turned into a collaboration strategy, by complying with the Myanmar government and other organisations. It can be said that the two postulated hypotheses for the situation in Myanmar both incorrect. After the lift of US economic sanctions in 2016, the NGOs active in Myanmar did not rely more on the inside lobby, and collaboration strategy to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry.

The NGOs were very active in Bangladesh and Myanmar before the Rana Plaza collapse and the lift of US economic sanctions, a lot of their activities were already set up. Accordingly, the two sudden shocks did lead to a change in environment, whereas the social and political environments of the countries have been influential for the type of strategy used by NGOs. However, there was no direct change in strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions after the Rana Plaza collapse and the lift of sanctions. Furthermore, the types of NGO strategies did not differ between the key parameters. All strategies were used for different elements, NGOs have been using the strategies that are best suited to their environmental, political and social influences to improve the labour conditions. Therefrom, it can be concluded, that the strategies of NGOs to improve the labour conditions in the fast fashion industry did not change to a great extent under the social or political circumstances of two sudden shocks that happened in Bangladesh and Myanmar, since 2013. This could be explained by the fact that NGOs were already focusing its strategies on improving labour conditions in developing countries before the two sudden shocks took place. After the sudden shocks there was a lot more media attention for the unethical labour conditions in developing countries, especially after the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh. However, this attention did not last long, it provided NGOs with a temporary media attention, which they could use to raise awareness. Therefrom, this study shows that labour conditions in the fast fashion industry do not change overnight, it takes years.

NGOs continue to improve the labour conditions, however, to achieve this, NGOs need support from institutions and governments to achieve change at a legal level. Unfortunately, there is still little involvement of the local government, in both Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is important that the eight fundamental conventions of the ILO are ratified and in force in Bangladesh and Myanmar. NGOs can only act to a certain level, therefore, the government should pursue its binding legislation on human, and labour law. Additionally, the European Union can develop, or strengthen its cooperation with international NGOs to support their strategies to improve labour conditions. Furthermore, the European Union can help international NGOs, e.g. by giving subsidies, to raise more awareness for the poor labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in developing countries. For example, by supporting the campaigns that target European consumers,

and by informing them about the negative sides of the fast fashion industry. In addition, consumers, and companies are ought to change their behaviour. Considering the growing consumers' demand of fast fashion, the intention of Fair Wear Foundation (n.d.b) and Oxfam International (2015b) to aim their awareness at the brands as well as the consumers might be an important approach to improve labour conditions in developing countries in the fast fashion industry. Consumers, and companies should become more aware of the consequences to their actions, and on how these actions can be changed to help.

This study contributed to the understanding of how different types of NGO strategies can improve labour conditions in the fast fashion industry in Bangladesh and Myanmar. The analysis of this study added to existing research by conceptually mapping the strategies of NGOs before and after the two sudden shocks, by structuring the strategies of NGOs under three key parameters. Categorising the strategies of NGOs under key elements has not been done in existing literature. The results showed that there is no causal relation between the strategies of NGOs and the elements. However, it substantiated that strategies used by NGOs depend on the social and political circumstances of the country (Pache & Santos, 2010; Doh & Guay, 2006). The results of this study should be considered in the light of some limitations, limitations due to the focus, the applied methodology, the data selection, and the language barrier. The study has limitations considering the focus of the study. The study has been focused on international NGOs, the location of the developing countries made it unattainable to carry out field research in Bangladesh and Myanmar. Another aspect that made field research impossible are the financial aspects. Consequently, this research was conducted at a greater distance with the focus on international NGOs. The applied methodology also had an impact on the study. Due to the qualitative research methods the sample size was smaller, and fewer articles and documents have been analysed due to time. Further the data collection, the data in this study derived mostly from NGOs that might be biased in their representation of information. NGOs do not often publish information on activities that did not achieve the desired goals, they rather publish their achievements than their non-achievements. In addition, important documents could have been missed by the researcher, due to inaccessibility or not mastering the language of the documents, e.g. Bengali or Burmese. Future research may design a similar coding scheme for other developing countries. Moreover, the qualitative research method can be used in combination with quantitative methods, e.g. field research and interviews with local trade unions, NGOs, or garment workers. Due to the language barrier, this study focused on three international NGOs: Clean Clothes, Campaign, Fair Wear Foundation, and Oxfam International. To analyse the experiences of garment workers more in depth, a suggestion would be to focus future studies on local trade unions active in Bangladesh and Myanmar.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Coding scheme

Report / article	Code	Parameter	Example
CCC – Made by Woman (2005)	Outside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“Clean Clothes Campaigners wanted the public to know that exploited labour in these industries often had a female face, and if something was going to be done about their situation that fact couldn’t be ignored.”
	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“the CCC embraced the role of informing the public and industry of the roles they could and should play to support the often difficult and dangerous organising efforts of these women.”
	Sequence; inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“... the challenge remains to communicate the importance of understanding the role that gender plays in shaping conditions in these industries, and how solutions to any problems need to take this on.”
	Lobbying & collaboration	Safety / security, social dialogue	“Devising strategies to connect to these women, understand their needs, and support their attempts to gain respect as workers with legal rights should be a top priority for trade union and NGO activists.”
CCC – Full Package Approach to Labour Codes of Conduct (2008)	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“There are many steps companies can and should take (...) to improve workers rights, there are no quick-fix solutions. Clean Clothes Campaign established steps for garment companies , so they can ensure their products are made under humane conditions.”
CCC – Solidarity Action – Making a Difference (2013)	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“ Direct Solidarity is one of the main tools used by the Clean Clothes Campaign to reach its goals of improved working conditions in the global garment and sports shoe sectors and the empowerment of workers.”
	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“Since the CCC began its work many companies have developed codes of conduct ...”
	Collaboration strategy	Safety / security	“ The CCC works with other organizations to simultaneously push all those responsible for improving workplace conditions (...) to actively work to solve problems.” “Supporting this model results in more sharing of skills and experience between labour rights activists globally”
CCC – Still Waiting: Six Months After Rana Plaza (2013)	Outside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“the CCC stepped up its campaigning on health and safety problems in the sector in Bangladesh.”
	Collaboration strategy	Safety / security, social dialogue	“many of the brands and retailers sourcing from Bangladesh have taken some first steps towards a safer industry by forming the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, which now has more than 100 signatories.”
	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“There must be a commitment from all brands to ensure compensation funds are sufficient to cover full and fair compensation payments to all the victims and their families.”
	Social and political impact	Safety / security	“Trade unions and labour rights campaigners had been warning for nearly a decade that such a disaster was not only likely but inevitable.”
	Labour conditions	Wages	“In the aftermath of Rana Plaza, it became clear that not a single brand, retailer or audit scheme was properly incorporating building inspections as part of their standard audits.”
			“At the time of the Rana Plaza collapse the minimum wage was just BDT 3,000 (USD 38) per month”

	Collaboration strategy	Social dialogue	“(…) local and international trade unions and NGOs developed a formula to calculate full and fair compensation for the victims of such disasters.”
	Inside lobby strategy	Social dialogue	“Although initiated before the Rana Plaza collapse, discussions around the development of new labour laws did benefit from the increased pressure brought to bear on the government following Rana Plaza.”
	Outside lobby & collaboration	Social dialogue	“The CCC and the International Labor Rights Forum will continue to press for dignity and respect for Bangladeshi garment workers.”
CCC – Rana Plaza 3 years on (2016)	Outside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“(…) H&M became the first brand to sign the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety (….) dozens of other retailers also felt obliged to sign on as a result of pressure from consumer and trade union campaigns . To date over 200 garment brands, retailers and importers have signed up.”
	Collaboration strategy	Safety / security	“signatories will continue to push for all factories to be repaired as soon as possible and for future programmes for workplace safety and other workers’ rights to follow a similar model of accountability that has now been established under the Accord.”
	Outside lobby strategy; social and political impact	Safety / security, social dialogue	“After the collapse of the Rana Plaza building an initial upsurge in union activism could be seen and pressure on the Bangladesh government to improve freedom of association in the country was high. Nevertheless, three years on we can see that these apparent gains have largely been eroded, and that union repression is once again the norm.”
CCC – Five years since the Rana Plaza collapse (2018)	Labour conditions	Wages	“In Bangladesh, wages have not been increased since 2013, and their value has significantly dropped by inflation.”
	Sequence; Social and political impact	Safety / security	“Rana Plaza turned out to be only a short-lived wake up call for the industry.” “It is generally agreed that there is one area where progress has been significant and maintained, albeit limited to Bangladesh, and that is in the improvements to fire and building safety”
Oxfam – Made in Myanmar (2015)	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“Oxfam believes that the private sector has an important role to play in development and can contribute to tackling poverty and inequality through providing decent work and upholding people's basic rights.”
	Sequence; labour conditions	Wages	“Before August 2015, there was no minimum wage in place in Myanmar. (...) workers were earning as little as \$0.60 a day as a base wage, as well as facing long hours of overtime, including forced overtime.”
	Inside & outside lobby strategy	Social dialogue, wages	“Throughout 2012, workers in Myanmar held mass strikes in protest at low wages, unpaid overtime and poor conditions. Following more than two years of negotiations (...) a new minimum wage was announced.”
	Inside lobby & collaboration strategy		In August 2015, Oxfam brought together representatives from international sourcing companies, (...) and other stakeholders in Yangon to present and discuss the preliminary findings from this research.
Oxfam – In Work But Trapped In Poverty (2015)	Social and political impact	Safety / security	“In Myanmar, the garment industry is growing rapidly, providing jobs for around 300,000 workers. Many international companies are now starting to source from the country.”
	Labour conditions	Wages	“The average base salary was found to be \$1.50 a day, and \$40 a month.”

	Inside lobby strategy	Wages	“Urgent action is needed to address Oxfam’s concerning findings that so many waged workers are working hard but trapped in poverty.”
Oxfam – What She Makes (2017)	Inside & outside lobby strategy	Wages	“Brands have the power — and the responsibility — to make this change.” “Brands can change the way they do business to ensure workers earn a living wage.” “FWF will actively inform companies why production in Myanmar carries a high risk.” “FWF will implement additional, country specific requirements that must be followed by the affiliates and will be verified by FWF.” “Until November 2014, FWF commits to a number of steps to take to set up activities in Myanmar to be able to verify improvements in working conditions in factories and to promote social dialogue and effective grievance mechanisms.”
FWF – Position Paper on Myanmar (2013)	Inside & outside lobby strategy	Safety / security, social dialogue	FWF audits in 2014 show that unauthorised subcontracting remains a common issue in Bangladesh. Building and fire safety, and the prevention of violence against women are two high-risk topics that are being addressed by FWF. “This practical Guidance Document aims to help garment factories in Myanmar to set up a more robust Age Verification System.”
FWF – Bangladesh Country Study (2015)	Labour conditions; Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“In this Position Paper, FWF committed to a number of steps to set up activities in Myanmar to be able to verify improvements in working conditions in factories and to promote social dialogue and effective grievance mechanisms.”
FWF – Guidance Age Verification (2017)	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“Knowing when to shift between a range of activities in a variety of areas, often with different partner organisations, is the most effective way of influencing policy” “Supplementing an outside strategy (...) with an inside strategy (...) is an example of a proven complementary method.”
FWF – Enhanced Monitoring Programme Myanmar (2018)	Inside lobby strategy	Safety / security, social dialogue	“Workers who are bold enough may file complaints or resort to open protests, news of which sometimes finds its way into international media. More often, workers toil on in silence.” “Independent trade unions were prohibited for more than 50 years, strikes were banned and any form of dissent was violently suppressed.” “actors in the garment industry and involved governments urgently need to rethink their policies and practices with regard to Myanmar.” “all the actors involved (...) have a fundamental responsibility to protect and respect human rights and labour rights”
Fair, Green & Global Alliance (2014), The Strength of Lobbying and Advocacy	Lobbying & collaboration Inside & outside lobby strategy		“(...) it is clear that different NGOs were in control of the distribution of compensation funds.” “the collective force of global and local elite actors dominates over marginalized workers in developing countries.”
SOMO, ALR & LRDP – The Myanmar Dilemma: Can the garment industry deliver jobs for workers in Myanmar? (2017)	Social and political impact Social and political impact Social and political impact Lobbying & collaboration	Safety / security Safety / security, social dialogue Social dialogue Social dialogue	“in the aftermath of Rana Plaza, pressure from the European Union, the United States, and international organizations resulted in minor pro-union labour reforms. (...), resulted in an increase in the number of recognized unions.”
Chowdhury (2017), complicit behavior of elite NGOs	Social and political impact Social and political impact	Wages Social dialogue	
Anner (2018), Binding Power: The Sourcing Squeeze, and Building Safety	Social and political impact; collaboration strategy	Social dialogue	

in Bangladesh Since Rana Plaza	Lobbying & collaboration	Safety / security	“Worker’s rights compliance remains a significant issue in Bangladesh. The responsibility to address these violations rests with suppliers and the government.”
Fashion Revolution (2019), Transparency Index	Inside & outside lobby strategy	Safety / security	“We want to see brands publishing more detailed information about the outcomes of their efforts to improve human rights and environmental sustainability. And finally, we will be encouraging major brands to share far more information about their purchasing practices, their actions to reduce waste and their efforts to achieve gender equality for women across the industry.”
Ahmad (2019), Decent Work Check	Labour conditions	Wages	“The minimum wage must cover the living expenses of the employee and his/her family members. Moreover, it must relate reasonably to the general level of wages earned and the living standard of other social groups.”
	Labour conditions	Safety / security, wages	Forced labour is the work one has to perform under threat of punishment: forfeit of wages, dismissal, harassment or violence, even corporal punishment. Forced labour means violation of human rights.
	Social and Political impact	Social dialogue	“Freedom of association means freedom to join a trade union. This is part of the fundamental human rights. Employees may not be put at a disadvantage when they are active in the trade union outside working hours.”
ILO (2017), NORMLEX	Social and Political impact	Social dialogue	“Ratifications of fundamental Conventions by country”

Appendix 2 – Relation between strategies and parameters

Parameters	Strategies		
	Inside lobby	Outside lobby	Collaboration
	Number of occurrences in the coding scheme		
Wages	3	2	0
Safety/security	7	6	6
Social dialogue	13	6	5