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# Building safer and greener tanneries

Lessons from SMEP  
(Sustainable Manufacturing  
and Environmental Pollution  
Programme)



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We'll gather your questions and put these to our panellists during the discussion.



## What factors contribute to a socially and environmentally sustainable leather tannery sector?



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# Agenda

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## **Welcome & introduction to SMEP**

Heidi Chan, ETI

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## **Overview of SMEP**

Nafiz Mahmud Ayon, ETI Bangladesh

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## **Progress: insights into promising practices and lessons**

Nafiz Mahmud Ayon, ETI Bangladesh

Farjana Yasmin, ETI Bangladesh

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## **Reflections**

Abil Bin Amin, ETI Bangladesh

A K M Ashraf Uddin, Executive Director, Bangladesh Labour Foundation

5

## **Panel questions and answers**

All presenters

# Sustainable Manufacturing and Environmental Pollution Programme



# Improving Environmental and Social Conditions in the Savar Tannery Estate

Our approach

- 1. Strengthening environmental and social management systems (ESMS) within participating tanneries** to improve environmental compliance, operational efficiency and risk management
- 2. Promoting human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD)** to strengthen tannery readiness for emerging international environmental and human rights requirements
- 3. Sectoral advocacy and stakeholder engagement** focused on fostering collaboration among key actors across the leather supply chain **to support environmental improvements sector wide**

# Leather + Bangladesh



Chemicals used in tanning process can pose risks to workers health and poorly treated wastewater pollutes when released back into waterways.

Globally, many buyers use Leather Working Group (LWG) certification for assurances of environmental practices.

In Bangladesh, leather is the second largest export industry after the ready-made garment sector.

Strong domestic source of hides as a by-product of household consumption.

Tanneries on the Savar estate face structural challenges to process wastewater effectively.

Export potential unrealised as few tanneries can access premium markets





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Sustainable Manufacturing and  
Environmental Pollution Programme



# Improving Environmental and Social Conditions in the Savar Tannery Estate (Aug 2024–Jun 2026)

40 tanneries in Savar Tannery Estate

**Goal:** Reduce environmental & social impacts; build systems and skills for responsible, efficient production

## Activities:

- Establish ESMS systems & tannery action plans
- Capacity building of tannery management & workers
- Support forming safety & anti-harassment committees
- Lobbying & advocacy for sectoral change
- Promote Human Rights & Environmental Due Diligence (HREDD) framework



# Programme Focus: Strengthening People, Practices, and Planet for Sustainability



# How we achieved change with tanneries

## Support to business

- Individual **environmental assessment** → ESMS action plans to close gap between current practice Leather Working Group (LWG) standards (410+ KPIs on environment & social indicators)
- 11 tanneries developed their environmental data management systems
- 11 tanneries developed Industrial Carbon Emission report
- 31 **Anti-harassment committees** established
- 32 **Safety committees** established



# How we achieved change with tanneries

## Workforce engagement

- **9 types of training reached 1600+ participants** (Chemical, Water, Waste, Housekeeping, OHS, DIFE Checklist, Safety Committee, Gender Sensitivity, Social Dialogue, Environmental & Social Management System, HREDD)
- Message boards, pictorial training flipcharts, campaigns in tanneries
- **140+ Climate Champions** (tannery resource person)
  - 940+ workers engaged
  - Promoted environmental discussion in tannery as **Climate Champions**
  - Promoted utilization and demand creation of PPE in tanneries

## Workers' roles in environmental action and adaptation

- Co-developed **ESMS action plan** with management
- Defined their role in the **implementation of KPIs**
- Trade Union **engagement in environmental discussion**
- **Recent CBA included reference to environmental priorities**

## Stakeholder engagement

- Project priorities integrated into annual planning of the **Leather Development Forum**.
- Human Rights and Environmental Due Diligence (**HREDD**) embedded as a key priority.

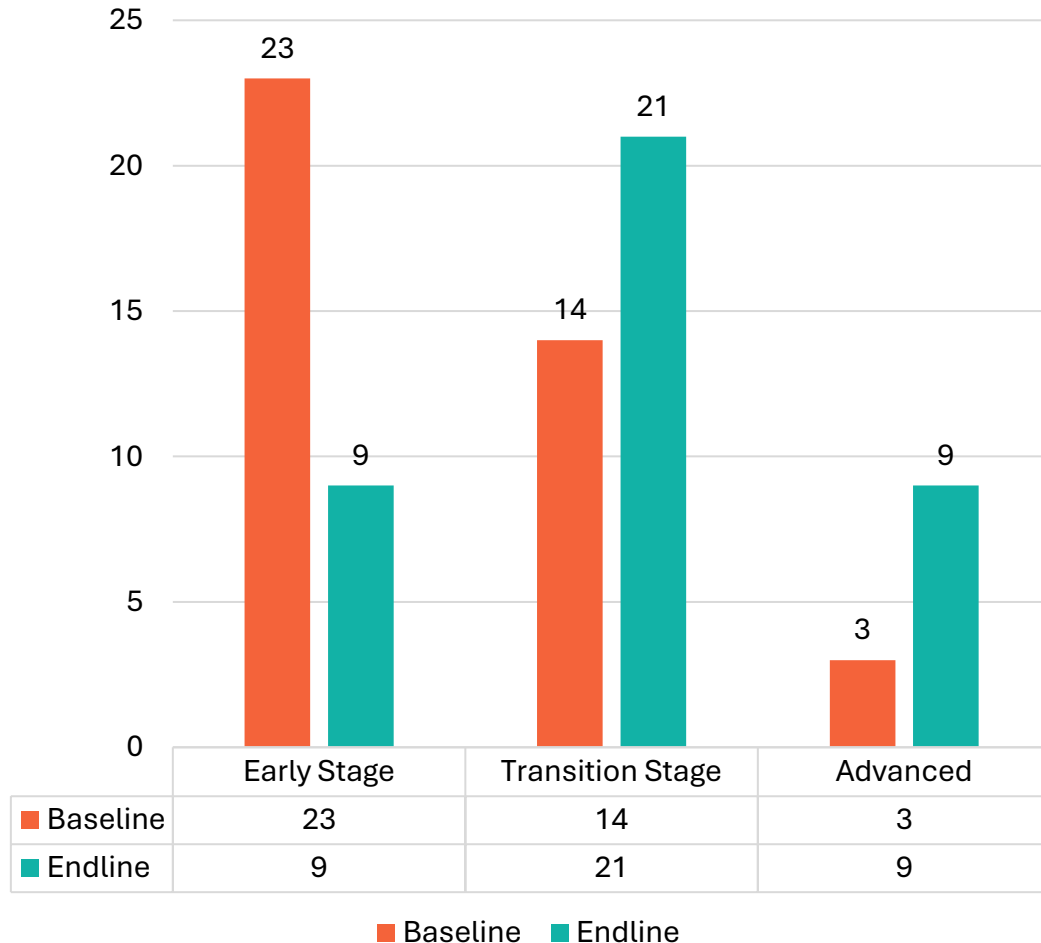
# Areas for further action

- **Safety Committees:** Awareness uneven; many workers unclear on mandates. Committees need stronger accessibility, visibility, and effectiveness.
- **Anti-Harassment Committees:** Coverage expanded; awareness growing but limited. Some inactive due to irregular meetings; functionality depends on employer commitment.
- **Awareness & Culture:** Harassment issues now openly discussed, supported by sessions, meetings, and training.
- **OHS:** PPE recognised as essential; usage improved (gloves, masks). Access uneven; >80% say provision unchanged.
- **Social Dialogue (Environment):** Agreements often remain on paper; enforcement weak. Unstable employment reduces participation and bargaining power.
- **Sustainability:** Environmental bargaining secondary to wages/conditions. Short trainings insufficient; unions call for long-term engagement.



# Environmental management – tannery alignment with international standards

Overall tannery situation



## Early Stage

- **Baseline → 23 tanneries** (limited systems, weak documentation, minimal monitoring)
- **Endline → 9 tanneries** (substantial reduction, less reliance on informal practices)

## Transition Stage

- **Baseline → 14 tanneries** (basic SOPs, partial monitoring, improved awareness)
- **Endline → 21 tanneries** (structured systems, monitoring, housekeeping, stronger management engagement)

## Advanced Stage

- **Baseline → 3 tanneries** (strong governance, systematic monitoring, higher LWG alignment)
- **Endline → 9 tanneries** (expanded governance, documentation, resource monitoring, stronger compliance readiness)



# Environmental management systems

## Key improvements

- **Chemical Management:** Tannery awareness improved—less wastage, stronger RSL procedures, reduced hazardous use, and regular testing.
- **Waste management:** Segregation, SOPs and records are more systematic; 20 factories now keep waste measurement records.
- **Water controls:** Recipe-based water use and reuse systems expanded to 35 factories.
- **Energy & chemicals:** Efficient machinery is used in 29 factories, soft starter/VRF in 32; 21 RSL procedures and 24 RSL tests are in place.
- **Effluent & data:** Sedimentation SOPs, CETP report archiving, onsite checks and 11-factory data tracking now support performance management.
- **Worker behaviour:** Awareness improved across waste, water and energy; active participation in waste management rose.

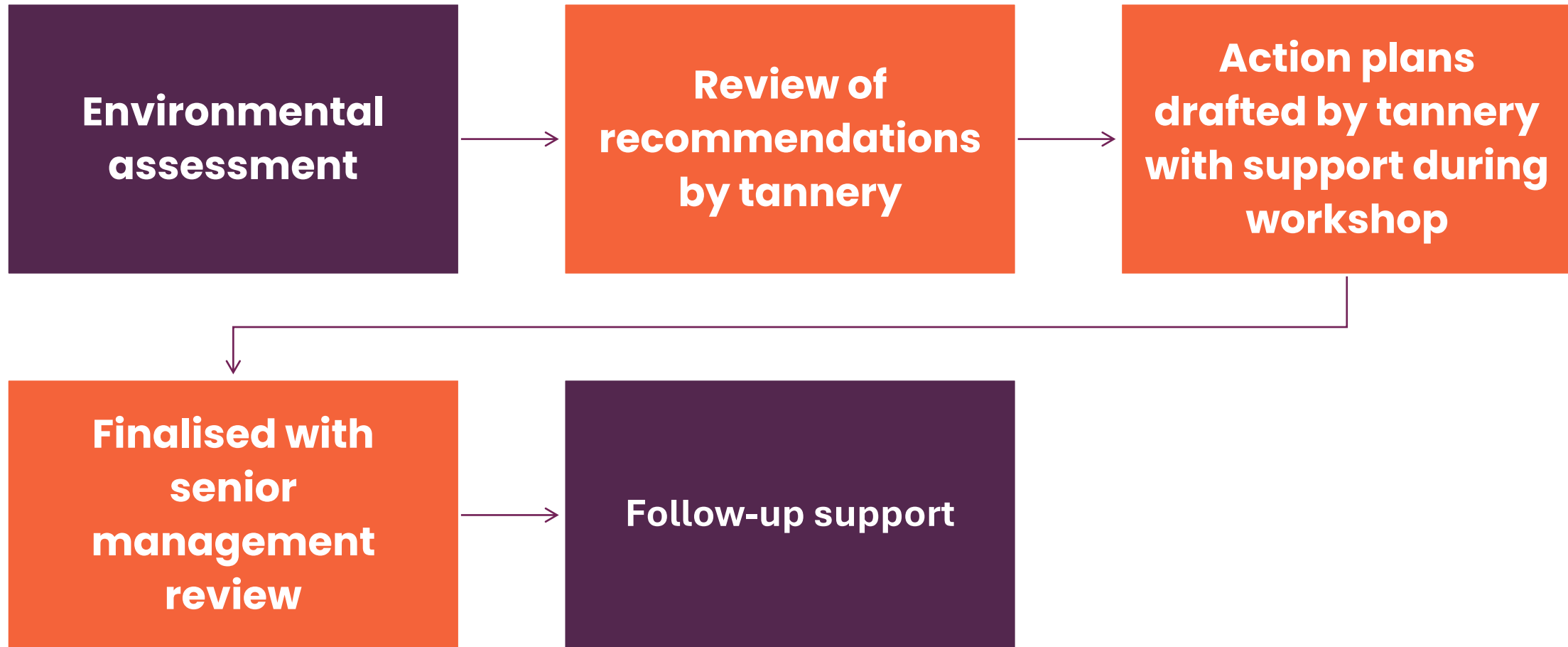


# Environmental management systems

## Remaining challenges

- **Institutional Capacity Building:** Collaborative approach on developing Environmental Management System (EMS) is needed
- **Monitoring depth:** Process-level water, chemical and energy optimization is still limited across many tanneries.
- **Capital barriers:** Solar, condensate recovery, air nozzles and own ETP installation remain slow due to cost and space constraints.
- **Effluent compliance:** CETP capacity issues and factory pre-treatment gaps need collaborative solution
- **Chemical controls:** Hazardous chemical reduction and recipe adherence need stronger, consistent factory-level oversight.
- **Green-house gas performance:** Emissions outcomes are mixed; factories need production-linked targets and Scope-wise reduction plans.

# How we achieved change: Environmental Management System (EMS) action plans



# How tanneries made change

## EMS actions plans

Thematic area	Number of KPIS
Waste management	13
Water management	25
Pollution reduction measures	6
Energy efficiency	25
Capacity building	111
Chemical management	26
Traceability	23
Operations and policies	69
Ohs	56
Gender & inclusion	12
Housekeeping	7
Awareness raising	39

**412** planned KPIS

**211** completed

**43** ongoing

**159** yet to start

# Factors That Pushed Action Plans Forward

- **Low-cost focus:** tanneries prioritised housekeeping, awareness, PPE, chemical management, and waste segregation over capital-intensive investments.
- **Capacity building:** In-house training seen as essential across OHS, chemicals, water, waste, and housekeeping.
- **Management role:** Active owner/management support drove progress; delays linked to limited interest or pending approvals.
- **Incremental progress:** Regular advisory visits helped translate action plans into practice.
- **Behavioural change:** Sustaining worker practices requires continuous awareness, not one-off training.
- **Market Situation:** Market demands and production workloads often outweighed sustainability investments, alternatively the market can also signal the importance of environmental and social risk mitigation.



# In summary...

- SMEP support helped participating tanneries improve basic environmental and social management practices.
- Sustained progress depends on technical upgrades, worker voice, management engagement, social dialogue and enforcement.
- Sector-wide barriers, including CETP and waste management performance, limited finance, and weak traceability, continue to limit access to international standards and markets.



# Engaging stakeholders on human rights and environmental due diligence and structural challenges

- Researched and consulted global leather stakeholders to develop **Guidance for buyers and tanners on HREDD** in the leather supply chain
- Engagement with key stakeholders, promoted **mainstreaming of HREDD and facilitated discussions** about challenges and recommendations.
- Engaged Bangladeshi stakeholders on HREDD and **co-developed HREDD modules** with the Leather Development Forum (LDF)





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## Panel discussion



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**Heidi Chan**  
Gener Programme Lead  
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**Moderator**

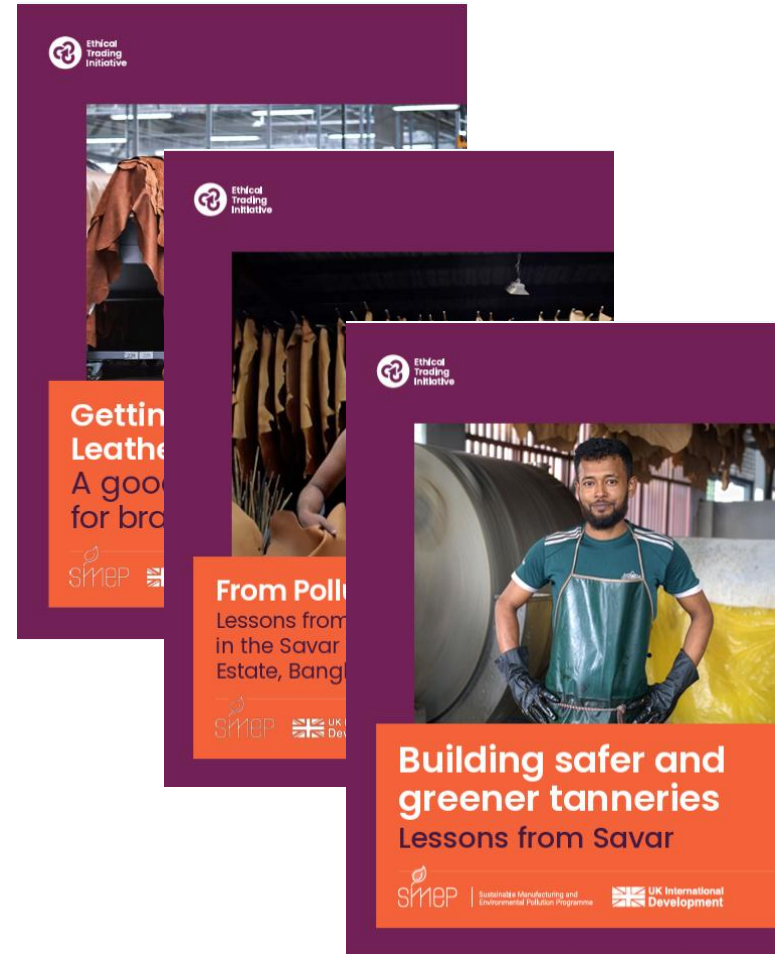


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# More information



[SMEP case studies](#)

[Guidance and SMEP learning papers](#)

[Insights about decent work across the broader portfolio of SMEP projects](#)



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# Thank you

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