

SWITCH-ASIA BRIEFING



Source: Silvia Sartori/SWITCH-Asia Network Facility

Sustainable development of Asia's textile and garment industry

“The garment industry in Myanmar is extremely important as we have seen in other countries. This sector has excellent potential for job creation, skills development and can be a starting point for further industrialisation. [...] Of course, job creation and industrial development are not enough. We must ask what is the quality of the jobs being created, what is the sustainability of the industrial development, will these jobs provide enough income and be safe enough for factory workers to lead healthy, productive and satisfying lives? Will our factories be clean enough and environmentally responsible enough that they will not destroy our eco-system? These are the important questions.”

(U Aye Myint, Myanmar's Minister of Labour at the opening of the SWITCH-Asia Conference in Yangon on 30 March 2015)

On 30-31 of March 2015, the SWITCH-Asia Network Facility held its first regional roundtable and networking event on the **“Sustainable Development of Asia's Garment and Textile Industry”** in Yangon, Myanmar. Since 2008, the EU-funded SWITCH-Asia Programme has been supporting 16 grant projects in the wider textile and garment sectors in Asia's developing countries, with interventions ranging from CSR to cleaner production, to product labelling and certification, and more. The Yangon conference was organised in cooperation with the ILO Country Office in Myanmar and brought together these SWITCH-Asia projects with an audience of local, Asian and European policy-makers, experts and practitioners.

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The relevance of the sector



The textile and garment industry is a sector of high economic, social, health and environmental relevance for both Asia and Europe. Textiles and garments account for one of ASEAN'S largest sources of exports, amounting to about EUR 35 billion in 2013¹. Europe imported textiles and garments totalling about €92 billion² in the same year. The significance of these sectors for employment, economic growth and trade in Asia and Europe cannot be underestimated. When complying with the provision of favourable work conditions and occupational health and safety measures, the sector also has

the potential to generate robust, positive impacts on gender balance (women account for the majority of the workforce employed by the sector), livelihood of households and communities, and skill development. Many Asian countries have historically played a key role in this sector, developing specific expertise along the supply chain of textiles and apparels. As countries continue developing and regional integration towards a common market moves forward, new cooperation patterns and opportunities arise for the sustainable development of the sector.

The case of Myanmar

Since it has embarked on a transition process towards democracy and international sanctions have been lifted, Myanmar has become a new and popular destination for international investment, and a new player in the regional textile industry. Not surprisingly, garment and textiles are included in priority areas of the new national export strategy.

While its cheaper costs currently make it an attractive and competitive alternative to more traditional textile hubs such as China or Bangladesh, the country is aware that a balance must be struck between competitiveness and social and environmental performance if sustainable growth and competitiveness are to be ensured in the long-run. In this regard, its current development stage provides it with an unprecedented chance to set the course for a new model of growth that takes stock of lessons learnt and best practice from the region. ***“As a latecomer, Myanmar has the opportunity to learn from other countries’ industry experience, which displays different models of growth, which may support the development of a local responsible and sustainable industry”***, noted during the conference by Michal Strahilevitz Ben Eliezer, ILO's Chief Technical Advisor, Responsible Business Programme.



2 1) [http://euratex.eu/library/statistics/key-data/key-data-details/?tx_ttnews\[tt_news\]=4285&cHash=080b12174f0f9e9ceb5bf368f4fcb9036](http://euratex.eu/library/statistics/key-data/key-data-details/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=4285&cHash=080b12174f0f9e9ceb5bf368f4fcb9036)
2) http://www.hktdc.com/resources/MI_Portal/Article/rp/2015/04/469453/1430290530306_SriLankaAppare

The role of consumers

When addressing the sustainable development of the Asian garment industry, the role of consumers should also be kept in mind. With Europe being one of the main export destinations of textiles and garments produced in Asia, European consumers have the potential to shape the textile sourcing process following social and environmental impact criteria. After accidents such as the Rana Plaza collapse in Bangladesh in April 2013, awareness is spreading and demand increases regarding safety, compliance and the environmental impact along the textile supply chain. In this context, it is noteworthy to remark that **the EU is planning a Garment and Textile Industry Flagship Initiative during the European Year of Development 2015**, which has the objective to promote responsible supply chains in the garment sector. Traceability and transparency of production are thus particularly important to facilitate informed purchasing decisions among European customers. Concurrently, the OECD is also addressing this topic with its initiative on 'Responsible supply chains in the textile and garment sector'³.



Source: PRO SUSTAIN project

Addressing consumer concerns and in response to the waste of resources caused by 'Fast Fashion' with its dozen collections per year, an alternative 'Slow Fashion' movement is developing, based on comprehensive awareness and informed decisions by all stakeholders in the fashion supply chain.

Enabling sustainable development of the textile industry

During the SWITCH-Asia Conference, David Birnbaum, founder of the garment industry consultancy Third Horizon, remarked that **"in an industry willing to impose sustainable development, where the customers already enjoy direct relationships with the upstream suppliers and large enough to force those suppliers to follow rules, sustainable development becomes a very practical strategy. The difficulty lies in the ability to develop the tools necessary to achieve sustainable development."** Already concluded and still on-going SWITCH-Asia projects which operate in the region already

illustrate some solutions and possible routes forward in response to such challenges. Operating in different countries and along different links of the textile supply chain, they all represent scalable best practice on how cleaner production and sustainable practice can be integrated into the textile industry with the result of enhancing industry competitiveness, transferring skills and know-how, enhancing livelihoods, generating employment, preserving traditional handicrafts and minimising adverse environmental impacts whilst maintaining and securing growth.



Source: The SWITCH-Asia Network Facility

Ms Alina Neacsu presented the EU garment flagship initiative.

3) <https://mneguidelines.oecd.org/responsible-supply-chains-textile-garment-sector.htm>

As the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) implements a common market by 2015, opportunities multiply for member countries to develop innovative partnerships and pursue new cooperation patterns based on complementarities. Putting together their specialisations and areas of expertise in the textile and apparels sectors, the AEC member states could create a new model of regional integration that addresses all links of the industry supply chain and promotes vertical integration, minimising inter-regional competition and strengthening trade within the region.

ASEAN's garment industry: complementarities, competition and mutually reinforcing advantages

By Khine Khine Nwe, Secretary General, Myanmar Garment Manufacturer's Association

Currently, the nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are harnessing the power of trade, migratory labour and transferable capital to create prosperity in South-east Asia. In particular, the international garment industry within ASEAN is helping to integrate regional investment, transfer skills, create jobs and boost economic growth.

With its new opening and democratisation, Myanmar is the latest nation to embark on this path, following in the footsteps of Vietnam and Thailand in achieving considerable progress in GDP growth and industrialisation. Complementarities and opportunities for cooperation are abundant within ASEAN. Let us consider for instance the case of Thailand, Singapore and Myanmar. Myanmar possesses the most cost-effective labour for garment manufacturing in this group. Singapore excels in banking and finance – not just within Southeast Asia, but globally.

Thailand has decades of experience in value-added manufacturing across several major industries. Similarly, Singapore's relative lack of manufacturing means that their economic base depends on providing financial and consultancy services for nations who produce the consumer goods on which they depend. Thailand's relatively expensive manufacturing means their firms can profit from expanding production and creating jobs in countries like Myanmar.

This is precisely what we are seeing. Banks and law firms from Singapore provide the professional services helping to propel Myanmar's economic development. Thai manufacturing firms are setting up operations in Myanmar and in so doing create jobs and transfer technical skills. This also holds true for Vietnamese logistics companies and engineering firms based in Yangon.

However, the challenge for ASEAN is not just growth, but to foster respon-

sible and smart growth. ASEAN economies must embrace lean and safe manufacturing, robust and effective wastewater management and utilise renewable energy.

Myanmar's industrial environment and manufacturing base are eager for new skills and knowledge transfer. Sustainable production techniques can be learned and embraced by Myanmar's burgeoning manufacturers as standard practice. Responsible manufacturing investment can be prioritised. The Myanmar Investment Commission already requires a CSR policy to accompany new foreign investments in manufacturing. In this way, the Myanmar government is welcoming those investors committed to responsible investment and skills transfer. Myanmar can leapfrog from bygone manufacturing practice to 21st Century best practice. Myanmar's lost decade during sanctions now translates into an opportunity to do more, and faster and better. Within ASEAN, strengths and weaknesses can be used to complement each other towards a sustainable growth model. Environmental resource constraints make sustainable production more than just desirable – they make it essential. We must use trade and investment as tools to build an environmentally smart and responsible manufacturing base in Southeast Asia that enriches lives without diminishing natural resource wealth.



Source: Silvia Sartori / The SWITCH-Asia Network Facility

SWITCH-ASIA PROJECT CASE STUDY FROM VIETNAM, CAMBODIA AND LAOS



Sustainable Product Innovation in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos (SPIN-VCL)

The EU-funded SWITCH-Asia project “Sustainable Product Innovation in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos” (SPIN-VCL) focused on sustainable product design by improving material choice and use, production technologies, distribution systems, environmental impact (especially energy consumption) during the product’s lifetime and end-of-life options. Implemented between 2010 and 2014, and working closely together with industry stakeholders such as business organisations, design institutes, universities and international donors, SPIN succeeded in having more than 2 000 products redesigned in a more sustainable way. A large proportion of these products were brought to the market by more than 500 companies in the sectors of handicrafts, furniture, food, textiles and fashion in each of the three countries.

With regard specifically to the textiles and fashion sectors, the project supported 25 companies in Vietnam and Cambodia on textile use in local handicrafts, the reuse of materials like silk into new products and the up-cycling of residuals, as well as promoting the companies internationally. In Vietnam, new designs were developed based on

traditional minority themes, using fewer materials and expanding their reach beyond traditional markets.

In cooperation with experts from the project partner UNEP, SPIN also developed a significant policy component with draft policy action plans for Sustainable Product Policies being presented to the governments of Vietnam and Cambodia, especially on public procurement (for instance of textile products) for officials, infrastructure workers and health sector clothing.

SPIN-VCL developed a toolkit with a full set of do-it-yourself manuals, technical studies on markets, sustainable product innovation (SPI) potential and different technological options. A searchable database and a simple hybrid expert system on SPI have been developed for use by the target groups. Local intermediaries are using this toolkit today as part of their service, and sustainable product innovation has become a common service offered, especially in Vietnam.

Besides gaining enhanced exposure locally – the project’s shop is centrally located in Hanoi and takes an active part in local trade fairs – the project became a “gateway to Europe” for the companies performing the best SPI practice. They were offered market access via visibility at fairs and exhibitions. SPIN-VCL facilitated participation in over 10 international trade fairs in Vietnam and Cambodia, and four years of participation in the European trade fair ‘Ambiente’. Via SPIN-VCL, 30 companies have been enrolled in export-oriented programmes of the Dutch Centre for Import Promotion for Developing Countries, which facilitate the introduction of many innovative products into Western markets.

For more information on this project, please visit: <http://www.switch-asia.eu/projects/spin-vcl/>



Photos source: SPIN-VCL project



SWITCH-ASIA PROJECT CASE STUDY FROM MYANMAR



SMART Myanmar

The EU-funded SWITCH-Asia “SMEs for environmental Accountability, Responsibility and Transparency” (SMART Myanmar) project began in early 2013. The project worked closely with the Myanmar Garment Manufacturer’s Association (MGMA) and dozens of its member factories and several other institutional partners, such as the national chamber of commerce (UMFCCI) and the Myanmar Bankers’ Association, to promote and educate manufacturers on sustainable consumption and production (SCP) best practice. The objective is to increase compliance with social and environmental guidelines and standards and ultimately the competitiveness of the sector beyond profits alone.

In Myanmar, initial knowledge of compliance with international social and environmental guidelines and standards, occupational health and safety practices, and sustainable approaches in garment manufacturing were severely lacking. The project therefore initiated a robust training programme, hiring and training a team of young local industrial engineers and pairing them with international textile and garment experts from Germany, China and India. This group engaged in factory interventions with 16 selected factories, advising on and assisting with improvements in factory productivity with a focus on resource efficiency, i.e. to reduce energy, water and fabric consumption, and social compliance emphasising occupational health and safety, also with reference to the use of chemicals. Following assistance from SMART Myanmar, the selected factories recorded reductions in fabric wastage of up to 18.3%, energy consumption reduction of up to 20% and water consumption reduction of up to 16%. More efficient production processes have also been established, dangerous objects and chemicals discarded, aisles and emergency exits cleared, software to monitor efficient production installed, best practice in writing and organising employee contracts taught, and hiring procedures to avoid child labour introduced. All these changes ultimately resulted in an increased productivity of up to 30% in two years, thus positively contributing to enhanced industry performance.

Major steps were made to improve workers safety, i.e. evacuation maps, new emergency exits, fire prevention training, personal safety equipment, and access to basic health services. Showcase factories have improved their management systems



Photos source: SMART Myanmar project

and formulated management procedures to prevent child labour and reduce working hours. Some factories have managed to reduce their monthly labour fluctuation rate by 20%. After SMART's compliance academy, one factory immediately passed an international certification process and received an order from an international retailer.

Capacity building provided to MGMA enabled the industry association to develop new income-generating services, like commercially successful events and exhibitions, new communication tools including their newsletters and well visited website, matchmaking services for international investors and buyers, and a CSR advisory desk. The association also ratified the first-ever Code of Conduct for Myanmar's manufacturing sector. Monthly seminars are organised by MGMA with project support on topics like environmental labels and are well attended by garment companies. Business delegations are organised to improve the policy framework, the most recent to Bangladesh to gain insight on their customs and tariffs regime and to learn from good practice.

For more information on this project please visit:
<http://www.switch-asia.eu/projects/smart-myanmar/>



The large fashion retailers can place even greater demands on manufacturers to lower their costs and to produce and ship goods quickly, but at the same time they also ask for social and environmental compliance. It is very challenging for us to fulfill all these requirements but we can become more compliant. After an assessment of our factory carried out by the SMART Myanmar SCP consultants and after attending their Social Compliance Academy, we set up a Corrective Action Plan. On the basis of it, we implemented several measures - some of them did not cost much like training on how to prevent accidents and use protective equipment in the cutting room. We did much for fire prevention and safety, installed fire extinguishers and established escape routes. Most of the managers and supervisors had training on safety. The workers in this factory are now aware about hazards and safety. I am a strong believer in good and safe working conditions and their positive impact on my business: there is a direct link between health and safety and productivity. The cost of preventing hazards is much smaller than the costs of accidents and illness. I need to provide good working conditions in order to recruit and retain skilled workers who are a scarcity in the tight labour market of Myanmar's garment sector. At the end the day, what is good for employees is good for the company. My next step will be to incentivise compliance with the HR department and line supervisors."

Dr. Min Gaung Oo, Managing Director of Myanmar Synergy (one of the factories supported by the SMART Myanmar project)

Promoting fair trade textiles and garments from Asia

By Christine Gent, Executive Director, World Fair Trade Organisation – Asia

Sustainable textile production is driven by respect for the environment, people and profit. Fair trade pushes the boundaries between profitable trade and development by including the supply chains' most marginalised and the unrecognised actors. In so doing, it recognises vulnerable workers, often women, in the sustainable supply chain, both in mainstream and alternative markets.

WFTO-Asia connects Asian Fair Trade Organisations (FTOs), building platforms for them to cooperate at both national and regional levels and to gain market access worldwide, facilitating the recognition process, enabling them to gain credibility, market access and to campaign around trade issues. WFTO was founded in 1987 as the International Federation for Alternative Trade (IFAT). WFTO-Asia, the regional chapter, was registered in 2009. The World Fair Trade Organisation Guarantee System (WFTO GS), launched in 2011, recognises when an organisation is dedicated to Fair Trade regardless of the product made. Currently, there are 76 FTOs working in textiles and garments in eleven Asian countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Laos, Mongolia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Vietnam.

A FTO can be an independent manufacturer within an international supply chain (such as Teddy Exports in South India who supply bags to The Body Shop), or they can represent the alternative supply chain with FTOs in all links of the chain: the manufacturer, importer and retailer (such as a dedicated Fair Trade Brand like People Tree which buys from FTOs in Nepal, Bangladesh and India and sells the garments in Europe).

While there is no one set formula defining the FTO beyond being a financially independent unit, all FTOs comply with the ten principles of Fair Trade throughout the organisation:

1. Creating Opportunities for Economically Disadvantaged Producers
2. Transparency and Accountability
3. Fair Trading Practices
4. Payment of a Fair Price
5. Ensuring no Child Labour and Forced Labour
6. Commitment to Non Discrimination, Gender Equity and Women's Economic Empowerment, and Freedom of Association
7. Ensuring Good Working Conditions
8. Providing Capacity Building
9. Promoting Fair Trade
10. Respect for the Environment

While the number of FTOs is growing – in Asia alone it grew by 16% in 2014 – fair trade has significant potential for further growth within the garment industry, giving recognition to the producers down the supply chain where they can be difficult to monitor, connecting consumers to primary producers, and by providing alternative trading models from the producer to the consumer.

FTOs participate in ground-breaking work. There are groups training women in the slums of Mumbai to produce garments for the European high street. FTOs provide viable employment alternatives to the sex trade industry in Kolkata. Environmentally, there are FTOs who are delivering garments that are certified organic cotton, which is Fair Trade in production. In Bangladesh, groups are working with remote rural production centres enabling job creation, reducing urban migration and enabling families to stay together.

For fair trade to be fully successful, consumers need to learn more about the social and environmental impact of the garment industry and gain appreciation of the value of different textiles and their production. Value has to change from being a simple equation with only product quality, design and price to a complex one that includes the social and environmental cost.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) has not yet fully recognised fair trade as part of their reporting process. Many labour-intensive industries within the producing countries of Asia could identify how much of their purchasing has the potential to be fair trade and then measure their progress against fulfilling this target. This would be a significant incentive for companies to engage with fair trade.

For fair trade to make a real impact in textiles, there needs to be more engagement of fair trade within the fashion industry. Awareness-raising around fair trade through the fashion press, film, and social media is making some progress in attracting the attention of the fashion industry. Despite this, demand for fast fashion needs to be reduced and the market for sustainable production to develop, which would allow longer lead times, more compatible with fair trade production. At the same time, limited investment in sustainable supply chains (especially for financing advance payments to producers), capacity building and market development are holding progress back, and delaying the process of scaling up. Areas where the garment industry and fair trade can work together need to be identified, FTOs need to build capacity so that these areas can be addressed, and with this in place, CSR needs to define ways to report against fair trade processes.

SWITCH-ASIA PROJECT CASE STUDY FROM BANGLADESH AND INDIA



Jute: an eco-friendly alternative for a sustainable future

Jute is vital to the economy and poor communities in India and Bangladesh. Bangladesh is the largest exporter of both raw jute and jute products. For many years, jute has been the biggest source of income from export in Bangladesh (accounting for 68% of export earnings in the country in 1980-1981), while India remains the largest producer of both raw jute and jute products. However, with the emergence of synthetic products, demand for jute fell drastically (in 2004, jute accounted for just 3% of all Bangladeshi exports), impacting gravely on the livelihood of jute producers and on environmental sustainability.

The EU-funded SWITCH-Asia project “Jute: an eco-friendly alternative for a sustainable future project” was carried out between 2010 and 2014 with the aim of mitigating this situation through promoting sustainable production and consumption of eco-friendly Jute Diversified Products (JDPs).

SMEs producing JDPs lacked the ability to supply eco-friendly and demand-driven JDPs. Similarly the market was

not conducive for growth of JDPs. The project interventions therefore included improving technical skills of SMEs and enhancing production processes addressing pollution, health and safety and energy savings. The project also aimed to improve market access, consumer awareness and JDP-conducive policies.

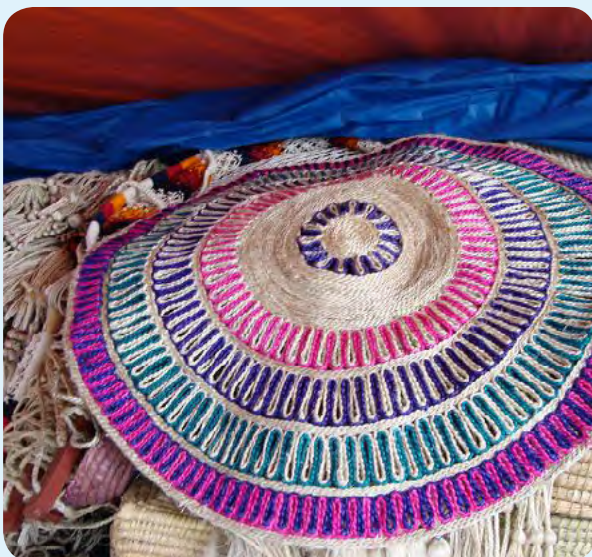
The project provided technical workshops, consumer campaigns, policy advocacy, remote mentoring and guidelines on health & safety and carbon emissions to SMEs.

As a result:

- 36 service providers were trained, who continue to provide needs-based support even after expiry of the project;
- 162 JDP SMEs increased their sales by 21% through eco-friendly production practices and market access;
- Around 23 500 producers increased their income by 15%;
- 30 SMEs in Bangladesh and 10 SMEs in India developed 193 new ranges of JDPs for local market;
- 21 Bangladeshi SMEs developed 51 ranges for institutional buyers;
- 7 SMEs in Bangladesh and 4 SMEs in India developed 39 new ranges of JDPs for the EU market;
- Two Business Facilitation Units were established as one-stop service centres for participating SMEs. These centres run on a commercial basis and have already facilitated total sales of JDPs worth €145 000 in Bangladesh and €143 400 in India;
- The Bangladeshi Government initiated enforcement measures to implement the Mandatory Packaging Act 2010.

For more information on this project please visit:

<http://www.switch-asia.eu/projects/jute-an-eco-friendly-alternative-for-a-sustainable-future/>



Photos source: Eco-Jute project



Changing consumer behaviour and its influence on European fashion retailers

By Dr. Christina Raab, Principal Consultant & Head of Strategy, MADE-BY

Sustainability in the garment and fashion industry has increasingly come into the spotlight in recent years. Efforts to tackle the environmental and social challenges of these sectors have gained momentum, not least through governmental and business initiatives, but also media reports and targeted civil society campaigns⁴.

These have also contributed to greater awareness among consumers and a certain interest in manufacturing conditions and the stories behind the clothes. While the number of informed and conscious consumers is increasing globally, the number of consumers that factor sustainability into their actual purchasing decisions and are ready to pay a premium for it still remains relatively small⁵.

Changing consumer behaviour and engaging consumers can however become a powerful solution and driving force for many of the pressing sustainability issues of the garment industry. Taking the case of waste as an example: Europeans discard about 5.8 million tonnes of textiles each year; only 25% of which is recycled⁶. Through new business models, consumers can be empowered to help to close the loop for the industry. Such innovative approaches include take-back schemes in retailer stores that collect worn clothes and award the consumer for it,

like H&M offers in collaboration with I:CO. Such clothes can then either be up-cycled to vintage or second-hand collections, down-cycled into insulation material or recycled into yarn and fibres for new clothing. Another business model that has been gaining traction is the leasing of clothes, like the scheme offered by Mud Jeans. The consumer leases a pair of jeans for one year and then brings them back to the apparel brand for reuse, repair or recycling. Helping the consumer to understand the value of new and worn clothes is pivotal to shifting away from fast fashion consumption and disposal behaviour.

Consumer-facing textile labels and certifications have also contributed to increasing consumer awareness. Studies show that in order to be effective, labels need to be clear, relevant and understandable to the consumer. Several initiatives at the national level in Europe have recently launched online platforms and related apps that explain and compare textile labels in easy ways to help consumers make more sustainable choices. One example on a federal government level is the consumer portal "Siegelklarheit" in Germany that was derived from a project sponsored by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Additionally, new means of communicating with consumers are emerging. These focus on making sustainable lifestyles core to brand value and reputation, shifting from sustainable products to building a holistic sustainable brand. This approach often entails comprehensive sustainability programmes that take brand, supply chains and products into account. Key to such consumer communication is transparency, credibility of information and trust. Furthermore, sustainable solutions provided to consumers need to be practical, should ideally be fun and entail a feel-good factor, as in the case of G-Star RAW where trendy collections contain yarn spun from recycled plastic rubbish recovered from oceans and coastlines.

Consumer interest towards sustainable lifestyles is expected to increase over the next few years⁷. Consumer behavioural change is furthermore projected to become a driving market force for the textile industry in and beyond Europe. This includes not only today's consumers but also tomorrow's customers and the emerging middle classes in many Asian countries. With greater access to data and social media, consumers will have more transparency and information on product impact and greater expectations around the sustainability performance of brands and retailers.

It is essential to continue engaging consumers as key stakeholders in the textile value chain that holds the power to accelerate sustainable consumption through purchasing behaviour and choice. If consumers are informed and educated, they will care about the impacts of the garment sector, choose clothes more consciously and also reward sustainability with their purchasing influence.



Source: The SWAP Team / CC

10 4) Examples include, besides others, the EC Garment Initiative, the Partnership for Sustainable Textiles in Germany, the Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety, the Better Cotton Initiative or the Greenpeace Detox Campaign.
5) Greendex Reports; National Geographic and GlobeScan; 2014
6) Environmental Indicator Report; EEA; 2014
7) "Value Gap. The business value of changing consumer behaviour"; BSR and Futerra; 2013

SWITCH-ASIA PROJECT CASE STUDY FROM PAKISTAN



Sustainable cotton production in Pakistan's cotton ginning SMEs (SPRING)

Cotton production supports Pakistan's textile industry, the largest industrial sector in the country, comprising more than 400 textile mills and 1 000 ginneries. The cotton and textiles sector accounts for at least 30% of Pakistan's total labour force and nearly 60% of exports.

By 2015, the EU-funded SWITCH-Asia project "Sustainable cotton production in Pakistan's cotton ginning SMEs" (SPRING) aims at having at least 500 cotton gin SMEs recognise the benefits of sustainable cotton production and consumption and 40% of them committing to more sustainable production practice, in line with agreed better ginning practice guidelines, and supported by the procurement practices of European retailers.

The SPRING project focuses on: demonstrating the importance of sustainable cotton production to ginners; developing ginners' links to both Better Cotton farmers and procurers; and developing and encouraging adoption of more efficient and sustainable ginning practices pertaining to process and mechanical efficiency, energy efficiency, fibre quality and decent work.

SPRING encourages a switch to more environmentally sustainable practice in the ginning industry of Pakistan, focuses on increasing the capacity of ginning industry for sustainable cotton production and sourcing practice, improves business capacity to produce more market-driven products, ensures that workers have the right set of skills to work with ginning SMEs, establishes linkages between Better Cotton farmers, ginners and other supply chain actors sustainable service provision, and campaigns for increasing demand for sustainable cotton and cotton products as well as supportive policies for the sector. Three years after its launch, the project has developed four sets of around 45 Best Ginning Practices (BGPs) related to mechanical maintenance/condition improvement, production process improvement, electrical energy conservation and environment, health and safety conditions improvement for participating ginners and guided them to implement recommended BGPs.

Adoption of these practices has already resulted in 10-15% overall savings in the use of electricity, a reduction of 1.5 to 2 KWh/bale, energy savings of 31 451KWh/season with a monetary value of €5 630 and a very short payback period of 23 days, a 30% increase in productivity, a significant reduction in the short fibre index, and increased fibre length resulting in attracting more buyers and a better price for good quality cotton.

Establishment of strong linkages between Better Cotton producers, farmers, ginners of the SWITCH-Asia SPRING project, spinners and retail end suppliers has resulted in enhanced procurement of Better Seed cotton as well as production of Better Cotton bales.

Street theatre was used as an innovative tool to raise awareness among ginning workers, ginners and the rural community regarding social and environmental issues in cotton production and processing. The theatre performances conducted in rural areas attracted more than 5 000 members of the farming community, gin workers and the general public.

The activities conducted have resulted in an increase in interest of ginners in becoming part of the Better Cotton System. In 2015, more than 170 ginners requested registration as Better Cotton Initiative ginners to cater for more than 90 000 Better Cotton farmers engaged in sustainable cotton production at the farm level.

Besides exploring the use of cotton gin waste as a medium for growing mushrooms, using it as an efficient fuel in a household gasifier stove, the SPRING project team has succeeded in the production of sun-dried board using cotton gin waste as a raw material. The board made at local board-making unit is a mixture of 60% cotton gin waste, 30% wood particles and 10% wood fibre. It is found to be 80% stronger and 60% stiffer than commercial insulation boards.

For more information on this project please visit:
<http://www.switch-asia.eu/projects/cotton-production/>



Photos source: SPRING project

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

With its significant impact on resources and environment, industrial growth, trade, employment, skills development and livelihoods, the textile industry remains a sector of utmost relevance for both developed and developing countries worldwide. Asia has historically been a key player in this field, with many of its countries notorious for sourcing and processing textile products. A latecomer in the group, Myanmar has recently become an appealing new destination for foreign investment in this industry.

The discussions held during the SWITCH-Asia Regional Roundtable in Yangon and insights provided by SWITCH-Asia projects operating in this sector pointed to increased awareness among stakeholders about the need to shift to more sustainable consumption and production practice. Consumers are voicing stronger demand for more transparent and fairer working conditions, while buyers and exporters increasingly realise that compliance and sustainability are key to enhancing competitiveness. International initiatives are multiplying to enable and promote more transparent and sustainable supply chains within the textile and garment sector.

Despite these promising steps forward and commendable initiatives, challenges such as fierce competition, weak regulatory enforcement and the popular “fast fashion” still prevent the mainstreaming of sustainable practice into textile production and consumption. Continuous and additional efforts are needed to enable a truly sustainable industry, which besides voluntary agreements may entail regulatory actions, for example based on the EU Generalised Scheme of Preferences. To this end, the cases developed and supported by SWITCH-Asia projects represent innovative and alternative best practice coupled with cost-effective solutions that can be replicated and scaled-up in the region.

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