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The disaster graphically demonstrated the true cost of quickly changing trends, or “fast fashion”, for high-street brands such as Gap and Benetton: dangerous working conditions, long hours and little pay for the garment workers. And what made it worse is that 2013 was global fashion’s most profitable year to date.

????????????????????“???”????????Gap??2013????
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“Most of the public is still not aware that human and environmental abuses are endemic across the fashion and textiles industry and that what they’re wearing could have been made in an exploitative way,” says Carry Somers, the co-founder of Fashion Revolution, who argues that transparency is the first step towards persuading brands to take responsibility for working conditions across the supply chain. Which is why, last week, people are taking those “label selfies”, tagging the brands of what they’re wearing, and asking #whomademyclothes.

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Often the answer will be “poor Bangladeshis”. But similar working conditions prevail across the globe, and the big brands seem blithely unconcerned. The international Behind the Barcode report, published last year by the charity Baptist World Aid Australia, found that 86 percent of brands surveyed made no attempt to ensure a living wage across their supply chains, and half didn’t even know the locations of the factories in which their garments are made. And while H&M and Inditex (Zara) have taken action to pay wages above the legal minimum at the final stage of production, in the “cut-make-trim” factories, this does not extend to the textile workers, who spin or embroider the fabric, or to the cotton farmers at the very beginning of the supply chain.

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The latter certainly deserve better treatment. In the past 15 years, there have been 250,000 cotton-farmer suicides in India (equivalent to one every 30 minutes) because they simply can’t make ends meet. But, says Somers: “Tragedies are preventable. All we need is to make every stakeholder in the fashion supply chain responsible and accountable for their action and impacts. We have incredible power as consumers, if we choose how to use it.”

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The 63-million reach of last year’s #whomademyclothes hashtags is just a first step.

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Vocabulary

come clean: ??????????

iniquitous: ??????????

stakeholder: ??????