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Challenges in Implementing Green Human Resource Management in The Jute Industry of Bangladesh

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Abstract— This study examines the obstacles in implementing Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Bangladesh's jute industry. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six HR professionals from three jute industries, using a qualitative, exploratory approach. Thematic analysis revealed barriers such as the absence of green HR policies, financial constraints, operational limitations, limited employee awareness, and inadequate managerial support. The study draws on Sustainable HRM, the Resource-Based View (RBV), and Stakeholder Theory to explain factors influencing GHRM in resource-constrained industries. However, the results highlight the organizational culture, employee engagement, and leadership commitment in integrating environmental concerns into HRM functions. This research contributes to the limited literature on sustainable HR practices within Bangladeshi contexts and offers practical recommendations for managers, policymakers, and industry regulators seeking to improve environmental performance through effective GHRM strategies.

Keywords- Bangladesh, Environmental Sustainability, Green Human Resource Management, Jute industry, Resource-Based View, Stakeholder Theory, Sustainable HRM

I. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh is the second-largest jute producer in the world, contributing substantially to the national economy with annual export earnings exceeding US \$1 billion and accounting for approximately 42% of the global supply [1]. Jute, which is frequently referred to as the "Golden Fiber," is renowned for its environmentally beneficial properties. It is naturally decomposed, consumes minimal energy during processing, and captures carbon dioxide during cultivation. Nevertheless, the industry is still plagued by systemic inefficiencies, outdated infrastructure in government-owned mills, and a general dearth of modernization and forward-thinking policy development. At the same time, environmental risks like air and water pollution and increased risks of climate are on the rise in Bangladesh, which puts sustainable industrial practices as a pressing need. The jute industry is facing a turning point with the growing interest in green products around the world. Its long-term success depends on the ability to implement sustainable practices supported by enterprise and institutional change. In this context, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is a very important strategy that offers a framework for integration of environmental considerations into human resource functions and the development of a culture of sustainability in the workforce [2], [17].

The jute industry in Bangladesh is considered to be a golden fiber, which has long been a substantial contributor to the economy of Bangladesh, making the country among the leading producers and exporters of jute in the world [1]. Although the global demand for sustainable products is on the rise and it has the features of environmental protection, the industry still faces numerous internal difficulties. These include, in general, a relative lack of innovation in strategic operations, inefficiencies of management, especially in the state-run industries, outdated technologies and lack of investment in human development. The need for transformation of the jute sector has come into increasing importance against the backdrop of international awareness around environmental sustainability (UNCTAD,2020; World Bank,2022). The human resource management and development practices used by organizations in alignment with environmental goals is an important part of this change. Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) is a strategic management model that enables the incorporation of

environmental awareness in various aspects of HR functions such as employee training, performance management, reward system and employment [2] GHRM has been successfully applied in different industries of Bangladesh, such as banking, garment, and hospitality, and made organizations more efficient and sustainable. However, these initiatives are often hampered by various factors, including lack of financial resources, low level of support from top management, poor environmental awareness and lack of formal green policies [4] Despite the prevalence of these general insights into GHRM practices, there is a notable gap in the literature in terms of their usage in the context of the jute sector [6]. Much of what has been written about VRM is focused on industries that operate within more structured human resource systems, and doesn't account for jute's idiosyncratic workings and constraints. Organizations whose nature is relatively unknown This leads to a question which needs to be examined critically: what are the particular challenges that jute enterprises in Bangladesh face in attempting to adopt GHRM practices?

The present study is intended to examine the current practices or non-practises of different green HRM components in the jute sector and the constraints that restrict their successful implementation. These barriers can be due to financial limits, resistance to change, technology gaps, or lack of knowledge about sustainable practices. Through the careful investigation of these factors, the research aims to

produce practical understandings that can point HR practitioners and policy makers towards more sustainable and inclusive practices in the sector. This research is beneficial in both the domain of academics and in practice. On the academic front, it extends the scope of GHRM literature to a conventional and under-researched sector. In practical terms, it provides a deeper understanding for decision-makers in the jute industry on how HR strategies can be executed in line with environmental goals to foster long-term sustainability. The study's ultimate objective is to facilitate the green transformation of the jute sector, thereby guaranteeing its competitiveness and relevance in a global market that is becoming increasingly propelled by sustainability. The study's detailed information

will be described in the literature review, methodology, discussions, and other sections of the report.

Scope: This study is confined to examining the barriers to adopting Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) in Bangladesh's jute sector. It focuses on HR practices such as recruitment, training, and performance management, highlighting financial, organizational, and policy-related constraints. The findings are limited to qualitative insights from selected jute industries and are intended to provide guidance for managers and policymakers in promoting sustainable HR practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past decade, Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) has emerged as a strategic framework for embedding environmental objectives within core HR functions such as recruitment, training, appraisal, and reward systems. Their main premise is that by aligning HR policy with sustainability measures, organisations can foster pro-environmental behaviour of employees, build corporate reputation and eventually achieve improved environmental performance [17], [2]. Basic research has focused on how human resource (HR) practices, especially green HR, training and performance appraisal, can build ability, motivation and opportunity (AMO) for employees to participate in environmental citizenship actions [19].

These theoretical assertions are supported empirically by the analysis of data from Bangladesh. For example, (Karmoker, Zannat, and Roy 2020) found green training practices, appraisal and reward practices to be significant drivers of pro-environmental behaviour among the hotel employees of Khulna. Extending this line of inquiry, Karmoker et al. (2021) showed in the ready-made garment (RMG) industry that GHRM not only affected employee behaviour at the workplace but also that employees with higher levels of environmental awareness were more open to green initiatives. Similar results are found in research outside the RMG industry: Rupa, Alam and Sultana (2023) examining responses from 310 Bangladeshi employees using PLS-SEM found that while green recruitment and

compensation had a direct positive effect on environmental performance, training and appraisal needed a stronger cultural fit to make an impact. These findings are in line with more general evidence

indicating that managerial commitment, green infrastructure and employee environmental literacy are important facilitators of successful GHRM [20].

Despite such positive outcomes, there are many challenges to implementation in practice. In the banking sector, financial technology constraints like lack of e-HRM infrastructure, top management lack of support, high initial cost, and data security have been reported as constraints to digitalizing the green practices. Such limitations are also found in the manufacturing and service sectors, which strengthens the argument that, in addition to good policies, successful GHRM necessitates organisational capacity building and change management strategies and supportive governance mechanisms.

Importantly, the literature is focused on industries with relatively organised HR systems such as banking, apparel and hospitality, leaving traditional industries under-examined. Despite the production of a natural fibre that is largely biodegradable but also low in carbon, the jute sector is largely missing from the discourse of GHRM. Jute organisations are characterised by archaic management practices, lack of technological up-gradation and fragmented supply chains, possibly posing unique challenges in terms of integrating green HRM practices.

Theoretically, the Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) framework is of special relevance in this context. SHRM defines HRM as a driver of organisational sustainability where economic, social and environmental dimensions are in balance. It focuses on integrating sustainability objectives into recruiting, training, performance evaluation, and employee engagement practices. Within the frame of the jute industry, SHRM offers a channel for orientation of HR practices toward sustainability goals while being operationally constrained.

In addition, the Resource-Based View (RBV) emphasises human capital as a resource that is valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable with the potential to give long-term competitive advantage [3]. By fostering employees' green skills and knowledge through targeted HR practices, firms can respond effectively to environmental challenges and strengthen sustainability outcomes even in resource-constrained settings. In traditional sectors such as jute, RBV highlights the potential of leveraging human resources as strategic assets when technological investments are not feasible.

Drawing on both SHRM and RBV, this study frames GHRM not simply as a set of operational interventions but as a strategic mechanism for advancing long-term sustainability in Bangladesh's resource-constrained,

traditional industries, particularly the jute sector.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the organizational and managerial obstacles associated with the implementation of GHRM practices in the jute sector of Bangladesh?
2. What is the perception of the significance of GHRM initiatives in the organizations of Business Managers?
3. What are the institutional, policy, and infrastructural obstacles that impede the effective implementation of green HRM practices in the Bangladeshi jute industry?

IV. METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

This study focuses on the challenges of implementing Green Human Resource Management (GHRM) practices in the jute industry of Bangladesh, using a qualitative research approach. This approach allowed an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges, providing detailed insights into a less-studied industrial context.

Research Design

An exploratory qualitative design was implemented, using semi-structured, in-depth interviews as the primary data collection method. This design ensured that key topics related to GHRM were addressed while allowing flexibility to explore participants' unique perspectives. The study was informed by the Sustainable Human Resource Management (SHRM) theory and the Resource-Based View (RBV), complemented by insights from Stakeholder Theory.

Sampling Method and Participants

Purposive sampling was used to recruit six participants from three prominent jute industries in Bangladesh. All participants were senior HR officers or managers directly involved in HR functions, with experience in environmental or sustainability-related initiatives. This ensured informed and relevant perspectives on the implementation of GHRM.

Data Collection Procedure

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted over a two-week period in July 2025. With prior consent, each interview was audio-recorded using a secure digital device to ensure accurate capture of responses. During the interview, field notes were also taken to record immediate observations, tone, and key phrases. Each interview lasted

approximately 15–20 minutes. The interviews followed six open-ended guiding questions focusing on:

- Current GHRM practices
- Organizational and structural obstacles
- Leadership and managerial support
- Employee engagement
- Functional and operational limitations
- Suggestions for improvement

Data Processing and Axial Coding

After data collection, the recordings were carefully replayed, and detailed verbatim transcriptions were created. The transcription process included cross-checking with field notes to ensure contextual accuracy. Following transcription, the data was analyzed using Axial Coding. This involved:

Open Coding: Breaking down the transcripts into discrete units of meaning and assigning initial codes to phrases, sentences, and key expressions.

Axial Coding: Grouping related codes into categories by identifying relationships between concepts, causes, contexts, and consequences.

Theme Development: Linking the categories to broader themes that directly answered the research questions.

Integration with Discussion: The final themes (e.g., financial constraints, lack of awareness, outdated machinery) were then used to structure the Analysis and Discussion section of this report.

Analysis of Data

In accordance with the six-phase framework developed by Braun and Clarke [6], the data were subjected to thematic analysis. We manually created the first codes based on key phrases, concepts, and recurrent themes found in the participant responses after transcription. Following that, these codes were grouped into more general themes that captured the main obstacles, organizational dynamics, and operational difficulties associated with the implementation of GHRM.

To improve the findings legitimacy and dependability, a peer debriefing was carried out with an academic supervisor who independently checked the coding framework and emerging themes for coherence and pertinence. Stakeholder theory helped us understand how various groups, like employees, managers, regulators, and buyers, influence the use of environmentally friendly HR practices in the jute industry.

Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted with strict adherence to ethical standards. These purposes were explained to the participants and the participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Prior to each interview, written consent was obtained. Subjects were also informed that they have the right to drop out of the study at any time without any consequences.

V. DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

A common thread through the interviews was that managers and staff did not have much exposure to the concept of Green Human Resource Management.

One HR manager, from Industry A, commented: "We deal with training, recruitment and performance reviews, but we've never discussed green HR policies formally." Another interviewee said, "Most of our people feel that environmental issues are a production or compliance issue - not for HR." The findings are in line with previous studies that stated that environmental awareness of employees is an important aspect in sustainability measure adoption. Without specific awareness programs and well-defined guidelines, GHRM continues to be a concept in the jute industry, lost in the every-day operational focus.

Several participants reported that green practices are often resisted due to established management practices and operating habits.

One senior HR officer from Industry B said, "We have done it like this for decades and changing the system means extra work and possible disruptions." Others said that people are afraid that new environmental policies will decrease production or increase costs. Such resistance is consistent with Milliman et al. [15], who have emphasised that cultural inertia can be one of the major impediments to sustainability-oriented change. In the case of the jute sector, which has operated with little change in its business model, the critical issue is how to reform the organisational culture so that environmental policies are viewed as investments in long-term efficiency and competitiveness rather than disruptive. All of the interviewees expressed concerns over the financial sustainability of green HR practices.

A manager from Industry C said: "We can barely afford to operate on a daily basis, so investing in green training or equipment is hard." Another commented, "Profit margins are low and the management's focus is on short-term production needs versus environmental programmes." These statements are consistent with Daily and Huang's [7], observation that financial constraints would normally downplay sustainability in resource-scarce industries. In the case of the jute sector in Bangladesh, lack of specific budget directed toward green HR measures means even where there is

willingness, there is a delay or reduction in implementation.

Participants also repeatedly mentioned that old, resource-hungry equipment prevents environmentally-friendly work-system improvements.

One HR manager commented, "Our production lines still run machines from the 1980s; they're more energy-hungry and they generate more waste." Read another: "We can't fully implement green operational policies without upgrading our equipment." This issue is worsened by the low level of technological modernization of the sector: according to Longoni and Cagliano [11], this characteristic makes more problematic the integration of sustainability, due to the infrastructural backwardness. It is suggested that mechanisation in the form of phased investment and public-private partnership will make it possible to improve the viability of GHRM based operations.

In particular, a number of interviewees felt that the lack of sector-specific regulatory frameworks and incentives is a key obstacle.

One of the managers commented, "No specific guidelines are given by the government on green HR in the jute sector." Another said, "If there were incentives or low-interest loans to do green things, we could move more quickly." This echoes Delmas and Toffel [8] who found a major factor in increasing the speed of environmental practices is policy support. Without enforceable standards or market incentives, jute mills are uncertain about how they can couple human resource (HR) functions with sustainability goals.

Finally, several respondents noted leadership's lack of prioritisation of environmental issues, along with low employee-level engagement in green practices.

An HR officer shared, Environmental projects are more distant in an organisation's mind than production. Another told me, we don't need incentive programmes to get people to do green stuff. This is supported by the work of Jabbour and Santos [14], who put forward the view that commitment of leadership and involvement of employees is essential for the incorporation of sustainability into HR functions. In the jute sector, leadership commitment is needed to not only allocate resources but to set an example in environmentally responsible behaviour, whilst employee incentives can enable a sense of collective responsibility towards sustainability.

VI. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the problems of the application of Green Human Resource

Management (GHRM) practices in the jute industry of Bangladesh through qualitative interviews with HR managers of three major companies. The findings identified six key barriers: low level of awareness to the existence of GHRM, resistance to change, fundamental limitations of finances, outdated machinery, lack of incentives from the government and weakness of leadership commitment to change and lack of commitment from the employees. To overcome these challenges, specific training and awareness-raising programmes must be addressed to HR professionals and employees, leadership must be developed to enable environment-related objectives to be incorporated into the company's strategic vision, and government-funded incentive schemes, such as tax reimbursements or low interest loans for green projects, are necessary. In addition, incremental infrastructure upgrade, employee-led environmental activities, and partnership with industry bodies and NGOs will improve sustainability outcomes.

By bringing a Sustainable HRM and Resource-Based View perspective to a conventional sector that has not been well explored in the research literature, this research has theoretical and practical implications. With a particular emphasis on the human capital as a powerful catalyst for environmental performance in resource constrained industries, it provides actionable strategies for HR managers, industry leaders and policy makers. Lastly, the green transformation of the jute sector will rely on strong leadership commitment, cultural change

and continuous collaboration across all stakeholders.

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