

Why

I am

in **WE**

**Courageous  
people  
working on  
human rights  
in factories**



The road to change is paved with persistence. Frustration, oppression and injustice are all too familiar to our international WE team. But when the going gets tough, the tough get going.



## A bigger splash

In the course of its thirteen years' existence, the WE Program has seen an ever-changing line-up. There has always been an influx of people joining the program, bringing in new ideas, while others leave to embark on new adventures, sharing their learnings on working with human rights in factories all over the world.

In this collection of stories we want to capture the energy and the collective wisdom of all those people, past and present. We've handled hard stuff together, worked on complex issues and have gone through challenging times. What motivates us is the wish to bring about meaningful change. What binds us is the desire to make sense of things together.

We firmly believe knowledge doesn't reside in the individual, it resides in the collective. Combining all those different backgrounds, experiences, skills and expertise, allows us to act from a place of greater wisdom and keep moving forward.  
*Team BOTZ, April 2021*

# Gladys Tang

Tchibo

“When I visited factories as an auditor, the harsh working conditions always made me think of my mother. She was a seamstress, working from home when I was a little girl. I would sit next to her, helping her cut the fabrics or holding them when she was at her machine. And then she would tell me about the time she worked in a factory when she was young. How hard it was, because no one helped her and she had to teach herself how to sew by looking at the others. And how her fingers hurt at the end of the day.

I’ve worked in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for my entire career. I started as an auditor, doing the checking-thing, but with all the brands I worked for CSR felt like a talk-show. No one really bothered about social compliance issues. My job felt meaningless and was sucking the energy out of me.

When I heard about the WE Program and read about the dialogue approach on Tchibo’s website, this gave me hope. I joined the CR-team (Corporate Responsibility) and shortly after I attended a WE workshop for the first time. It was in Cambodia and I will never forget it. During the tea break a woman came up to me. She said she wanted to thank Tchibo for the WE Program and tears started flowing from her eyes. I have never seen a person being so grateful. I could tell that the program meant so much to her, but as a newcomer I didn’t have a clue why. From that moment on I not only wanted to know more about it, I wanted to be part of it! In my daily job I’m mainly involved with the WE facilitators, I do not visit factories very often. But the stories my mother told me connect me with the workers in the factories.”



**‘The stories my mother told me connect me with the workers in the factories’**



**'They were after the money and didn't think twice about their workers'**

## Samphy Y

### Cambodia

"I was born two years after the civil war ended. Cambodia was a torn country. There were no laws, we did what we could to survive. My father was a small-time business man, exporting furniture to Thailand. But at least he was earning money. I was one of the lucky kids who could go to school. As a teenager I kept thinking: if I can earn money, I can help the poor people in some way.

When I studied Labour Law at Japan's Nagoya University I heard inspiring stories about Corporate Social Responsibility: successful companies giving back to society. I loved that idea. It gave me hope that change was possible.

Back in Cambodia I started working as a manager at a legal non-governmental organisation (NGO). Part of the job was

dispute resolution. I was shocked to find out Cambodian companies still didn't comply with the law. They were after the money and didn't think twice about their workers. Sometimes I felt so overwhelmed by it all.

When I was introduced to WE Program I sensed immediately that these people really wanted to make a difference. I could feel their passion. And the job gave me a lot of autonomy; to put in lots of thinking and try new things to make a change. Fortunately, I have a great team to back me up. I know a lot about Labour Law, but to facilitation I'm still pretty new."

# Axel Schröder

Tchibo

“Way before I started at Tchibo I already heard about the WE Program; every now and then I would stumble upon it. And even though I read about it occasionally, it remained quite a mystery. Tchibo and WE: what are they doing? How does it work? Starting at Tchibo it took me weeks to understand it. But then, pow! Mystery resolved! I realised WE is not just another shiny training programme, but really innovative. Something we need more of in this world.

There have been three particular occasions that impressed me with WE. First of all, how I felt that my mind and heart were being opened up by the stories and skills - which are still a little magical to me - of the facilitators during my first ITC (International Team Conference) in Hamburg. This still prevails and fuels my thinking.

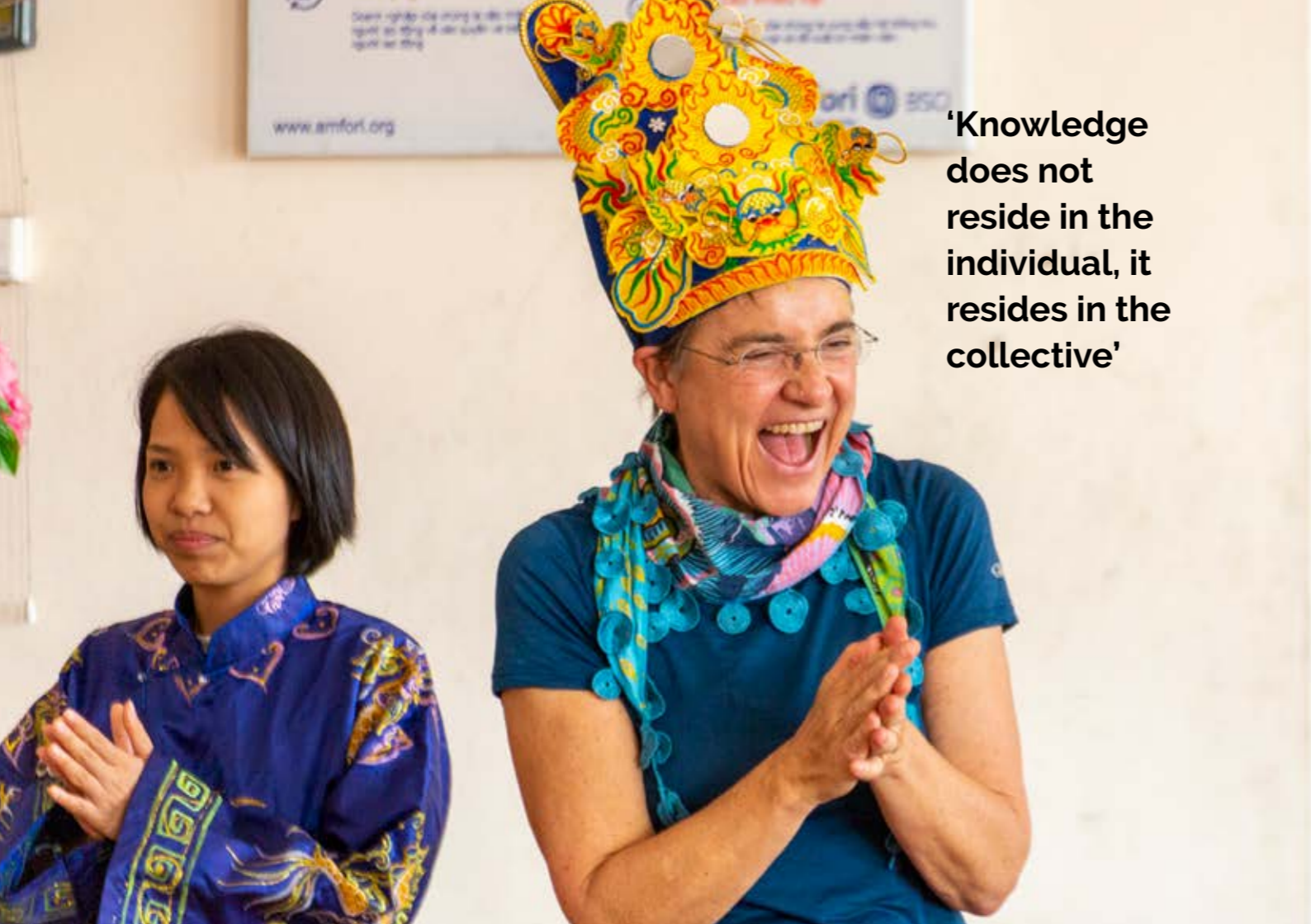
On another occasion, how Idil, Cihan and Gladys managed to create true openness and honest exchange about Freedom of Association and trade unions in a workshop with, let’s say, sceptical managers in Myanmar.

Last, but not least, how Chenyan and Anthony could make the unionists of our partner IndustriALL - naturally sceptical as well - become close and creative with WE facilitators at our second GFA workshop. They created together, that was a breakthrough for me!

Facilitation wasn’t a thing for me before, but now I see what this capability is able to carve out. The wisdom for change lies within the people, no matter how small they may feel. And what we need to make this change happen? It’s the community and the understanding of the bigger picture. Collaboration is key.”



**‘The facilitators’  
skills are still a little  
magical to me’**



**'Knowledge does not reside in the individual, it resides in the collective'**

# Caroline Rennie

Switzerland

“At university I saw this document that was stapled on a tree. It said they were looking for volunteers to work in refugee camps in South-East Asia. And I thought: absolutely! That totally calls me. And then I read: deadline tomorrow. I went straight to the library to prepare myself for the interview, because I knew so little. I got Indochina confused with Indonesia - they must have laughed themselves sick. But apparently my enthusiasm showed through, because they sent me to the Philippines and then to Thailand. Working in the refugee camps, I felt I was not strong enough. At least not for that level of human misery. Being surrounded by thousands of people who carry with them these stories of intense suffering, there comes a moment where you can't take it anymore.

So I got into the environment, working on sustainability for companies and as an

external consultant. It was through the WE Program that I got back into human rights. What keeps pulling me? I cannot bear injustice. I cannot bear suffering. That's hard-wired in me. And so I end up having to work constantly, to feel like I'm doing something to improve that. Because otherwise I fall into despair.

I have a desire to make sense of things together. Knowledge does not reside in the individual, it resides in the collective. We have teams now who really understand how to bring about meaningful change. It feels like a verification of what I believed in when we started.

None of us expects to 'be there'. None of us thinks there will come a moment when this program somehow has arrived. We understand and want it to be something that is perpetually evolving and can evolve in a healthy way, on its own.”

# Kadir Uysal

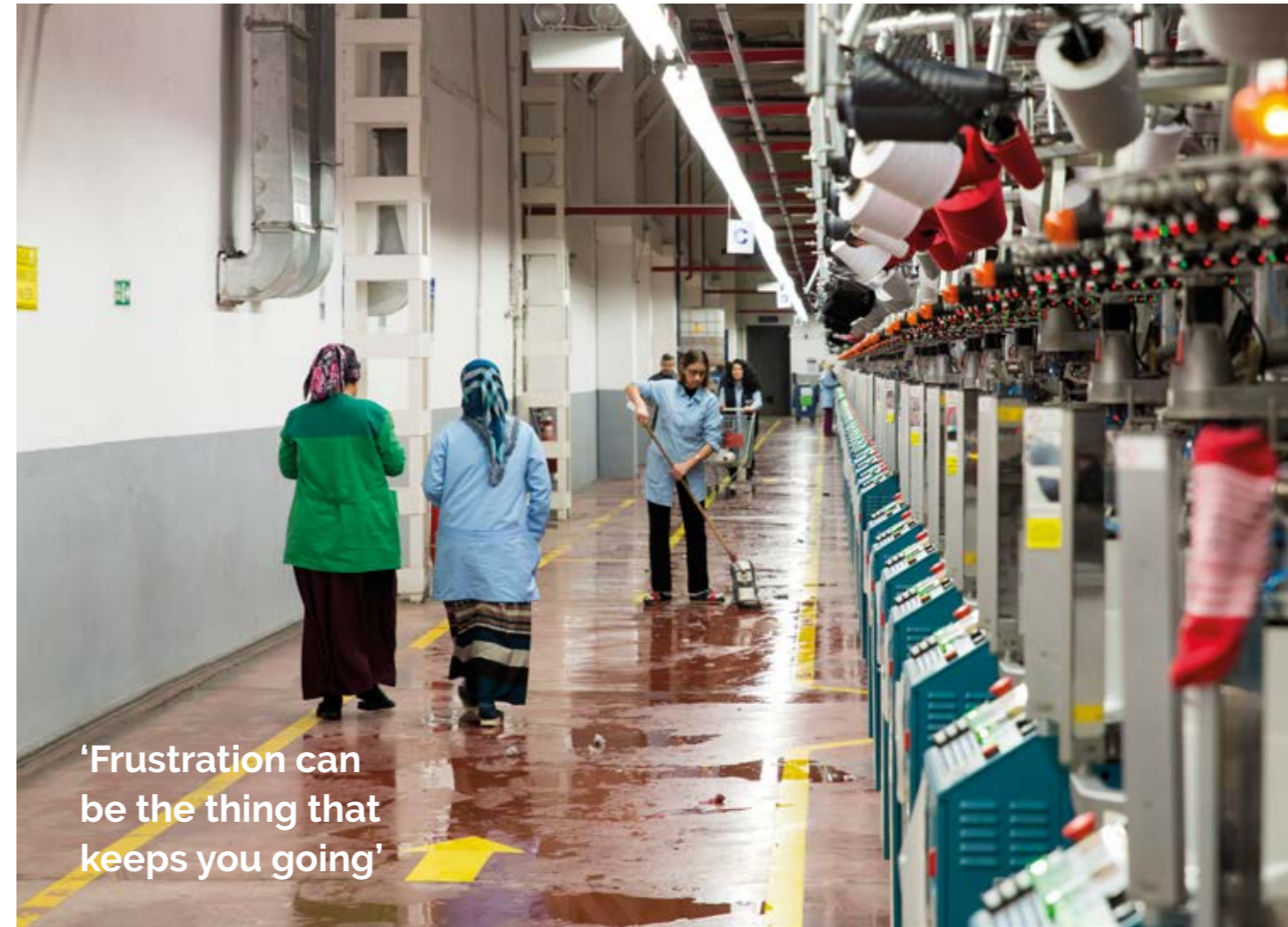
Turkey

“Working for the ILO and Eti, an organisation of brands, I’ve been in many factories. And when you go there, you are always taken as a brand representative. There’s this perception of ‘audit’ that’s very hard to break. After several years, I wanted to be closer to where the labour is happening. To go to factories and really be in touch with people.

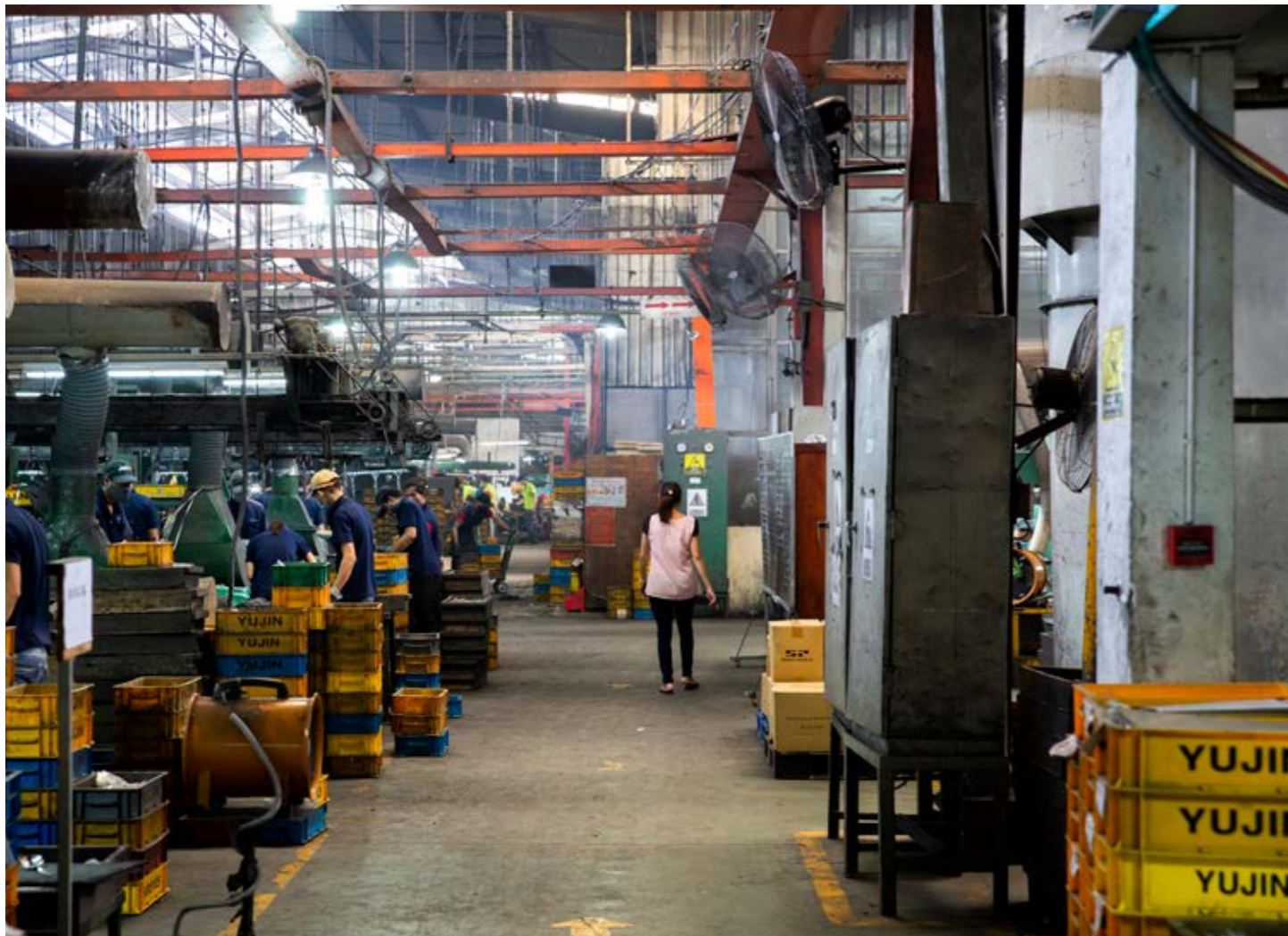
During my first WE Factory Visit I saw workers opening up in a way I’ve never seen before. It was in a factory that has been in the program for a while, so the trust was there. I witnessed the dialogue coming up so openly and so naturally. It wasn’t totally unexpected. It was one of reasons I wanted to join WE: to be able to participate and contribute to this myself. But still, when you witness it for the first time, it’s impressive.

I’m a curious person with a deep interest

in working conditions and a desire to improve them. But for me, this is also about making work more meaningful. People in factories seldom have the opportunity to talk. If we don’t go there, they never have the chance to sit there in equality and start the dialogue. It’s just work-work-work. In the organisations I’ve worked before I had to put in a lot of effort to make small steps. Frustration can be the thing that keeps you going. Still, with topics that are close at heart I find it hard. Unionization, workers representation ... it doesn’t work in many of our factories. We don’t have a culture of dialogue in Turkey. It is our reflex to think as individual decision makers. For people who have the authority already it is really difficult to share authority. I know there is no easy answer to this, but if you ask me what I would like to change first, this is my top priority.”







The quality of listening  
determines **the quality**  
of transformation

# Muhammad Abdullah Zafar


## Bangladesh

“During a Factory Visit we discussed how fair wages and working hours can effect the personal life of the workers. Workers who could barely read and write formed groups and were asked to draw what they would do if they had a fair wage. Using pen and paper they started depicting what their lives would look like, even though they didn't know a thing about the concept of living wage - the minimum income necessary for a worker to meet his basic needs. When they presented their ideas, everyone, including the management, was impressed. The pictures they drew about their own life experience perfectly matched the living wage concept. They showed that a fair wage would ensure proper housing, nutrition and health support for their family. And proper education for their children. It would also allow them to make savings for the future and help them to

address emergency needs. At that moment I realised that WE is not just a social quality enhancement program. It is also an empowerment program. It creates a bridge between workers and their managers. Knowing each other's context and building trust results in co-created decisions for the wellbeing of everyone. One of the first lessons I learned in my WE-career is that managers are often resistant at the first thought of human rights enhancement. But once the process starts they gradually realise that WE is not about trial and retribution. It is a platform for dialogue, courageous conversation and co-creation for a desired future. Secondly, I learned that workers do not come forward to express their opinion initially, but in the course of the program, they feel empowered and become more and more assertive.”



**'Knowing each other's context and building trust, results in co-created decisions'**



**'I love the happiness  
of participants  
after an intense day  
of dialogue'**

## Le Thi Thu Huyen

Vietnam

“Just recently, I was very upset to hear that in one of the factories we visited with the WE Team, a worker had lost his arm. He had just been recruited and the factory had too many orders to train him properly on how to use the machines.

During WE Workshops on Occupational Health and Safety many workers have shown me their hands with missing fingers. Most of them lost them years ago, when they just started their job. They said that if only there had been a We Program then, they would have been more informed and perhaps the accident wouldn't have happened. But we have a WE Programme now and from time to time these accidents still happen. For me it shows you have to raise awareness again and again.

I'm glad there are plenty of rewards as well. I love the happiness of participants after an intense day of dialogue. They feel included in the factory process, sometimes for the first time. Dialogue is a powerful tool. The other day we talked to a manager - who had not paid much attention to the WE Programme before - to emphasise the importance of his participation. During the next meeting, he took part enthusiastically in all discussions. The results of that day: very solid plans to pay the salaries on time. Breakthroughs like that are a great reward.”

# Fatima Chowdhury

Tchibo

“During my previous job as a labour advisor for the US Embassy, I had the opportunity to meet some of the survivors of the Rana Plaza disaster. Rana Plaza was the clothes factory in Savar that collapsed, killing 1100 people and injuring 2500. Some of the victims I talked with were disabled, missing a hand or a leg. But the worst was the trauma they were left with.

They told me how they had been stuck under the debris for hours. Scared and alone in the dark. Suffering so much pain they just wanted to die. Hearing the shouting around them fall silent bit by bit.

I had heard, read and talked about the Rana Plaza disaster before, of course. It had been such a huge story. After meeting those survivors, I realized that for me it had been just that: a story. But for

them it was a relentless nightmare, that revisited them every single night and day. That day, I knew I had to get involved in improving the working conditions in factories. So that we don't witness another Rana Plaza. When my contract ended at the embassy, I didn't go back to a legal job. I started looking around and finally found the WE Program.

Even as a part of WE, I get impatient sometimes. I feel frustrated when I realize there are still so many workers out there working in unsafe factories, deprived of their basic human rights. Luckily I also meet workers who say they feel empowered through the WE Program and managers who understand the need for dialogue. Those are the moments I know we can't give up.”



**'Meeting the Rana Plaza survivors changed my life'**



**'Wrong happens not because we are evil'**

# Moon Mukherjee

India

"I come from a background where helping others has been a constant family value. My grandfather chose to be a doctor in remote, dry and dusty Rajasthan and work at the grassroots rather than pursuing a medical career in the limelight. His clinic was visited by Martin Luther King and for years after that Coretta, his widow, would send my grandparents New Year's greetings. Every year King's story would be told to us, grandchildren, which made a big impression. As I spent a considerable part of my childhood with my grandparents, it's no coincidence that I decided to leave corporate work to take on this line of work. The tipping point for me came when I started working with the Fair Labor Association. I was creating an e-learning programme on the Code of Conduct and Sustainable Compliance and when I started interviewing people around me, I discov-

ered this sort of human rights violations at the workplace almost seemed to be a norm and not an aberration. I became mindful of how much the typical domestic worker, nursing staff, restaurant waiter and petrol station attendant gets paid and is exploited and realized that a large part of it is due to ignorance. I'm convinced that wrong happens not because we are evil, but because we don't know better. The framework of the WE Program gives me direct access to the people whose life I want to impact. The realisation that it is possible to step out of the board room and work at making a real difference to the people that matter makes it very fulfilling. Though the evidence of the impact isn't always tangible, this program gives me a sense of purpose and helps me reach my vision and quest for a better future."

# Jai Chandrashekar

India

“During a Factory Visit one of the female workers opened up and shared her story about sexual harassment. Shortly afterwards, she reached out and told us she was accused of stealing a piece of cloth from the factory. They had forced her to sign a letter admitting the theft and had asked her to resign. We requested the factory management if they could bring everyone involved in this case together during our next visit: the accused worker, co-workers, security guard and management. And then we asked them to talk, listen to each other and try to understand each other’s story. “Will you be the judge?” they asked us. And our answer was: “No! Our role is to make you talk to each other. Talk about what happened. How it affected you. And then talk about what you want to do about it.” It’s moments like these that

show why this program makes so much sense. If we are not present, what misses in the end is the respectful way of listening to each other and the dialogue process that follows. It is our responsibility to create space for that and make sure everyone is heard.

In my work as a consultant on leadership development and behavioural change, I’m used to walk into a room filled with participants who are eager to learn and ready to go. In the WE Program I have to get them into the room and get them going. These past years I’ve learned to deal with the surprises and frustrations that are part of factory reality. I’m not focussing anymore on what’s not working. I accept what’s there and make the most of it. A glass half-full can also quench the thirst.”





**'I see so many talented women in the factories I visit'**

# Sanaiyya Faheem Ansari

## Bangladesh

“At the age of three I lost my father. My mother, my sisters and I moved in with my mother’s family and lived by their rules. My uncle became my guardian. But when I was nine years old, he abused me sexually. He told me to keep quiet about it, or he would throw my family out into the street.

For nineteen years I did. But at 28, I opened my mouth. My uncle had become a prominent government official by then, so my family told me to keep quiet or leave. I left, together with my mother. But after nine months she went back to her family, because she missed my sisters. It was a terrible blow.

As a reaction, I engrossed myself in my work for a Human Rights organisation. I worked with women breaking out of

situations of oppression and could recognise their pain.

About eighty percent of the workers in the garment industry are women. This means Bangladesh is earning a lot of money through women. But this has never been acknowledged. There’s a lot to be done when it comes to Human Rights and gender discrimination.

I see so many talented women in the factories I visit. For me it is very important to make real contact with them during the WE Workshops. To hear their stories, to encourage them to speak up and to help them discover what they’re good at. If you don’t dig in, you miss many opportunities.”

**Dialogue** builds the capacity of the system to see itself







'I can see and understand both sides'

# Anne van der Horst

Tchibo

“When I was asked to take over the responsibility for the Human Rights team in 2017 it gave my life a new turn. It gave me the chance to do something meaningful that could really make a difference - not only for the company - but beyond.

Before joining Corporate Responsibility I worked in the buying department for six years. First as a buyer and after that I was in charge of defining and optimizing buying processes. This is why I'm well aware of the permanent challenge to meet diverse and sometimes opposed requirements regarding design, quality and price and social and environmental aspects. I can see and understand both sides and that helps finding solutions. Doing this work has shifted my perspective from being aware that people have to work under these conditions to being

aware that we have influence on them. If there is a possibility for change, even when it would mean small steps, I try to make that happen.

Bringing in the people involved and their different perspectives seems so logical and at the same time it is difficult. Therefore, I enjoy learning from the facilitators how to set the stage and then hold the space to make the change possible. I am convinced that there is a lot we can learn from WE and the methods used, also for Tchibo internally. Against this background, it makes me proud to be part of WE and to be able to contribute to change.”

# Chenyan Liu

Tchibo

“I grew up in Shenzhen, near Hong Kong. What was a small village in those days is now China’s biggest city: it has 66 million inhabitants. Throughout my childhood I was surrounded by an evergrowing number of factories and their migrant workers. I didn’t have a clue though about their lives or working conditions. My older cousins, who started working for foreign investors in those days, formed my first impression of ‘workers’: bright, young people with a high income, who were very modern and dressed well.

It was not until I started at my first job at a local non-governmental organisation (NGO) that I came in contact with the real ‘workers’. For my research on labour relationship topics I interviewed managers and migrant workers in factories. Most of the workers I met were young - around twenty - and I noticed they were sad, tired

and not enjoying their lives. Day in, day out, they had to work long hours. They didn’t see their parents anymore and it was hardly possible for them to have a social life, since they only had a couple of hours of spare time each month.

Their managers and co-workers were the only people they saw on a regular basis. They told me they sometimes felt like machines.

I became very sad doing this kind of work because I felt powerless to do something about their situation. I started looking for a job where I could have more impact on the supply chain. My next job in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) gave me more influence on production processes, but I did not have contact with the workers. It was not until WE that I found the right balance between being in touch with workers and being able to bring about change.”



**‘They told me they sometimes felt like machines’**



**'I've visited  
many workers  
in hospital with  
broken bones'**



# Jekib Ahmed

India

“During the ten years I was involved in social compliance, I’ve always felt bad about what I was doing. I have seen that social audits do not result in creating a safe working environment. In one of the factories I audited the workers were even scared to go to the washroom, because there was a supervisor who slashed them with a big power cable if he thought they stayed away too long. We visited many workers in hospital with broken bones.

I would report on the abuse. And then the factory would write a corrective action plan. At the next visit, they had on paper how all these changes had been implemented. That day the power cable guy would be absent. The workers would keep their mouths shut. And everything would be ‘compliant’. I reported on this guy five years ago, but I know he’s still there.

I did about thirty to forty audits per year like that.

Then the We Program came my way. And for the first time I experienced that managers and workers can own up to their mistakes or struggles, without having to fear for retribution. Also, the factories got the freedom to decide which problems to tackle and which way is best for them.

When I started with WE I warned a new colleague: ‘Get out of compliance while you can!’ It took me time to restore my belief in what I do. But now I see how the courageous conversations in the factory are making a difference. It gives me an incredible satisfaction.”

# Ege Erim

Turkey


“In this kind of work, when you’re working with people, you never know what’s going to happen. And this ‘not knowing’ boosts my adrenaline. I feel alive doing this work!

When we go to a factory we have an agenda of course. But I always remind myself it is *my* agenda, not necessarily *their* agenda. What does the factory need? Where is the potential for growth? It’s great if we can make a difference and see results. But it does not happen overnight, it’s a constant battle.

Of course I want factories to respect human rights and have more open and inclusive conversations. But that’s not something you accomplish within a couple of visits. Me pushing people in a direction they’re not ready to go yet, won’t necessarily make the process faster. So I don’t get depressed when things don’t work out

the way we plan. I just take a deep breath and think: maybe next time. Let’s come up with another plan and try something new. I’m not an activist. I’m not politically involved. I’m not even an idealist. I think I’m just curious and passionate about human nature. What gives me energy is the belief that anyone can change his or her life story. When I see the curiosity in workers’ eyes, when I notice they grasp human rights as a vital component of being a human, it makes me optimistic about the future.

A factory is not just four walls and some machines. It’s the people who make the factory. The minor decisions they make, their daily routines, the way they treat each other... all those things come together and ‘make’ the factory. Therefore, I believe personal impact is an inseparable part of social impact.”

A woman with curly brown hair, wearing a black top, is seated and speaking to a group of people in a meeting room. She is gesturing with her hands while talking. In the background, a man in a light-colored jacket is standing near a whiteboard, and another person is partially visible on the left. A large screen displays a presentation. A yellow decorative frame is on the wall to the right.

**‘Personal impact is an inseparable part of social impact’**



**'They've been hit by hardships half of their lives, but they don't give up'**

## Sang Chea

### Cambodia

"I grew up in the province, in a Chinese-Cambodian family. A job in the business field would have been the obvious choice, but my parents gave me absolute freedom. What I studied and the field I wanted to work in was up to me. Going to university was a turning point. I was lucky to make many good friends who inspired me to do something different and to be brave. That's how I found out I really like social work. Talking to workers one on one for our story project made me realise how privileged I am. While I was enjoying high school, they had to go out at a very young age to earn money and support their family. Although they've been hit by hardships half of their lives, they don't give up and still see a brighter future ahead of them. When I think about their stories, it really pushes me to go that extra mile. I cannot change their past. But I can help

them to bridge the conversation with their managers, so they may be able to express what they think. And inspire them to have more conversations among themselves. I think the solution is to be found in *real* dialogue, where workers and managers sit down, listen and find better solutions together. If these dialogues could be facilitated by the local WE teams, they would even be more effective and sustainable.

The way the program operates is unlike any other project I've worked for. Normally you have to reach a fixed outcome, but here you get space to experiment and stretch your thoughts. We have to test if what we do is influential, if it's really changing things on the work floor. So we may not see the end, but we can enjoy the process more. Because in the process people may already change."

# Janet Lai

Tchibo

“I started my career in a trading company in Hong Kong, travelling to China frequently to see if our factories needed to do something in order to comply to the standards of our clients. Very often that would mean ‘faking the records’. Initially, I thought I was doing the right thing: getting past the audit and doing business with a lot of foreign brands. Our company would get orders and the workers could keep their jobs and feed their families. But then I kept seeing and hearing things that were unsettling. I saw workers with injuries, workers doing lots of overtime and hardly spending time with their families. Although the company made huge profits, they didn’t even pay minimum wages. I came to a point where I couldn’t stand it anymore. I even started having bad dreams about my work. Knowing there wasn’t much I could do, I quit my job.

I studied to become an auditor and six months later I was on the other side of the fence, thinking I was doing the right thing now. But after a while I realised I wasn’t. As an auditor I was telling people what was right or wrong, but I wasn’t helping them to find a solution. I started wondering: is there something else out there? Is it possible to make a difference? And then the job at Tchibo came along.

As I learned more about the WE Program, I thought: this is something different. Something I’ve never seen or heard before. And it still feels that way, because the program is very dynamic. WE encourages us to explore our potential, build up knowledge and share this with others. Although I’m not in the frontline, like the facilitators, I do feel part of the change we’re creating and it makes me feel proud.”



**‘I came to a point where I couldn’t stand it anymore’**



**‘They presented us with the painful truth about this industry’**

# Neel Bhuinya

India

“One of my most powerful WE-moments has been a Forum Theatre-session in Moradabad. Having witnessed the impact of Forum, the factory owner there invited us back to do a full-fledged session on Occupational Health and Safety for the workers of two big factories.

When we came back, we explained to our team what Forum is and how it had evolved in the peasant movement in Brazil and Argentina. Although most of these workers are illiterate, they got to the idea. “Through this play we can tell about our lives, right?” We proposed a basic story line from a popular seventies Bollywood movie, knowing it would resonate with our audience. And then we asked them: do you think we can replace this with your stories? In the course of the day they came up with characters, with dialogues and in the end we had this beautiful Forum on the hazards of working

in the factory and how life changes after an industrial accident. It was staged in front of huge audience: all the workers of two factories, the management, the owners and their family.

In multiple layers, the WE-concept of courageous conversation, happened there and then. The players presented us with the painful truths about this industry. The pressure during work, the hazards, how maintenance is skipped or done at very low cost... What made it so impressive was that the owners and the management, who were sitting right in front of them, did not deny these stories for a second. They confirmed them, saying: this is our reality. So after the Forum people could come up with ideas for industry change.

I feel proud about the way we initiated changes in these factories and how they sorted out their difficulties afterwards together.”

# Rene Wang

China

“When I was a student, I did an internship at Asus, the largest computer company in Taiwan. My mentor there told me I might have a talent for facilitation. I had never heard of it before, I even had to look it up with Google. But after I found out more about it, I thought it was an amazing job. I loved the teamwork and the people oriented approach.

Luckily, Taiwan is one of the best countries in Asia where you can study to become a certified professional facilitator. I went to ICA, the Institute of Cultural Affairs. When I finished, at the age of 26, I was the youngest certified professional facilitator in the world.

In the past years I’ve been facilitating and designing over 150 workshops for strategic planning, problem solving, action

planning, team building and training in different industries and companies in both Taiwan and China.

My work usually takes place in the boardroom, so what I do in the WE Program is completely different. It’s a big step from a corporate environment to the factory floor. However, I still work with people, I still use my facilitation skills and I still focus on deep listening and asking questions to hear the perspectives from all participants. In my workshops I want to allow, honour and encourage everyone in the room to enter the dialogue and share their opinions. Our starting point in the WE Program is that everyone in the room is equal. But we need to facilitate to make that happen.”



**‘It’s a big step from a corporate environment to the factory floor’**







**'WE has given me some of the biggest life lessons a person may ever get'**

# Helen Kuyper

The Netherlands

"My mother says I was delivered like this at birth. With a small note, saying: she will try to do good things, don't get in her way. The whole idea that where you are born more or less determines the rest of your life, is horrifyingly unfair to me. Since trading places is not an option, the least I can do is spend my time in a good way. If you have to work for a living, it better be something meaningful.

I don't think small. I want to work on important things with as many people in as many places as possible. If you can work towards change with two people, you can also do that with twenty. And if you can do it with twenty, you might as well do it with two hundred, two thousand or whatever it takes to change this industry.

The WE Program has changed me in a million different ways. Working with people from so many countries, from different

cultures, with different backgrounds, has given me some of the biggest life lessons a person may ever get. I'm allowed to do this work and not once in a while, but every day. WE gives me the opportunity to implement everything I learn - from colleagues, from our facilitators, from the people I meet in factories - to get a little closer to good working conditions. I'm always focused on the bigger picture, on the possible next step, to stay ahead of where we're now or where we're moving to.

People often think I do this work because I want to change things over there, but that's not what I do. I work there, because I want to change things here. Our Western European societies are built on making money off of the back of other people's suffering. We can only truly change things if we are willing to see the consequences of our actions here."

# Haider Sagheer

## Pakistan


“I’ve been engaged in more than fifty factories in Pakistan, since 2004, working to improve productivity. In many cases good results were achieved in the pilot phase. But I noticed they could not be sustained afterwards. When I joined the German organisation for international co-operation GIZ as technical advisor in 2014, I started learning about the dialogue approach and I realized the critical importance of engaging frontline workers, a missing link in my previous assignments.

In the garment industry in Pakistan workers are not employees, they are contractors. When a huge order is about to come in, senior managers tell their middle managers: go get people. The managers only think of them as a source of production, not as human beings. And they certainly don’t think of them as being

of any help in improving productivity or business. Nor does it occur to the workers that they could be involved.

This is why dialogue has such impact. For the first time, the workers are being listened to. And the managers actually implement their good ideas. And what’s more: the managers then start to think of them as assets. They start thinking: I should employ them. Then I will benefit even more from their ideas.

So, unleashing the human potential through dialogue is a powerful approach to bring change both at an organisational, individual and societal level. I strongly believe that listening to the workers’ perspectives with deep empathy can bring lasting results. It is a real drive for me to be in WE.”



**‘The managers only think of workers as a source of production’**



People don't dislike  
change, they just dislike  
being changed

# Sothearat Seoung

Cambodia

“I was born on the day Pol Pot came to power. My father, who was a government soldier, fled to a place unknown to us. When I was five, my mother heard he had joined a paramilitary group in the jungle near the Thai border. She took me there to live with him in the paramilitary camp.

When I was ten, the fighting escalated badly and we were moved to a big UN refugee camp in Thailand. As the camp was in an open field, it was always hot. Hot walking to school, hot in the hut we lived in. I heard the adults talk about the beautiful rivers and trees of Cambodia. All I wanted, was to go home. The seven years I lived there, felt like a very long time.

It has taken me many years and many different jobs and roles to build myself up as a young man, after I came out of the

camp. In the camp, there was a lot of abuse. I was insulted and beaten by my father, by my teacher and by kids my age.

Cambodia is a very hierarchical society. The education system teaches people to obey. In the factories I often hear Chinese management calling Cambodian workers stupid, because they are so meek. In my work, I dedicate myself to creating a safe space for people to practice asking questions, challenge hierarchy, develop healthy relationships and to grow. Joining WE for me has been ‘where rubber meets the road’. I feel I am doing exactly what I am meant to do. But that doesn’t mean it’s easy. It can really burn.”



**‘Joining WE has been ‘where rubber meets the road’**

**'I was doing something 'not right' by doing nothing'**



## Idil Ander

Turkey

“I have this strong childhood memory. There was a kid in my class who was constantly bullied and verbally abused by the others. Not by me, I did not join them. I didn’t do anything and I felt smug about it. I’m alright, I said to myself. Because I thought that was good enough. Until our teacher made this awakening speech in front of the class and said that none of this was ok. I was doing something ‘not right’ by doing nothing. I think this memory has travelled with me to where I’m now, working on human rights and decent working conditions.

The moment I realised that business actually is responsible for the good of society and for the good of the landscape it operates in, I knew what I should be working on. I have been a consultant in this area for the past ten years, focusing on

strategy building, stakeholder engagement and supply chain sustainability. The WE Program has transformed not just my passion, but also my perspective. The continuous learning environment that Tchibo supports, provided me with many different tools to use for change management. I realised that I do not only have a consulting role. While working with people in the factories and other stakeholders my profession can be so much more. Since WE, I have started facilitating to co-create, co-decide and collaborate to enable change. In most of my WE factory visits, I’m not leading, not consulting, but facilitating. I see my role as an enabler for supplier factories to reach their utmost potential. I listen rather than speak. I understand rather than manifest. That’s how real change can take place. It is really hard and it is really slow. But I believe it is for real.”

# Lily Martens

## The Netherlands

“Doing a training on Human Systems Dynamics with Glenda Eyong reminded me of the first time I went scuba diving: that amazing feeling that you think you know the world and then discover a whole new one.

Trained as a journalist, inquiry has always been a guiding principle in my work. There is a great value in ‘not knowing’. Knowledge is important and empowering, sure, but it can also become an obstacle that prevents you from asking, from listening and from staying open. I’m pretty good at ‘being there’, to see and sense what’s really happening.

Collective learning has become part of the DNA of WE. We know what works today, may not work tomorrow. We’ve seen that happening with Covid. The assumption that you can stick to one plan, one roadmap, is an illusion. That explains our eagerness to

probe and work with small adaptive actions. This program deserves the best we can give. Not in terms of solutions we can come up with, but in possibilities we help disclose. I know I can be disruptive and have this tendency to turn things upside down.

Part of that has to do with my creative, ever wandering mind - I really think that everything is possible. But it also comes from the fact that I will always challenge hierarchy. I believe in the power of diversity and I’m convinced that everyone in the room can be of value.

I’m much more centred and relaxed these days. My career has always been a string of new jobs and new projects I embarked on with great enthusiasm. And now I feel: this is exactly where I’m supposed to be. I know what I’m good at and I have a lot to offer to bring out the best in people and give them wings.”

**‘I know I can  
be disruptive’**



‘We have  
much more  
in common  
than we are  
different’



## Julia Zhu

China

“I heard about the WE Program from a learning buddy. I guess he mentioned it because of the social initiatives I’ve been involved in. In Sri Lanka, India and Vietnam I’ve been doing a lot of things around human trafficking, sexual abuse of baby girls and inclusiveness for minority groups. I have a strong belief that it’s important to give back, to support people who are less privileged.

On a human level I don’t see the difference between the CEO of a top brand and a worker in a factory. As human beings we have much more in common than we are different. We all have hopes. We all want to have a safe environment, we all want to get respect from others and we want to make a good living to support our family.

I’m idealistic. I always want to make the world a better place. At the same time I’m also very practical. I can go to a factory,

meet people where they are and see what could be the small steps forwards and how I can be of service.

For me the freedom to express is most important right now. Having visited many of our WE factories, I’ve noticed they resemble our parental authority structure. To operate in this context, in a way that is accepted by the management, is not easy. Because basically we’re changing the culture, which means their authority might be challenged. And for most of the owners it’s not easy to realise the benefits.

At this stage in my life, I feel calm about what I do. I know it’s going to work. I know how people interact, how group dynamics work, how we can help an organisation to change. I guess there’s such a thing as faith - as in ‘a leap of faith’. But I do not have to take a leap. I’m already there. Faith is in me and I’m in the faith.”

# Trang Thu Nguyen

Vietnam

“When I first heard about the We Program, the distance between me and the program felt long. I had never worked with factories and had also never considered that. The program seemed interesting, yet just another corporate’s attempt to do something meaningful. Also, I was about to go to Sweden for a year, to study Strategic Leadership towards Sustainability for a master’s degree.

Being away from home I felt connected more deeply with my roots in Vietnam. I realised I actually didn’t know much about the people of my country and their lives. Researching life cycles of many products eventually led me to questions about working conditions of workers and farmers in countries like Vietnam and China. I wanted to do something that allowed me to really be with them, rather

than on paper. And then the WE Program crossed my path again. I guess I needed the right time and the right mindset to embrace this new journey. A few months later, after moving back to Vietnam, I joined WE.

Since then I’ve questioned myself many times if what I’m doing really makes sense. Like most people, I feel the urge of seeing tangible changes and getting a sense of accomplishment. I find it important to keep reminding myself that I’m not here to change anything - neither people, nor the way they work - but to create conditions for people to be able to see things in a different way.

Witnessing the small steps they make, helps me to realise that we are on the right track and what I am doing could bring some meaning to others.”



**‘I needed the right time and the right mindset to embrace this journey’**



**'I can see that what we're doing has impact and I hope this goes beyond the factory walls'**



## Cihan Koral

Turkey

“As facilitators we have to establish a safe space for discussion. But it is also our job to go beyond the barrier of niceness and politeness and tackle conflicts and violations of human rights. I think it’s crucial to do this in a non-judgmental way. The whole matter of human rights in factories is too complicated to discuss in terms of ‘good or bad’ and ‘fair or unfair’.

It is rewarding to notice that workers who were afraid to speak up during the first couple of Factory Visits are now at ease and vocal. They know we’re approachable and feel free to complain about a situation, even in presence of their supervisors. Through the WE Program they have also been able to show they’re proficient and capable of much more than their managers expected. In two factories this has even resulted in two women being

financially supported to do a course in entrepreneurship and set up their own businesses.

I can see that what we’re doing has impact. And I hope this goes beyond the factory walls. I sincerely wish that what we teach people gets picked up by others. A couple of months ago I asked a group of women workers after a workshop on Freedom of Association: “When you go home today, what will you tell your children?” And they said they were going to share what they learned with their daughters, because they want to empower them.”

# Farah Tanzir

Bangladesh

“I’m the youngest of two girls in my family. When I was born people pitied my parents for not having a male child; I was not someone to be proud of. From a very young age I was aware of that. I felt guilty for not being a boy. To compensate I had my hair cut short and I dressed like a tomboy. It really made me happy when people mistook me for a boy. When I turned fourteen, and had my first menstruation, I realised I could not deceive myself any longer.

I can now turn to those people who used to make my parents feel guilty and say: ‘Look! I can do what a man does. And I’m not doing it just for myself. I’m also helping thousands of others, women and men. I’m working to change their perspectives in life - slowly, but eventually.’

Because of my childhood I’ve learned to accept things, rather than raise my voice. The WE Program has taught me to have courageous conversations and speak up if something’s wrong. It’s wonderful to see that happen in the factories as well. During one of our Factory Visits a female worker stood up to tell about the verbal abuse she was suffering from her supervisor. In front of the management, her co-workers and her supervisor. When WE started in her factory, this woman was hardly able to participate in a discussion. But within the course of the program she had built up this courage and had learned this was her right. She knew that she deserved to be respected. The beauty of our work is that this goes beyond the working place. It goes to our families, our neighbourhoods and our communities. It feels great to empower people.”



‘The beauty of We is that it also goes to our families and communities’





**'I didn't stand  
much of a chance  
at school, I felt  
like a nobody'**

# Anthony Kan

## China

“When I was a kid, I felt like a nobody. At school I got a zero in English dictation quite often. Since all the other subjects were in English and all exams were written, I didn't stand much of a chance. At home, I didn't feel much better either. Actually, I felt like I was adopted.

In high school there were two people who really built up my confidence. My Chinese language teacher told me: ‘Your English is lousy, but your Chinese is really good. You write beautiful essays.’ He even sent two of my stories to a publisher. At vocational school, my student counsellor picked me to train as a peer counsellor for students, which was a life changing experience. I learned a lot of basic counselling skills that I still apply now.

Since many years I have been doing voluntary work, training school teachers in Hong Kong and mainland China to develop student activities aimed at the personal growth of children. My work in the factories has the same drive. When workers start to grow and understand their rights and develop their sense of values... When they start feeling that as humans they have the same worth as the managers... then I know: this is what I am supposed to be doing with my life.”

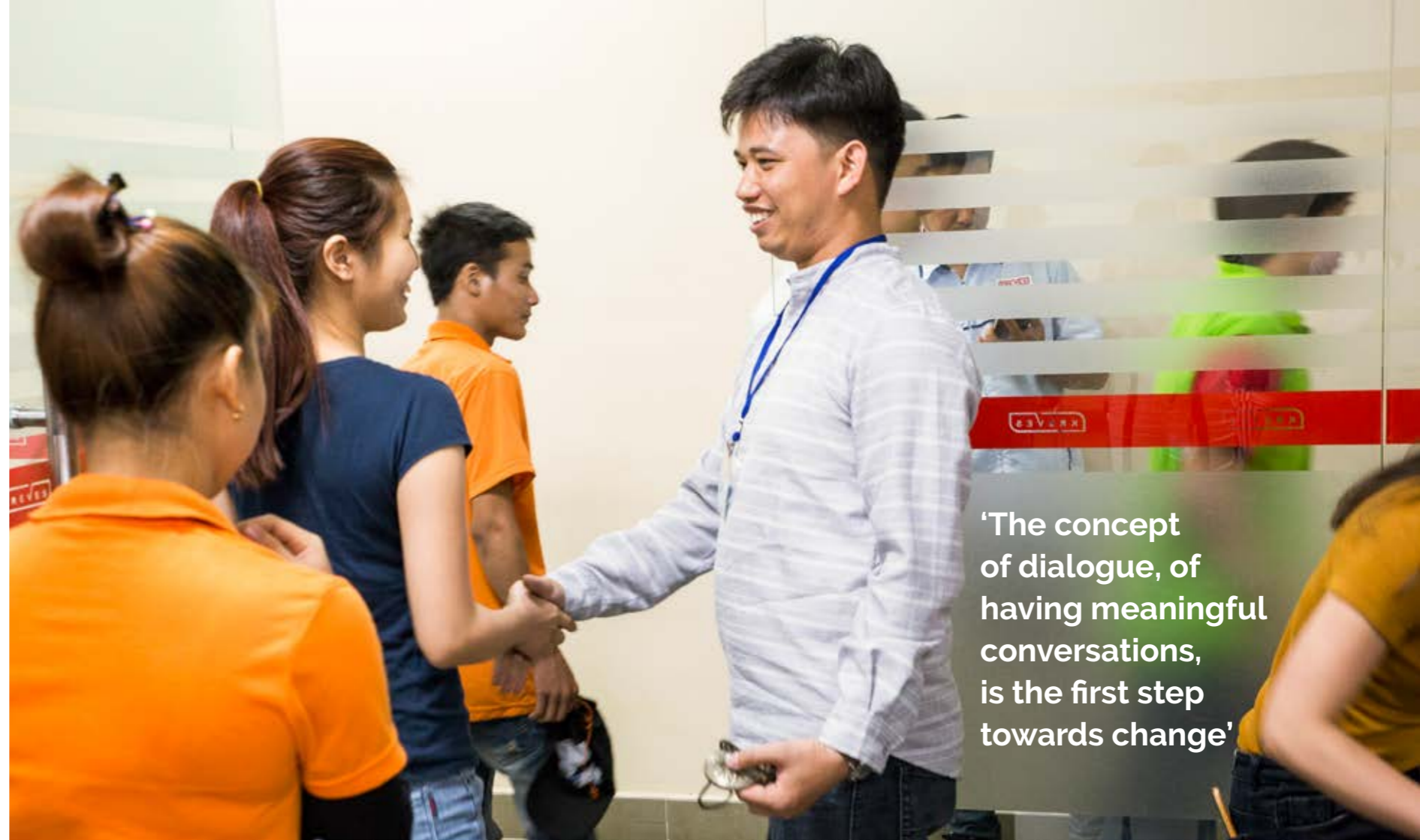
# Huan Nguyen Doan

## Vietnam

“A couple of months ago we did a Factory Visit in the south of Vietnam. We wanted to initiate a discussion on wages and working hours, but the people present indicated they did not want to talk. When we asked them why, they said it was of no use. There were no top managers present to begin with. And the whole concept of dialogue to them was feeble - they did not think ‘just talking’ could change things. At that moment we decided to end the meeting and went to find one of the factory managers. As we explained to him what we came for, he told us to go back to the group, inform what the workers wanted and send him the list with requests. He assured us he would read it carefully and would come up with solutions.

Although he meant well, we refused to be sent away and spent the next two hours

explaining to him what the WE Program is about. To our surprise he promised us to join fully during our next visit. When we returned two months later he kept his promise. At the end of the visit some workers came to me and said it was the first time they could have a real conversation with their manager. I was so happy at that moment! To me the concept of dialogue, of having meaningful conversations, is the first step towards change. But there is a long way to go before this becomes habit. Workers in Vietnam are often scared to raise their voice and managers are more familiar with giving orders, rather than talking and listening. To establish this new way of working in factories requires not only passion, but also patience.”



**‘The concept of dialogue, of having meaningful conversations, is the first step towards change’**



The stories we tell  
become **the house**  
we live in

# Sheila Wong

China

“Born and raised in a typical South-Chinese family, I was educated to be practical. So I majored in economics and finance as most of the good students in China do. Since I also had a great interest in social work and civil society, I thought my career would start with finance and end with charity.

All of this changed at a family reunion dinner, when my mother - sitting opposite of me - saw a lump in the front of my neck. Shortly afterwards a doctor diagnosed me with thyroid cancer and sent me to surgery. Life has been very gentle, but not this time. Three months later a sceptical relapse was detected during a check-up. At that moment I was 22 and freshly graduated.

Of course I could have complained: why me?!? But I didn't. At that moment I made the decision to start my career in civil

society NOW, aiming to change the world, even if it would be just a tiny little bit. By making the choice for this kind of work I said 'no' to a lot of obvious career choices. I also had to say 'no' to some of my friends, who could not understand why I did this. Does my family appreciate my career choice? At a recent family reunion dinner I heard my mother explaining to some relatives what I do. She said: 'My daughter is working in a social enterprise. She is helping the workers to deal with bad wages and the frustrations they have every day. My daughter is doing a good job.' I don't know if this is appreciation. It is understanding, which to me is more important.”



**'After the diagnose  
I decided to start  
my career in civil  
society NOW'**



'I am not here  
to criticize,  
but to listen'

# Kiet Nguyen Tuan

Vietnam



“Although I earned a bachelor degree in Petroleum Geology, I realised at an early stage in my career that my real passion lies in Social Connectedness and Well-being. I want to contribute to society and raise the awareness on sustainability and social responsibility. This led me to study further with International Management Consultancy and CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility), as well as techniques that would help me to become a powerful communicator. I have done courses in Neuro-Linguistic Programming and mindfulness meditation - studying the human mind and heart.

Since then I've trained and coached lots of people - individually and in companies - in transformational processes and shifting behaviour. During my work as a consultant I have seen much unfairness. I found it

very painful to see factory owners treat their workers as a tool for making money, not respecting them as human beings.

But it's not just at management level that a mind-shift is needed. I have also seen workers neglecting their health by doing lots of overtime to earn as much money as possible. A female worker once confessed that she had worked non-stop for three days, day and night. After that, she had to stay in a hospital for a month to recover. In many areas people are ruining their lives by working too much. As a WE facilitator I am here not to criticize, but to listen. Together we see things clearer and together we can find solutions and come up with improvements.”

# Muhammad Asif Hasan

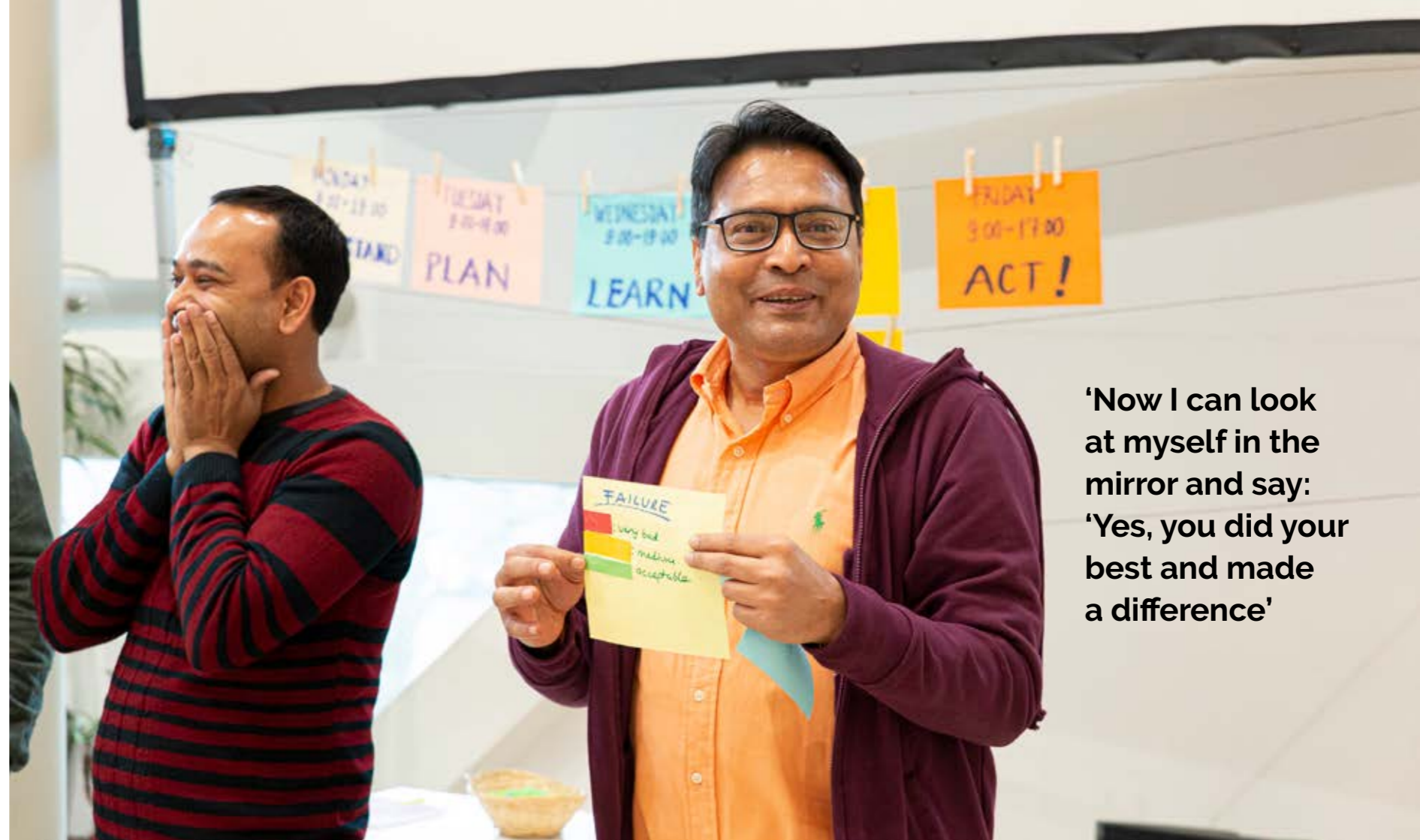
Bangladesh

“Having worked as an auditor for over a decade, I came to know the dark side of an industry focused purely on profit and filled with rampant violations of human rights. I’ve seen the gaunt faces of people working under inhumane, unethical and unsafe conditions with little human dignity and respect. And I no longer wanted to be a complicit in this vicious cycle of exploitation.

One incident from those years still haunts me. During an audit I was interviewing a young woman and I could tell that she was physically not well. After talking with her and her co-workers I learned she had a miscarriage only two days before. When I asked why she was not at home recuperating, she told me that she had no more leave days. She was afraid she’d lose her job if she was absent. In my audit report

she became just another critical finding. I realised though that the issue was not about leave days, it was about human rights. At that moment I knew I had to find another avenue if I wanted to be an agent of change.

Sometimes I feel change is not happening quickly enough. But then I realise the enormity of the challenge. The problems are deep-rooted and the road is difficult. But the cause is too important to contemplate giving up. Now, at the end of the day, I can look at myself in the mirror and say: ‘Yes, you did your best and made a difference.’ ”



**‘Now I can look at myself in the mirror and say: ‘Yes, you did your best and made a difference’**



Thank you to everyone in the factories. Together we will change the industry one step at a time.



**Problems will not be solved if we rely on a few supermen and women. We need everyone. It is only when we accept that everyone has value, that we will liberate the energy, imagination and momentum we need to create the best beyond measure.**