

Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry in Asia

Sustainable economic development

Background

The textile industry is a key sector of the economy in many Asian countries and, depending on the country, accounts for up to 80 per cent of export revenue. Although the underlying conditions in these countries vary considerably, the major challenges in this industry are the same: ensuring decent conditions for workers and reducing environmental impacts. As the industry is continuing to grow, local production companies, business associations, the relevant ministries, trade unions, civil society and international fashion brands need to intensify their cooperation in order to create a more socially, ecologically and economically sustainable industry. Moreover, the majority of workers are women, most work in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs with very little hope of job progression.

Our approach

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 and brings them together with the aim of developing a shared vision of sustainability and promoting greater cooperation. The project creates a pool of knowledge from successful sustainability initiatives in individual countries and disseminates that expertise across the wider region. In cooperation with global initiatives such as the Partnership for Sustainable Textiles, it works with industry stakeholders towards adopting a joint position on sustainable production criteria. A regional dialogue and knowledge-sharing is, for example, carried out via the first inter-Asian network of



Project name	Promoting Sustainability in the Textile and Garment Industry in Asia (FABRIC)
Commissioned by	German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ)
Project region	Asia: Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, Myanmar, Pakistan and Vietnam
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producer associations (STAR). Physical conferences, digital seminar series and the Asia Garment Hub as a digital knowledge platform offer further opportunities for exchange.

The benefits

Along common interests, the project connects actors in the Asian textile industry so that they can develop a common understanding of the prerequisites for sustainability, share knowledge and cooperate more closely.

The project encourages international buyers to use their market power in support of sustainability initiatives. Practical solutions are developed together with producers, which can then be transferred to other actors through strategic alliances or integrated development partnerships.

Regarding labour and social standards, the project aims to raise awareness, provide information and develop local capacity, especially for female workers.



Photos (L&R): Textile workers in a factory in Cambodia



Photo (L): Working groups of textile workers during a Sunday training at the WE House (Women Empowerment House) in Phnom Penh

Photo (R): Teaching during a Sunday training at the WE House

Regarding environmental and resource management, FABRIC aims to disseminate new approaches that have been piloted in individual countries across Asia. The project is working on solutions in energy, chemicals and (waste) water management.

Achievements

Labour conditions and rights: In order to improve working conditions, the project reached around 200,000 workers in total through information raising campaigns and trainings as well as advisory services in its partner countries. FABRIC works with international retailers such as Adidas, Tchibo and H&M, with producers and with workers or their representatives to strengthen workers' rights and improve working conditions. To disseminate information on labour law and occupational health and safety, FABRIC has developed two apps for workers in Myanmar and Cambodia. In Myanmar, the app has already been downloaded more than 16,000 times. As part of the 'Seth Yerng - Our Rights' app which has been available in Cambodia since 2021 around 66,000 workers in over 50 factories benefit from training sessions with management and workers representatives. In Cambodia, the Women Empowerment House (WE House) also offers an exchange café, Sunday training sessions, and an open counselling service for women textile workers.

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 Sustainability in

the Textile and Garment Sector'. With the onset of the pandemic in 2020, the new online seminar series 'Getting through the crisis together' was launched, reaching over 2,000 participants from 50 countries. Moreover, representatives of the STAR Network, started the Sustainable Terms of Trade Initiative (STTI) calling for better purchasing practices in the textile and garment industry. In partnership with the International Labour Organization (ILO), FABRIC launched the Asia Garment Hub, a digital knowledge platform that serves as a one-stop shop for industry stakeholders.

COVID-19 response: To mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic, in 2020 the project set up an emergency workforce resilience program. More than 4,000 women workers in Cambodia and Vietnam were strengthened in their financial literacy and stress management. A large-scale campaign educated workers in Myanmar and Cambodia about preventive measures on their way to work in times of COVID-19. In total, more than 58,000 workers were reached through this campaign.

Environment: To drive environmentally friendly and resource efficient production, FABRIC works with international brands, global initiatives and local production facilities. The digital learning materials and course modules developed for the 'Climate Action Trainings' are aimed to give local producers a better understanding of how to review and calculate greenhouse gas emissions in their production. The Textile Partnership's Chemicals Management Initiative has created similar online trainings. Currently, piloting is under way in 80 production sites in Vietnam, Cambodia, Pakistan and Bangladesh.

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