



Critically explore one international humanitarian care organisation that supports people within one of the following areas: poverty and inequality; health and nutrition; education; gender and youth

BY MELINA
SULLIVAN

WHAT IT DOES

- **Mission:** To drive positive change through the power of entertainment
- **Vision:** To create a just world free from poverty where everyone is safe, healthy, educated and empowered

**FUNDED
BY**

**COMIC
RELIEF**

- Raises funds
- Allocates those funds to projects in the UK and internationally
- Raises awareness of the issues it feels strongly about

Key issues:

- Global mental health
- The right to safe and secure shelter
- Helping children survive and thrive
- Fighting for gender justice

<https://www.comicrelief.com/funding/funding-strategy>

HISTORY

1985



£60
MILLION

£15
MILLION

SPORT
RELIEF

1988

150

30
MILLION

<https://www.comicrelief.com/about-comic-relief/history>

MERCHANDISE

- More than **£1 billion** raised through Red Nose Day, Sport Relief, events, corporate partnerships and merchandise
- Impact on poor and disadvantaged
- Comic Relief website: “We want to develop long-term, sustainable relationships with those merchandise partners who develop our Comic Relief branded products and who support our overall aims as a charity. A key indicator of this would be that they too are committed to ethical trade, have their own responsible sourcing policies in place and are striving to maintain high social, ethical and environmental standards both in their own operations and throughout their own supply chains.”
- Have all Comic Relief’s activities been in line with this ethos?

<https://www.comicrelief.com/positive-practices/ethical-sourcing-comic-relief-branded-merchandise>



Picture: Comic Relief

KEY PRIORITY AREAS



SPICE GIRLS

- #IWannaBeASpiceGirl T-shirts
- Gender justice project
- "Girl power" - female empowerment
- Proven popularity
- Vital alternative revenue stream – wider audience
- Collaboration had all the hallmarks of a huge fundraising success



Picture: Comic Relief

INVESTIGATION

- T-shirts made in Bangladesh – one of Comic Relief's key priority areas
- Workers paid the equivalent of 35p an hour for a 54-hour week
- 16-hour days, verbal abuse, made to work when ill
- Sweatshop labour
- “The women who are producing these clothes are getting poverty wages. They don't have a dignified job. What kind of gender justice is that?”



Picture: Noor Alam/ Guardian

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/20/spice-girls-comic-relief-tshirts-made-bangladesh-factory-paying-staff-35p-an-hour>

LIVING WAGE

- Machinists paid 8,800 taka a month – the equivalent of £82
- ISEAL set the monthly living wage for Gazipur at 13,630 in 2016 – or £123
- Asia Floor Wage Alliance set the monthly living wage for Bangladesh as a whole at 37,661 in 2017 – or £340
- 4 times the minimum wage of 8,000 taka, the lowest amount employers can legally pay workers
- What is a living wage? The amount people need to provide a basic but decent standard of living.
- What should it cover? Labour Behind the Label says a living wage should cover the basic living costs of one working adult, one child-caring adult and two children, for example, or one working adult and two elderly adults



HUMAN RIGHTS

The group says:

- In countries with no social security and no safety net to help people in need, it is vital a wage ensures people can live in human dignity
- It applies to all workers and there must not be any wage lower than this wage
- It is reached within the standard working week, which is not more than 48 hours per week
- It is made up of a basic wage before benefits, bonuses and overtime pay

A living wage is also a human right. Article 23 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that "everyone who



works has the right to just and favourable remuneration ensuring for himself and his family an existence worthy of human dignity"

[\(United Nations, 1988, pp. 5\)](#)

WAGE PLEDGE

- In 2014, Comic Relief pledged to pay all its employees a living wage
- Chief executive **Kevin Cahill** said at the time he was proud the charity had become Living Wage accredited.
- He added: "It's only right that our practice and policies as an employer reflect our values, goals and ambitions as a charity. I'm immensely pleased to now be part of an initiative that strives to achieve this for employees across all sectors."

In this case Comic Relief's practice clearly didn't reflect its goals.

<https://www.comicrelief.com/news/comic-relief-proud-commit-living-wage>



WHAT WENT WRONG?

What we know about the supply chain:

- **Insterstoff Apparels** – factory in Bangladesh where machinists stitched the T-shirts together for 35p an hour
- The T-shirts were shipped to the Czech Republic, where the slogan #IWannaBeASpiceGirl was printed
- Belgian brand **Stanley/Stella** oversaw the production process, receiving about £4.40 per T-shirt from US online retailer **Represent**
- **Represent** – sold the T-shirts at £19.40 each
- **Comic Relief** – received about £11.60 from the sale of each shirt

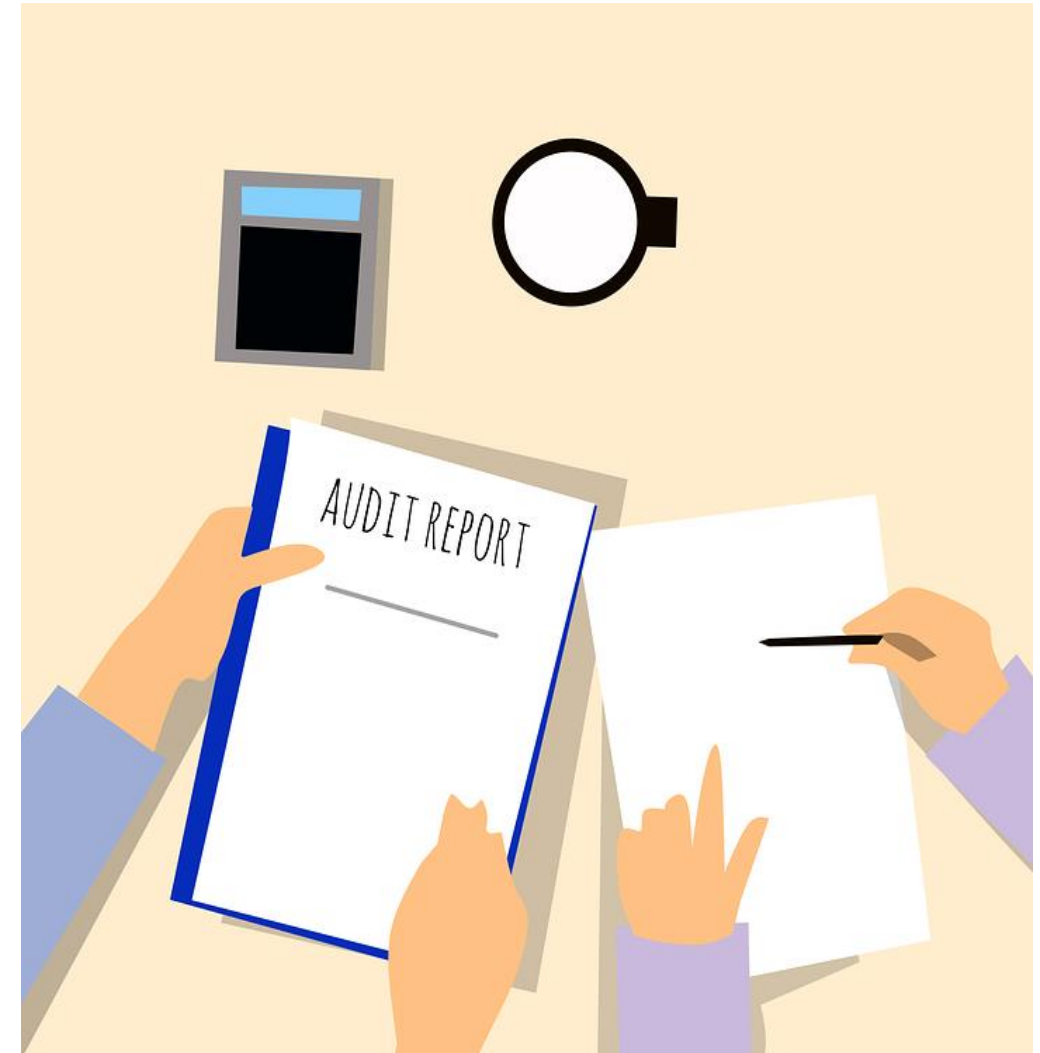
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/20/bangladesh-factory-making-spice-girls-tshirts-workers-conditions>



Picture: represent.com

AUDITING FAILURE?

- Spice Girls and Comic Relief checked Represent's ethical sourcing credentials but Represent had changed supplier without telling them
- Represent took full responsibility
- Stanley/Stella claimed to have monitored the factory
- Interstoff Apparels denied the accusations
- Labour Behind the Label's policy director **Dominique Muller** believes the evidence showed failures in brand auditing and monitoring, which suggests the fault lay with Stanley/Stella
- What is an audit? They protect brands and those in their supply chains from malpractice
- Research by **Sedex** suggests companies that are regularly audited are more likely to make positive improvements in their working conditions.



<https://www.innovationforum.co.uk/articles/why-local-capacity-building-could-solve-the-spice-girls-problem>

WHY THE DISCREPANCY?

- Audit of Interstoff Apparels carried out by the **Fair Wear Foundation** on behalf of Stanley/Stella found no issues
- Whether audits actually identify issues thought to be only part of the problem
- “How can they when the vast majority of audits are pre-announced, whereby the site knows someone is coming to do an audit?” - **Hilary Thompson**, director at The Forest Trust (TFT)
- Whether Interstoff Apparels knew in advance about the audit is unclear
- But it could be argued that unannounced visits could help ensure audits are credible and fair, potentially avoiding situations similar to the one Comic Relief found itself in

<https://www.innovationforum.co.uk/articles/why-local-capacity-building-could-solve-the-spice-girls-problem>



PROTECTION FOR WORKERS

- Workers' union Unite called for better protection for textile industry workers
- Assistant general secretary **Tony Burke** - situation was an “indictment of the entire system” in place for garment production that even charities like Comic Relief can’t be sure who they’re buying their merchandise from.
- Unite's global union, Workers Uniting - the way to prevent what are “ostensibly slave labour products” entering our markets is for legally enforceable and binding agreements in countries like Bangladesh that are backed up by laws involving the right to form and join trade unions and for workers to bargain collectively in a bid to improve pay and conditions
- Legally binding agreement following the Rana Plaza disaster needs to be extended to include union organisation, decent pay and working conditions

<http://unitelive.org/spice-girls-t-shirt-scandal/>



CONTRASTING VIEWS

- Rana Plaza disaster brought worldwide attention to the plight of workers in the garment industry in Bangladesh who are part of the global supply chain (**Alamgir and Banerjee, 2019**)
- They claim these global production networks are a win-win situation
- But the reality appears to be somewhat grimmer - low wages, unsafe working conditions, overtime often without payment and a lack of collective workers' rights are the norms in this sector (**Anwary, 2017**)
- Supports Workers Uniting's push for laws regarding unions



Picture: Wikipedia

TRANSPARENCY

- **Alisha Miranda** - the public must hold big companies like Represent to account
- If everyone starts pushing companies to inform us about who makes our clothes, they will take notice
- **Veena Dookoo** – supports transparency but suggests the charity is responsible, particularly its fundraising managers
- Says a charity's success ultimately depends on its reputation and fundraising managers "need to be informed, involved and committed – at every step of the way" to avoid putting that reputation at risk.
- Their responsibility to source ethically, while meeting fundraising targets, can be a balancing act but those that do it well frequently request audits.



ETHICAL MERCHANDISE

Three ways for charities to ensure their merchandise is ethical:

- Work with suppliers and factories that have passed strict social accountability audits
- Conduct inspections at different stages throughout the production process to reduce the risk of companies cutting corners
- If the price looks too good to be true, it probably is. To provide safe working conditions, liveable wages and quality products, factories need to invest significant funds
- **Lucy Siegle** - it would take a brave organisation to say change is needed and cheap volume product is not the answer, but that is what needs to happen. And if Comic Relief qualifies the T-shirt scandal as having happened because of 'one rogue factory' it could find itself at a dead end.
- But Comic Relief is loved and respected, so if it was to take a revolutionary approach to merchandise, where it leads, others would follow

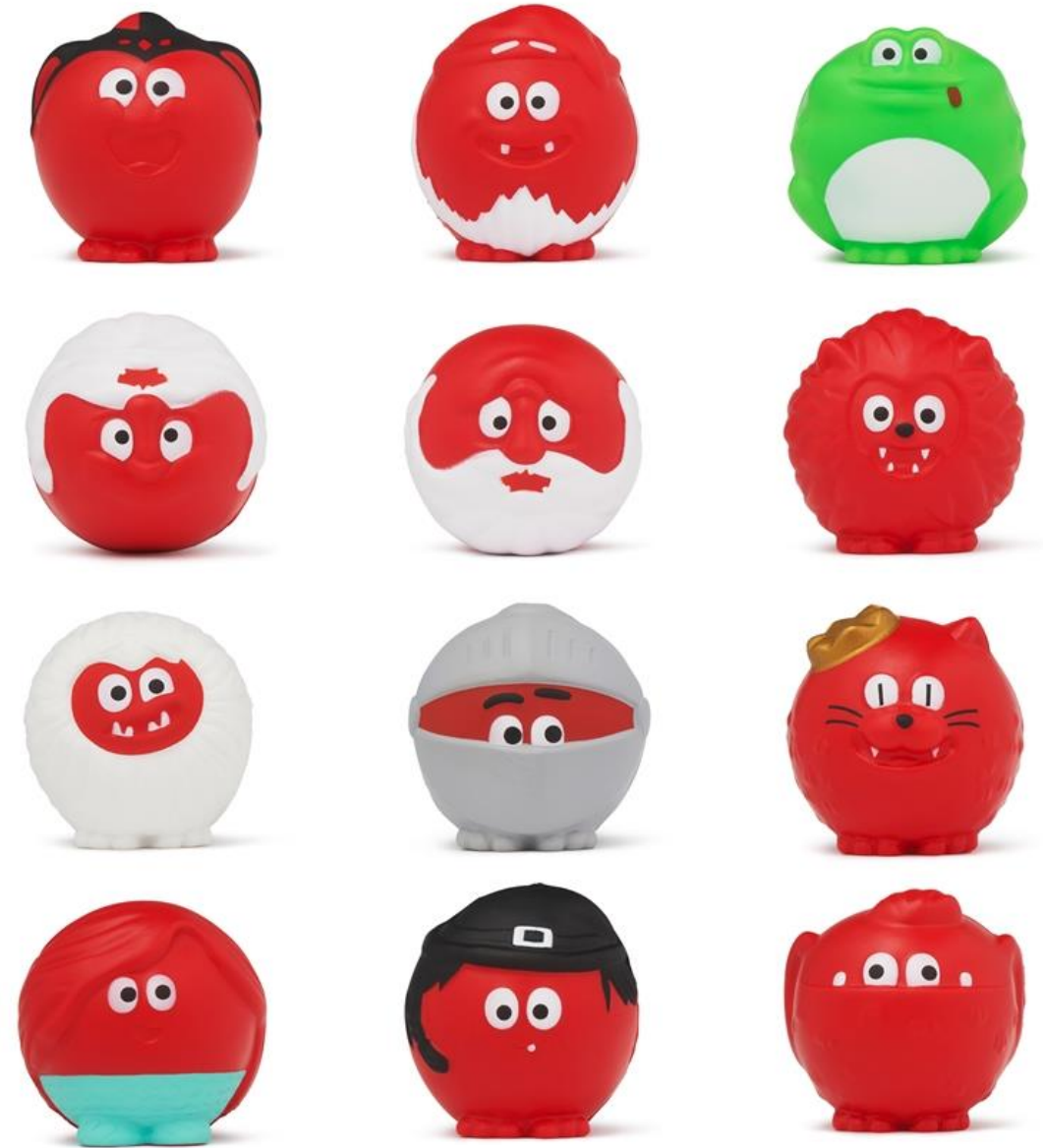


ECO - AGE



CONCLUSION

- Charities need to meet fundraising targets and selling merchandise is a valuable way of contributing towards this. But Comic Relief's T-shirt scandal demonstrates the difficulties involved in global and ethical manufacturing of such merchandise.
- While supply chains can be complex, that doesn't mean charities should not take all the steps they can to help protect themselves against unethical practices which could put their reputations at risk.
- In fact, it appears that only through greater transparency, thorough auditing, repeated inspections and stronger commitment from fundraisers and manufacturers that change can evolve and charity bosses like those at Comic Relief will be spared from having red faces behind their red noses.



Picture: Comic Relief

REFERENCES

Funding Strategy. Available at: <https://www.comicrelief.com/funding/funding-strategy> [Mar 6, 2019].

The History of Comic Relief. Available at: <https://www.comicrelief.com/about-comic-relief/history> [Mar 6, 2019].

Comic Relief Annual Report and Accounts 2016/17. Available at: https://www.comicrelief.com/sites/default/files/downloads/PR4821%20Comic%20Relief_Report%20%26%20Accounts_AW_FINAL.pdf [Mar 8, 2019].

Comic Relief International Grants List. Available at: https://www.comicrelief.com/sites/default/files/downloads/Comic_Relief_International_Grants_List.pdf [Mar 8, 2019].

Comic Relief Proud to Commit to the Living Wage. Available at: <https://www.comicrelief.com/news/comic-relief-proud-commit-living-wage> [Mar 13, 2019].

United Nations. 1988. Human rights: A compilation of international instruments. Geneva, Centre for Human Rights, pp. 5.

Innovation Forum - Why local capacity building could solve the Spice Girls' problem, January 26, 2019. Available at: <https://www.innovationforum.co.uk/articles/why-local-capacity-building-could-solve-the-spice-girls-problem> [Mar 16, 2019].

What is an Asia Floor Wage?, 2017. Available at: <https://asia.floorwage.org/what/what-is-an-asia-floor-wage> [Mar 6, 2019].

Anonymous, May 10, 2013. Dhaka collapse toll passes 1,000. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22476774> [Mar 17, 2019].

Ethical Sourcing of Comic Relief Branded Merchandise. Available at: <https://www.comicrelief.com/positive-practices/ethical-sourcing-comic-relief-branded-merchandise> [Feb 6, 2019].

ALAMGIR, F. and BANERJEE, S.B., 2019. Contested compliance regimes in global production networks: Insights from the Bangladesh garment industry. *Human Relations*, **72**(2), pp. 272-297.

ANKER, R., 2006. Living wages around the world: A new methodology and internationally comparable estimates. *International Labour Review*, **145**(4), pp. 338,0_4.

ANWARY, A., 2017. Feminised Workforce in Transnational Production: Bangladesh Ready-made Garment Industry. *History and Sociology of South Asia*, **11**(2), pp. 174-191.

DIXON, E., November 11, 2018. There's Only 3 Weeks To Buy The Spice Girls' Comic Relief T-Shirt, So Here's How. Available at: <https://www.bustle.com/p/where-to-buy-the-iwannabeaspicegirl-t-shirt-for-the-spice-girls-comic-relief-campaign-13125303> [Mar 18, 2019].

DOOKOO, V., February 20, 2019. *Three ways to ensure charities' promotional merchandise is ethical*. Available at: https://fundraising.co.uk/2019/02/20/three-ways-to-ensure-charities-promotional-merchandise-is-ethical/#.XJBGJij7Q_N [Mar 17, 2019].

REFERENCES

FLETCHER, R., January 24, 2019. *Unite calls for workers rights in Bangladesh amid Spice Girls t-shirt scandal*. Available at: <http://unitelive.org/spice-girls-t-shirt-scandal/>

KHAN, D.M.E., ANKER, D.R., ANKER, M. and BARGE, D.S., 2016. *Living Wage Benchmark Report - Dhaka, Bangladesh and Satellite Cities. Context: The Garment Industry*. Available at: http://www.isealliance.org/sites/default/files/resource/2017-12/Dhaka_Living_Wage_Benchmark_Report.pdf [Mar 7, 2019].

MIRANDA, A., January 26, 2019. *T-shirts like the Spice Girls' will always be made unless we hold retailers to account*. Available at: <https://metro.co.uk/2019/01/26/t-shirts-like-the-spice-girls-will-always-be-made-unless-we-hold-retailers-to-account-8392029/> [Mar 17, 2019].

MURPHY, S., January 20, 2019. *Revealed: Spice Girls T-shirts made in factory paying staff 35p an hour*. *The Guardian*. ISSN 0261-3077. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/20/spice-girls-comic-relief-tshirts-made-bangladesh-factory-paying-staff-35p-an-hour> [Mar 6, 2019].

SIEGLE, L., January 22 2019. *The Lucy Siegle Take: How Charity Can - And Should - Have Positive Impact*. Available at: <https://eco-age.com/news/lucy-siegle-take-how-charity-can-and-should-have-positive-impact> [Feb 20, 2019].

SMITH, R., May 28, 2003. *PROMOTIONAL MERCHANDISE: Promotional power*. Available at: <https://www.thirdsector.co.uk/promotional-merchandise-promotional-power/article/620320> [Mar 18, 2019].