

Preliminary findings of ActionAid Bangladesh survey on
Condition of the Victims One Year on from the Rana Plaza
Disaster



If not Realized...



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**Condition of the Victims One Year on from the Rana Plaza
Disaster**

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Background

One year on from the Rana Plaza garment factory collapse survivors and families of those that died are struggling while they await compensation. Unfortunately there is a titanic gap between the promise of compensation and reality. The government has created a fund to support the victims but there is a lack of information regarding it. There is also a lack of coordination on the amount distributed and the number of victims reached by various other funds.

A comprehensive study was conducted six months on from the Rana Plaza collapse by ActionAid Bangladesh in association with the German Society for International Cooperation (GIZ) and the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The aim was to identify the gaps in services and compensation as well as to assess the needs for reintegration and restoration of the workers. It prompted the organizations to undertake a further survey one year on from the disaster.

It was important to assess the status of compensation promised and delivered to the victims in line with the ILO convention on compensation for employment injuries (Convention 121).

Objective of the survey

This survey is a follow-up of the previous needs assessment survey conducted six months after the Rana Plaza collapse. The survey focuses on current conditions of the survivors and families of the deceased, their social and economic vulnerability along with assessing the need for compensation.

Methodology

For the first survey ActionAid Bangladesh developed a broad database of 2297 people of which 1509 were survivors of the collapse and 788 were family members of those that died. The same database was used as to conduct the follow-up survey. However, 73 survivors and two family members of the deceased could not be reached as their phones were either switched off or there was no response. As a result 1436 survivors and 786 family members were surveyed. All of the respondents were interviewed over the phone and the interviews were conducted between 5 and 15 April 2014.

A semi-structured questionnaire was prepared for the survivors and a separate questionnaire for the families of the deceased. The responses were compared with the findings of the previous survey. The identity and information on the respondents was also cross-checked with the six month survey.

The survey illustrates the vulnerability of garment workers by highlighting the experience of the Rana Plaza workers.

Scope

The vulnerability of industrial workers, particularly women, in a semi-industrialized nation is complex. The survey limits its assessment to social, economic and physical (partly psychological) aspects of vulnerability.

Limitations

The survey is not a list of the total casualties of the Rana Plaza collapse. Rather it is a reflection of the current status of the victims who were reached through the six month survey. Therefore the figures and percentages refer to those of the respondents only.

Present Condition of the Survivors

It has been observed that many of the survivors and family members of the deceased are struggling with economic hardship along with social and physical vulnerability. The survey aims to assess the social and economic hardship of the workers along with their physical and psychological recovery.

Demographic Information

A total of 1436 survivors were surveyed of which 65% were women. The workers in Rana Plaza were generally young. Of those surveyed almost two-thirds were 29 to 38 years of age. The majority of the respondents (63%) were married, just over a quarter were unmarried, and 11% were either widowed, divorced or separated. 68 of the married women were pregnant.

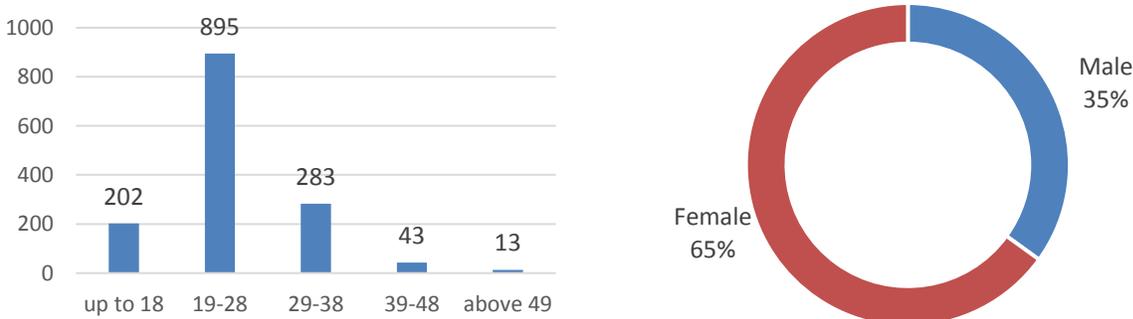


Figure 1: Age-sex structure of the respondents

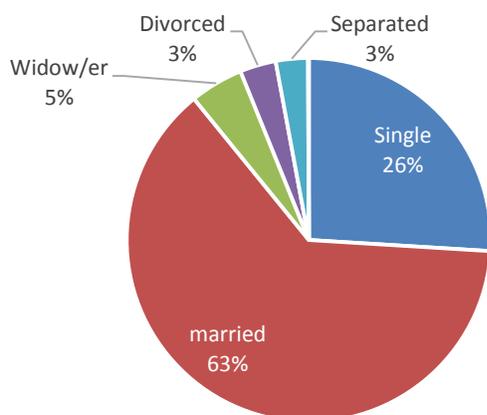


Figure 2: Marital status of the respondents

The respondents worked for five garment factories housed in the eight-story Rana Plaza commercial building. These are New Wave Bottoms, New Wave Style, Phantom Apparels, Phantom Tac and Ether Tex.

Almost half of the respondents were employed as operators in the sewing sections of these factories.

Recovery status of the injured

In the six month survey 39 out of 1498 survivors had to undergo amputation, 9% faced a worsening physical condition and 2% reported to be at serious risk. Around 92% (1386) survivors reported to be suffering from mental trauma or depression.

Table 1: Status of injury

Physical condition	No. of survivors with injury	%
Stable	222	15.5
Getting better	1,063	74.0
Getting worse	130	9.1
At serious risk	21	1.5
Total	1,436	100.0

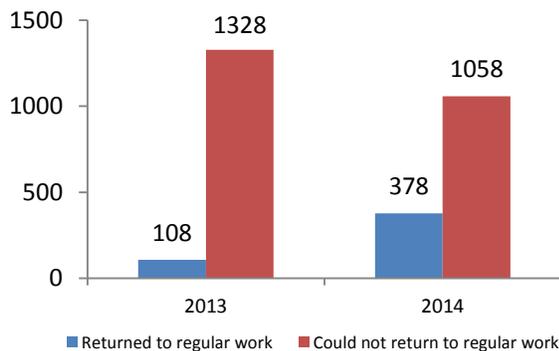
After one year 222 out of 1436 respondents were in a stable condition. Almost 90% of the injured reported that they were recovering.

However, it was found that the physical condition of 130 workers was getting worse and 21 are at serious risk.

Even amongst those described as stable, more than three quarters (76.2%) continued to visit a physician. They will need both financial and logistical support to continue treatment, stretching over year in some cases, which will be a huge financial burden for the worker and their family.

Present employment status

A year after the accident, 1058 of the 1436 respondents (73.7%) have not returned to work. Physical ailment is the major reason (63.74 %) while a significant number of respondents (23.76 %) are still recovering from the mental trauma.



It is of grave concern that 7.54% of the respondents mentioned unwillingness of the employers to give them jobs as the reason for their current unemployment. Having children, pregnancy or looking for job in other sectors are some of the other reasons mentioned by the respondents.

Figure 3: Employment status of the survivors

The survey found that only 378 of the survivors had a job. Almost half of the respondents (182 people) have re-joined the garment industry. Other major sectors where the survivors are working included self-employed in small business, labourer, tailoring, farming and jobs in other industries.

Table 2: Nature of current job of the survivors

Nature of job	Total	Male	Female
Garments worker	182	72	110
Petty business/ self-employed	59	44	15
Wage labourer	47	34	13
Other industry worker	27	17	10
Tailor	22	5	17
Farming	11	11	0
Salesperson	10	9	1
House help	5	1	4
Auto rickshaw driver	4	4	0
Cottage industry worker	3	1	2
Fisherman	2	2	0
Street vendor (food etc.)	2	2	0
Construction worker	1	1	0
Security Guard	2	1	1
Mobile phone repairing work	1	1	0
Total	378	205	173

Economic hardship

A year after the tragedy, almost 95% of respondents are facing a lot or some difficulties in meeting their daily needs. Two thirds are experiencing a lot of difficulty - a situation that has deteriorated since the six month survey in 2013. Alarming 35 survivors cannot meet their daily needs.

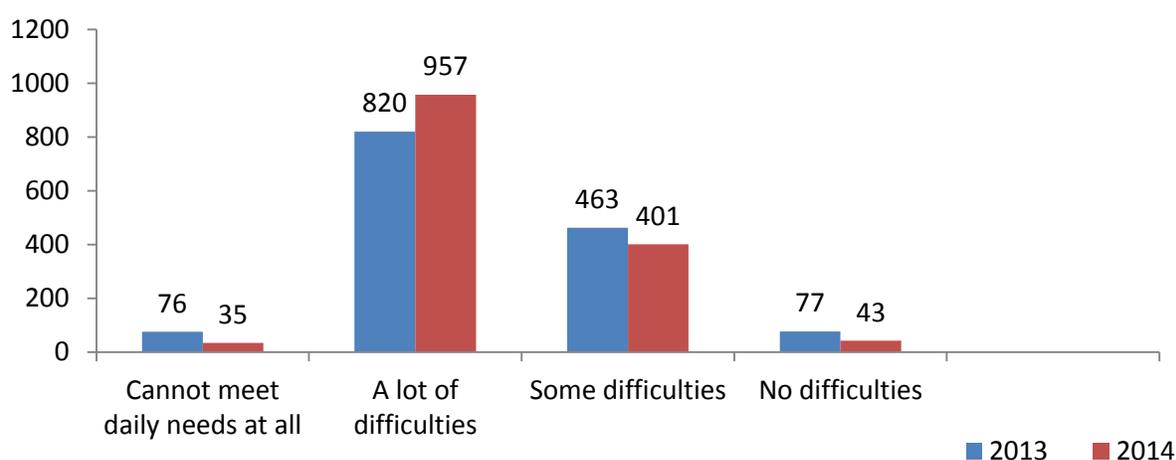


Figure 4: Economic hardship of the survivors

Paying for food, outstanding rent and loans remain as the top three priorities for survivors in 2014 as they were in 2013. Survivors are struggling with the same issues and cannot find a solution. The lack of savings and outstanding debt revealed in the six month survey will have contributed to the vulnerability of the survivors today.

Table 3: Comparative picture between priorities in 2013 and in 2014 to offset economic hardship

Types	Number of survivor respondent	Rank in 2014	Number of survivor respondent	Rank in 2013
Food / daily meal	1,149	1	1045	1
Payback outstanding house rent	766	2	724	2
Payback outstanding loan/ debt	722	3	663	3
Education cost of children	542	4	207	6
Payback due amount of grocers	522	5	360	4
Follow checkup/ treatment	439	6	221	5
Household essentials	433	7	166	8
Medicine	365	8	190	7
Baby food/supplement	186	9	84	9
Educational expenses of siblings	40	10	45	10

- **Multiple counts**

Support acknowledged by the survivors

The survivors stated that they have got support from various sources for their medical treatment, psychological care, meeting food and other essential needs in the form of cash and support in-kind. Hundreds of voluntary groups and individuals provided help to the Rana Plaza victims. The following table shows cash, treatment and other support received by the survivors from the government agencies, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA), the retailer Primark, various private, non-government and international organizations.

Most of the support sources provided cash to the survivors to meet their essential needs. To a lesser extent treatment and associated support was provided. Psychological recovery of the traumatized survivors and their social re-integration were the least focused area, followed by support to deal with permanent or temporary disability.

Table 4: Sources and types of support

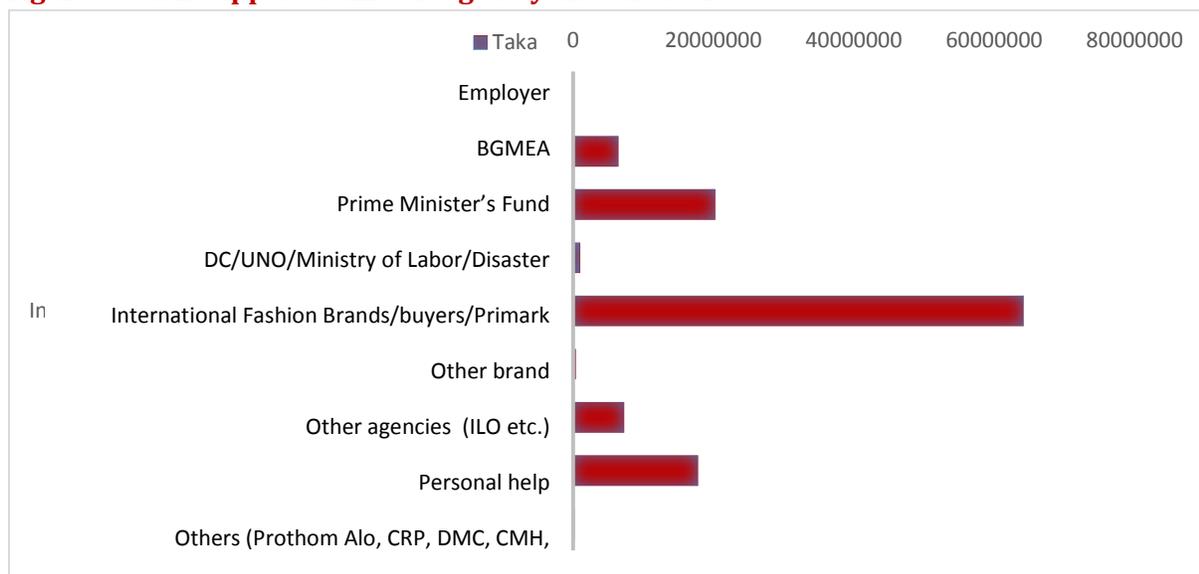
Source of support	Number of survivors acknowledged					Total count
	Cash	Treatment	Psychosocial help	Assistive device (e.g. wheel chair)	Others	
Government	504	32	0	2	31	569
Primark support through mobile cash transfer (BKash)	1368	39	1	1	40	1449
BGMEA	468	9	0	3	3	483
Private and non-government	444	12	1	4	67	528

Foreign Organizations	236	1188	8	51	1722	3205
Others	29	63	0	0	83	175

- Multiple count

The survivors acknowledged that the BGMEA provided 5.5% of the total cash support, reaching 467 out of the 1436 survivors surveyed. The majority of the cash support (54.4%) to the survivors came from international fashion houses, brands or buyers including Primark with short term cash through mobile phone-based cash transfer facility BKash. The other major contributors are the Prime Minister’s Fund (17.2%) and individual donations (15.1%).

Figure 5: Cash support acknowledged by the survivors



According to the respondents a total of 117,997,680 Bangladeshi Taka (US\$1,519,574) was distributed amongst 1400 survivors, which is an average of Tk. 84,284 (US\$1086) per person. The amount of the cash ranged from Tk. 1,500 (US\$19.33) to Tk. 1,395,000 (US\$17,970).

The survey found that almost 60% of the respondents used the money to pay for food. They also used the money to pay back loans, house rent, treatment and medical costs, grocery bills, children’s education and household expenses.

Present Condition of Families of the Deceased

The Rana Plaza collapse claimed the lives of approximately 1130 people. To assess the present condition, needs, vulnerability and compensation status a total of 786 families of the deceased workers were surveyed in 2014.

Economic hardship

The survey revealed that a year after the disaster, 55 of the families have no consistent source of income as no member of the family is regularly earning.

The majority (69.9%) of the families have one earning member while almost one in five families have two earning members in the family.

Earnings

Most of the families reported to have monthly income of less than Tk 10,000. According to the respondents, 244 out of the 786 families (31%) have a monthly income ranging between Tk 1,000 and Tk 5,000, which is lower than the minimum wage fixed by the government for garments workers. Three hundred and seventy nine families (48%) earn between TK 5,000 and Tk 10,000. Only 91 families have a current monthly income of more than Tk 10,000. A number of families did not respond on their earnings.

Socio-economic vulnerability

The struggle to restore livelihood and daily needs underpins the socio-economic vulnerabilities of the families of deceased victims. Prior to the disaster, 91% of respondents did not have any savings. The survey conducted in 2013 also found that 28% of the families were in debt. Almost a third of families of the deceased workers did not possess any assets

Financial needs

Out of 786 families of those that died, 67.8% said they are facing a lot of difficulties in meeting their daily needs. Another 25.9% are facing some difficulties. Amongst the rest, 4.2% are not in a position to meet their daily needs at all. Only a few are able to meet their daily needs without any difficulty.

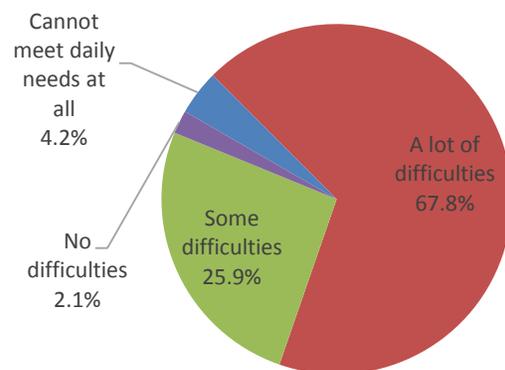


Figure 6: Problems of meeting daily needs

To meet their current economic needs, the families claimed on average a financial requirement of Taka 436,135, with a range of Tk 25,000 to Tk 60,00,0000. The survey shows that some of the families have demanded long term compensation to meet their long term needs.

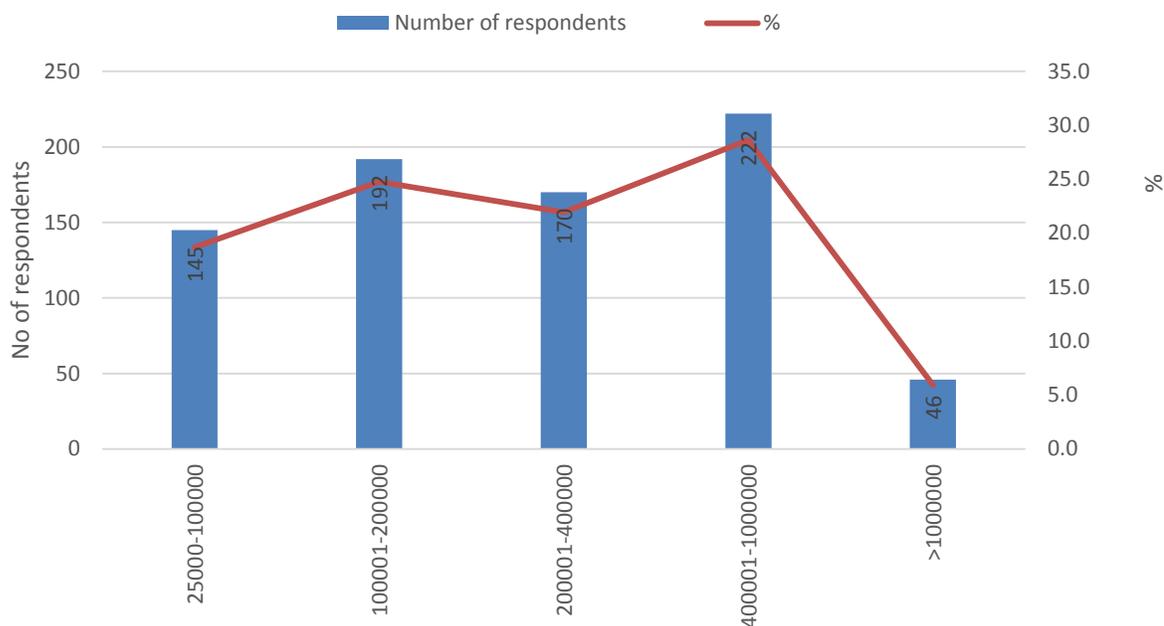


Figure 7: Cash support required to meet immediate needs

Financial support

The respondents acknowledged various sources from which they had received financial assistance, including from major institutions. The majority of families had received support from the Prime Minister’s Emergency Fund, Primark through BKash money transfers, the local administration of the government, the BGMEA and international organizations.

Table 5: Sources and amount of financial support acknowledged by the family members of the deceased

Source agency	No. of supported families	Average support per family	Maximum support per family	Minimum support per family	Total financial support provided by the agency/ group
Prime Minister’s Fund	715	140,614	420,000	10,000	100,539,000
DC/UNO/ Ministry of Labor/ Disaster etc.	183	23,869	220,000	2,000	4,368,000
International brands/buyers including Primark	599	49,704	950,000	4,500	30,369,300
Other agencies	530	23,486	240,000	1,000	12,447,800
Individual	53	22,226	150,000	1,000	1,178,000
BGMEA	11	47,273	200,000	5,000	520,000
Others	2	40000	40000	40000	40000

Major Institutional Services

Assistance from BGMEA¹

The Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) reports that it has provided at total of 145.08m taka (US\$1.85m). This has paid for treatment (Tk 74m/US\$0.5m), salary and other allowances (Tk 76m/ US\$0.97m), donation to the Prime Minister's Relief Fund (Tk 20m/US\$0.26m), support to pregnant survivors (Tk0.42m/US\$5385), and rescue and rehabilitation (Tk 96.6m/US\$0.12m).

BGMEA said that it has provided treatment and medical support to 850 injured at various health facilities and has supported 12 pregnant survivors for their delivery and treatment.

BGMEA handed over orphan boys and girls to ORCA Homes, Chittagong and Anjuman-e Mofidul Islam Orphanage in Savar. BGMEA agreed to provide jobs to all jobless workers of the five garment factories housed in the Rana Plaza. To date, a total of 70 workers, who lost their jobs have contacted BGMEA and received jobs at different garment factories.

Prime Minister's Relief Fund

The Prime Minister set up a fund to support the victims of Rana Plaza. According to the BGMEA, civil society organisations and the media, Tk 1270m has been donated to the fund.² The Bangladesh Association of Banks has donated Tk800m (US\$10m) and the BGMEA Tk 20m(US\$0.26m).³

So far Tk 221m (US\$2.8m)⁴ has been distributed to 909 victims from the Prime Minister's Fund on nine occasions². This includes the cost of DNA sampling, treatment and other support.⁵

The Prime Minister's Fund is considered by trade unions and civil society organizations as humanitarian assistance following the industrial disaster. The remaining funds should be disbursed at the earliest to avoid any major setback for the victims of Rana Plaza.

Compensation: The unresolved issue

On the first anniversary of the Rana Plaza factory collapse the victims of the disaster are awaiting long-term compensation. The much expected compensation from 28 high street retailers and major brands is still to be resolved.

¹ BGMEA, <http://www.bgmea.com.bd>

²The Dhaka Tribune, published on April 14, 2014, <http://www.dhakatribune.com/business/2014/apr/14/families-53-rana-plaza-victims-receive-pm-fund-assistance-tomorrow#sthash.NzSxusHw.dpuf>

³ibid

⁴The Daily Star published and accessed on April 17, 2014, accessed at <http://www.thedailystar.net/city/53-more-families-get-help-from-pm-20381>

⁵ProthomAlo, published and accessed on April 17, 2014, accessed at <http://epaper.prothomalo.com/index.php?opt=view&page=1&date=2014-04-17>

Trade union leaders and civil society organisations demanded that the brands pay up US\$40m by 24 April 2014 to the ILO-managed Rana Plaza Donor Trust Fund but, as of 19 April 2014, confirmed pledges stood at only US\$15.3m.

So far contributions to the Rana Plaza Donor Trust Fund have been provided by Bonmarché, C&A Foundation, Camaïeu, El Corte Inglés, Inditex, Kik, Loblaw, LPP S.A., Mango, Mascot, N Brown Group, Premier Clothing, Primark, and BRAC USA (which included donations from Asda, Gap Foundation, The Children's Place, VF Foundation, Walmart, Walmart Foundation.⁶)

Primark provided short-term support to approximately 3639 victims of the Rana Plaza collapse, equivalent to nine month's salary (Taka 45,000/US\$579).⁷ It is reported that Primark will pay only the 580 workers and families of the New Wave Bottoms, the factory that used to supply them. This covers only 16% of the total victims of Rana Plaza collapse.⁸ Primark on its website claims that it started paying US\$9m as a part of the long-term payments to the workers of New Wave Bottoms on 17 March 2014.⁹

Primark also say that they will make a further payment of \$1m to the remaining workers through the Rana Plaza Fund.¹⁰

In lieu of a conclusion: If not realized...

If the compensation fails to be delivered the survivors and the families of those that died will continue to suffer and their futures will be jeopardized. Children, particularly boys, could be exposed to hazardous work and may be forced to drop out of school. Adolescent girls may be at risk of early marriage and trafficking. Health care of the elderly and disabled will be reduced. Abject poverty is a threat.

The vulnerability of the workers is not static. It is multi-faceted. Short term schemes will not improve the lives of the victims. Compensation is required to address the long term needs. If compensation is not realized, their vulnerability will be accelerated.¹¹

⁶Rana Plaza Arrangement. Accessed on April 19, 2014 , accessed at <http://www.ranaplaza-arrangement.org/fund/donors>

⁷Primark website accessed on April 19, 2014, accessed at <http://www.primark-bangladesh.com/our-work-in-summary/>

⁸ETI Director, PRIMARK

⁹Primark website accessed on April 19, 2014, accessed at <http://www.primark-bangladesh.com/>

¹⁰ibid

¹¹Blaikie