

Cosmetics and Sustainability

According to *Wise Guy Reports*, a leading world market research organization, the cosmetics industry is slated to grow to an estimated US\$69 billion by the year 2025. With rising disposable incomes across the globe and increasing demand for beauty products, the industry will witness a compound annual growth rate of above 5% between now and then.

The rapid growth of this sector means that we need to seriously consider its social and environmental impact. One of the biggest concerns of cosmetics production is the sourcing of raw materials. Cosmetics firms were one of the leading purchasers of mica in 2015, consuming 18% of the total market value, according to a 2018 report commissioned by the Dutch non-profit *Terre des Hommes*. The report explores the social impact of mica mining due to its prevalent use of child labor in the developing world. Mica is a group of sheet silicate minerals that are widely used in making paint shimmers, cement, cosmetics and in the electronics and automotive industries. The mining of this mineral group in developing countries is very labor intensive and is at high risk of utilizing child labor. The report states that countries at highest risk are Madagascar, China, India, Brazil and Sri Lanka. Most of the mica mines in India are illegal and these mines tend to have a greater chance of poor working conditions, exploitation and having a negative impact on children's rights. Madagascar's weak oversight and corruption means that illegal mines there are also at risk of infringing on basic human rights.

Just like in the apparel industry, there is a growing need in the cosmetics sector to promote sustainable sourcing and production practices. Since many of the raw material extraction and production is taking place in countries where there is a high risk of exploiting worker and children's rights, it is up to consumers to ensure that the products they are buying have been manufactured responsibly. A minimal amount of due diligence is called for before choosing skincare or make-up products and, if possible, consumers should go for smaller suppliers. This would make it easier to inquire about sourcing standards. They're also more likely to be producing sustainably because of shorter supply chains.

Beyond the social impact, it is important to consider the environmental consequences the industry is having. The use of non-renewable resources like petroleum products and minerals can attribute to the adverse effect on ecosystems affected by mining and drilling activities. A lot of the packaging for shampoos, moisturizers and cosmetics tend to be non-biodegradable so as not to be affected by the contents. The use of attractive packaging materials for marketing purposes, which increases the amount of plastic required, exacerbates the problem. Washing away make-up containing large amounts of non-biodegradable compounds or heavy metals also exposes our water systems to contamination from these materials. These pollutants can have a lasting impact on our environment and directly affect local ecosystems.

With the increasing integration of global supply chains, it is crucial that consumers put more thought into the effect of their consumption choices. For the growing cosmetics industry, sustainability needs to be at the forefront of production concerns.