

# 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. In Vietnam the textile and garment industry has grown by more than 10 per cent annually in the last years. 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 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 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

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 Vietnam
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works with industry stakeholders towards adopting a joint position on sustainable production criteria.

## 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 brings actors together, builds trust and promotes greater willingness to share knowledge. FABRIC also successfully cooperates with Chinese investors, for example implementing trainings in Chinese language in Chinese owned factories in Myanmar and Cambodia.

**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 factories by working with producers to find practical solutions. Those solutions are then transferred to other actors through strategic alliances or integrated development partnerships.



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



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**Social and labour standards with special focus on gender:**

Workers are now much more prepared to stand up for their rights, and there is growing pressure from consumers and international buyers that these rights are materialized. The majority of workers are women, most work in low-skilled, poorly paid jobs with very little hope of job progression. With regard to labour and social standards, the project aims to raise awareness, provide information and develop local capacity. The project also establishes representation mechanisms that enable workers to protect their interests.

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

**The results**

■ **Labour conditions and rights:** The project reached around 185,000 workers through information raising campaigns and trainings as well as advisory services in its partner countries in order to improve their working conditions. Around 70,000 workers in more than 50 factories in Cambodia, Myanmar and Pakistan have participated in dialogue training with managers and employee representatives, for example to improve occupational health and safety. FABRIC collaborated for some of these training sessions with international retailers such as

adidas, Tchibo and H&M. To cite just one example of the benefits of the trainings, 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 comprehensive trainings for 180 inspectors. To disseminate information on the labour law and occupational health and safety, FABRIC has developed two apps for workers in Myanmar and Cambodia.

- **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’. In the crisis of 2020, representatives of the STAR Network started a new initiative calling for better purchasing practices in the textile and garment industry. The initiative, which is supported by FABRIC and the International Apparel Federation (IAF) helps manufacturers and associations to formulate their demands on fair payment and delivery practices and finds huge media attention. It has already been joined by additional associations from Turkey, Morocco and Indonesia.
- **COVID-19 response:** Due to the dramatic effects of the pandemic, the project focused early in its beginning of the pandemic on quickly educating workers through information campaigns about COVID-19 and its infection mitigation. FABRIC was able to react very quickly to the new conditions and successfully implemented awareness campaigns on COVID-19 at short notice. Through trainings, two apps and a media campaign more than 70,000 workers received reliable information on COVID-19. Furthermore, FABRIC organized 11 online seminars with more than 45 speakers from 12 countries that were joined by over 1,800 participants.

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