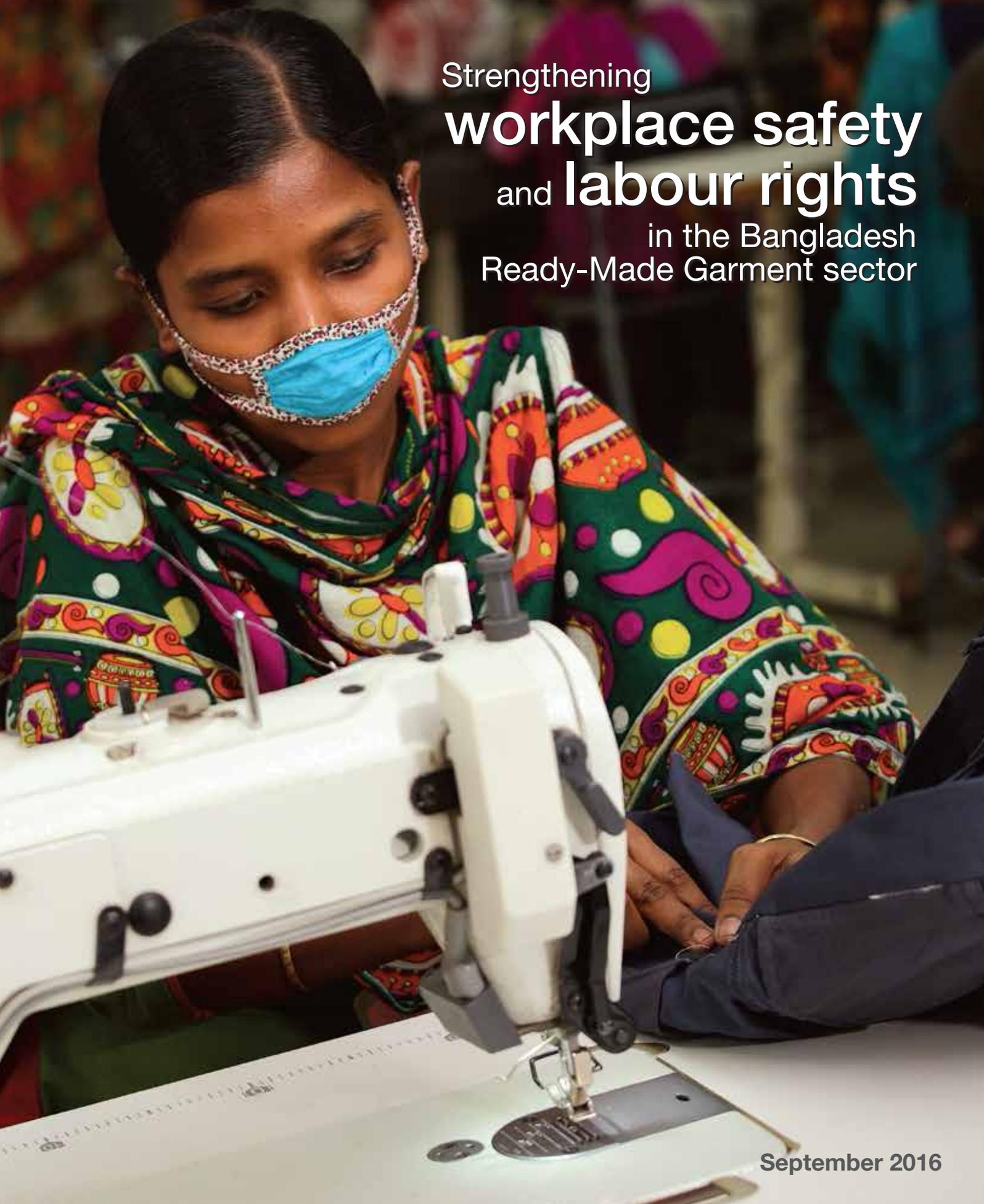




International
Labour
Organization

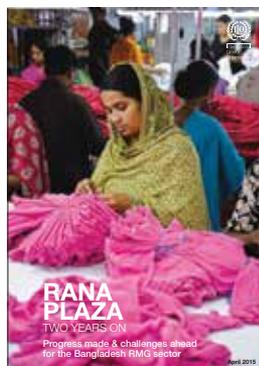
Strengthening
workplace safety
and **labour rights**
in the Bangladesh
Ready-Made Garment sector



September 2016



October 2014



April 2015

This publication is an update on two earlier brochures produced to highlight ILO's efforts to improve workplace safety and labour rights in the Bangladesh RMG sector.

Acknowledgments

ILO's activities in Bangladesh have been delivered in coordination with numerous headquarters departments and other offices in the region.

Recognition must be made to:
The Governance and Tripartism Department, Partnerships and Field Support Department, Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, the Decent Work Technical Support Team in New Delhi, International Training Centre in Turin, the Deputy Director General's Office for Field Operations and Partnerships, the Social Protection Department, the Standards Department, the Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), Bureau for Employers' Activities (ACT/EMP) and Department for Communications (DCOMM).

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Message

The 24th April 2016 marks the 3rd anniversary of the Rana Plaza collapse. While this will always be an occasion to remember those who died or were injured, we can also take stock of the progress made towards forging a safer Ready-Made Garment (RMG) industry and improving the rights of those who work in it.

There have certainly been a number of milestones over the past 12 months.

In December 2015, the assessments of over 3,600 export-oriented RMG factories for structural, fire and electrical safety were completed. To date, 39 have been closed and a similar number partially shut down. Several hundreds of others voluntarily closed or relocated, potentially saving the lives of many thousands of workers. This is a major achievement. However, these factories can only be considered safe once each one has carried out remediation to fix the faults identified by inspections.

The last year has seen the continual reform of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments supported by ILO with funding from Canada, the Netherlands and United Kingdom. The labour inspectorate is today far better resourced, effective and credible than it was at the time of Rana Plaza. Likewise, the Fire Service and Civil Defence department has continued to hone its professionalism and is increasingly collaborating with DIFE to carry out follow up inspections of factories.

Efforts have continued to build a culture of Occupational Safety and Health in Bangladesh with large numbers of workers, managers and trade unionists trained. Meanwhile, the ILO/IFC Better Work Bangladesh initiative now works with more than 100 factories employing over 190,000 workers; helping these enterprises to be more compliant while boosting working conditions and productivity.

During 2015, Rana Plaza victims and their families received their final compensation payments. While this is a positive step it must also be recognised that for those in such difficult circumstances, the wait has been too long. An Employment Injury Social Protection Scheme should help avoid a repeat of such a situation and will benefit employees and employers alike. Over the past year ILO has worked to develop such a scheme and in October 2015 signed an agreement with Germany to take this ahead.

While there has been good progress in enhancing safety in the Bangladesh ready-made garment industry, progress relating to workers' rights has been more challenging. The growth in new RMG labour unions has slowed

and efforts are needed to reverse this trend. Allegations of anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices must be investigated in a systematic and transparent manner. Industrial relations, especially at workplace level should also improve. A new initiative supported by Sweden and Denmark, will see the ILO and the Government of Bangladesh focus on fostering dialogue and relations between employers and workers and the development of conciliation and arbitration mechanisms.

Looking towards the next 12 months we must prioritise the remediation effort for RMG factories while also looking to create a firm foundation for the continuation of this work under the national inspection initiative. The reform process for regulatory agencies must continue. We also look for an expansion of the Better Work programme and progress in the establishment of an Employment Injury Social Protection scheme. In addition, we must continue to strive to create an environment in which labour rights for all are fully respected.

**Srinivas B Reddy,
Country Director
ILO Bangladesh**

A Global Call To Action

The collapse of the Rana Plaza building in a dusty outskirts of Dhaka, Bangladesh on the morning of 24 April 2013 ranks amongst the world's worst industrial disasters. Months later, when the final death toll was tallied 1,136 people had lost their lives and many more were injured or faced a very uncertain future.

Rana Plaza was no localised disaster. The connection between the death of so many garment workers and the clothes they produced for international markets was felt by consumers worldwide.

It was clear that business could not continue as usual for the Bangladesh Ready Made Garment (RMG) sector. Fundamental changes relating to safety, inspection and compliance had to be made. The world agreed. Rana Plaza simply could not be allowed to happen again.

ILO reacted rapidly.

Just days after the collapse of Rana Plaza, Deputy Director General Gilbert Houngbo led an ILO mission to Bangladesh to facilitate dialogue between the government, employers, workers, development partners and other stakeholders. Key areas for action were identified that led to the development of a Tripartite Joint Statement on Building and Fire Safety on 4 May 2013.

As part of the Joint Statement, agreement was reached on the need for the inspection of all RMG factories for structural, electrical and fire safety. Also highlighted were the need for



Over the past three years there has been a lot of progress in improving working conditions in the ready-made garment industry of Bangladesh. All RMG factories have been preliminary assessed and are now safer. The Labour inspectorate is more effective and knowledge of Occupational Safety and Health has improved. The Government of Bangladesh is committed to further improving working conditions not only in RMG factories but in all sectors and for every worker.



Md. Mujibul Haque

Honorable State Minister, Ministry of Labour and Employment
Government of Bangladesh





longer-term processes to enhance the capacity and accountability of the regulatory bodies responsible for inspection and compliance.

Importantly, ILO strongly advocated for buyers worldwide to ‘stay with Bangladesh’ and that any rush for the exit by international brands would have far-reaching consequences for the estimated four million garment workers, many of whom are women. Despite the challenges the RMG industry faced, Deputy Director General Hougbo expressed confidence that they could be addressed.

The process of developing the Joint Statement, as well as an earlier agreement on fire safety made following the Tazreen fire disaster in November 2012, signified a change in the dynamics of the Bangladesh garment industry.

The Government of Bangladesh made a clear commitment to work with the employers and workers to improve safety of the RMG sector. These steps were later detailed in the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA). It also saw considerable engagement with, and input from,

the international brands and retailers as well as development partners. Engagement which has continued to this day.

Local and international collaboration

Since Rana Plaza, local and international stakeholders have worked together to enhance workplace safety in the RMG sector.

ILO launched its Improving Working Conditions in the Ready Made Garment Sector Programme with the support of Canada, the Netherlands, and United Kingdom on 22 October 2013. This initiative has worked with the government as well as workers’ and employers’ organisations to enhance workplace safety and support the reform of the labour inspectorate. It has also helped foster a culture of Occupational Safety and Health, provided support to Rana Plaza survivors and launched Better Work Bangladesh.

Other key initiatives include the Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety, which brings together over 200 apparel

corporations, global and local trade unions, NGOs and workers’ rights groups in a legally-binding arrangement. Meanwhile, the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety comprises 28 mainly North American brands.

Both the Accord and Alliance have carried out comprehensive programmes to improve the safety of the factories they source from as well as train workers in areas such as fire safety. They have also regularly shared their valuable experience and expertise with the government inspection efforts supported by ILO.

A Sustainability Compact for the RMG Industry was launched by the European Union and governments of Bangladesh and USA with support from ILO in July 2013. In January 2016, Canada also became a Compact partner. The Compact sets out a series of commitments and deadlines for changes relating to safety, legislation and working conditions as well as responsible business conduct. It has proven an important mechanism to assess progress in the industry through its regular review process.



I congratulate the Government of Bangladesh for all they have achieved over the past three years, but also call on them to continue their efforts to improve the labour rights dimension as it is a vital part of the solution that we are all looking for.

Gilbert Hougbo

Deputy Director General for Field Operations and Partnerships.
International Labour Organization

The 5+3 group: helping drive forward change

The ‘5+3’ group brings together the ambassadors of five countries (EU, US, Canada, United Kingdom and one other EU member on a rotating basis) along with the three secretaries of Commerce, Labour and Employment and Foreign Affairs. ILO provides technical support. Meeting in Dhaka 2-3 times a year the group discusses issues relating to the RMG sector and labour rights in general and has proven a valuable forum that helps both deliver and monitor change.

A range of other organisations have also made significant contributions. Both the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) and Fire Service and Civil Defence Department (FSCD) have given safety training to workers. The ILO's US Department of Labor-funded project to enhance fire and building safety is enhancing the regulatory framework while building capacity of the fire service. German development agency GIZ is working to train the labour inspectorate as well as providing equipment and resources for the fire service. Denmark has also launched a project aimed at enhancing occupational safety and health.

A strong local collaboration and coordination effort has been

required and the Private Sector Development Group of the Local Consultative Groups (LCGs) coordinated by the Netherlands Embassy plays an important role in bringing together key stakeholders and coordinating further action.

An improved legislative environment

In the aftermath of Rana Plaza it was clear that fundamental legislative and regulatory changes needed to be made. Revision of the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) was identified as a priority to create a solid foundation upon which safety in the RMG sector could be built. The Act was revised in 2013. Major changes included the simplification of provisions relating to the registration of trade unions and the

stipulation for safety committees including members of the workforce to be established in every factory with over 50 workers.

Although the revised Labour Act still falls short with regards to ILO Conventions 87 and 98 on Freedom of Association and Collaborative Bargaining the revisions provide a firmer foundation for more equitable labour practices that can and will continue to be built upon.

The issue of Implementation rules for the Bangladesh Labour Act (2006) on 15 September 2015 was another key milestone in the evolution of the legislative environment. These rules provide guidance on how central elements of the BLA such as formation of safety committees is to take place.



Factory

Inspections And Remediation

Following the Rana Plaza collapse the immediate priority was to inspect 3,508 export-oriented Ready Made Garment factories throughout Bangladesh for structural, electrical and fire safety. These factories were considered active at that time based on a larger list provided by the industry associations.

An inspection team visits an RMG factory.



Factory inspections as at 31 July 2016

Initiative	Assessments Completed
National Initiative	1,549
Accord	1,505
Alliance	890
Jointly Inspected (Accord and Alliance)	-164
Total	3,780



After the Rana Plaza incident the Ministry of Labour and Employment has taken various steps to improve the safety of garment factories in a short time. The main challenge is to overcome the lack of awareness among factory owners and workers. The prime goals of the Bangladesh Government are to implement the Labour Law properly and avoid any similar such tragic incidents occurring in the Bangladesh industrial sector.



Mikail Shipar

Secretary

Ministry of Labour and Employment

Government of Bangladesh

The inspection of RMG factories was carried out by three initiatives. The Bangladesh Accord on Fire and Building Safety and the Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety inspected factories that their members source from. The remaining factories were assessed by a government effort supported by the International Labour Organization with funding from Canada, the Netherlands and United Kingdom.

By the end of December 2015 the inspection process was complete with 3,632 factories inspected by the three initiatives.

Of these, 39 have been closed for presenting immediate danger to workers while a further 42 have been partially closed: actions which have potentially saved the lives of many thousands of workers.

The inspection process had to overcome a series of challenges. An intense period of coordination and collaboration saw harmonised inspection standards agreed

between the initiatives based on the Bangladesh National Building Code and international good practices.

A common reporting template was developed to ensure consistency between inspection reports produced by different groups.

ILO has played a central role in facilitating stakeholder cooperation. The process of harmonisation is a significant achievement that helps create a solid foundation which the Bangladesh inspection service can build on for the future.

Whilst the completion of inspections marks a major milestone, no factory can be considered fully safe until it has carried out all actions highlighted in the inspection reports.

Emphasis is now being placed on the development of Corrective Action Plans and follow up remediation work. A number of factories also need to complete Detailed Engineering Assessments where further information to assess their safety is required.

Looking to the future

While much of the inspection work has been carried out through the support of Accord, Alliance and development partners, Bangladesh must ensure that it is ready to take ownership of this process once external support ends.

ILO is helping enhance the capacity of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) to be able to effectively follow up on the findings of fire and structural inspections in a systematic, comprehensive and transparent manner. The Fire Service and Civil Defense Department as well as the Capital Development Authority (RAJUK) have also been involved in this process in view of their important role relating to fire and building safety. An important outcome has been the commitment between the fire and labour inspection services to carry out joint inspections of factories.



In the three years since the Rana Plaza disaster, the safety and overall workplace situation in the RMG sector, and in other industrial sectors in Bangladesh is in visibly better shape than it used to be. Employers now understand that a safe and healthy workplace is a prerequisite for efficient productivity and smooth operation of an enterprise. It is our firm belief that working together with the development partners and the government, we shall be able to bring in the required reforms at the workplace, and industrial accidents of such scale will not happen again.

Salahuddin A. K. Khan

President

Bangladesh Employers' Federation

Supporting RMG factories to carry out remediation requires considerable resources and expertise. For this reason, ILO is working with the government and other stakeholders to establish a Remediation Coordination Cell (RCC). Staffed by members of the key regulators as well as by specialist private sector engineers, the RCC would oversee the process of remediation for some 1,500 non Accord and Alliance factories. It is expected that the RCC should be established in early 2017.

Remediation financing

A major barrier cited by many RMG factories to carrying out remediation is the cost. While many remediation actions can and have been carried out fairly easily others require major investment by factory owners. ILO/IFC have collaborated to develop a report that assesses the barriers to remediation financing and provides recommendations as to how such barriers may be overcome.

In addition to the support from Accord and Alliance, a number of development partners including JICA, USAID, IFC, EU, AFD, GIZ and others have pledged to provide remediation financing in the region of US\$200 million. The Government of Bangladesh needs to take effective steps to make these funds available to the most needy factories.





Progress in development of Corrective Action Plans and Detailed Engineering Assessments as at 31 July 2016

	Accord	Alliance	National Initiative	Total
# factories being followed up*	1,411	799	1,549	3,595
# CAPs developed	1,453	596	547	2,496
# DEAs developed	993	226	20	1,239

*Excluding factories which were inspected but since closed

Regulators Playing A More Effective Role

In response to the Rana Plaza and Tazreen tragedies, the Government of Bangladesh initiated a major reform of the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE). This has created an opportunity to make the inspection system more effective, credible and accountable. The new structure also allows for cooperation with other agencies and departments.

A labour inspector talks with workers in a spinning factory.



Major changes to DIFE include its upgrade to a department, the installation of high-level leadership and the creation of 392 new inspector positions. Budget allocations for DIFE also increased considerably, from US\$900,000 in 2013-14 to US\$4.1 million for the period 2015-2016.

By August 2015, 200 new inspectors had been recruited, taking the total to 284, a significant increase compared to the 92 active inspectors on duty at the time of Rana Plaza. The number of female inspectors has also increased to 20 percent of the total, which should help DIFE better interact

with the predominantly female RMG workforce.

As part of the reform process, DIFE has embarked on an ambitious drive to significantly strengthen its planning and operational mechanisms with the active technical support of ILO and its RMG programme funded by Canada the Netherlands and United Kingdom.

Key steps include development of a road map for inspection management reform that has seen the establishment of a number of dedicated operational units within DIFE dealing with areas such as

Occupational Safety and Health. A labour inspection strategy has been drawn up highlighting priority industries such as RMG, tea and ship breaking. Meanwhile, a labour inspection checklist for various industries and standard operating procedures for inspectors are being developed.

Both new and existing staff have been provided comprehensive training in a number of areas. This has ranged from basic training for new inspectors to more specialised areas such as fire assessment follow up. A significant programme of foundational training took place from late 2015 to early 2016 helping



Number of labour inspectors

June

2013 – 92

April

2016 – 284

Funding for Labour Inspectorate

2013 – 2014

US\$ 900,000

2014 – 2015

US\$ 3 million

2015 – 2016

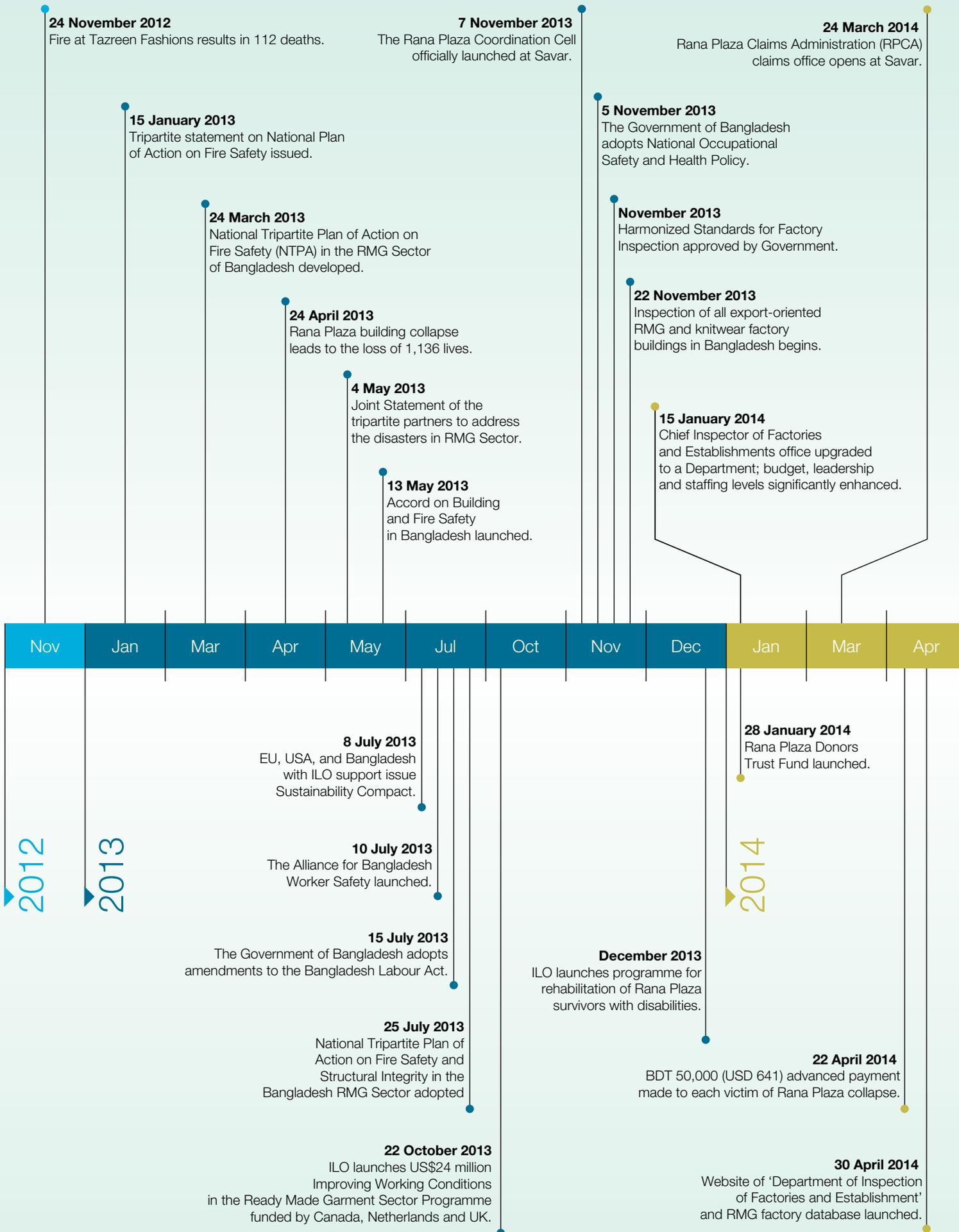
US\$ 4.1 million

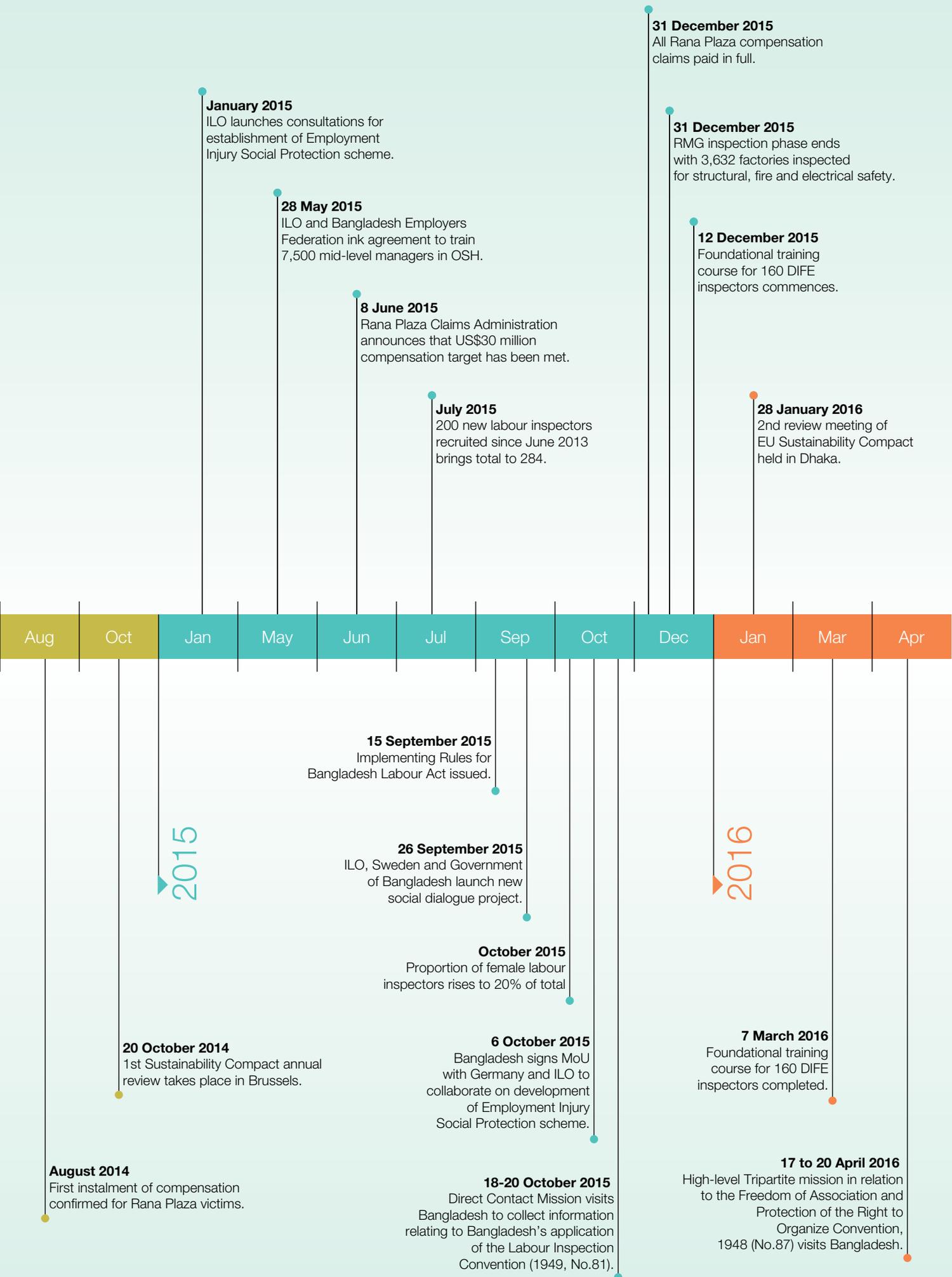


The Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) has undergone a comprehensive reform process since Rana Plaza. We now have more and better trained staff and are undertaking fundamental strengthening of the inspectorate by developing new systems and procedures to underpin our work.

Syed Ahmed

Inspector General
DIFE





August 2014
First instalment of compensation confirmed for Rana Plaza victims.

20 October 2014
1st Sustainability Compact annual review takes place in Brussels.

2015

January 2015
ILO launches consultations for establishment of Employment Injury Social Protection scheme.

28 May 2015
ILO and Bangladesh Employers Federation ink agreement to train 7,500 mid-level managers in OSH.

8 June 2015
Rana Plaza Claims Administration announces that US\$30 million compensation target has been met.

July 2015
200 new labour inspectors recruited since June 2013 brings total to 284.

15 September 2015
Implementing Rules for Bangladesh Labour Act issued.

26 September 2015
ILO, Sweden and Government of Bangladesh launch new social dialogue project.

October 2015
Proportion of female labour inspectors rises to 20% of total

6 October 2015
Bangladesh signs MoU with Germany and ILO to collaborate on development of Employment Injury Social Protection scheme.

18-20 October 2015
Direct Contact Mission visits Bangladesh to collect information relating to Bangladesh's application of the Labour Inspection Convention (1949, No.81).

31 December 2015
All Rana Plaza compensation claims paid in full.

31 December 2015
RMG inspection phase ends with 3,632 factories inspected for structural, fire and electrical safety.

12 December 2015
Foundational training course for 160 DIFE inspectors commences.

28 January 2016
2nd review meeting of EU Sustainability Compact held in Dhaka.

2016

7 March 2016
Foundational training course for 160 DIFE inspectors completed.

17 to 20 April 2016
High-level Tripartite mission in relation to the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No.87) visits Bangladesh.

Tears of joy mark labour inspector training



Md. Moniruzzaman receives his award from the State Minister for Labour and Employment

Md. Moniruzzaman could no longer contain his emotion as he received the award for best student on a comprehensive foundational training course for labour inspectors supported by ILO's RMG programme.

At a ceremony held 9 March 2016 presided over by Md Mujibul Haque, MP, State Minister, Ministry of Labour and Employment, the inspector from Dhaka explained that having the chance to be trained and then coming top amongst the 40 inspectors on the course had reduced him to tears of joy.

"I feel very proud. This was good training for all of us and will be very helpful in my service life. Now when I visit factories I am much more confident and know a lot more," Md. Moniruzzaman said.

160 inspectors gain an in depth understanding of International Labour Standards and Bangladesh Labour Laws as well as areas such as the Bangladesh and global economy, government service rules, procedures, team work and office management. As part of the reform process this course will become standard for all new inspectors.

The IT systems of DIFE are undergoing a major upgrade. This will help drive efficiency as well as transparency and accountability. The launch of a public data base and website in March 2014 where inspection reports can be accessed represents a step towards transparency and openness for the inspection service. In addition, basic

equipment such as motorcycles, office and specialist inspection equipment is being provided to DIFE so that it can function effectively.

Fire service

Recognizing the vital role of the Fire Service and Civil Defence Department (FSCD), emphasis



The Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments (DIFE) has produced a report with the support of the ILO's RMG programme detailing the actions and achievements of DIFE over the period May 2013 – October 2015. The report can be downloaded from www.dife.gov.bd/

has been placed on enhancing its capacity to carry out inspections and respond to incidents.

The Government of Bangladesh has boosted the strength of the FSCD with the number of fire service staff working as inspectors up from 50 to 268. ILO, with support from the US Department of Labor, is supporting this process by providing comprehensive training. A core of master trainers has been created

within FSCD to build the skills of colleagues nationwide. Meanwhile, 50 motorcycles have been provided by ILO's RMG programme funded by Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom to help fire inspectors visit factories.

Fire Service staff can now more effectively inspect factories, develop emergency action plans and carry out evacuation drills to ensure factory occupants evacuate

buildings safely when the alarm sounds. Collaboration between the Fire Service and Labour Inspectorate has also been greatly strengthened.

Other agencies such as GIZ and JICA are also working to strengthen the capacity of the Fire Service while Accord and Alliance have worked to build fire safety skills inside factories.

Fire inspectors check an exit stairway in an RMG factory.



Building A Culture Of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

The rush for development and to create jobs in Bangladesh often took place at the expense of workplace safety. Everything changed with the Tazreen Fashions fire and the Rana Plaza collapse. Conditions in the RMG industry came under global scrutiny and the need to develop a culture of safety shifted into high gear.

Three years on from Rana Plaza, workers and employers would appear to be more safety conscious although much still remains to be done including the key issue of remediation of RMG factories to correct faults identified during safety assessments.

ILO's has worked with the Government of Bangladesh to produce the country's first ever OSH Policy which clearly defines roles and responsibilities relating to OSH. An OSH profile presenting a complete picture of OSH in Bangladesh is also under production along with a National Plan of Action for OSH. These policy documents provide guidance to all national OSH efforts and help prioritize actions in areas with the biggest potential gains.

A key challenge has been the relative lack of technical capacity and understanding among employers and workers, and to a certain extent the government, on how to manage safety and health at the enterprise level.

In order to help create greater knowledge in the workplace, the ILO is collaborating with the Bangladesh Employers Federation (BEF) in an ambitious initiative to spread OSH awareness among some 800,000 workers.

Utilizing materials developed by the ILO's International Training Centre in Turin, a core group of 114 trainers has been formed, comprising government, employer organization and private sector staff. This group is already in the process of passing on its skills to some 7,500 managers and supervisors in 400 RMG factories. The newly trained managers will subsequently start building awareness among their workers.

Recognizing the vital role trade unions can play in safety, the ILO is working closely with the National Coordination Committee for Worker Education (NCCWE) and IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC). Through a training of trainers approach, a network of union leaders and organizers has been

built. Similarly to their government and industry counterparts, these trainers are undertaking workplace outreach activities to build awareness of occupational safety and health amongst union members.

The ILO/IFC Better Work programme is also operational in Bangladesh, and is currently helping improve working conditions and productivity in over 100 factories. As part of their tasks, Better Work advisors work with factories to help enhance awareness of safety among the management and workforce.

The Accord and Alliance have both carried out major efforts to enhance worker awareness in areas such as fire safety. GIZ and Denmark are amongst other development partners active in this area.

The amendment of the Bangladesh Labour Act in 2013 introduced the need for Safety Committees to be established in any factory with over 50 workers. The main



role of the Committees is to bring together management and workers to help create and maintain a safe workplace. The formation of Safety Committees is currently being piloted and once operational they

should make a major contribution to workplace safety.

To support the functioning of the committees, ILO is working with the labour inspectorate to prepare 'OSH

Kits'. These will include materials to help the committee members both better understand key OSH issues and carry out their tasks.

It is now an undisputed fact that Bangladesh RMG industry has made remarkable progress in workplace safety. The transformation of our apparel industry is not only playing a crucial role in shaping a glowing future of the sector but also turning Bangladesh into a role model for other countries to emulate. We are determined to establish 'Made in Bangladesh' tag as a symbol of safety in the global apparel market. We are committed to ensuring dignity, well being and safety of our garment workers.



Md. Siddiqur Rahman, President, Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

Building capacity on OSH

ILO is working with the Department of Inspections for Factories and Establishments to create awareness of practical steps as well as rights and obligations relating to OSH. These include materials aimed at workers, managers as well as owners.



Essential-OSH training as at 31 July 2016

Mid-level RMG managers trained on E-OSH: 8,038 from 400 factories

Safety Committee training

RMG managers/workers trained in Safety Committee participation: 81 from 18 factories

Better Work

Moves Into High Gear

Better Work Bangladesh is working to improve garment workers' lives by striving to secure safe, clean and equitable working environments.

Better Work Bangladesh

Factories participating in Better Work Bangladesh (July 2016)

96

Workers employed

197,912

Women workers

54%

Factory assessments completed

82

Buyer Partners

19

An innovative partnership between the ILO and the International Finance Corporation, Better Work Bangladesh was launched in October 2013 as part of the ILO's Improving Working Conditions Programme in the RMG Sector.

To do so, efforts are underway to build strong relations between

managers and workers who, with Better Work support, can then take ownership and responsibility for continuously improving working conditions and eventually competitiveness at the factory.

The Better Work model begins by getting to know the intricacies of each factory, building their trust in the programme and encouraging factories to take full ownership of compliance concerns. The first phase also requires that each factory, with the guidance of Enterprise Advisors (EAs) go through a self-evaluation of their working conditions. The interactions with the factories go beyond providing advisory services, to creating factory improvement plans, getting them to identify compliance deficiencies, and examining the sophistication of their Worker Participation Committees in relationship to their ability to resolve compliance issues.

A major benefit for RMG factories is that by participating in Better Work they are able to greatly reduce the duplication of buyer audits. Better workplace relations between management and staff can also not only lead to better

working conditions and employee satisfaction but also to higher productivity.

Better Work Bangladesh held its first stakeholders and buyers forum in Dhaka on the 6 and 7 March 2016 during which it took stock of progress made and discussed the future. The events saw dialogue take place on the Better Work programme and its partnerships, achievements and challenges as it seeks to improve working conditions and competitiveness in the Bangladesh ready-made garment sector. Issues discussed during the stakeholders forum included ongoing sustainability of Better Work, its ability to impact the industry as well as the role of trade unions in the programme.

Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom currently fund the Better Work programme in Bangladesh while the US Department of Labour and Switzerland support the programme in Bangladesh as well as globally.



The Better Work experience

Since October 2014 SQ Group, a leading RMG exporter, has been working with Better Work Bangladesh. Chief People Officer Md. Warisul Abid gives his impressions of the Group's Better Work experience to date.

Why did you choose to work with Better Work Bangladesh (BWB)?

SQ Group is the first company that voluntarily registered with Better Work Bangladesh. We chose to work with Better Work primarily for its unique approach to provide advisory, assessment and training services. RMG factories in Bangladesh go through different audits by different brands at different times. Hence, we felt that

a set of common standards would not only help avoid duplication of efforts, but also to achieve sustainable improvements in overall compliance at our factories.

What changes did you notice in your factory since working with BWB?

After working for one year with Better Work Bangladesh, we are noticing changes in the mindset and perspectives of our people towards addressing compliance issues at the factory level. Unlike the conventional auditing system, our team is gaining more understanding and capacity in performing the self-assessments. With valuable guidance and cooperation from BWB Enterprise Advisors, we are now coming up with self-directed action plans for appropriate solutions to the issues.

What are your expectations from BWB?

We believe Better Work has global expertise and knowledge. We want them as a trusted partner so that we continue to find out better, workable and tangible solutions to challenges we face. We believe Better Work will help facilitate better workplace communication so that we can bring positive change beneficial to our shop-floor associates, factory management and global buyers.

A Rana Plaza survivor supported by ILO makes paper bags as part of a home business.



Supporting

Rana Plaza Victims

The collapse of Rana Plaza left the dependents of the deceased or those injured facing an uncertain future. Support has been provided in the form of compensation, training and rehabilitation services.

Compensation for survivors and families

By late 2015 compensation had been paid in full in respect of claims relating to over 5,000 injured workers and dependents of the deceased. ILO played a key role in this process undertaking a coordination role as well as providing technical expertise on the design and operation of a compensation scheme in line with ILO Convention No.121 concerning benefits in the case of employment injury.

Agreement to provide compensation was formalised through the Rana Plaza Arrangement signed in November 2013 between the Bangladesh Ministry of Labour, leading buyers, employers' and workers' organizations as well as NGOs.

Despite the commitment by all parties, putting the plan into

practice faced considerable challenges. These included logistical issues such as registering, assessing and paying victims and their dependents, the coordination of a scheme with stakeholders based both locally and around the world as well as financial question of securing adequate funds to make compensation payments. Since payments were made vulnerability assessments of recipients have taken place to ensure that those who had received funds can take advantage of training or other support services available.

Employment Injury Social Protection for Bangladesh

Following Rana Plaza an unprecedented effort took place to provide compensation to survivors

and families of the dead. However it is neither realistic nor beneficial to repeat such a complex exercise whenever accidents occur. The Government of Bangladesh is therefore working with ILO and Germany to establish an Employment Injury Social Protection Scheme. Workers would receive compensation in the event of any future industrial accident while employers would also benefit as such a scheme would spread the risks arising from accidents across all enterprises. A feasibility study for the scheme has been undertaken while a number of study visits have also taken place to see how similar schemes operate in other countries in the region such as Cambodia and Malaysia.

Rana Plaza compensation

Total compensation paid to survivors and dependents

US\$ 30 million

Compensation lessons learned

A technical report presenting the design and operationalization of the Rana Plaza compensation scheme as well as lessons learnt has been developed by ILO's social protection department and can be downloaded at <http://bit.ly/1K2brju>

Rehabilitation for survivors

It has been a considerable challenge for victims of the Rana Plaza collapse to reintegrate into both society and work life. For its part, ILO has supported 300 injured workers with counselling and livelihoods training provided through NGOs Action Aid and BRAC.

Many survivors wished to setup their own small businesses rather than return to paid employment. A number of enterprises have been established and further assistance is being provided to help them become better established.

Meanwhile, many of those employed in different jobs have also received support from ILO. Psychosocial counselling is helping to address trauma and the return to the workplace. Physiotherapy has also helped address the physical challenges survivors continue to face.





Rehabilitation related actions supported by ILO

Survivors trained for reemployment

299 (231 women)

Those employed/self-employed

289 (205 women)

Victims/relatives receiving information
and counselling from Rana Plaza Cordination Committee

4,231 (2,605 women)

Victims/relatives receiving career, financial and
family counselling as part of vulnerability assessment

3,137



Much has been achieved since Rana Plaza, and all in all the industry is progressing favorably towards a safer standard. Now it is important that the standards of the Accord, Alliance and the National Action Plan are incorporated into a structure fully owned by the Government of Bangladesh, the employers and the employees. We believe that such tri-partite solution and a transparent way of working is the most efficient way to prevent disasters like Rana Plaza in the future.

Roger Hubert

H&M Country Manager

◀ After being injured at Rana Plaza, Shajahan Selim was helped by ILO to set up a small grocery shop.

Improving Labour Rights

While there has been good headway in enhancing safety in the Bangladesh ready-made garment industry, progress relating to workers' rights has been more challenging. More needs to be done to ensure speedy registration of trade unions and to promote social dialogue.

Improving labour rights

Consultations are needed on further amendments to Bangladesh's labour related legal framework towards ensuring full compliance with core ILO Conventions and to address the conclusions and recommendations of the ILO supervisory bodies, including with regard to freedom of association.

From 17 to 20 April 2016 a high-level tripartite mission in relation to the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize Convention, 1948 (No.87) visited Bangladesh. The mission was undertaken at the request of the Committee on the Application of Standards (CAS) at the 104th Session of the International Labour Conference. During its visit the mission met a wide range of government, employer and worker representatives as well as development partners.

Promoting Social Dialogue

There remains a widespread distrust in Bangladesh between employers and trade unions. Such negative





There are still some challenges with owners who are afraid that if unions form in their factories that productivity will suffer but the opposite is true. We need to show that unions will be good for business. More Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining will help lead to Decent Work and better factory productivity.

Alhaj Sukur Mahmud

President
National Coordination Council
for Workers Education

A trade union organizer trained by ILO passes on new skills to members.



attitudes pose barriers to the formation of new unions and for existing labour unions to operate effectively. Better understanding of the positive role trade unions can play as well constructive cooperation between employers and workers will help in this regard.

A new ILO social dialogue initiative funded by Sweden and Denmark will focus on the development of dialogue mechanisms and relations at workplace level between employers and workers. By doing so it will seek to prevent disputes. The initiative will furthermore develop conciliation and arbitration

mechanisms into a more credible, trusted and transparent system.

To ensure the sustainability of social dialogue, collective bargaining and workplace cooperation efforts, ILO is also upgrading the premises and equipment of the Industrial Relations Institute (IRI) as well as the training curricula and the capacity of the trainers. The IRI will be an important vehicle for delivering rights training for social partners.

Trade union registrations

The growth in the formation of new RMG unions slowed in the later

part of 2015. It is therefore vital to ensure that the registration process is carried out as a smooth and expeditious formality, in accordance with objective and transparent criteria.

Support for the Directorate of Labour and trade unions

Further efforts are also needed to ensure that alleged anti-union discrimination and unfair labour practices are investigated and if necessary, prosecuted in a timely and transparent manner. For this reason it is important that the

Dr Wazed Ali, trade union leader from the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE) discusses labour rights on the 'My labour, My rights' radio programme.



Directorate of Labour has the necessary staff and resources to carry out its role effectively.

ILO has worked with the Directorate of Labour (DoL) to help it launch on-line systems for the registration of trade unions and case management related to unfair labour practices. Training for DoL officials and union members is helping them better understand what constitutes discrimination while standard operating procedures to deal with discrimination are also being developed.

ILO is working with the National Coordination Committee for Workers Education (NCCWE) and the IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC) to build the capacity of trade union organizations and create an enabling environment for worker organizations and collective bargaining at factory level.

The capacity of over 2,500 workers' representatives, trade union organizers, mid-level managers and employers' organization members has been enhanced through various training events aimed at generating

better understanding of labour rights and obligations.

Outreach activities such as radio talk shows, drama and song performances, posters, brochures and other materials aimed at workers in the RMG as well as shrimp and leather industries also help raise awareness of rights and responsibilities.

Number of trade RMG sector trade unions

December 2012:

132

July 2016:

408



If we want real change we need real Freedom of Association in the factories. If we can have this then we can change all things. If there is no Freedom of Association or trade unions, then it will not be possible to address workers' rights or safety issues.

Babul Akhter

General Secretary

IndustriALL Bangladesh Council (IBC)



“Sometimes supervisors shout when the sewing machine needle breaks and production stops. But shouting does not solve the problem. We need to learn to communicate better.”

Anju Aru, an RMG factory sewing machine operator who has participated in workplace cooperation training supported by ILO.



Canada



International
Labour
Organization

The Sustainability Compact



A Sustainability Compact to promote continuous improvements in labour rights and factory safety in the Ready Made Garment and Knitwear Industry in Bangladesh was launched on 8 July 2013.

The Compact brings together the European Union (EU), Bangladesh, the US, Canada and the ILO accompanied by employers, trade unions and other key stakeholders with the common goal of improving working conditions and labour rights in Bangladesh's RMG industry. ILO is responsible for coordination and monitoring of the Compact commitment.

The Compact builds upon the National Tripartite Plan of Action (NTPA) on short and long-term commitments related to three inter-linked pillars: respect for labour rights; structural integrity of buildings and occupational safety and health; and responsible business conduct.

Specifically, it sets out a series of commitments and deadlines for changes relating to safety, legislation and working conditions as well as their effective implementation and enforcement.

The Compact Partners met in Dhaka, on 28 January 2016, to take stock of the progress in its implementation since the last review meeting a year before.

They recognized further progress made by Bangladesh since the last meeting. Areas highlighted included the issue of the

Bangladesh Labour Act implementing Rules, the completion of factory safety inspections, the launch of Better Work Bangladesh and the continuation of efforts to improve the capacity of the regulatory authorities.

Meanwhile concrete steps were identified in priority areas for continuing action. These included:

- ensuring that the trade union registration process is a formality
- more staff and resources for the Directorate of Labour so it can prosecute unfair labour practices and promote harmonious industrial relations
- adopting changes to the EPZ legal framework in order to protect freedom of association and collective bargaining rights
- ensuring the effective implementation of the Bangladesh Labour Act and its Rules, in line with relevant ILO Conventions
- completing the recruitment of labour inspectors
- ensuring effective inspections in all active export-oriented RMG factories, including subcontracting factories
- undertaking remediation of all export-oriented RMG factories, according to the developed Corrective Action Plans

The Compact partners will meet again in early 2017.

www.ilo.org/dhaka

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ILO's activities to improve working conditions in the RMG sector are funded by



Workers' rights and fire safety initiatives carried out by ILO are supported by

