

**NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO**



**Impact of international and local value chain challenges on the employees' working conditions in apparel factories, Maputsoe Lesotho**

**By**

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Development Studies in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for Master of Arts Degree in Development Studies**

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**Submission date: 4 August 2025**

**Declaration**

I hereby affirm that this dissertation presents my work and has never been submitted for examination in any university for the award of academic certificate. I also declare that all the sources of information used in this research have been appropriately acknowledged and referenced.

This research is conducted with the utmost respect for all participants and the researcher was committed to maintain the highest standards of ethical and academic integrity throughout the research process.

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## **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Almighty God for His grace and for being faithful and supportive throughout the completion of this dissertation. This accomplishment would not have been possible without His grace.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor for his knowledge and passion in supervising me. I am very grateful. I also want to thank the employees, supervisors, shop stewards, and management of the firms; their contributions and experiences were pivotal to the success of this research.

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to Professor Oluwabiyi Oluremi for his mentorship and support, my grandparents, my late father, my mother, my little brother, my partner, my best friend and to everybody who contributed to the completion of this work. I love you all dearly.

May the living God bless you all!!

## **Abstract**

The apparel industry in Lesotho has been a major source of employment, yet working conditions of employees have long been a concern. This research aimed to investigate the impact of international and local value chain challenges on the working conditions of employees in apparel factories in Maputsoe, Lesotho. The research questions focusing on the effects of cost containment measures, quality control standards, high labour reserve, labour laws and policies on the working conditions of employees. This study employed a qualitative approach to gather primary data. The primary data was analysed using thematic analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the findings. The findings revealed that the apparel industry in Maputsoe, Lesotho, faces value chain challenges that influence employees working conditions, including exposure to exploitative practices and low wages among others. Finally, the study concluded that challenges within the apparel value chain have a significant impact on the working conditions of employees. The recommendations suggested that the management of firms, labour unions and policy makers should collaborate to improve working conditions of employees such as increased wages.

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## **Acronyms**

AGOA	African Growth and Opportunity Act
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GVC	Global Value Chain
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISO	International Organisation for Standardisation
MFA	Multi-Fiber Arrangement
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UN	United Nations
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
US	United States
VCA	Value Chain Analysis
WTO	World Trade Organization

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## **Chapter one: Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Working conditions in apparel industries capture one's attention, make us pause and ask ourselves, what is wrong? The apparel industry serves as an ideal for analysing the dynamics of buyer-driven value chains. The relative simplicity of establishing clothing enterprises, combined with the significant protectionist measures in developed nations within this sector, has resulted in an extraordinary variety of garment exporters emerging from developing countries (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). Additionally, it is observed that both backward and forward linkages are extensive, contributing to the substantial employment opportunities associated with this industry (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). The apparel value chain is organised into five key components: the sourcing of raw materials, which encompasses both natural and synthetic fibers; the supply of components, including yarns and fabrics made by textile manufacturers; production networks that comprise garment factories along with their domestic and international subcontractors; export channels facilitated by trade intermediaries; and marketing networks at the retail stage (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011).

The apparel value chain is fundamentally dependent on international standards to effectively manage supplier activities. Global buyers determine what is to be produced, where, by whom, and at what price (Datamonitor, 2009). Typically, lead firms are in developed countries and delegate manufacturing tasks to a worldwide network of contract manufacturers in developing countries, which provide the most competitive rates (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010). These lead firms, which include retailers and brand owners, are predominantly based in major markets such as Europe, Japan, and the United States (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, it has been observed that these firms engage primarily in the most lucrative segments of the apparel value chain, which include product design, branding, and marketing (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011).

The historical growth of the global apparel industry has largely been influenced by trade policies. Since the early 1970s, this sector has experienced rapid expansion, creating jobs for millions in some of the world's least developed nations (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010). However, the industry has faced significant crises. The first of these is regulatory in nature. The Multi-Fiber Arrangement

(MFA), which imposed quotas and preferential tariffs on textile and apparel imports to the United States, Canada, and various European countries since the early 1970s, was gradually eliminated by the World Trade Organization (WTO) between 1995 and 2005 through its Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010; Ernst *et al.*, 2005). The second crisis pertains to the economy. The recent global recession, initiated by the banking collapse in the United States in 2008, rapidly extended its effects to numerous major industrialized and developing nations, bringing the world to the verge of the most profound economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010). The recession particularly adversely affected the apparel sector, causing factory closures, significant rises in unemployment, and escalating worries about social unrest as displaced workers sought new employment opportunities. Third, the COVID-19 pandemic has also disrupted global value chains, and the global apparel industry is no exception (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021).

The global apparel industry has historically served as a prime avenue for developing countries to engage in Global Value Chains (GVCs) (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021). Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, (2021) further noted that the clothing sector serves as a significant source of living for low-skilled labourers in developing countries. Thus, people in developing countries are low skilled and characterised as cheap labour which is a challenge and the apparel industry is characterised by labour-intensive and minimal technological barriers (UNIDO, 2020). However, minimal skills demanded by the industry also result in low wages and hazardous working conditions (Luginbühl, 2019). According to LeBaron (2020) and Pinnington *et al.* (2023), inadequate wages compel factory workers to undertake extended shifts, often ranging from 10 to 14 hours daily, with few breaks or rest days. Further noted that in peak periods, such as holiday seasons when the demand for ready-made garments surges, workers may endure shifts lasting up to 18 hours. These prolonged working hours can result in serious health issues, including fatigue and musculoskeletal injuries due to repetitive stress. Additionally, the literature points to the existence of abusive practices, such as exposure to hazardous working environments that involve harmful chemicals and unsafe conditions, which place undue stress on employees and can lead to unjust dismissals (LeBaron, 2020; Pinnington *et al.*, 2023). All these challenges seem to be putting much pressure on apparel firms to survive hence putting pressure on factory workers as well resulting in the violation of working conditions which has not been given attention in Lesotho.

The apparel value chain in Lesotho through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) is a relatively recent development that plays a crucial role in job creation, poverty reduction, and economic growth (Bennet, 2006; Morris & Staritz, 2017). Its origins can be traced back to the 1980s, largely due to the Multi-Fibre Arrangement, which established export quotas for developing nations sending apparel to developed countries (Ernst *et al.*, 2005). These quota restrictions led to a phenomenon known as quota hopping, where manufacturers relocated their operations to countries with available quotas. Consequently, several firms, predominantly owned by Taiwanese investors, established subsidiary manufacturing facilities in Lesotho, primarily aimed at exporting to the United States (Morris *et al.*, 2011). The industry received an additional boost from the implementation of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) in 2000 (Gibbon, 2003). This period also marked the emergence of the first trade union within Lesotho's apparel sector.

Scholars have examined working conditions within various value chains in Lesotho. For instance, Dietz (2021), examined the effects of government intervention in Lesotho on the working conditions of farmers engaged in the wool and mohair value chain. However, in the context of the apparel value chain, numerous researchers have studied the efficacy of national labour laws and advocacy systems in regulating labour standards (Pike, 2014). Research on the implementation and monitoring of codes of conduct has also been conducted and assessed (Barenberg, 2009; Locke *et al.*, 2009). Despite this, the effects of both international and local challenges facing the apparel value chain on the employees' working conditions in apparel factories in Lesotho remains understudied.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

The apparel value chain in Lesotho is a significant development that plays a crucial role in job creation, poverty reduction, and economic growth (Bennet, 2006; Morris & Staritz, 2017). However, the effects of both international and local challenges facing the apparel value chain on the employees' working conditions in apparel factories in Lesotho remains understudied. This study thus sets out to examine those challenges with a view to determine their effects in Lesotho.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate how international and local challenges facing the apparel value chain impact the employees' working conditions in apparel factories in Maputsoe, Lesotho.

### **1.4 Research questions**

1. How do firms' cost containment measures impact the employees' working conditions?
2. How do the quality control standards set by leading firms impact the working environment for employees within the apparel manufacturing factories?
3. What is the impact of high labour reserve on the apparel factory workers' working conditions?
4. What is the contribution of international and local labour laws and policies on workers' working conditions?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The success of this research, viewed through a theoretical lens, has the potential to enhance academic discussions surrounding development by providing a deeper understanding of the root causes of the poor working conditions in the apparel industry. In addition, the success of this research also has a potential to contribute to the two Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For example, decent work and economic growth (SDG 8): by investigating working conditions in the apparel industry in Lesotho, the research would provide valuable insights into how to create more decent work opportunities in the apparel value chain and promote economic growth. Furthermore, responsible consumption and production (SDG 12): by analysing the impact of international and local challenges on the apparel value chain, the research could inform more responsible consumption and production practices in the apparel industry which can help reduce the negative social impacts.

From a policy standpoint, the findings may inform specific actions by firms, labour unions and policy makers to improve working conditions including changes to human resource practices and workplace safety measures. Ultimately, the outcomes of this research are assured to influence policy decisions that promote sustainable development objectives and industrial advancements.

## **1.6 Limitations of the study**

Gathering information from the management of firms regarding the working conditions within their firms proved to be challenging, as some managers seemed reluctant to share insights about their operational strategies. Additionally, some employees seemed to be hesitant to disclose negative experiences concerning their working environment.

## **1.7 Delimitations of the study**

Due to the extensive size of the global value chain, the researcher decided to limit the scope of the study by looking only at the apparel value chain. To further downsize the scope of the research, empirical data was collected only from apparel factories in Maputsoe Lesotho. Another significant delimitation is context focus on labour working conditions in the apparel sector which restricts insights into labour conditions experienced by workers in different industries.

## **1.8 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented the background on the challenges facing apparel value chain and working conditions in the apparel industry. The problem statement was also provided, showing that a confluence of challenges affects employees' working conditions in the apparel industry though the apparel value chain has brought development in Lesotho. This chapter also presented the purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study and the limitations of the study.

## **Chapter two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by presenting the Global Value Chain Approach as a theoretical framework which underlines this study. Furthermore, the chapter reviews the literature of the crisis facing the apparel industry worldwide (issues of cost containment measures, quality control standards, high labour reserve and Labour laws and policies). The chapter also reviews literature on apparel industries within the global value chain: prospects and challenges in the developing countries and provides literature on Lesotho. Finally, it ends by providing the chapter summary.

### **2.2 Theoretical framework**

Various frameworks assess value chains and look for ways to enhance value chain activities. Porter's Value Chain Analysis (VCA) is one of these frameworks, as its analysis involves breaking down a series of activities that a business performs to deliver a valuable product or service. The analysis helps to identify areas where improvements can be made to increase efficiency in both local and international competitiveness (Elin & Freja, 2017; Taylor, 2005).

In addition, the Resource-Based View (RBV) highlights the significance of a company's internal resources and capabilities in achieving a sustainable competitive edge (Barney & Arikan, 2018). The theory of transaction cost economics focuses on the importance of governance structures and contractual arrangements in minimizing waste and effectively coordinating value chain activities (Ketokivi & Mahoney, 2017). The dynamic capabilities perspective underscores the necessity for firms to adapt and reorganize their value chains in response to external environmental changes (Bleady *et al.*, 2018).

The most appropriate framework for this study is Gereffi's (1980) Global Value Chain (GVC) Approach, which serves as a powerful driver for a full range of activities—including design, production, marketing, distribution, and consumer support—distributed among various firms and workers across international borders (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2011). As a theoretical framework, Lee (2010); Mayer & Gereffi (2010) stated that the GVC approach emphasizes the progression of value added throughout the industry, spanning from conception to production and final usage. This is achieved by analysing the job descriptions, technologies, standards,

regulations, products, processes, and markets in specific industries and locations. Thus, it offers a comprehensive perspective on global industries, integrating insights from both top-down and the bottom-up approaches.

According to Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2016), the global value chain approach examines the global economy through two distinct perspectives: the "top-down" (global) and the "bottom-up" (local) to answer questions regarding development issues that have not been addressed by previous paradigms. Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2016), defined the concept of "governance" within the top-down perspective as the role of leading firms and the structure of international industries. In contrast, Humphrey and Schmidt (2002) defined the bottom-up perspective, which centres on "upgrading," of the strategies employed by countries, regions, and various economic actors to sustain or enhance their positions in the global economy regardless of the challenges they face.

Gereffi and Memedovic (2003) indicated that, global value chain approach in the apparel value chain is concerned with the network of organisations and activities involved in the production, sale and consumption of apparel products across borders. For example, the manufacturing sector in China has been extensively studied using the GVC approach to understand how Chinese firms participate in global production and how the global economy has transformed their domestic production systems (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016). On the other hand, Gereffi (2018) provided a comprehensive overview of the global value chain approach, its application to various industries. For instance, researchers have studied the automotive industry in Mexico using the GVC approach to understand the role of foreign direct investment and domestic production in shaping the industry (Stankovich, 2021). Furthermore, scholars have analysed the mining sector in South Africa using the GVC approach to understand its role in the global economy and the challenges it faces, such as safety and labour issues ( Fedderke & Pirouz, 2025).

The GVC approach has been applied extensively to analyse the changes in production, trade and corporate strategies that have transformed the apparel industry in East Asia and Latin America (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003). This represents a significant knowledge gap, as the experiences and challenges of the global value chain in the African apparel sector, particularly on the apparel factory workers in Lesotho, may diverge from those in other regions due to factors such as colonial histories, regional trade agreements and political instability.

The GVC approach is appropriate in this study because it states that activities in the value chain should take place within the country but two more activities should take place outside of the country (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2011). In the case of Lesotho, input activities such as production of cloth and design are executed outside the country. Manufacturing of clothes and packing occurs inside the country however, the last stages of the value chain are carried out in lead firms. For instance, distribution of finished products to consumers, marketing, final consumption and disposal mainly take place in the United States of America (USA).

### **2.3. Cost containment measures in apparel value chain.**

Cost containment in the apparel value chain refers to a set of strategies, policies and practices adopted by firms to reduce production costs while maintaining quality and sustainability (Magnus *et al*, 2024). For example, Ridhwan and Indawan (2024) indicated that as uncertainties continue to persist in the fashion industry, firms need to regard cost reduction as an achievement of real and lasting reductions in the unit cost of goods or services, which may include short times, layoffs, cutting of wages and time shifts without compromising their intended use or quality. To effectively reduce costs, manufacturers need to concentrate on four key components: value enhancement, cost savings, cost containment and cost avoidance (Magnus *et al*, 2024).

In addition, the ultimate goal of cost containment is to improve profitability and competitiveness in a highly competitive global marketplace as it involves a range of activities, from process optimization and supply chain management to sourcing strategies and labour practices (Jarab & Mabrouk, 2023). Nevertheless, according to Magnus *et al* (2024), the apparel value chain faces a multitude of challenges because of external shocks, fast changing trends and intense competition which puts cost pressures on global apparel firms. These issues include pandemics, evolving global trade regulations and geopolitical tensions.

#### **2.3.1 Pandemics**

World Health Organisation (2021) defines pandemics as an occurrence of infectious diseases that spreads across a vast geographical region and exhibits a high prevalence, typically impacting a considerable proportion of the global population, often lasting for several months or even years. Furthermore, (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021) states that pandemics disrupt the global value

chains and the global apparel industry is not an exception. For example, during the covid-19 shock, world merchandise trade declined by 9.2 percent in 2020 (WTO, 2020).

Baldwin and Freeman (2020), explained that the global value chain in the apparel sector has faced a 'triple hit' during the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially, direct supply disruptions occurred as apparel factories in China stopped operations in response to government-imposed containment measures. As the virus spread to other nations, numerous apparel producers, including those in Bangladesh, India, Mexico, and Pakistan, also ceased production. Subsequently, nations with minimal COVID-19 cases and only limited lockdowns measures, like Cambodia and Vietnam, experienced the repercussions of supply-chain disruptions. Given that China is the leading global supplier of cotton, fabric, and other essential raw materials, manufacturers in these nations encountered shortages of inputs and rising costs (Baldwin & Freeman, 2020).

Finally, the enforcement of lockdowns across Europe and the United States led to unprecedented disruptions in global demand. The impact of direct supply disruptions due to lockdown measures varied by country, influenced by factors such as the speed of the virus's arrival, the effectiveness of containment strategies, and the interplay of supply-chain contagion and demand fluctuations, all of which have shaped the severity of the effects on apparel production and the subsequent recovery paths (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021).

### **2.3.2 Global trade regulations**

Quotas refer to quantitative restrictions placed on imports and exports of specific goods by a country (Fugazza & Conway, 2010). Gereffi (2018) stated that in the apparel industry, quotas are commonly used to limit the import of clothing from other countries such as China, with the aim of protecting domestic industries. On the other hand, preferential tariffs are defined as reduced or zero tariffs applied to certain goods imported from specific countries (Baden & Velia, 2002).

The quota system originated with the long-term arrangement concerning international trade in cotton textiles and substitutes, initiated under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1962 (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011). The author further stated that this agreement was later expanded to encompass additional materials through the Multi Fibre Arrangement which was established in the early 1970s and regulated quotas until 1995, when the WTO Agreement on Textiles and Clothing (ATC) took over the governance of apparel and textile items. It is further

noted that major economies, including the United States, Canada, and several European nations, utilized the MFA to enforce quantitative restrictions aimed at shielding developed markets from cheap imports originating from developing countries.

Gereffi and Memedovic (2003) affirmed that during the phase-out of these arrangements, various unilateral trade agreements and preferential schemes containing specific provisions for apparel and textiles were implemented to mitigate the adverse effects on least developed countries. Such trade agreements have been crucial in enabling least developed nations like Nicaragua and Lesotho to maintain their competitive edge in the global apparel sector (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011).

Additionally, these agreements include the CAFTA-DR Tariff Preference Levels (TPL) accord between the United States and Nicaragua; the African Growth and Opportunity Act, which offers temporary concessions to producers in sub-Saharan Africa; and the European Union's Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) framework that allows for duty-free imports from select least developed nations (WTO, 2020). While these agreements provide short-term benefits to the recipients, they also highlight the uncertain future of the apparel sector in these regions, which lack other competitive advantages (Gereffi & Frederik, 2010).

As noted by Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, (2011) and Gereffi & Frederik (2010), the implementation of quotas and tariff preferences has led to an increase in exports from certain countries to one or more of the three primary markets—namely the EU, Japan, and the United States—while simultaneously resulting in declines in other markets. For instance, Indonesia has managed to enhance its market presence in the United States and Japan, yet has experienced a reduction in its share within the EU-15. In contrast, Sri Lanka has successfully expanded its market share in the EU-15 while witnessing a decline in the United States. Since 2005, Lesotho has recorded a modest increase in its market share in the EU-15, although it has seen a decrease in the United States since 2004 (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011). Additionally, several nations, including Canada, EU-12, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand, and Tunisia, have experienced a persistent decline in their market shares since the early 1990s (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003; Fernandez- Stark *et al*, 2011).

Finally, Chutel (2025) reported that the small Southern African nation of Lesotho has limited alternatives to address the 50 percent tariffs imposed by the United States. The textile and apparel

sectors in Lesotho, which export approximately 70 percent of their goods to the U.S., are among the most severely impacted by President Trump's recent tariff measures. The 50 percent tariff was enacted due to the trade imbalance between the United States and Lesotho, a nation with a population of 2.3 million. Notably, only Saint Pierre, a sparsely populated French archipelago located off the Canadian coast, faced the same increase in tariffs. Consequently, the governments of the nations affected are facing the imminent threat of significant job losses (Ibid).

### **2.3.3 Geopolitical tensions**

Norine (2025) describes geopolitical tensions as the conflicts and rivalries that emerge between countries or regions as a result of geographical, political, and economic interests. Furthermore, Fiveable (2024) argues that such tensions can manifest through military engagements, diplomatic conflicts, or economic sanctions, which profoundly affect international relations and power structures.

The trade war initiated between China and the United States under the Donald Trump administration had a huge effect on international trade dynamics with a decline of 3 percent in 2019, followed by a further decrease of 7 percent in 2020 (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, Fibre2Fashion (2024) affirmed that the US-China trade conflict caused a notable drop in Chinese imports to the United States; however, it also allowed certain countries to gain advantages through substitution and complementary trade effects. For instance, nations such as Mexico, Vietnam, and South Korea experienced some benefits, while other countries, including Israel and Ukraine, faced declines in their exports to the US (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011).

In addition, the escalation of geopolitical tensions has led to a global increase in sanctions. For instance, in 2023, there were 108 restrictions related to the import of textile yarn and natural thread, 104 on textile fibres, 106 on man-made staple fibres, and 137 on wearing apparel, significantly affecting Asian countries (Fibre2Fashion, 2024). Chutel (2025) mentioned that within these import restrictions, Asian countries are both key contributors and the most adversely affected, with China and India being particularly hard hit in the aforementioned categories. Kumar *et al.*, (2025) argued that the rise in geopolitical conflicts, coupled with the increasing sanctions and protectionist measures, poses a substantial threat to the textile and apparel value chain.

### **2.3.4 Effects of cost containment measures on the employees in apparel factories.**

According to Magnus *et al.*, (2024), cost containment measures in the apparel industry have profound implications on the working conditions of employees. The author further stated that as manufacturers strive to reduce expenses in an increasingly competitive global market, the effects on workplace morale, health and safety standards and overall working conditions appear to be neglected.

In addition, Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, (2011) noted that although cost containment strategies may enhance productivity, but can simultaneously compromise essential aspects of workers occupational health and safety. For example, employees may experience diminished benefits, such as less satisfying wages, as a result of short times and increased workloads (Ridhwan & Indawan, 2024).

Literature suggests that cost containment strategies such as benefits and wage reductions tend to degrade employee's well-being while attempting to sustain factory profitability (Magnus *et al.*, 2024). Given Lesotho's unique socio-economic context with high HIV/AIDS prevalence among workers and a predominantly female workforce, the implications of this cost containment measures may be more striking than in other regions. The study is expected to reveal tensions between management's drive for efficient production and effects on employees' working conditions.

## **2.4 Apparel quality control standards.**

According to Keist (2015), quality control in the apparel sector is an important component of the apparel manufacturing process that guarantees that the products meet the established quality standards. The implementation of quality control measures within the apparel value chain offers numerous advantages such as reducing production costs through the early inspection of quality issues in the manufacturing process thus, minimising the need to rework (Tetra Inspection Report, 2025). Apparel quality control aids in ensuring that the apparel products conform with the required quality standards and improves the consumer satisfaction and brand's reputation.

### **2.4.1 ISO and AATCC quality control standards**

ISO, which represents the International Organisation for Standardisation, is responsible for the publication of internationally recognised quality standards such as ISO 9001, 14001, 45001,50001

aimed at ensuring quality, good environment, safety and efficiency in apparel firms (Tetra Inspection Report, 2025). The apparel sector is a huge global industry that represents fierce competition along with rigorous demands for quality, safety and sustainability (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003).

Furthermore, it is within this context that Kadolph (2007); Keist (2015) asserted that the ISO certification has gained considerable importance as it offers an independent validation that a company's management systems meet international standards of best practice and also offers a comprehensive framework for apparel factories to integrate quality, safety and sustainability into their operations thereby, fulfilling both market and regulatory requirements. Thus, Harpa (2011) affirmed that many international buyers consider ISO certification, particularly ISO 9001 for quality, as a necessary condition for engaging in business, thereby making it essential for apparel exporters to maintain their competitive edge.

The ISO management systems standards that are most relevant for apparel factories focus on three essential domains: quality, environmental impact, occupational health and safety (Keist, 2015). It is further stated that implementing these standards enables companies to confront primary challenges in the industry including product quality, environment pollution and safety of workers. The following outlines the key ISO standards and how they apply within the apparel sector:

### **ISO 9001- Quality management in apparel and fashion**

ISO 9001 is an internationally acknowledged standard for Quality Management Systems (QMS) that establishes a strategy that enables organizations to consistently fulfill customer needs and improve satisfaction by delivering high quality products through ongoing process enhancement (Harpa, 2011). For instance, ISO 9001 mandates that each phase of production—ranging from the inspection of incoming materials to dyeing, printing, stitching, and final packaging—is regulated by documented standard operating procedures and quality control measures (Fibre2Fashion, 2024). Consequently, textile and apparel enterprises that adopt ISO 9001 frequently experience significant advantages, including reduced defects and rework (resulting in time and cost savings), enhanced operational efficiency, and improved product uniformity (Tetra Inspection Report, 2025).

### **ISO 14001- Environment management for sustainable apparel production**

The textile sector is widely recognized for its detrimental effects on the environment, being identified as one of the largest contributors to pollution globally, particularly the United Nations, which ranks second in terms of pollution generation (Fibre2Fashion, 2024); this is largely attributed to excessive water consumption, the use of chemical dyes, and the production of waste. According to Estrellas (2025), ISO 14001 stands as the foremost international standard for Environmental Management Systems (EMS), playing a vital role for manufacturers in the textile and apparel industries who seek to lessen their ecological impact. In addition, the author further asserted that this standard offers a structured approach for identifying the environmental dimensions of a company's activities, including water use, chemical waste, and air emissions, while also providing a systematic method for mitigating adverse effects. Thus, adopting ISO 14001, textile mills and apparel factories pledge to establish quantifiable environmental goals, such as maintaining clean environment and minimizing effluent discharge, while also monitoring their performance in relation to these objectives and adhering to environmental legislation to protect their workers' health (Tetra Inspection Report, 2025).

### **ISO 45001- Occupational health & safety in apparel manufacturing**

The health and safety of workers is of paramount importance in the apparel manufacturing industry, where incidents such as machinery-related injuries and structural failures have historically led to significant repercussions (Fibre2Fashion, 2024). It is further stated that ISO 45001 serves as the global benchmark for Occupational Health and Safety Management Systems, succeeding the previous OHSAS 18001 standard, and is particularly pertinent to garment factories and textile mills. In addition, Elnashar and Hamzawy (2025) stated that in the context of textiles, this standard delineates the requirements for firms to recognize workplace hazards, evaluate and mitigate risks, establish comprehensive safety protocols, and promote a safer work environment. Consequently, ISO 45001 plays a crucial role in protecting the workforce and demonstrates a firm's commitment to the well-being of its employees, which is essential in an industry frequently criticized for its labour conditions.

According to Tetra Inspection Report (2025), AATCC (American Association of Textile Chemist and colourists) quality standards-develop globally recognised testing methods, standards and guidelines for evaluating the quality, performance and durability of textile and related materials.

Keist (2015) asserted that these standards help manufacturers, brands and testing laboratories ensure that textile products meet industry expectations in terms of colour fastness, water resistance and sustainability. Tetra Inspection Report (2025) affirmed by stating that following these standards, apparel manufacturers and retailers can deliver reliable, high performance textile products while meeting industry regulations.

#### **2.4.2 Impact of quality control standards on apparel workers**

Quality control standards have long been integral to manufacturing processes, aiming to ensure product consistency and customer satisfaction (Tetra Inspection Report 2025). However, according to Kadolph (2007), the influence of quality control standards extends beyond output quality to shaping the working conditions of factory employees. The author further stated that the evolution of these standards reflects broader industrial transformations from inspection methods to sophisticated frameworks such as ISO 9001, not only standardised for production optimization but also highlight protocols that can directly or indirectly affect the workplace safety and operational stress-level for employees.

Additionally, Fibre2Fashion (2024) stated that rapid growth of apparel factories in countries like China has created a demand for fast fashion which may put pressure on factories to produce large quantities of products in a short period of time, potentially compromising quality, causing stress and fatigue for employees. Moreover, Keist (2015), indicated that quality control standards may improve product reliability; however, failure to meet quality control standards often lead to rework and need for attention, which may impact workers' physical health and their psychological well-being. It is thus likely that findings on Lesotho would reveal the effects of compliance with quality control standards on the working conditions of employees, highlighting issues related to high pressures to maintain quality control demands and consequences for failing to meet them.

#### **2.5 High labour reserve on the apparel working conditions.**

According to Kim *et al.*, (2019), high labour reserves can lead to an increase in labour disputes, as workers become frustrated with low wages, poor working conditions and lack of job security. On the other hand, Schmerer (2014) argued that high labour reserves may lead to non-compliance with labour standards, as employers may feel less pressure to comply with regulations when there are many potential workers in the labour market, potentially leading to worsening working conditions.

For instance, First, Helpman and Itskhoki (2010), argued that high labour reserves in countries such as China and Vietnam have led to increased labour disputes and strikes as workers demand better wages and working conditions. Second, Helpman and Itskhoki (2010), observed that labour disputes had become a common feature of the Chinese apparel industry due to the oversupply of workers in the labour market. Finally, Porto (2008) found that high labour reserves in many developing countries had led to downward pressure on wages in the Export Processing Zones (EPZs) with employers using temporary contracts and outsourcing arrangements to reduce labour costs.

According to Kim *et al.*, (2019), the interplay between a large pool of job seekers and limited formal employment opportunities frequently compromises worker's rights, including fair wages and job security. Considering high labour reserve effect within the apparel sector in Lesotho, it is plausible that findings demonstrate challenges related to violations of workers' rights, including inadequate wages and poor working environments.

## **2.6 The contribution of international and local labour policies and laws.**

As stated by Gereffi and Mayer (2004); Elliott and Freeman (2003), the international policies and labour laws are a response to the needs and challenges faced by employees in a global economy who are, however, partly introduced by employers, unions and governments. In addition, Pike (2014) affirmed that insufficient introduction of international policies and labour laws to workers at international and national level cross the most crucial principle of democracy which contend that people have a right to participate in the decisions that affect their lives. It is further indicated that this might be the case in less developed countries with weak labour legislation and in countries with strong labour legislation but enforcement is an issue.

According to Gross (2002), the Supreme Court's ruling in 1937 upheld the Wagner Act in the United States (US), provided workers with legal support for their right to engage in collective bargaining and ensured their freedom of association. This Act introduced one of the most democratic frameworks in the history of US labour for worker involvement in determining wages, working hours, and other employment conditions. The government's regulation of labour relations and laws marked a significant shift in public policy aimed at advancing social justice for workers;

however, this progress was later compromised by the Taft-Hartley Act of 1947, which empowered employers to resist and hinder unionization efforts (Pike, 2014).

On the other side of the globe, the South African Labour Relations Act, enacted in 1995, established a framework that facilitates collective bargaining, collaborative decision-making, and conflict resolution between employees and employers (SAGI, 2009; Bhorat *et al.*, 2009). This legislation also aligns with the obligations set forth by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Venter *et al.*, 2009), thereby instituting regulations that uphold the rights to freedom of association, collective bargaining, fair labor practices, and the right to strike or initiate a lock-out (Bhorat *et al.*, 2009). According to Pike (2014), the primary aim of implementing comprehensive labor legislation in South Africa was to promote economic development, social justice, labor peace, and the democratization of the workplace.

Both instances exemplify the regulatory function of international and local governments in creating protection policies for workers. Nevertheless, Pike (2014) noted that even when well-intentioned brands adopt corporate policies that reflect their commitment to social responsibility towards workers in their supplier factories, they encounter a number of challenges. Firstly, although they may maintain records of their sourcing practices, these factories frequently procure materials from other, less traceable factories, complicating enforcement due to the inherent structure of the global value chain (Gereffi, 2005). Secondly, the auditing methods they utilize are not consistently effective; for instance, issues such as inaccurate reporting or top-down enforcement, may result in violations of labour laws and poor working conditions going unaddressed (Elliott & Freeman, 2003).

The existing literature indicates that although labour laws and policies provide a foundation for improved working conditions, the inherent structure of the apparel value chain poses challenges that undermine their effectiveness (Gereffi, 2005). Therefore, the overall findings would likely reflect difficulties in working conditions, persistent shortcomings in compliance and enforcement of labour laws and policies within Lesotho's apparel industry.

## **2.7 The global apparel value chain: prospects and challenges in the developing countries.**

Gereffi and Fernandez-Stark (2010), noted that the global apparel value chain ranks among the oldest and largest exports globally, as numerous countries engage in production for the international textile and apparel market. Additionally, the apparel sector serves as a prime example of a buyer-driven commodity chain, characterised by power imbalances between suppliers and global buyers of finished apparel products (Gereffi & Memedovic, 2003).

Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, (2011) further emphasized that global buyers dictate production decisions, including the location, labour force, and pricing. The leading firms in this context, which encompass retailers and brand proprietors, are mainly located in the key markets such as Europe, Japan, and the United States. Typically, these firms delegate manufacturing to a worldwide network of contract manufacturers situated in developing nations that provide the most competitive pricing, while they concentrate on the most critical functions within the apparel value chain—namely, design, branding, and marketing—conducted either in their home countries or in proximity to significant global markets (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2010; Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011).

Figure 1 shows the process of global value chain within the apparel industry. This process starts with design -raw materials (prominently occurring in developed countries), followed by production carried out by US and EU factories located in developing countries. The subsequent stages include exporting, marketing and distribution, all conducted by lead firms based in the US and EU.

**Figure 1: Process of global value chain in the apparel industry.**

1



### 2.7.1 Prospects

The global value chain through the World Trade Organisation's elimination of the quota system for textile and apparel in 2005, granted many developing countries and small export-driven economies access to the markets of industrialised countries (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010). On the other hand, Bernhardt (2013) stated that as international production becomes increasingly fragmented and the prominence of GVCs rises, involvement of developing nations in global apparel production has grown. In fact, several developing countries have emerged as significant

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<sup>1</sup>[https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Basic-Fashion-Industry-Value-Chain-Source-Adapted-from-Gereffi-and-Frederick-2010\\_fig1\\_287988779](https://www.researchgate.net/figure/The-Basic-Fashion-Industry-Value-Chain-Source-Adapted-from-Gereffi-and-Frederick-2010_fig1_287988779)

apparel producers, with many now among the leading apparel exporters, including Bangladesh (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010).

Castañeda-Navarrete (2021) asserted that the global value chain within the apparel and textiles industry has contributed to the economic growth of several developing nations. Furthermore, UNIDO (2020) indicated that this global apparel value chain is characterized by its labour-intensive nature, minimal technological barriers to entry, and low capital investment requirements, resulting in the creation of both formal and informal manufacturing jobs, predominantly in developing countries. For instance, in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Pakistan, this industry represents approximately fifty percent of total manufacturing employment (Huynh, 2017).

### **2.7.2 Challenges**

The global apparel value chain poses numerous challenges for economic development and working conditions in the developing nations. Despite economic gains associated with integration into GVCs, following the end of the Multi Fiber Arrangement, countries such as Lesotho and Kenya have experienced a decline of approximately 50 percent in their market share since 2004 (Bernhardt, 2013). A primary factor contributing to this shift in market dynamics appears to be the introduction of the African Growth and Opportunity Act in 2000 (Gereffi & Frederick, 2010). AGOA provided several African nations with preferential access to the United States market, which initially attracted foreign investors seeking quotas and boosted exports, particularly in Kenya and Lesotho during the early 2000s (Fernandez-Stark *et al.*, 2011). However, after the MFA's expiration, the apparel sectors in Kenya and Lesotho faced a decline in competitive advantage compared to Asian exporters, a situation exacerbated by the combination of unutilized MFA quotas and AGOA, alongside the exit of numerous 'MFA quota hopping firms' (Ibid).

According to Staritz (2011), during the 2000s, both Mauritius and South Africa experienced a decline, which intensified following the phase-out of the MFA. However, their trajectories diverged: Mauritius remained a significant exporter, whereas South Africa has largely vanished from the export market. Additionally, from 2000 to 2010, both nations not only lost market share but also witnessed a decrease in their export values (Staritz, 2011). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated challenges within the global apparel value chain, leading to increased prices

and shortages of inputs due to government-imposed lockdowns in response to the virus outbreak (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021).

The global apparel value chain also has profound implications related to labour conditions in the developing countries. Global apparel value chain is characterised by the outsourcing of labour-intensive processes to lower cost regions through low-wage labour markets, enabling lead firms to maintain competitive pricing while maximising profits (Castañeda-Navarrete *et al.*, 2021). However, this dynamic often results in precarious working conditions for employees in developing countries, where regulatory frameworks may be weak or poorly enforced (Rossi *et al.*, 2014).

Bernhardt (2013), argued that globalisation has intensified pressures on suppliers to reduce costs and accelerate production cycles, which frequently happens at the expense of workers welfare. On the other hand, Gereffi and Memedovic (2003), emphasised that labour practices within the global apparel value raise critical ethical considerations as issues of worker exploitation, unsafe working environments and inadequate workers protections persist despite increased global scrutiny.

## **2.8 Literature on Lesotho**

Extensive research has been conducted on the textile and apparel sector in Lesotho, concerning gender issues, the implications of HIV/AIDS, the economic and political impacts of the industry, challenges related to its sustainability, foreign direct investment dynamics, competitive advantages and sector performance, environmental sustainability concerns, and the development of human resource strategies aimed at ensuring the long-term viability of the Lesotho apparel industry (Makatjane & Tsikoane, 2017; Talasi, 2021; Ayoki, 2016; Jeppesen & Bezuidenhout, 2019; Mabathoana *et al.*, 2019; Marshall & Fenwick, 2016; Morris & Staritz, 2017).

Historical developments have shaped Lesotho's apparel industry into a labour-intensive industry heavily reliant on foreign investment and export markets, particularly under the preferential trade agreements such as AGOA (Morris & Staritz, 2017). This was followed by additional investments from Taiwanese enterprises aiming to exploit Lesotho's underutilised Multi-Fiber Arrangement quotas and the advantages provided by the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act preferences, which included the third-country fabric derogation post-2000, as well as to benefit from the various foreign direct investment incentives available in the country (Edwards & Lawrence, 2010; Staritz

& Morris, 2013). However, these economic gains often mask persistent challenges faced by employees, including low wages, job insecurity and occupational hazards (Barnes & Joergens, 2006).

Although the global apparel value chain contributed to job creation, knowledge transfer, and production capabilities in Lesotho, it has not led to significant process innovations or made substantial investments aimed at enhancing working conditions, technology, and skill development yet it remains fraught with complex working conditions that reflect broader socio-economic challenges (Staritz & Morris, 2013). In addition, Pike (2014), stated that the regulatory framework governing labour practices plays a critical role but frequently falls short in ensuring decent working conditions due to enforcement in the country.

The literature section on Lesotho serves to highlight how challenges within the apparel value chain affect Lesotho's workforce, given its status as a developing country heavily reliant on apparel exports. This localised focus is crucial as it provides empirical grounding for understanding broader patterns within developing economies particularly in global value chains (Gereffi & Fernandez-Stark, 2016). However, a gap exists due to insufficient comprehensive and timely data on the impact of global value chain challenges on working conditions in the apparel industry, precisely in Lesotho. Relating this gap to the study purpose reveals its critical role in advancing knowledge about how global apparel value chain challenges affect working conditions of employees in Maputsoe, Lesotho.

## **2.9 Chapter summary**

This chapter discusses Global Value Chain Approach as a theoretical framework that underpins this study. This chapter further covers empirical literature that entails the cost containment measures in the apparel value chain, quality control standards, high labour reserve and labour laws and policies as well as the prospects and challenges of global apparel value chain in the developing countries. Finally, it also presents literature pertinent to Lesotho in relation to the research topic.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines and explains the research methodology utilised in the study, including the research design, an overview of a study area, the study population, sample and sampling method, data collection methods and instruments, data analysis methods, validity and reliability and ethical considerations. The final section presents the chapter summary.

### **3.2 Research approach**

This study employed a qualitative approach. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), qualitative approach is a type of social research that focuses on gathering a general idea from the subjects, with the goal of exploring, interpreting, and describing the issue. Creswell (2013) noted that, with the use of open-ended questions, the qualitative approach involves the systematic collection, analysis and interpretation of non-numerical data such as text, audio to gain insights into people's feelings, experiences, perspectives and social interactions to generate meaning and understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Elin and Freja (2017), emphasised that this approach allows flexibility in research and opens up for the possibility of making changes based on the findings, though it may contribute to the risk of biased interpretation of findings. Lune and Berg (2017), stated that this approach can be used to understand the experiences and perceptions of people and determine meanings of events or things based on their attributes. Thus, several scholars have used this approach in their research. For example, Wang (2017) carried out a qualitative study to investigate stakeholder involvement in corporate social responsibility (CSR) decision-making within a global apparel factory.

### **3.3 Research design**

This study applied qualitative case study research design due to its capacity for conducting an in-depth investigation of a specific problem within an organisation or place over a specific timeframe (Leavy, 2017; Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, Bryman and Bell (2011) emphasised that case studies are qualitative because they are particularly effective for describing, comparing, evaluating, and comprehending various dimensions of a study problem. McCombes (2019), stated that the case study research design is advantageous for dissertation work, as it allows for a focused

and manageable project scope, especially when resources or time for extensive research are limited.

The case study design is applicable to this research as it allowed the researcher to investigate the impact of international and local challenges on working conditions of employees in Maputsoe factories. The researcher decided to choose Maputsoe factories as a case study due to their accessibility which eliminates transportation costs. Furthermore, this location features factories similar to the ones in the Maseru industrial area. Thus, this may not limit the generalisation of findings.

### **3.4 Description of study area**

The research took place in Lesotho, a small nation with a population of approximately 2 million individuals, where most individuals are involved in subsistence farming (Silici, 2010; Chakela, 2011; Morris et al., 2011). This landlocked nation, completely surrounded by South Africa, is often referred to as 'The Mountain Kingdom' (Ibid). Furthermore, the study was carried out in Leribe district, Maputsoe. Maputsoe is located directly on the border with South Africa, opposite Ficksburg. The industrial centres where South Africa (SA) and Taiwanese owned firms are clustered are known as Maputsoe town and Maputsoe Ha Nyenye, respectively.

Figure 2: Map of Lesotho with blue arrow pointing study area (Maputsoe).



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Figure 2 illustrates the map of Lesotho. The red dots signify the ten districts of the country, with Maseru marked by a dot in red and black to denote its status as capital city. The blue arrow directs attention to Maputsoe in Leribe district, where Maputsoe and Ha-Nyenyene industrial areas are located (See appendix B and C to have clearer picture of these industrial areas).

### 3.5 Study Population

Mweshi and Sakyi (2020) defined population as the complete set of individuals or items that are relevant and are subject to investigation. The Lesotho National Statistics Bureau (2021), estimated that the total number of employees in Lesotho's factories is approximately 46 500. This study focused on Maputsoe town and Nyenyene industrial centres, which comprises approximately twelve

<sup>2</sup> [Detailed Maps of Kingdom of Lesotho](#)

factories and their respective branches. For instance, Josson is one such factory that operates thirty-one branches located in both industrial centres. Consequently, the population under consideration included shop stewards from unions of the apparel workers, managers, supervisors, and production employees, representing both genders from various types of factories; those owned by South Africa and Taiwanese entities.

### **3.6 Sample and sampling methods**

According to Shukla (2020), the sample is a subset of the larger population, comprising selected members from that population. The sample includes only a portion of the total elements (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). For this study, the sample included some apparel factories in Maputsoe and Ha-Nyenyene industrial centres, managers, supervisors, production workers and shop stewards. The sample size consisted of fourteen participants; two shop stewards, two managers, two supervisors, eight production workers. These figures were not predetermined but they were established when the researcher encountered data saturation during the collection process.

The criterion for selecting participants was based on purposive sampling (non-probability sampling) whereby participants from different workers unions, workers from different factories, managers and supervisors were chosen based on their knowledge, experiences, and understandings of the issue under investigation.

### **3.7 Data collection methods and instruments**

According to Thomas (2004), data collection methods are systematic approaches to gathering information to fulfil research objectives. In this study, direct interviews were used to collect the necessary data. For instance, the respondents were subjected to a series of open-ended questions during the interviews, which some occurred in a leisure space and in the factory space. Furthermore, the instruments that were used for gathering data in this research included; the interview guide, notebook, a pen and a smartphone for audio recording, where permitted.

### **3.8 Data analysis methods**

The research employed thematic analysis, a prevalent qualitative data analysis technique that systematically identifies, organises, and interprets themes within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The authors further indicated that the primary objective of thematic analysis is to cultivate a

comprehensive, detailed, and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon being studied. With the use of [Atlas.ti](#) version 25, the process of thematic analysis included several essential steps: familiarisation with the data, coding, theme development, theme review and refinement, and data interpretation and reporting.

In the data familiarization phase, the researcher engaged deeply with the data, reading and re-reading the material to achieve a thorough understanding of its content. Subsequently, during the coding phase, the researcher systematically identified and labelled significant units of the entire data such as words and sentences and formed them into groups according to their similarities and that assisted the researcher to make sense of and develop connotation from the content.

In the theme development stage, the researcher identified and organised the codes into patterns of themes that highlight commonalities within the dataset. During the phase of theme review and refinement, the researcher assessed and fine-tuned the themes to ensure that they accurately represented the essence of the data and maintained consistency. Finally, in the data interpretation and reporting phase, the researcher analysed the themes in relation to the research questions and produced categories from a detailed report outlining the study's findings.

This method of data analysis helped the researcher to come up with a conclusion from the population using the selected knowledgeable and experienced participants to give their opinions and experiences on the issue under investigation who in this case were shop stewards, managers, supervisors and manufacturing workers from Maputsoe and Ha-Nyenyene apparel factories.

### **3.9 Validity and reliability**

Although validity and reliability are closely related, they denote separate characteristics of measurement processes. Noble and Smith (2015); Bryman (2016); Cook and Campbell (2015), noted that reliability pertains to the consistency, stability, and repeatability of measurement procedures. On the other hand, validity pertains to the extent to which a method accurately measures the intended construct and how truthful the findings are (Martins, 2023). In the absence of validity and reliability, researchers cannot trust the accuracy of their findings (Leedy & Omord, 2015).

The accuracy of the study was ensured by adhering to the principles of validity and reliability as they pertain to qualitative research. Credibility assesses whether the research findings genuinely

present plausible information derived from the initial data provided the participants and whether these findings accurately convey the original viewpoints of the participants (Mathosi, 2022). The credibility of the study was upheld through triangulation, which used the observations of the researcher and collection of data from various sources through interviews, at different times and across two industrial areas.

In qualitative research, the trustworthiness of findings is typically guaranteed through dependability (Tlali & Musi, 2022). Therefore, the researcher enhanced dependability by providing a comprehensive description of the data collection process, the formation of categories and all the processes throughout the entire research inquiry. According to Tlali and Musi (2021), transferability is realised when the findings from the study can be readily applied to other settings and contexts, which is referred to as external validity of the findings. In this study, the setting of Maputsoe apparel factories was elaborated in the section titled- The description of the study area to facilitate transferability. The study achieved conformability by assessing accuracy, relevance and meaning of the data through the pilot study, involving the supervisor to check the data.

During the data analysis, digitally recorded data was transcribed into a word document. The [Atlas.ti](#) version 25 software was employed to organise initial codes based on the research questions of the study (see appendix A). The use of [Atlas.ti](#) was important as it provided the researcher with powerful tools to systematically organise and code data, which helped in forming categories that led to a deeper understanding of data patterns that might otherwise remain confusing.

### **3.10 Ethical considerations**

During the data collection phase, the participants were asked to provide their informed consent prior to engaging in one-on-one interviews. A thorough explanation was made to the respondents about the importance of the study and ultimate objectives that the study seeks to accomplish. This was intended to ensure that the respondents understood the importance of their involvement in the study and their adherence to the interview. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, allowing participants to withdraw from the study anytime if there was a need to, thereby ensuring their comfort in answering all the questions posed. For respondents who did not want their names recorded during data analysis to maintain their confidentiality, anonymity was guaranteed; in that case, the researcher used labels such as R1, R2, R3 and so forth for participants' reference. The

firms were labelled F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, F6, F7 to show the specific firm which each participant is from. The researcher was committed to treating all participants with respect and ensuring equitable treatment throughout the study process.

### **3.11 Chapter summary**

The chapter clarified that the study followed a qualitative approach. It also discussed the research design, description of the study, targeted population, sample and sampling technique. The chapter also presented the data collection and analysis methods, validity and reliability, and the ethical considerations.

## **Chapter Four: Findings, Data Presentation and Analysis**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the study on the impact of global and local value chain challenges on the working conditions of employees in the apparel industry in Maputsoe, Lesotho. The demographic profile of the participants is presented, followed by a diagram summarising the themes and categories generated from the data analysis report. The next section presents organised data, analysis and interpretation of themes constructed from research questions, using categories that emerged during coding. Quotes are also used to show that various participants contributed to the themes and categories of the study. Finally, the chapter ends with a chapter summary.

### **4.2 Participants of the study**

Table 1 outlines the demographic profile of the participants who engaged in one-on-one in-depth interviews. To maintain confidentiality, the participants were labelled R1, R2, R3 and so forth to show their individuality.

**Table 1: Demographic profile of the participants**

Participants	Age	Sex	Place	Marital status	Firms	Position	Highest level of education
R1	33	F	Ha-Maqele	Married	F1	Sewing	None
R2	41	F	Ha-Maqele	Widow	F2	sewing	None
R3	38	F	Ha-Maqele	Married	F3	Quality control (QC)	Standard 7
R4	35	M	Crossong	Married	F4	Dispatcher	JC
R5	25	F	Ha-Nyenye	Single	F5	Timer	LGCSE
R6	28	F	Mpharane	Widow	F6	Ironing	LGCSE
R7	42	M	Ha-Nyenye	Married	F7	Cuterer	JC
R8	48	F	Ficksburg	Married	F2	Manager	Tertiary
R9	35	M	Mpharane	Married	F4	Cuterer	SOSC
R10	38	F	Ficksburg	Married	F1	Manager	Tertiary
R11	43	F	Ha-Nyenye	Married	F1	Supervisor	SOSC
R12	45	M	Hleoheng	Widow	F2	Shop steward	JC
R13	39	F	Mohalalito	Single	F3	Shop steward	Tertiary
R14	40	M	Ha-Mathata	Married	F2	Supervisor	COSC

**Source: field data (2025).**

Table 1 shows that different participants holding different positions in the factories were interviewed: manufacturing workers, shop stewards, supervisors and managers. Most of these participants were females and few were males. The age of the participants varied from twenty-five to forty-five years; most were adults while few were youth. Most participants held LGCSE or COSC certificates, few held Standard 7, JC and Tertiary certificates while some had no

qualifications. Additionally, the majority of participants were married while some were single or widowed. Most participants interviewed lived near the industrial areas while others resided afar.

### 4.3 Themes and categories

Throughout the process of coding, various categories emerged under each pre-established theme. Table 2 provides an overview of these themes with their respective categories followed by detailed analysis and interpretation of each theme.

**Table 2: Themes and categories of the study**

<b>Themes</b>			
<b>Cost containment measures</b>	<b>Quality control standards (QCS)</b>	<b>High labour reserve</b>	<b>Labour laws &amp; policies</b>
Job insecurity	Pressure to uphold QCS	Reduced workers' motivation.	Oppression
Workload elevation	Repercussions for failing to meet QCS	Inadequate training	Minimal adherence
Diminishing benefits		Temporary employment	
Financial hardships			
Hesitant management			

Source: field data (2025).

Table 2 shows that there were four main themes that were pre-determined through research questions: Cost containment measures, quality control standards, high labour reserve and labour laws and policies. As the table shows, each theme led to several categories.

#### 4.4 Costs containment measures and employees' working conditions

Job insecurity emerged as the first category linked to cost containment measures which reflected broader factory dynamics. The findings indicated that shop stewards played a critical role in representing employees interests by negotiating protections against effects of cost containment measures. Nevertheless, employees reported that cost containment measures affected their working conditions by increasing job insecurity. They expressed that this was evident when their firms reduced expenses by implementing layoffs and short times. R4 explained:

*Our firm minimises costs through layoffs; this strategy adversely affects us because when it eventually hires again, it excludes many individuals by selecting only a certain group. Some individuals permanently lose their jobs thus complicating their lives, as no means of income translates to inability to satisfy basic needs.*

Elevated workload emerged as the second category, presented in different ways. The findings revealed that though shop stewards stated that they advocated for balanced workloads to safeguard workers' well- being, employees argued that workloads increased and because of that, they worked under pressure and were shouted at when they returned from a short time. R1 elaborated, “*We spend two weeks or more at home and when we return, we work under pressure and are shouted at due to high workloads*”.

However, supervisors and factory management emphasised that increased workloads were necessary to optimise operational efficiency and reduce expenses. This perspective prioritised financial and productivity gains of firms but overlooked employees' well-being. R10 stated as follows:

*We implemented short time periods as our method to reduce costs. As short time means ‘no work, no pay’, I acknowledge that this approach has increased the workload for our employees. However, they seem to be coping well, as they consistently achieve the required daily output without any reluctance and there have been no complaints.*

Diminished benefits emerged as a third category of cost containment measures. Management and supervisors viewed diminished benefits through the lens of fiscal responsibility and competitive positioning, emphasizing cost savings as essential for long-term sustainability. R8 stated, “*Cost*

*containment strategies help us to control escalating operational expenses. Consequently, reducing benefits enable us to achieve savings while simultaneously attaining high levels of productivity”.*

Although insights from shop stewards indicated that they represented the implications of benefits reductions on workers and advocated for fair benefit reductions. Employees articulated that their firms continued to reduce benefits and that affected their well-being and disrupted their schedules. R2 explained:

*Our factory previously offered us tea with milk and we enjoyed both teatime and lunch time (now we only have lunch time). We used to depart at half past 2 on Friday, which is no longer the case. So, this is a way our factory tries to cut costs, and the time shift of our departure on Friday affects us negatively because we used to do laundry and run some errands in town.*

Insights gathered from shop stewards and employees revealed the fourth category: the intrusion of cost containment measures into the domestic lives of employees. Their insights highlighted how cost-cutting strategies not only impact employees' work environment but also have repercussions at home, as reduced hours and wages hinder their ability to fulfil the basic needs. R1 stated, *“Our factory cuts costs through short time periods. We spend two weeks or more at home and that affects us negatively as we struggle to afford our needs like paying rent, purchasing food and providing for our children's education”.* The same sentiments were expressed by R6 who narrated, *“Our firm reduces costs through cutting our wages, this strategy that our firm uses affects us horribly because we suffer to an extent that we barely afford basic needs”.*

The last category disclosed factory management reluctance to change current cost containment measures that have a detrimental impact on employees. From a managerial perspective, participants stated that reluctance often arose due to the fear that adjustments could introduce vulnerabilities that were not prepared to absorb, potentially jeopardising long-term goals and commitments of the factory. R8 stated, *“Honestly, altering the existing cost containment strategies is challenging. We are concerned that new modifications could disrupt and introduce unforeseen financial instability in our factory”.*

On the other hand, Shop stewards highlighted their efforts to balance factory management with realities faced by workers. They stated that they frequently advocated for sustainable cost-cutting

strategies that avoid overburdening employees while maintaining operational targets. They further expressed their belief that the rights and well-being of workers must be prioritized when factories adopt their cost containment strategies. R12 emphasised:

*We strive to advocate for the well-being of workers to the best of our ability. Nevertheless, factory management is hesitant to implement changes and tends to ignore problems that impact working conditions, including substandard health and safety measures and inadequate benefits.*

From the findings, it is observed that cost containment measures adversely affect the working conditions of employees. This includes increased job insecurity, workloads, diminished benefits, financial hardships and the hesitant management, as employers may prioritise profits over the well-being of their employees. These findings align with existing literature, which argues that while cost containment strategies may enhance the profitability of factories, they can simultaneously result in increased workloads, job insecurity, and diminished employee benefits (Magnus *et al*, 2024).

#### **4.5 Quality control standards and employees' working conditions.**

Serving as an initial category, pressure to uphold quality control standards reflect different insights of the participants. The findings revealed that quality control standards are integral to manufacturing excellence but have an impact on working conditions because they influence safety, workload, morale and ethical treatment of employees. Managers and supervisors stated that they often focus on strategic and operational benefits of these standards while employees stated that they faced direct effects such as pressure to uphold quality control standards which can be challenging in fast paced work. R1 remarked, “*if we happen not to meet quality standards, we are instructed to give a score (daily target) along with rejected items, which puts a lot of strain on us as we take days to rectify the rejects*”.

Shop stewards also confirmed that they were aware of quality standards impact on employees. R13 reported:

*Employees are directly affected by quality standards in their daily tasks as they experience pressure to work faster or longer to meet quality standards. As a result, we required ongoing dialogue with the factory management to discuss how we can achieve a balance*

*where quality standards promote both product excellence and healthy, safe working conditions for employees.*

The final category showed that failing to meet quality standards triggered adverse repercussions that affected multiple stakeholders, including managers, supervisors and employees. Managers and supervisors asserted that they faced pressure in ensuring that employees meet quality standards while several workers, including those in the cutting room, emphasised that when they fail to meet quality standards, their work faces greater scrutiny from both supervisors and the management and if the issue is deemed serious, it could lead to a disciplinary hearing or even job loss. R9 further elaborated:

*We understand that accuracy and attention are crucial for us to ensure quality. If one makes a mistake, we are encouraged to immediately report that to supervisors. They will then determine the severity of the error and decide on the best course of action. For minor mistakes, we are guided on how to avoid similar mistakes in the future. However, if the mistake is more serious, disciplinary action like written warnings are taken.*

It can be observed from the findings that the consequences for failing to meet quality standards extend beyond production disruptions to influence employees working conditions, as workers often experience pressure and frustration when quality expectations are unmet. Thus, this aligns with existing literature on quality management, which indicates that failure to meet quality standards often necessitates repetitive tasks and increased vigilance, which may impact employees' physical health and psychological well-being (Keist, 2015).

#### **4.6 Effects of high labour reserve on factory workers' working conditions.**

The data revealed that there were different opinions concerning the impact of large labour reserves on the working conditions of the factory workers in the study area. One of the categories that emerged was reduced workers' motivation. Participants stated that high reserve labour caused tension and threatened their employment. R5 elaborated, "*The high labour reserve creates tension in our work environment, as we are often yelled at and threatened to be fired because there is a large number of individuals waiting for job opportunities at the gates*". Another participant added, "*A substantial labour reserve does threaten our jobs, as we can be fired without prior notice if we do not meet operational expectations, since many individuals are actively looking for jobs*" (R4).

One participant with different sentiments stated, *“In our factory, high labour reserve does not affect our working environment, as both supervisors and the management respect us, and in turn, we respect them too and perform our duties effectively”* (R2).

Another category that emerged was inadequate training. Managers and supervisors shared similar views, stating that they believed there was no necessity to invest in training individuals, as they preferred people who possessed the necessary skills, considering that having a substantial labour pool was beneficial for their factories. R10 elaborated, *“Indeed! We frequently recruit new personnel because existing employees sometimes misrepresent their job knowledge, and some engage in theft, prompting us to terminate their employment immediately and bring in new candidates seeking jobs.”*

Nevertheless, Employees indicated that due to inadequate training, they encounter gaps in skill development and that limits their ability to meet job demands effectively. R3 elaborated, *“We get stressed and frustrated especially when we are expected to perform tasks without sufficient preparation and support. We need training to develop our skills”*.

The final category was temporary employment. Most employees highlighted that they are often hired on temporary contracts, get fired if they make mistakes, fail to meet operational benchmarks or delay in achieving their daily targets. R6 emphasised *“From my perspective, being hired on temporary contracts, job insecurity emerges as a persistent concern, shaping not only my financial stability but also my psychological well-being”*.

Shop stewards added that they were aware of high labour reserve impact on the employees and that they have tried to advocate for improvements though they did not really succeed. R12 explained:

*Concerning the high reserve labour, I am aware of certain firms that mistreat their workers. For instance, hiring them with temporary contracts, lowering their wages and terminating their employment without prior notice, knowing that there are a lot of people looking for jobs. Our union attempted to engage in negotiations with factory management to secure improved treatment for employees and enhanced working conditions; however, this appears to be problematic as changes do not endure for a longer period.*

From the findings, it can be observed that employees are mainly concerned about job security, whereas managers tend to focus on the company's profitability and operational efficiency. Furthermore, managers frequently possess more authority and influence over workplace conditions, which may result in a lack of awareness regarding the challenges encountered by employees. This situation of elevated labour reserves and its repercussions on working conditions within the apparel sector corresponds with various themes present in the current literature. Labour Market Power: Mertzanis (2019) contended that high labour reserves in developing countries provide companies with increased leverage in the labour market, enabling them to exploit workers and avoid investments in training or benefits. Labour-Management Conflict: conflicts between labour and management are common in the apparel industry, often arising from different priorities and power imbalances (Godard, 2014).

#### **4.7 The contribution of international and local labour laws and policies on workers' working conditions.**

The final theme investigated the impact of both international and local labour laws and policies on the working conditions of employees. Workers' oppression emerged as a first category. Findings revealed that the management often focused on profits and efficiency and that inherited tension between legal compliance and economic pressures within the industry. Managers indicated that they genuinely strive for labour laws but also have to meet production quotas and maintain competitiveness. *"The bottom line is, we need to meet our deadlines and sometimes that means pushing our employees harder than we would like"* R8 stated.

The experiences of employees themselves provided the most direct insights into the realities of working conditions. Many workers reported facing long hours, low wages and unsafe working conditions. *"We work long hours, often without proper breaks. We are exploited!"* R6 recounted. Employees further noted that they are unable to access water, toilets, and medical facilities during working hours, which adversely impacts their health. R1 remarked:

*Our laws and policies stipulate that we should be safe, work in a clean environment, and receive adequate wages; however, our company prohibits us from wearing masks, restricts our access to drinking water, and does not allow us to use the toilets or visit clinics unless it's critical and this jeopardises our health.*

The findings highlighted that the goal of shop stewards by advocating for improved working conditions was to create an environment where labour laws and policies were not merely enshrined but were consistently upheld in practice although their effectiveness was constrained by limited power. R13 elaborated, *“The laws are there but not always enforced. We constantly face resistance from management; we need support from the government to press penalties for violations”*.

The second category, which is also the final, was minimal adherence to labour laws and policies. The employees elaborated that their factories failed to adhere to labour laws and policies, as they were subjected to extended working hours accompanied by inadequate wages. *“We are exploited because the wages are very low compared to the work we do. The daily score is very high and exhausting. I don't think our firm complies with labour laws, no!”* R5 stated.

Furthermore, Shop stewards indicated that minimal compliance arose from insufficient enforcement by the government, making it challenging for labour unions to tackle it independently. R12 stated:

*Our labour union has undertaken various initiatives to ensure that companies adhere to labour laws and enhance working conditions. We promote awareness regarding labour laws and workers' rights among employees. Additionally, we collaborate closely with management to negotiate equitable and secure working conditions, which encompass discussions on wages, working hours, and safety standards. However, we have not achieved success in most firms and I think this is due to lack of enforcement from our government because it seems difficult for labour unions to fight this battle alone.*

It can be observed from the findings that employees work under oppression, compliance and enforcement mechanisms are inadequate, leading many firms to disregard minimum wage laws and safe working conditions, which in turn results in unsafe and inequitable labour environments. This observation is consistent with existing literature on non-compliance, which suggests that most firms frequently violate labour laws and policies, especially concerning minimum wage and safety standards, often influenced by factors such as corruption (Elliott & Freeman, 2003).

#### **4.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the findings from one-on-one in-depth interviews. The introduction and demographic profile of participants have been presented. The chapter also presented, interpreted

and analysed the key themes and categories that emerged from the data analysis report regarding the impact of international and local value chain challenges on the working conditions of employees in the apparel industry. The first theme, cost containment measures, underscored the detrimental effects on the working conditions of employees and their life at home.

The second theme, quality control standards, highlighted skills that workers have to possess in order to meet quality standards, consequences they face if they fail to achieve them, pressure to uphold them and the benefits associated with quality control standards. The third theme explained how high reserve labour impacts the working conditions of employees and lastly, the fourth theme, stated the labour laws and policies, describing whether the firms comply or not and how that affects the working conditions of employees.

## **Chapter Five: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides a summary of the main findings. Additionally, it offers conclusions based on the findings, recommendations and areas for future research.

### **5.2 Summary of key findings**

#### **5.2.1 Cost containment measures**

The findings on cost containment measures revealed that these measures include short times, layoffs and wage reductions, all of which influence the working conditions of apparel workers. The findings also indicated that cost reductions resulted in increased job insecurity, workloads, diminished benefits, financial hardships as employers may have prioritised profits over the well-being of their employees.

#### **5.2.2 Quality control standards**

The analysis on quality control standards showed that these standards not only influence the final product quality but also have effects on the working conditions of employees. The findings further highlighted that consequences for failing to meet quality standards extend beyond production disruptions to influence employees working conditions, as workers often experience pressure and frustration when quality expectations are unmet.

#### **5.2.3 High labour reserve**

The high labour reserve theme showed that surplus workforce weakens workers' value, often resulting in exploitative employment practices. Employees were primarily concerned about job security, whereas managers may have focused on the company's profitability and operational efficiency. The findings further revealed that managers frequently possess more authority and influence over workplace conditions, which may result in a lack of awareness regarding the challenges encountered by employees.

#### **5.2.4 Labour laws and policies**

The findings on labour laws and policies highlighted efforts of workers unions to enhance workplace conditions. However, the findings showed that employees continued to work under oppression due to inadequate compliance and enforcement mechanisms. As a result, many firms disregarded minimum wage laws and safe working conditions, which in turn resulted in unsafe and inequitable labour environments.

#### **5.3 Conclusions**

The study concluded that the global apparel value chain is a complex system that is shaped by factors such as cost containment measures, quality control standards, high labour reserves, labour laws and policies, which have an impact on the working conditions of employees. Although cost containment measures may benefit firms' profitability, it was concluded that they frequently exert profound effects on working conditions as apparel workers often face intensified workloads, increased job insecurity and wage reductions. The study also concluded that quality control standards do not only influence final products but put pressure and frustration on employees if quality standards are not met. In addition, the study concluded that high labour reserve weakens employees' value because employers often mistreat their workers knowing that they have the advantage of a surplus workforce. Moreover, it was concluded that employees work under oppression due to lack of compliance and enforcement mechanisms to labour laws and policies.

#### **5.4 Recommendations**

The recommendations suggested that the management of firms should be considerate when cutting costs and provide employees with fair wages. Additionally, the study pointed out the need for firms to refine monitoring mechanisms, training and promoting employee engagement through quality control circles to improve working conditions and product quality. Further recommendations stated that labour unions and firms' management must pay greater attention to workers' experiences and address the impact of high labour reserve by coordinating efforts to ensure equitable working conditions for apparel workers. Moreover, governments and labour unions must oversee firms and ensure compliance with labour laws and policies.

## **5.5 Areas for future research**

More studies that give voice to factory workers and integrate their experiences and perspectives regarding working conditions are needed. This can assist management in pinpointing optimal strategies in improving these conditions. Also, research on the effectiveness of various policy interventions, such as labour laws, government regulations and enforcement, can help to identify best practices for enhancing working conditions.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: [Atlas.ti](#) Report

#### Project: MA -Research Project- June 2025

Report created by Mahlakolane Rammule on 2025/06/19

#### Code Report

All (4) codes

- **Cost Containment Measures**

#### 12 Quotations:

##### 1:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 1

Our factory cuts costs through short time periods. We spend two weeks or more at home and when we return, we work under pressure and are shouted at due to high workloads. This affects us negatively as we struggle to afford our needs like paying rent, purchasing food and providing for our children's education.

##### 2:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 2

Our factory previously offered us tea with milk and we enjoyed both teatime and lunch time (now we only have lunch time). We used to depart at half past 2 on Friday, which is no longer the case. So, this is a way our factory tries to cut costs, and the time shift of our departure on Friday affects us negatively because we used to do laundry and run some errands in town.

##### 3:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 3

Our firm reduces costs through short times but mostly through layoffs, this strategy that our firm uses to cut costs affects us badly because we barely afford basic needs.

##### 4:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 4

Our firm minimises costs through layoffs; this strategy adversely affects us because when it eventually hires again, it excludes many individuals by selecting only a certain group. Meaning some individuals permanently lose their jobs thus complicating their lives, as no means of income translates to inability to satisfy basic needs.

#### **4:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 4**

We work hard but the wages are low. The environment is clean, but it is stuffy, excessively cold in winter and overly hot in summer because the windows are up and few to let sunrays and fresh air in. The water is available but access is restricted to lunch time only.

#### **5:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 5**

Our firm reduces costs through layoffs and dividing us in the sense that others work day shift and others night shifts. This strategy that our firm uses to cut costs affects us badly because we are not used to working the night shift. It is cold because there are no heaters, and one can imagine how cold it is.

#### **8:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 8**

Cost containment strategies help us to control escalating operational expenses. Consequently, reducing benefits enable us to achieve savings and while simultaneously attaining high levels of productivity. Honestly, altering the existing cost containment strategies is challenging. We are concerned that new modifications could disrupt and introduce unforeseen financial instability in our factory.

#### **10:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 10**

We implemented short time periods as our method to reduce costs. As short time means ‘no work, no pay’, I acknowledge that this approach has increased the workload for our employees. However, they seem to be coping well, as they consistently achieve the required daily output without any reluctance and there have been no complaints.

#### **6:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

Our firm reduces costs through cutting our wages.

### **6:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

This strategy that our firm uses affects us horribly because we suffer to an extent that we barely afford basic needs.

### **6:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

Our firm is clean, makes sure that we don't work with hunger because they provide us with porridge, tea and soup, however, they stopped giving us porridge mixed with Rama/milk".

### **12:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

I understand that cost containment measures such as time shifts in my firm have increased workload which impact employee's morale and overall well being. We strive to advocate for the well-being of workers to the best of our ability. Nevertheless, factory management is hesitant to implement changes and tends to ignore problems that impact working conditions, including substandard health and safety measures, insufficient wages, and inadequate benefits.

## **0 Codes**

- **Quality Control standards**

## **21 Quotations:**

### **1:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 1**

If we happen not to meet quality standards when we work, we are instructed to give a score (daily target) along with rejected items, which puts a lot of strain on us as we take days to rectify the rejects.

### **2:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 2**

If we do not meet quality standards, the firm loses customers specifically if the operation fails and cannot be fixed. We become stressed because the bosses get angry and that is followed by some employees being expelled or there being short times. This means 'no

work, no pay' resulting in difficulty in our lives, as we fail to pay rent and school fees for children.

**5:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 5**

If we do not meet quality standards, we get fired especially if I am not the supervisors' favourite or already have written warnings.

**14:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 14**

We exert considerable pressure on our workers to adhere to the quality standards because failing to do so would result in losing customers, and we are keen to avoid that.

**11:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 11**

We push workers hard to meet the quality standards because if we don't do so, we lose customers and we don't want that to happen.

**6:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

Our firm has high inspection to ensure that we deliver required quality.

**6:5 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

However, it happens that the operation fails, in that case, we are given warnings. We become stressed because that threatens our jobs.

**7:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 7**

I can attest that it is very important to maintain high quality standards in the apparel industry.

**7:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 7**

I need to ensure that I meet the following: accurate, be attentive and consistent to meet quality standards.

**7:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 7**

We must ensure that each garment is cut to the correct dimensions and that the fabric is

evenly distributed, which can be challenging in high pressure or high paced work when the order needs to be delivered within a short period of time.

**7:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 7**

If I fail to cut a garment according to the specified sizes, my work is subject to greater scrutiny by supervisors but if the error is serious enough, it is brought to the attention of management thus resulting in disciplinary action or even getting fired.

**7:5 ¶ 1 in Participant 7**

But if it can be fixed, the garment may need to be re-cut, which can lead to delays and additional costs for the company.

**9:1 ¶ 1 in Participant 9**

We understand that accuracy and attention are crucial for us to ensure quality.

**9:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 9**

If one makes a mistake, we are encouraged to immediately report that to supervisors. They will then determine the severity of the error and decide on the best course of action.

**9:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 9**

For minor mistakes, we may be guided on how to avoid similar mistakes in the future. However, if the mistake is more serious, disciplinary action like written warnings are taken.

**9:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 9**

I remember one day, I accidentally cut a few pieces of fabric slightly larger than specified. My supervisor pointed out the error and explained why it is important to follow the pattern accurately. She also suggested that I should improve my accuracy by double checking measurements before cutting and taking breaks to avoid fatigue.

**13:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 13**

Employees are directly affected by quality standards in their daily tasks as they experience pressure to work faster or longer to meet quality standards. As a result we required ongoing dialogue with the factory management to discuss how we can achieve a balance where quality standards promote both product excellence and healthy, safe working conditions for employees.

## **0 Codes**

### **o High Labour Reserve**

#### **9 Quotations:**

##### **2:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 2**

In our factory, a high labour reserve does not affect our working environment, as both supervisors and the management respect us, and in turn, we respect them too and perform our duties effectively.

##### **3:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 3**

We get stressed and frustrated especially when we are expected to perform tasks without sufficient preparation and support. We need training to develop our skills.

##### **4:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 4**

A substantial labour reserve does threaten our jobs, as we can be fired without prior notice if we do not meet operational expectations, since many individuals are actively looking for jobs.

##### **5:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 5**

The high labour reserve creates tension in our work environment, as we are often yelled at and threatened to be fired because there is a large number of individuals waiting for job opportunities at the gates.

##### **10:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 10**

Indeed! We frequently recruit new personnel because existing employees sometimes misrepresent their job knowledge, and some engage in theft, prompting us to terminate their employment and bring in new candidates seeking jobs.

### **6:6 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

From my perspective, being hired on temporary contracts, job insecurity emerges as a persistent concern, shaping not only my financial stability but also my psychological well-being.

### **12:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

Concerning the high reserve labour, I am aware of certain firms that mistreat their workers. For instance, hiring them with temporary contracts, lowering their wages and terminating their employment without prior notice, knowing that there are a lot of people looking for jobs. Our union attempted to engage in negotiations with factory management to secure improved treatment for employees and enhanced working conditions; however, this appears to be problematic as changes do not endure for a longer period.

## **0 Codes**

### **○ International and Local Labour Laws and Policies**

#### **19 Quotations:**

### **1:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 1**

Our laws and policies stipulate that we should be safe, work in a clean environment, and receive adequate wages; however, our company prohibits us from wearing masks, restricts our access to drinking water, and does not allow us to use the toilets or visit clinics unless it's critical and this jeopardises our health.

### **2:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 2**

Labour laws that I know are that we should not run in the firm, we should put on masks, we should do social distancing because machines can burst. Our firms allow all that and

we have emergency assistance if someone gets hurt, our firm is clean because we have cleaning people, we have water and our toilets are clean. Our wages are not satisfying at all because we barely afford to pay rent, pay school fees and afford our daily needs.

**3:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 3**

In terms of a clean environment, our firm fails because outside where we sit when eating is full of trash, however, we have clean water, and the toilets are clean and wages are not satisfying as sometimes we work long hours without pay. For example, working from 7 am to 10pm.

**4:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 4**

Our firm reduces costs through layoffs. This strategy that our firm uses to cut costs affects us badly because when it hires again, it leaves a lot of people outside as it selects a certain portion. Meaning some people lose their jobs permanently thus making life difficult because no source of income relates to no means to satisfy basic needs.

**4:5 ¶ 1 in Participant 4**

We work hard but the wages are low. The environment is clean, but it is stuffy, very cold in winter and very hot in summer because the windows are up and few to let sunrays and fresh air in. The water is there but restricted to drinking unless it is lunch time.

**5:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 5**

We are exploited because the wages are very low compared to work, we do. The daily score is very high and exhausting. I don't think our firm complies with labour law, no!"

**8:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 8**

The bottom line is, we need to meet our deadlines and sometimes that means pushing our employees harder than we would like.

**6:7 ¶ 1 in Participant 6**

We work long hours, often without proper breaks. We are being exploited!

**12:3 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

Some firms prioritise compliance, recognizing the benefits for both employees and the company's reputation. However, some firms prioritise profits and turn a blind eye to labour violations.

**12:4 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

This lack of compliance creates an unsafe and unfair working environment.

**12:5 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

Our labour Union took several steps to ensure that firms comply with labour laws and improve working conditions.

**12:6 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

We raise awareness about labour laws and workers' rights for employees. We also work closely with management to negotiate fair and safe working conditions, these discussions involve wages, working hours and safety environment.

**12:7 ¶ 1 in Participant 12**

However, we have not achieved success in most firms and I think this is due to lack of enforcement from our government because it seems difficult for labour unions to fight this battle alone.

**13:2 ¶ 1 in Participant 13**

The laws are there but not always enforced. We constantly face resistance from management; we need support from the government to press penalties for violations.

**0 Codes**

**Appendix B: Nyenye industrial area Maputsoe.**



**Source: Casino Photography**

**Appendix C: Industrial Area Maputsoe Town**



**Source: Casino Photography**