



## Mandate Spotlight: 055 Bangladesh Leatherina

## E-commerce, Sustainability, and Market Access Support to Women-led Leather Goods Enterprise

**Location:** Bangladesh

**Beneficiaries:** Leatherina Pvt. Ltd.

**Consultant:** Kisserup International Trade Roots

**Start:** Mar. 2021

**End:** Oct. 2021

**CTIF Contribution:** CAD \$88,865

### Context

Like many other small exporting enterprises, Leatherina – a Dhaka-based woman-owned and -led SME specializing in the production of sustainable, handmade high-end leather bags and accessories – experienced a drastic reduction in demand and sales during the COVID-19 pandemic. Leatherina had been prioritizing its growth prospects in the short- and medium-term, including establishing two online platforms and a corresponding digital marketing strategy. The intention of the strategy and online platforms was to explore a pivot towards new markets, which, especially during the height of the global pandemic, ensures their business' long-term sustainability.

Established in 2016, Leatherina exports a small range of products to the European market and offers a limited quantity of retail items to the local market under its brand name, Gootipa. Leatherina has membership in several business associations, including ECOTA, the Bangladeshi forum for fair trade enterprises, and the Bangladesh Federation of Women Entrepreneurs (BFWE), and was recently granted membership to the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO).

### Brief Description of the Mandate

This mandate assisted Leatherina in strengthening its sustainability and growth prospects through the development of an e-commerce platform that allowed potential customers to review and purchase all their products remotely. Simultaneously, this TA assisted Leatherina in accessing new clients in the North American market and strengthening their ability to adhere to environmental sustainability, social safeguarding and legal standards expected by clients in the North American market. Further, the TA addressed the gender imbalances in recruitment and discrimination in pay scale that are common attributes of the manufacturing industries in Bangladesh.

### Selected Key Findings and Recommendations

- **Developing an E-commerce Plan was created to support their business-to-business (B2B) export development in alignment with** the North American market and their business-to-consumer (B2C) goal for local Bangladeshi markets.
- **Digital Marketing Strategy** was also created to support Leatherina's business-to-business (B2B) export development alignment with the North American market, including securing a private label or Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEM) deals with clients in North America in the medium-term. It is also critical for Leatherina to build awareness and gain traction with the North American B2B marketplace.
- Leatherina's export readiness, responsible business conduct, and team upskilling are externally evidenced by the creation, development, and ability to now oversee and manage their new online platforms to access not only the domestic online shopping market in Bangladesh but also new international markets, such as Canada and the US.

- Leatherina is now equipped to establish new business opportunities in North America, and they have begun discussions for bulk orders from potential Canadian buyers.
- Communication publicly of their commitments to gender and social inclusion and environmental sustainability, including Leatherina’s guaranteed membership to the World Fair Trade Organization and their Mission Zero Waste initiative, thereby enhancing their ability to sell to North America and other global markets.

## Environment & Climate Change

Leatherina practices upcycling, using leather with minimal health and climate concerns, practices efficient manufacturing methods to economise the use of resources, such as water and electricity, and optimises the utilisation of leather to leave the lowest possible quantity of solid waste. Leatherina is consciously committed to mainstreaming environmental sustainability and mitigating climate risks through various initiatives, including the Mission Zero Waste (MØW).

Mission Zero Waste (MØW) is an innovative initiative of Leatherina, which supports the concept of a ‘circular economy’ or a “model of production and consumption, which involves sharing, leasing, reusing, repairing, refurbishing and recycling existing materials and products as long as possible.” Leatherina aims to reach full zero waste discharge status for its two main raw materials sources by 2025. To complement MØW, the CTIF mandate, as part of the advisory support requested by Leatherina, included the preparation of a report on “Best Practices for Leather Sustainability” that aimed to guide the environmental sustainability aspects of Leatherina’s future business decisions.

## Gender and Social Inclusion

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) practices have been integrated within each task of the mandate, including maintaining a minimum gender ratio of 60:40 female to male for all key focus groups and surveys while ensuring best data practices collection through the utilisation of a GESI lens.

This mandate assisted in the review and implementation of Leatherina’s Gender Equality and Social Policies that included provisions on the preference in certain jobs for women, including considering their responsibilities at home; free sanitary napkins for female workers; implementation of gender equity policies for job promotion and career development; no discrimination for women and any other workers and employees in the recruitment process, promotion, and job distribution; providing counselling for women on legal, reproductive and general health; and disciplinary action against sexual harassment and discrimination in the workplace.

## Testimonials



Figure 1: Ms. Taslima Miji, Founder and Managing Director of Leatherina (third from the right) with Leatherina staff and UY Systems consultants

*“The technical assistance project by CTIF has been very helpful for my company Leatherina to stay strong with vision despite being hit hard by the global pandemic. The intervention was very much focused on the practical and strategic needs of the company to continue the dream amidst struggles. CTIF’s assistance has come on our way as a great help to market our product in the home market and abroad. I wish continued success of CTIF’s future interventions.”*

*- Ms. Taslima Miji, Founder and Managing Director, Leatherina*