Freie Universität Berlin

Garment Supply Chain Governance Project

What are appropriate governance structures for improving labour and environmental standards in GPNs?

Motivation

On 24th April 2013 the **Rana Plaza** factory building collapsed as a result of severe structural defects. More than 1100 people died and many more were injured. This event is considered the deadliest garment-factory accident in history.

Rana Plaza has been a „**focusing event**", leading to a range of institutional developments on the international (e.g. the "Accord on Fire and Building Safety") and national level (e.g. the German "Textile Partnership").

This research project aims to examine **garment global production networks** (GPNs) as a critical case for the theory and practice of developing sustainable standards in GPNs.

"Made in Bangladesh"

Bangladesh's garment industry, employing around **3.6 million people**, accounts for **13% of GDP** and nearly **25% of the country's exports**. The well-being of Bangladesh's people, particularly women who comprise over 80% of the industry, depends crucially on the garment sector which in turn relies on lead firms in the EU and other developed countries.

But there are only **'soft laws'** to encourage lead firms to hold their suppliers to international labour and environmental standards, and the Bangladesh government has been slow to implement fundamental social and infrastructure reforms.
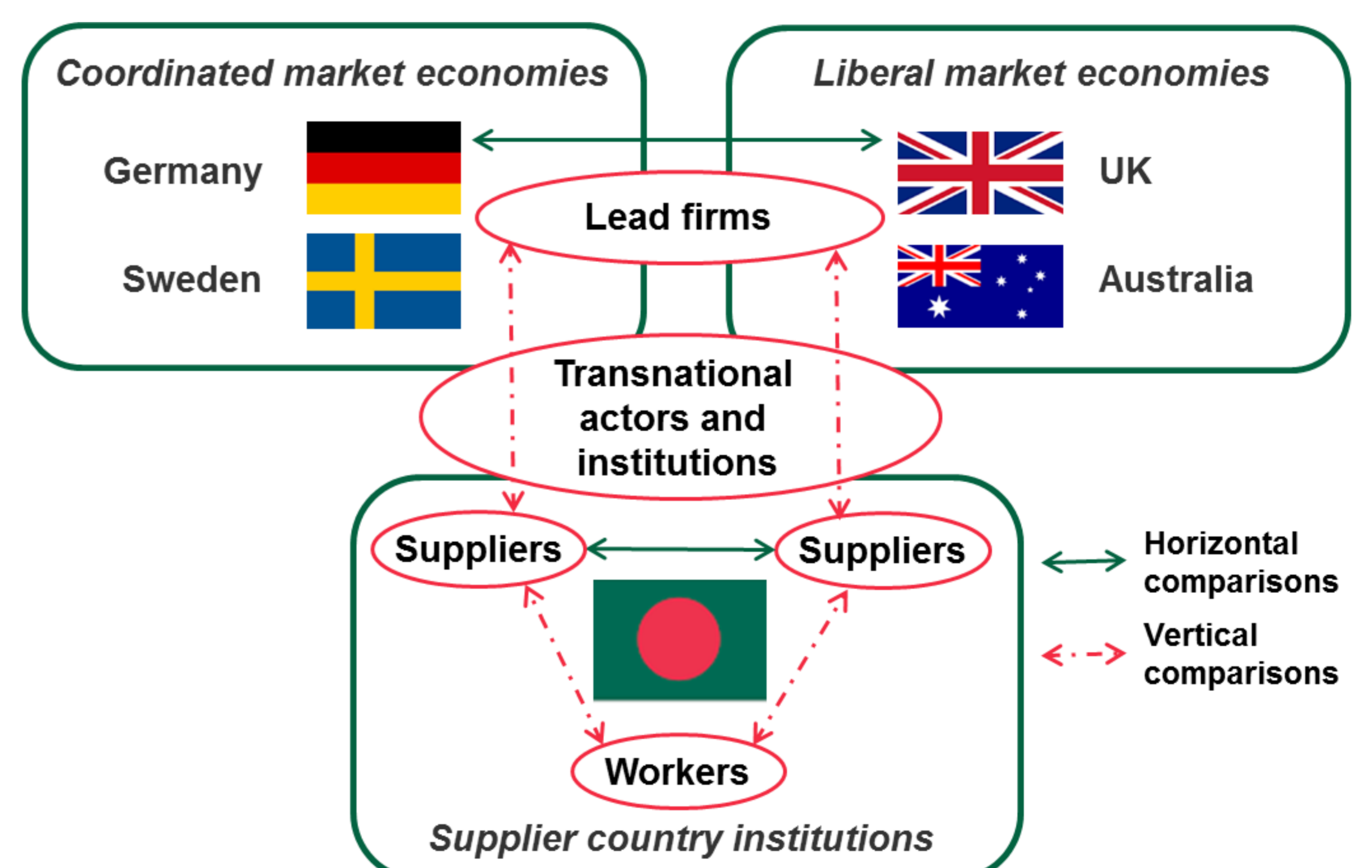
Core research aims

- Compare and evaluate the supply chain governance structures and practices of lead garment firms based in different developed countries (Australia, Germany, Sweden, UK).

- Analyse the labour and environmental policies and practices of factories in Bangladesh supplying these lead firms.

- Explore Bangladeshi garment worker attitudes and behaviour regarding changing factory labour and environmental standards.

- Understand the impact of new initiatives (such as the 'Accord') on labour and environmental standards in factories supplying garments to the lead firms in the above-mentioned developed countries.

- Examine the role of the Rana Plaza building collapse as a focusing event that mobilizes support for changes in factory standards intended to have long term and wider implications for the garment industry.

- Contribute to policy-making in developed and developing countries by providing strong evidence-based recommendations for improving labour and environmental standards in global production networks.

Methodological approach

This unique, three year (2016-18) project combines a **systematic, comparative analysis** of developed country lead firm policies and practices with comprehensive, on-the-ground research among managers, workers, government and civil society organizations in Bangladesh.

Following a change-oriented, multi-actor, multi-level approach, we draw primarily on:

- **contextual data** designed to facilitate analysis of institutional change and its impact on factory practices in the wake of the Rana Plaza disaster,

- **interviews and surveys** with lead firms, suppliers, and workers enabling a deeper explanation of organizational dynamics, and

- **case studies** permitting stronger insights into lead firm practices aimed at improving suppliers' labour and environmental standards.

Coordinated market economies — Germany, Sweden
Liberal market economies — UK, Australia
Lead firms
Transnational actors and institutions
Suppliers — Suppliers
Workers
Supplier country institutions
Horizontal comparisons
Vertical comparisons

For further information: www.garmentgov.de