

Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry in Asia (FABRIC)

The challenge

The textile industry plays a major role in the economy of many Asian countries. In Bangladesh and Cambodia, it generates around 80 per cent of all export earnings, in Pakistan over 50 per cent. The goal is further growth. While the underlying conditions vary considerably between countries, the challenges they face are similar – to ensure decent conditions for workers and reduce environmental impacts.

To overcome these challenges while continuing to expand, the industry needs to be more socially, environmentally and economically sustainable. This can be done, but it requires collaboration. Local production companies, business associations, ministries, trade unions, civil society and international fashion brands can learn a lot from each other – especially if they are prepared to work together more closely than before.

The goal

The FABRIC project (Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry in Asia) supports the Asian textile industry in its transformation towards fair production for people and the environment. It identifies the common interests of key actors – in the factories, ministries, civil society and international brand manufacturers – and brings them together with the aim of developing a shared vision of sustainability and promoting greater cooperation. Such an approach can pave the way for qualitative growth alongside price competition.

Acting as a think tank, the project creates a pool of knowledge from successful sustainability initiatives in individual countries

Programme	Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry in Asia (FABRIC)
Partner organisations	NGOs, government bodies and private sector and civil society organisations in Asia, in particular Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Pakistan and Viet Nam
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Overall term	2015 to 2021

and disseminates that expertise across the wider region. In cooperation with global initiatives such as the Alliance for Sustainable Textiles, it works with industry stakeholders towards adopting a joint position on sustainable production criteria. The project operates in Bangladesh, Cambodia, Myanmar, Pakistan and Viet Nam and also works with China.

The areas of work

Regional dialogue and knowledge-sharing: Strong networks and regular knowledge-sharing can help the industry to implement sustainable business models across the board. The project works to create the right conditions and develop the capacity for such a dialogue. It brings actors together, builds trust and promotes greater willingness to share knowledge.

Cooperation with the private sector: The project encourages international buyers to use their market power in support of sustainability initiatives. For example, they can help to improve working conditions in local factories by working with producers to find practical solutions.



All stakeholders in Asia's textile industry face big challenges – ensuring decent conditions for workers and reducing environmental impacts.



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The next step is to transfer those solutions to other actors, perhaps in the form of strategic alliances or integrated development partnerships.

Social and labour standards: Workers are now much more prepared to stand up for their rights, and in this area there is growing pressure from consumers and international buyers. With regard to labour and social standards, the project aims to raise awareness, provide information and develop local capacity. To this end, FABRIC works with both employers and workers by facilitating social dialogue, mechanisms for worker representation and the introduction of management systems.

Gender equality: The majority of employees in the textile and garment industry are women. Most work in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs with very little hope of job progression. The project establishes representation mechanisms that enable them to protect their interests. It improves the advisory services available to female workers and develops targeted trainings to help them acquire new skills and qualifications.

Environment: With regard to environmental and resource management, FABRIC aims to disseminate new approaches that have been tried and lessons that have been learned in individual countries across Asia. In part, this simply involves passing on specific knowledge – on how to avoid the use of toxic chemicals, for example. At the same time, however, the project shows the groups involved how important it is to adopt an efficient system of environmental management and helps them to implement suitable measures.

The results

- **Labour conditions and rights:** Around 70,000 workers in more than 50 factories in Cambodia, Myanmar and Pakistan have participated in dialogue training with managers and employee representatives. The project ran some of these training sessions together with international retailers such as Adidas, Tchibo and H&M. To cite just one example of the benefits of this training, the accident rate in participating factories fell by up to 34 per cent. In Cambodia, FABRIC worked with the Ministry of Labour to revise the code of conduct for labour inspectors and, on this basis, provided initial and further training for 180 inspectors.
- **Female workers' rights:** When they are not working, female employees in Myanmar can meet at one of the women's centres where FABRIC has set up a legal advice service. To date, around 600 women have used the service to find out about key elements of the country's employment law. Together with sequa gGmbH, the project has developed an app called Shwe Job that provides information on employment law and workplace safety rules. The app is used by over 11,000 employees, and 20 manufacturers have introduced it in their factories.
- **Regional knowledge-sharing:** FABRIC established the first inter-Asian network of producer associations under the name of STAR (Sustainable Textile of the Asian Region). This partnership led to a series of conferences entitled Asian Dialogues on Sustainable Production in the Textile and Garment Sector. The Asian Dialogues are a platform where representatives of the Asian textile industry, government bodies, buyers and employees can discuss important matters and develop a more cooperative relationship. More than 600 participants attended the eight events in five partner countries.
- **Cooperation with Chinese investors:** Most textile factories in Cambodia and Myanmar are owned by foreign investors, mainly from China. Thanks to training courses organised by FABRIC, they have been able to improve their knowledge in areas such as national employment law, cooperation with trade unions and local culture.

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