



MINISTRY OF
TEXTILES
GOVERNMENT
OF INDIA

INDIA SUSTAINABILITY REPORT 2020

Science and Sentiment

A white paper by **THE CHOICE OF FASHION**



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SU.RE
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INDIA SUSTAINABILITY REPORT 2020

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INDIA AND THE WORLD'S SUSTAINABILITY MOVEMENT



Six months after The Voice of Fashion launched in July 2018, the phrases “consumer confusion” and “industry overstatement” around sustainability began to echo. As the first Indian fashion publication to devote a regular section to sustainability, we found curiosity laced with ambiguity among consumers, creators, designers, fashion houses. It was a challenge to present credibly reported articles without numerous fact checks as many fashion labels claimed “sustainability” practices without perhaps adhering to a basic set of scientific parameters. Confusing sustainability as another word for crafts enterprises or the handloom industry blurred the space further.

If what sustainability exactly means, how it is different (even when linked) from organic, natural, environmentally friendly, ethically or responsibly produced is already confounding, there are other perplexities. India lacks a contemporary vocabulary in different regional languages for communication with artisan groups to help reengage with what has been an inherent part of the Indian way of life. We are culturally programmed to spend conservatively, reuse clothes and other lifestyle goods, including school books and uniforms. We make manure from vegetable trash, quilts from waste fabrics, breakfast from leftover chappatis and so on.

Yet an urgent agenda has been thrown in our midst with the West pounding the sustainability debate, triggered by urgencies of information and reflection. Fashion is identified as one of the most polluting industries. Supply

chain exploitations and inequalities have been brought to the fore through awareness campaigns by platforms like Fashion Revolution and debates at the annual Copenhagen Fashion Summit. The fashion industry’s culpability has been unmasked.

Exploitation of garment workers in developing nations, the deplorable conditions of sweatshops, inequitable opportunities and earnings for female workers, child labour, absence of basic safeguards for health and worker safety, the use of toxic dyes and exotic animal skins—fashion bleeds with these concerns.

The slip is showing.

Where does India stand in this context? Is there an East versus West debate on fast fashion that spreads like a pandemic across the world through trends and collection drops and creates environmental hazards? Or is it time to explore a new, bold, “West and East for Responsible Fashion” global charter? Today’s consumers are globally connected after all.

India is not just another link in the world’s fashion supply chain. Its value and distinction is critical compared to manufacturing hubs in other developing economies given the uniqueness of our crafts industries that global and Indian fashion relies on.

The Voice of Fashion leads this fashion-specific exploration to bring systematically researched information. It is as



*India's Hima Das celebrates winning the silver medal after the final of the women's 400m athletics event during the 2018 Asian Games in Jakarta. She wore a Gamoosa, the Assamese woven textile, to commemorate the special moment
Image: Jewel Samad, AFP*

important for our readers as it is for fashion houses and individual designers who source from or make in India.

This white paper compiles and analyses the findings of a two-pronged exercise. One is a quantitative survey conducted in five Indian cities over three months among four respondent groups categorised by environmental awareness, fashion exposure, age groups and incomes. Hindi speaking, middle class respondents with limited environmental consciousness were as significant a group to study as were fashion and design students—millennials now and industry leaders of the future.

The questionnaire was designed to understand consumer awareness, willingness to change or minimise, the current practice of

recycling, vintage, rented or pre-loved fashion and whether consumers are interested in or portray commitment towards environmental conservation and socio-economic inequalities behind fashion. Surprisingly or perhaps not, almost half the respondents studied (46 per cent to be exact) were not familiar with sustainability as a term associated with fashion. Yet a majority are curious, show willingness for more information, want to align with environmentally conscious brands, authentication tags, even pay a little more for responsible fashion. Of course, fashion trends, shopping as therapy, changing clothes to suit seasons and trends, impress peers and for status continue to be high on agenda. As is the disposable mindset. But in the consumerist surge, sustainability is clearly emerging as a parallel track to jog upon. One that deserves its own scoreboard.

What might strike you is an apparent conflict between consumer concerns around social-economic disparities of fashion and the reluctance to delve deeper into issues like child labour and other inequities. These conflicts or “consumer confusion” as we call it are perhaps a part of making friends with sustainability in a contemporary milieu.

For the other half of this study, we interviewed CEOs and/ or sustainability officers of 17 top fashion and retail brands from India. Nine are representatives of group of retail captains who, in August last year signed SU.RE, a charter of commitment towards sustainability with IMG Reliance and the Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI).

Both the consumer survey findings and industry interviews are reproduced here. There are also edited excerpts, highlights, top

takeaways, photographs and infographics for a quick overview.

It is time to stop perceiving India as a manufacturing hub lagging behind in the global sustainability movement. The struggle between inherited complexities of our crafts and handloom industry and persistent issues of worker welfare, wage inequality, water and waste management continue.

But, the needle has moved.

This is the first survey that maps and decodes the change.

Shefalee Vasudev

Editor, The Voice of Fashion

**Asked to name sustainable fashion brands,
only 17 per cent of those respondents who
claimed brand recall brought up the following names
in tiny percentages leading to inconclusive analysis.**

These names only reiterate

"consumer confusion"

Fabindia, Adidas, Eka, Zara, Cottons, Doodlage, Good Earth, Eileen, Everlane, Grassroot, Khadi Gram Udyog, H&M, Levi's, Raymond, Upasana, Woolmark, I was a Sari, Puma, Amrapali, Peter England, Lifestyle, Reebok, Nike, FBB, Lee, GAP, Anokhi, Park Avenue, Pantaloons, Ikea, Anaya, People Tree, R | Elan, péro, Shift by Nimish Shah, Buna Studio, Vivienne Westwood, Louis Vuitton, Uniqlo, Amrich, Gurjari, Nicobar, Kilol, Ka-Sha by Karishma Shahani, Maku, John Miller, Stella McCartney, Co-optex, Raw Mango, Bodice...

KEYNOTE



MINISTRY OF
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Under the leadership of Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India is at the forefront in mitigating climate change and has been one of the world leaders in advocating sustainability. The first India Sustainability Report is a timely reflection of India's commitment towards environment protection and a pioneering work that underlines where Indian fashion, retail and artisanal enterprises stand in the sustainability movement of the world. It reveals consumer mindsets and manufacturer responsibility through scientifically gathered data. It signals the way forward for future proofing fashion and retail businesses towards environmental correctness.

The report will help formulate manufacturing guidelines for ethical practices, bring parity and fair trade to India's unique crafts and handloom sector. It helps understand the artisanal workforce as equal and why it is important for Indian designers and global brands which source from or make in India to safeguard their creative rights, health and wages.

Smt. Smriti Zubin Irani

Union Minister of Textiles & Union Minister of Women and Child Development



Quite honestly, when CMAI and IMG Reliance first thought of a project on sustainable fashion, we did not expect the enthusiastic response we would get from leading brands. Many were already engaged in some activity or the other which could be broadly defined as an effort towards a more sustainable fashion industry. I believe the SU.RE project provides a platform which could be a springboard for a comprehensive, holistic and combined effort on part of the fashion industry. The India Sustainability Report is an important first step in this direction—to understand what the consumer thinks and understands about sustainable fashion. I congratulate The Voice of Fashion for undertaking this extensive research and look forward to aligning the Industry's response to the expectations of the consumer.

Rahul Mehta

Chief Mentor, Clothing Manufacturing Association of India (CMAI)



A prominent trend in the Indian textile and fashion industry over the past few years is to incorporate sustainable solutions in conjunction with end-consumers through brand and designer associations. For Lenzing, India is becoming a huge market for domestic consumption and it is present across all major apparel categories such as ethnic wear, intimate wear, general outerwear, denims and home furnishings. The inclination to incorporate environment friendly products is strong across all categories. From niche design labels to value retailers, our fibers are finding acceptability everywhere.

S. Jayaraman

Regional Commercial Director (South Asia & South East Asia), Lenzing AG



At Reliance, we constantly endeavor to instill sustainability and circularity in everything we do. Our R&D teams strive to identify new avenues to deploy cost effective and efficient circularity concepts and enable sustainability in our downstream industry. Our portfolio of business ventures, based on technology platforms & collaborative business models like R | Elan™ Fabric 2.0 is an excellent example of our commitment and leadership in circular business in India—especially for fashion industry. R | Elan™ Green Gold fabric technology has one of the lowest carbon footprints globally as it uses renewable energy, adopts a zero waste concept and enables transparent, traceable manufacturing process. Our collaboration on SU.RE will provide thrust on usage of material in a circular manner, empower value-chain participation in sustainable fashion and make them partners in contributing to the quality of life of our future generations.

Gunjan Sharma

CMO – Polyesters, Reliance Industries Ltd.



01

QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

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Respondent Profile



TG1

Environment Conscious
& Affluent TG



TG2

Non Environment-
Conscious & Affluent TG



TG3

Non Environment-
Conscious, Middle Class
& Hindi Speaking TG



TG4

Students from Reputed
Fashion Design Institutes

The Four Target Groups: Definition and Strategy

This is the first such consumer survey on sustainability done in India. The Target Groups (TG) represented here do not correspond to TG segregations defined and used in most survey methodologies by surveying agencies or by the Ministry of Statistics, Government of India.

Clarity and affirmation of categories like “affluent and middle-class” were arrived through a pre-designed, stage one questionnaire, which included questions on annual income, number of earning members, spending on fashion and other lifestyle products, the type of car owned. Another set of basic questions on environmental responsibility and ecological concerns helped determine “environment-conscious” and not “environment-conscious.” Those who did not fit the intended scope of research were disqualified. Students of fashion and design were consciously included as strategy and choice to determine understanding of India’s future designers and through them the millennial mindset.

The Quantitative Survey was conducted by Qualisys, a market research and consultancy firm.

METHODOLOGY

The consumer survey was conducted through quantitative structured interviews, Computer Aided Personal Interviews (CAPI) or online. A link was developed for the questionnaire which was administered offline or online.

GEOGRAPHY

New Delhi, Mumbai,
Bengaluru, Kolkata,
Ahmedabad

SAMPLE SIZE (ADULTS)

228
TG1

341
TG2

248
TG3

120
TG4

Cumulatively, 937 adults aged 18-60 were interviewed in which gender ratio was 50:50. City-wise distribution was 186 in New Delhi, 186 in Kolkata, 187 in Bengaluru, 188 in Ahmedabad and 190 in Mumbai.

KEY FINDINGS

Sustainability as Choice: Awareness and Current Practices

40%

of the entire respondent pool said they only buy from eco-friendly platforms

65%

respondents in Bengaluru said they ordered online from eco-friendly platforms that did not use plastic and other non-biodegradable packaging

25%

Purchasing decision of 25 per cent respondents was based on the need for a fashion product rather than what was trending

78%

respondents interviewed used cloth bags for shopping



Environmental Consciousness: The Indian Mindset

61%

of environment conscious, elite target group said they were aware of their environmental footprint and take active steps towards it

Cities that have taken the most
active measures for correcting carbon footprint
and negative impact on the environment



DELHI
42%



KOLKATA
39%

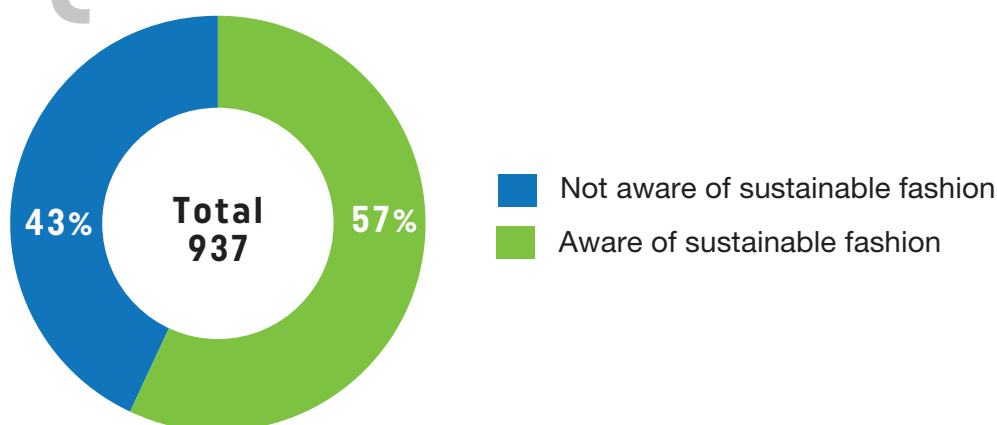


BENGALURU
32%

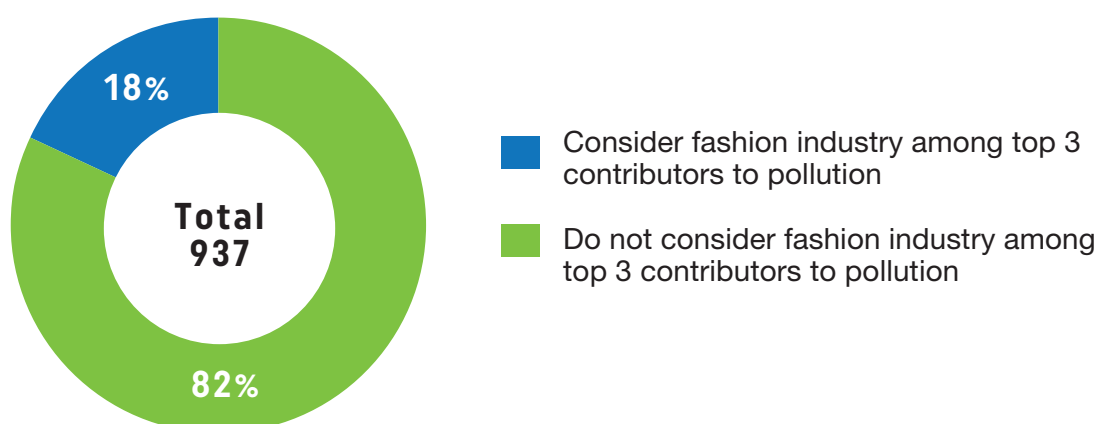
Other cities lagged behind especially Mumbai where
59 per cent admitted that they are yet to start taking
active measures

Sustainable Fashion: Perception, Information and Definition

Have you heard the term 'sustainable fashion'?



Do you believe the fashion industry is a major contributor to pollution?



46%

of the entire respondent group across cities, age groups and TGs said sustainable fashion was a new concept for them



68%

While 68 per cent students of fashion and design defined sustainable fashion as maximizing life of a fashion product by repair, reuse, and upcycling, only 38 per cent overall used that definition

85%

Across all respondent groups, the awareness of the term 'sustainable fashion' was the highest—at 85 per cent—among students of fashion and design

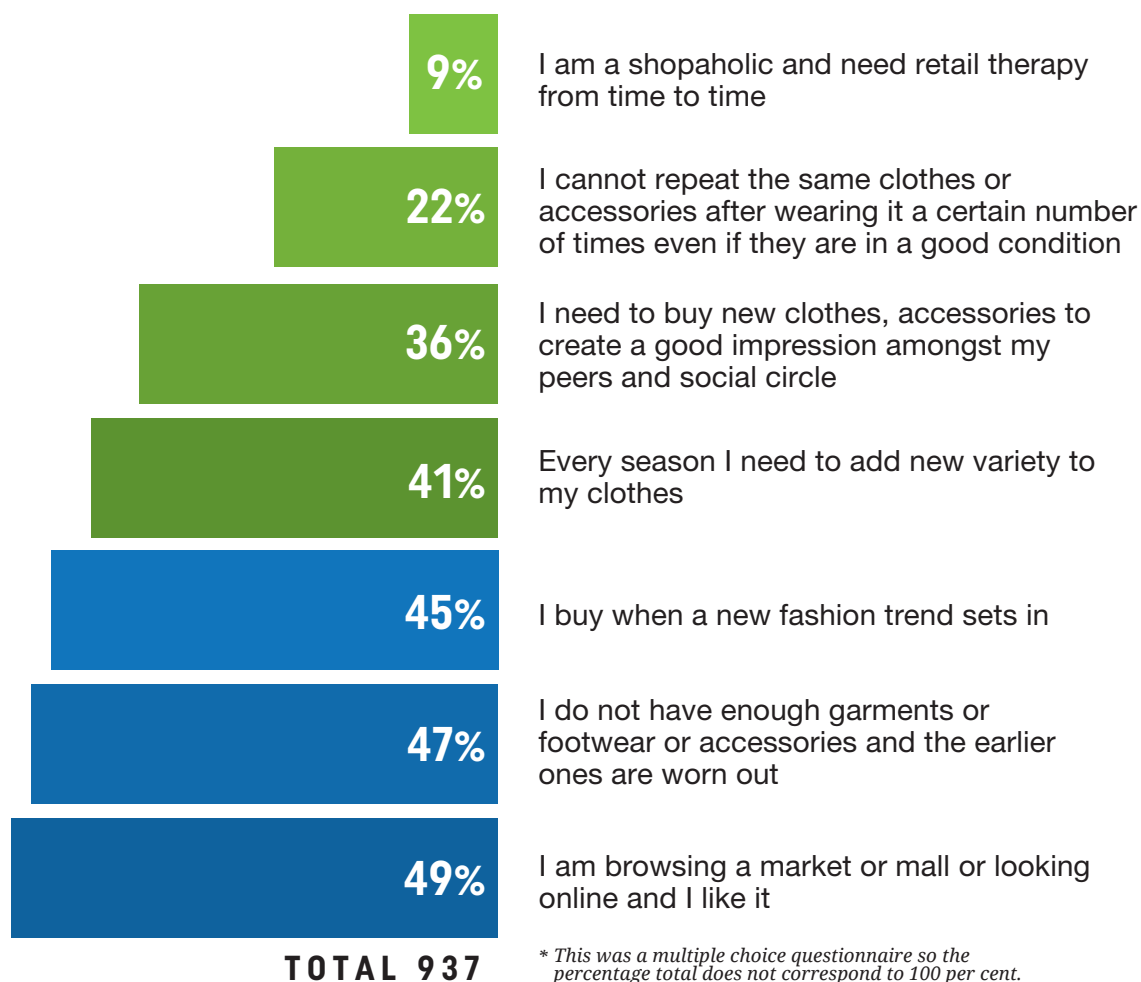
24%

Only 24 per cent defined Sustainable Fashion as consumption that boosts local economies such as handloom and handicrafts while 26 per cent said that buying environmentally-friendly clothing/footwear (such as sustainably grown fiber crops or recycled materials) meant sustainable fashion

82%

82 per cent of the total respondents knew the difference between the terms - sustainable, organic and ethical while 97 per cent students claimed to clearly draw the distinction

Fashion: Why We Buy



22%

of the total respondents said they could not repeat a garment or accessory many times even if it was in a good condition while 36 per cent said they bought new clothes to create a good impression on their peers and in their social circles

45%

said they shopped every time a new trend came in, 41 per cent said they needed new seasonal clothes

9%

confessed to being shopaholics and needed retail therapy from time to time

77%

of the respondent group said they prioritised their fashion buying decisions by brand name, while 80 per cent said they looked for comfort. Only 55 per cent said that pricing was a matter of top consideration while shopping. Only 18 per cent were concerned about who made their clothes when they bought



Consumers across age groups
shop for similar reasons

Recycle, Upcycle, Rent, Repair and Swap



How likely are you to adopt these sustainable practices?

Choose from options below:



Will you pay a little extra for extensive R&D, small batch productions and fair wage manufacturing structures?

I would not be willing to pay more for a sustainable/responsibly made fashion product as of now and will wait for prices to come down

13%

I would be willing to pay more sometimes for a sustainable/responsibly made fashion product

65%

I would definitely be willing to pay more at all times if I know that these are responsibly made fashion products

22%

TOTAL 937

24%

Among those who expressed apprehension for recycled fashion—shoes or clothes—24 per cent attributed the reasons to possible skin allergies, comfort level of the garment, and its effect on skin



50%

students of fashion and design said they would be happy to wear recycled garments

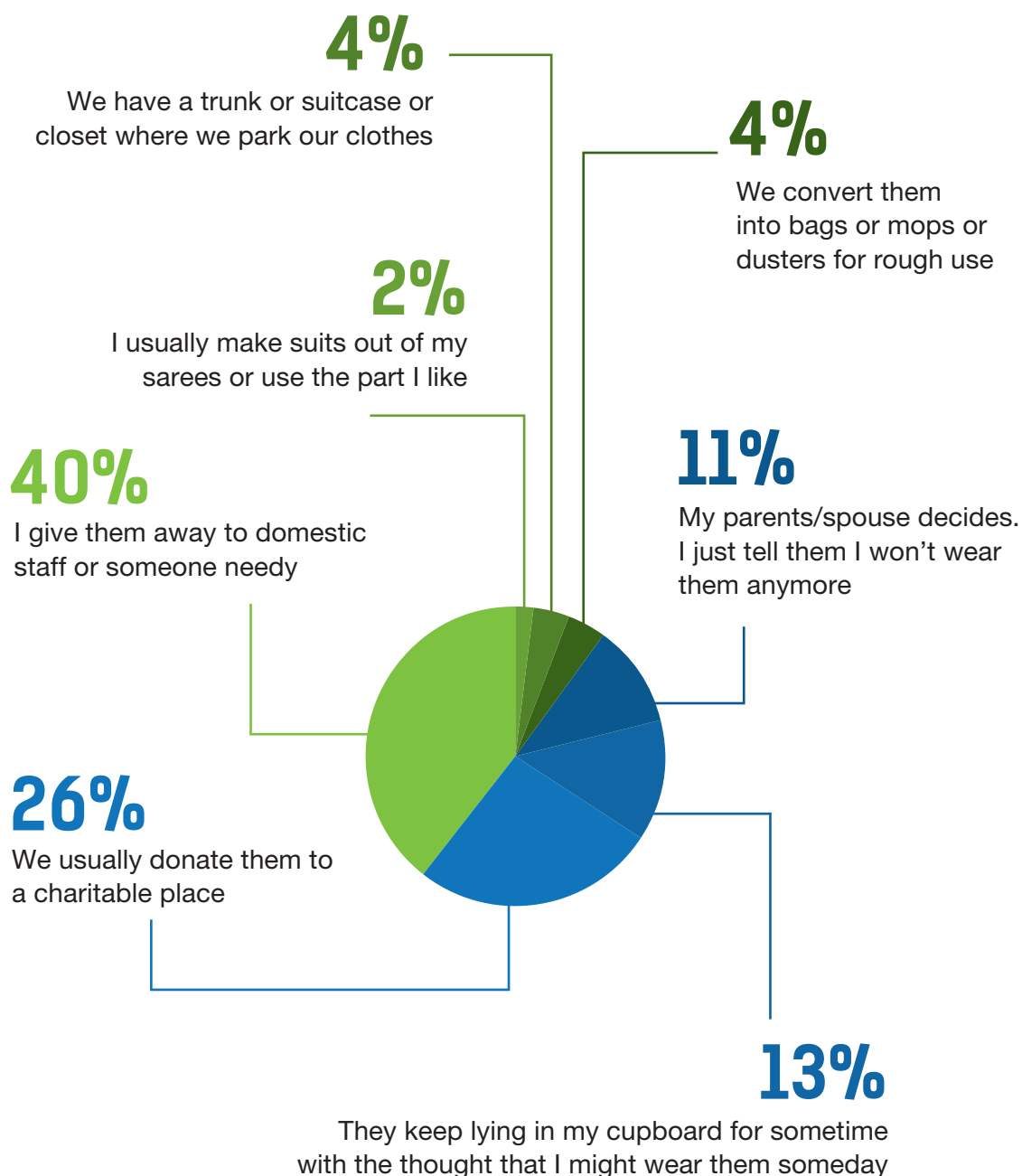
88%

fashion students claimed to know of Made in India brands that made garments from recycled materials





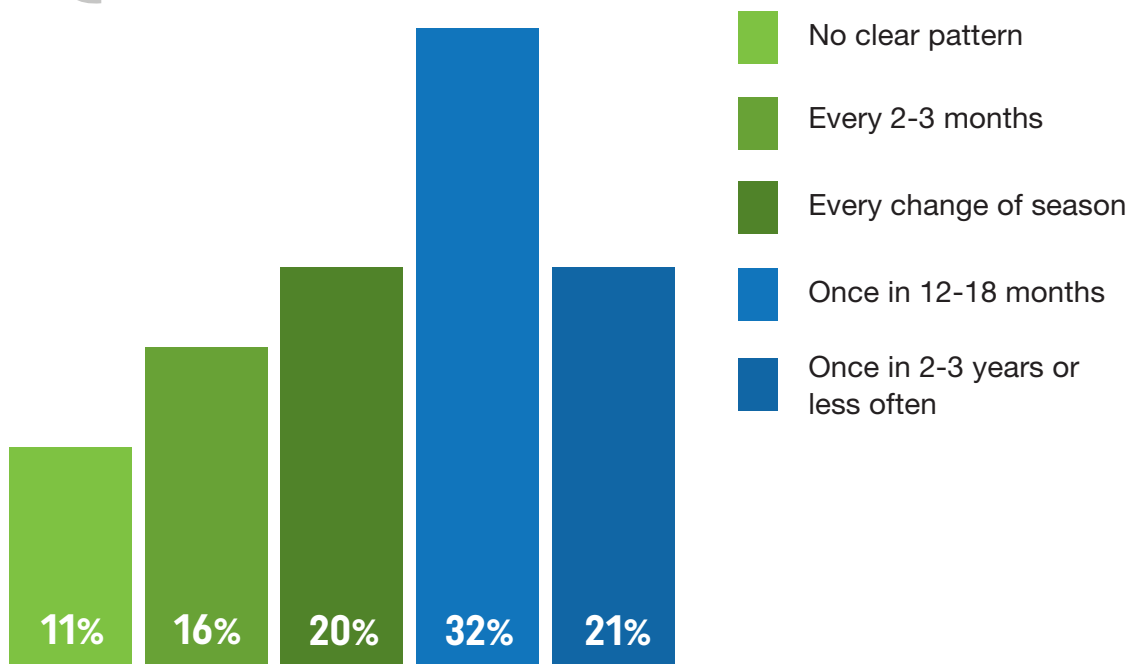
What do you do with your garments, once you stop wearing them?



A majority confessed to a disposable mindset when it came to old garments and fabrics. Recycling or upcycling to make other usable things out of old clothes only interested 6 per cent of total respondents.



How often do you discard old clothes?

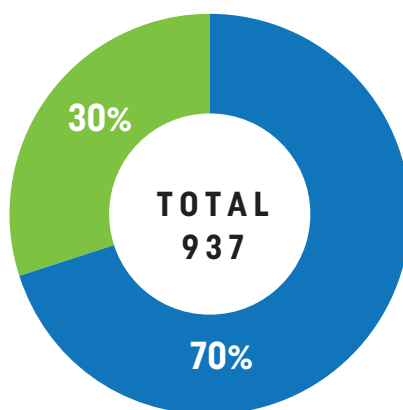


32%

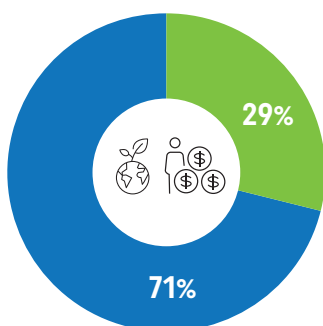
of the respondent group discards clothes within eighteen months of use. 20 per cent disposed clothes after change of every season while another 21 per cent said they did so every 2-3 years



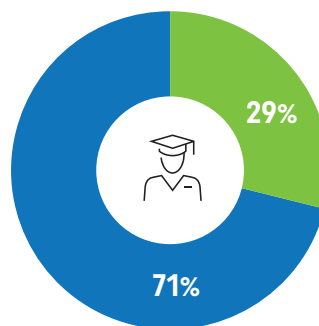
Have you ever tried designer clothes on rent?



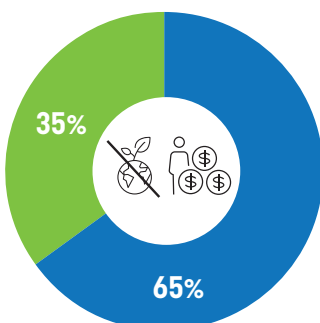
■ No ■ Yes



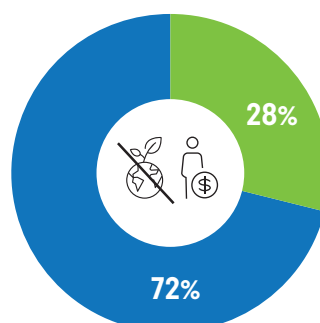
■ No ■ Yes



■ No ■ Yes

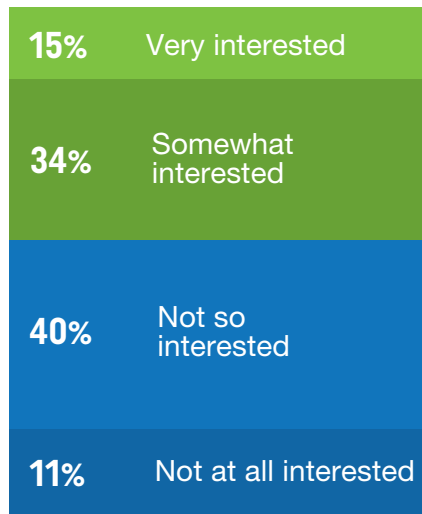


■ No ■ Yes



■ No ■ Yes

Q How interested would you be in trying such a rental clothing service?



Q What would motivate you to use rental services?



** This was a multiple choice questionnaire so the percentage total does not correspond to 100 per cent.*

57 per cent of overall respondents who had tried fashion rental services said they did it to afford big designer names or expensive products

36%

students of fashion and design said they frequently repaired their torn garments while 54 per cent said they did so sometimes

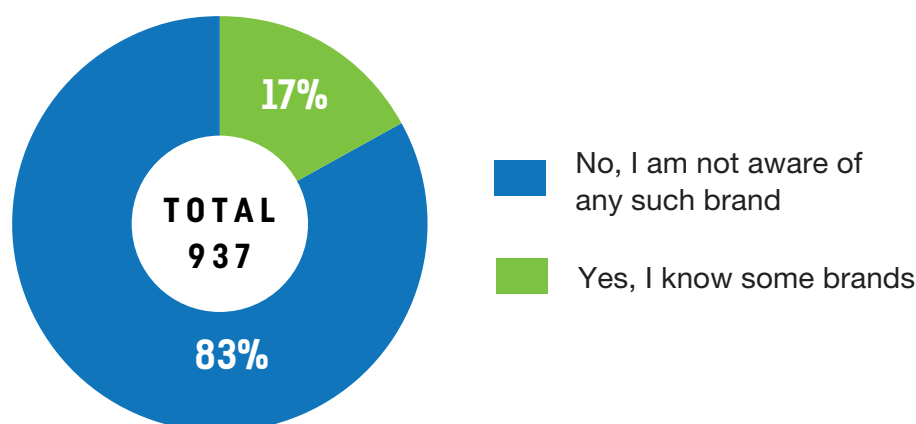
40%

respondents upcycle their clothes sometimes by making other wearables or bags out of them, 11 per cent do so very often but 49 per cent never upcycle

Sustainable Brands, Fabrics and Materials: The Big Reveal

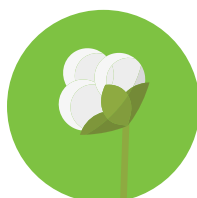


Do you know of brands which follow principles of sustainable fashion?



52%

respondents admitted to lack of awareness about sustainable fibres and materials. The remaining 48 per cent were either aware or “somewhat aware”



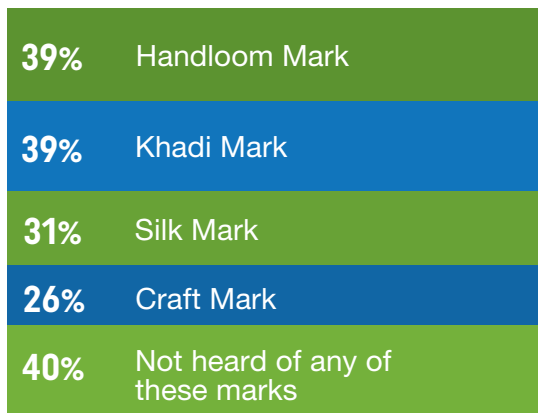
61%

of those who expressed sustainability awareness added that they knew about organic cotton. However, only 31 per cent knew about recycled wool and 30 per cent displayed awareness of plant-based materials like nettle, hemp, bamboo, banana and pineapple fibres

43 per cent of total respondents interviewed across age groups and cities are aware of the negative impact of leather on the environment. Surprisingly though, 47 per cent have low awareness. On the other hand, 10 per cent of the total, said that the use of leather was unavoidable for certain products even if it had a negative impact on the environment



Are you aware of these marks?



Khadi Mark and Handloom Mark are the most recognised labels of authenticity. Awareness of Craft Mark and Silk Mark though is relatively low

TOTAL 937

** This was a multiple choice questionnaire so the percentage total does not correspond to 100 per cent.*

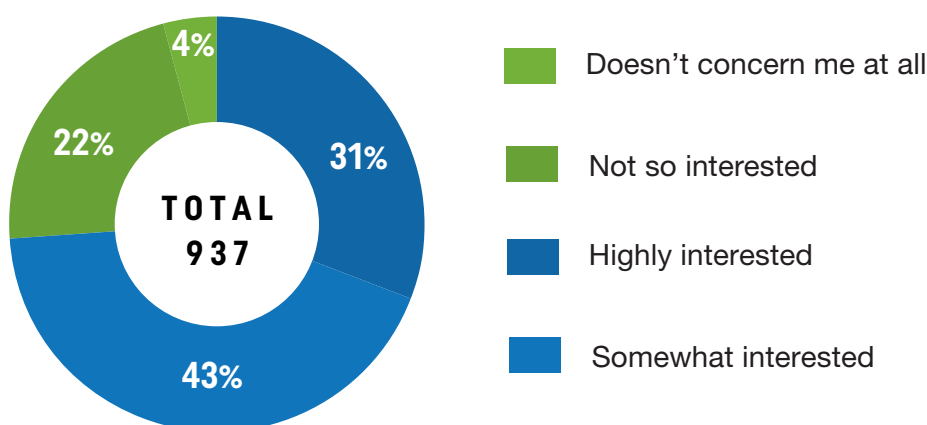
60%

of those aware of Khadi Mark claimed they had garments with Khadi Mark tag on them. While 55 per cent of those aware of Handloom Mark said they owned garments with a Handloom Mark tag on it

Who Made My Clothes: The Indian Outlook



Are you interested in knowing who made your garments?



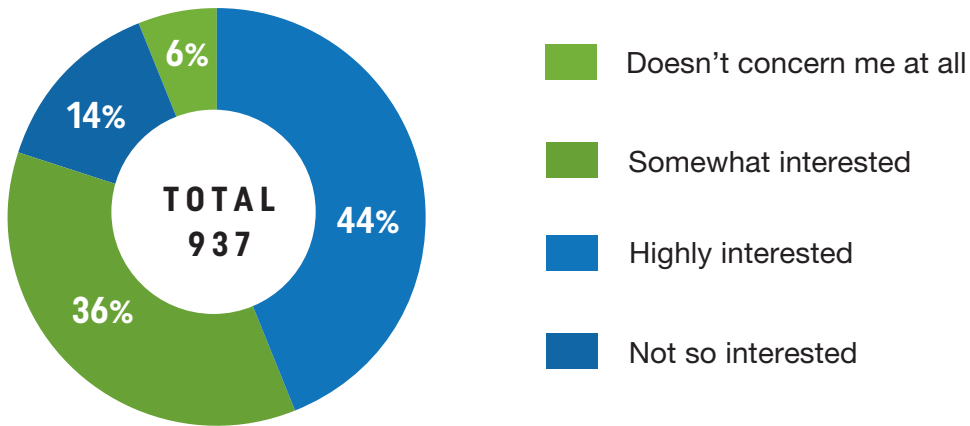
A majority of respondents said they were interested in knowing who made their garments—more than 65 per cent said so in varying degrees of interest

The respondent group most interested is the middle class segment that is not environment-conscious. Among this group, 41 per cent were also highly interested to know where the garments were made, not just who made them

Contrarily, only 31 per cent of those from the elite group, who claimed to be environmentally conscious said they were interested in knowing who made their garments and only 20 per cent were curious about where the garment was made. The rest were indifferent



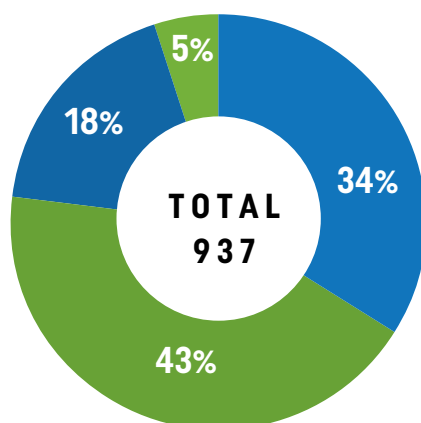
Would you be interested to know if the product has engaged child labor in its production?



A majority of respondents across age groups, segments and cities showed interest in knowing if child labour had been involved in the making of fashion garments and accessories



Would you be interested to know about social conditions behind the production of fashion garments?



- Doesn't concern me at all
- Somewhat interested
- Highly interested
- Not so interested

15%

of Hindi speaking middle class felt that concerns about social conditions surrounding garment production were for activists to engage with and not regular shoppers

17%

of the affluent, Hindi speaking respondent group felt that knowing about the social conditions behind garment production would take the joy out of shopping which they view as joyful activity

19%

Learning about oppressive conditions, impoverishment or other social factors that go behind the making of fashion does not really concern the Indian consumer. Across segments, age groups and respondent type, only 19 per cent said this information would help them make a responsible choice



Pay More, Use More vs. Small Cash, Big Trash

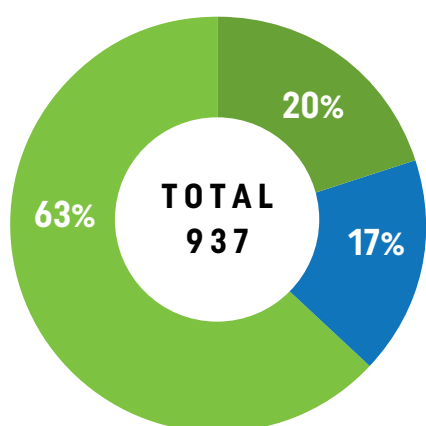
An outstanding majority of respondents across segments, cities and age groups displayed willingness to spend more on sustainable fashion to support fair wages and ethical supply chains




68%

When asked in detail, most (as many as 68 per cent) chose they would pay extra “sometimes” instead of “always”. Even 57 per cent middle class consumers who are not environmentally savvy said they would be willing to sometimes pay more.



Do you think fashion should be produced through responsible practices?



 No  Yes  Not Sure

63 per cent of the entire respondent group believes fashion should be responsibly produced. Others are unclear or unconcerned



02

QUALITATIVE STUDY

- 32** Between Science and Sentiment
- 34** Economic Growth must be in Synergy with Environmental and Social Interests
Aditya Birla Fashion and Retail Ltd.
- 37** Winging in Change to Redesign the Future
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- 40** Sourcing Responsibly is a Cost-Intensive Process
Bestseller India
- 43** The Livelihoods Mandate
Fabindia
- 46** Local Ingredients, Traditional Processes and Care
Forest Essentials
- 49** Artisans are the Living Repositories of Textile Know-How
Good Earth
- 52** Greening Hidesign
Hidesign
- 55** Planet and People: Joining the Dots
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- 58** Every Action has a Quarterly Milestone
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- 61** Innovative Sustainability and Sustainable Innovation
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- 64** Holistic Consistency and Regular Work
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- 67** Seasonal Collections fuel the most Unsustainable Practices
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Shoppers Stop
- 79** The Denim Industry Consumes Maximum Water
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BETWEEN SCIENCE AND SENTIMENT



The growing adherence to sustainability is a cathartic moment for the global fashion industry. The era to create products purely for beauty, glamour, status and form is well, almost over. Without responsibility, fashion will soon lose its flash.

Climate change, growing ecological vulnerability, fashion's notorious pollution of the planet and seeding inequality are now pushing companies and designers to invest in meaning and value. To find design solutions that save and simplify. This is a chance to weed out inequality—discover environmentally-friendly materials, smart manufacturing processes, enhance the lives of people and abolish child labour. The push for sustainability in supply chains can alter the DNA of the fashion business. It is a once-in-a-millennium opportunity.

That is exactly where a growing number of Indian retail brands and fashion designers stand today.

When The Voice of Fashion reached out to creative directors, sustainability officers and brand leaders for in-depth, informative conversations on their sustainability compliances, practices and goals—what emerged is a new, underreported transitional phase.

The 17 interviews published here include nine brands, which signed the SU.RE charter with IMG Reliance committing themselves to sustainability goals by 2025. Each company from that cluster—whether it is Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Limited (ABFRL) or Arvind

Fashions Limited (AFL); Bestseller or W; Lifestyle or House of Anita Dongre (HOAD), to name just a few—is not just using the term sustainability to leverage on marketing trends. Instead, there are thoughtful policies and practices that are invigorating change and resetting the big agenda. Not every company may be at the same level of sustainability practices; some admit to be a work in progress, while others are scaling up fast. Brands like ABFRL, AFL, HOAD or Levi's have made pioneering efforts.

Yet each brand included here has shifted from where it stood earlier with clearly defined short term and long-term goals. From innovative packaging, working with sustainable materials and fibres, to reducing waste, recycling industry leftovers, water management, vendor compliances and enabling technology.

Other names include crafts-focused retail giant Fabindia that was founded in the Sixties around sustainability principles long before this became a catchphrase and continues to be a case study for business management institutes across the world. On the other hand are fashion brands like Good Earth, Rahul Mishra, Raw Mango and péro. They are associated with ideas of artisanal responsibility. Do read their points of view to know how they do so and what drives them. Ritu Kumar's eponymous brand was included as it is India's oldest fashion designer and crafts conservationist label, founded by Indian fashion's grand matriarch Ritu Kumar.

To bring in diverse arguments from critically important sectors, we also interviewed luxury

Ayurveda brand Forest Essentials and leather-intensive design brand Hidesign. The former works from Haridwar and Rishikesh revitalising local communities to produce wellness products while bringing educational empowerment to the workers. The latter, based in Puducherry, the other tip of India, offers employment to locals while finding solutions to handle leather waste, tanning that is not hazardous, and invests in solar energy.

A section called Moving the Needle ushers a quick overview—from worker welfare to a new, emerging material library. Energy, water and resource saving highlights too.

What India needs, as every fashion leader agrees, is a culturally appropriate definition and understanding of sustainability. That is in tandem with global fashion initiatives for environmental protection and is scientifically measurable. At the same time, it is mindful of the peculiarities of our working culture that respects and rewards artisanal skills.

Problems may be universal but solutions must be local to sustain.

There are giant brands that become quickly visible through their campaigns and ability to join international platforms. However, some small, emerging fashion enterprises are also authentically trying to do their bit in this space. Let us not drown them out in the din. Not everything can be judged by appearance after all. That goes especially for brands or



Saroj Akka, an Ethicus weaver working her magic on brand's signature rainbow warp. Image: Ethicus.

individuals who may be currently overusing, misusing and abusing the term “sustainability” to find a foothold in the conversation but may be inadvertently diluting the big picture.

Shefalee Vasudev

Editor, The Voice of Fashion

ADITYA BIRLA FASHION AND RETAIL LIMITED

Economic Growth must be in Synergy with Environmental and Social Interests

Dr. Naresh Tyagi, Chief Sustainability Officer

TVOF: When did commitment to sustainability get off to a serious start in ABFRL?

Naresh Tyagi: At Aditya Birla Group (ABG), sustainability is fundamental to all our endeavors. We believe that economic growth must be achieved in synergy with environmental and societal interests. In 2012-13, we embarked on our structured sustainability programme, 'ReEarth for our Tomorrow.' Built on the ABG sustainability framework of Responsible Stewardship, Stakeholder Engagement and Future Proofing, ReEarth is a movement to give back more to the ecosystem than what we have taken from it. It goes beyond

conservation, and encourages rejuvenation with a holistic mission and focus areas.

How would you define holistic where a company is concerned?

The ReEarth programme covers the entire ABFRL value chain, the entire gamut of sustainability aspects impacting the sector, devised by drivers that include ABG's sustainability framework, global sustainability performances, industry trends, expert opinions, sustainable development goals, Indian and international best practices, and a materiality mapping with the help of Forum for the Future.

What were the first steps ABFRL took to turn itself into a sustainable company?

Launched in 2012, the sustainability program was implemented across ten missions with targets to be achieved by 2017.

These included:

- Enhancing energy efficiency
- Recycling and reusing of water and capturing rainwater
- Integrated waste management with compliance towards regulations
- Pursuing green building certifications
- Safe and hygienic workplaces
- Integrating sustainability in product design and development
- Minimising primary, secondary and tertiary packaging of products
- Safety management systems and CSR with a focus to support local communities.

The missions progressed well and we achieved

Aditya Birla Fashion & Retail Ltd. (ABFRL) is the fashion and apparel retail arm of the \$48.3-billion Aditya Birla Group (ABG), a Fortune 500 Indian MNC with a diversified business portfolio active across many industry sectors. The Group is a member of the UN Global Compact and aims to become a leading Indian conglomerate for sustainable business practices. ABFRL received the 'Sustainable Corporate of the Year 2019' in the Sustainability 4.0 Assessment and Awards, a Frost & Sullivan and TERI initiative. It also secured the eighth position among Textiles, Apparel and Luxury Goods globally in the SAM Corporate Sustainability Assessment (SAM CSA). Other recognitions include the CSR Project of the Year for community development at the UBS Forums Corporate Social Responsibility Summit & Awards 2019. ABFRL's Peter England Earth Chinos were selected as a case study in sustainable innovation at the UNEP product road-testing platform.

our stipulated targets. On crossing the 2017 milestone, we have now set ourselves new targets for 2020.

Was sustainability taken up as philanthropy, environmental responsibility, business strategy or to gain a lead over the competition?

ABG has always had a systematic approach towards creating sustainable businesses. Besides ABG's Sustainable Business Framework, we also adopt best practices from across the world. We believe building a profitable business model pegged on sustainability is the key ingredient for every business today. The ReEarth programme is focused on integrating sustainability across the entire value chain to support revenue growth, rejuvenate the environment and enhance living standards, especially of the marginalised sections of society. In 2018-19, under this programme, we witnessed substantial improvement in energy conservation, water management and CSR.

“On global platforms, India's understanding of sustainability is not well represented in the textile and retail sector. There is a perception that Asian brands are not concerned with these issues

What were the initial challenges and did those challenges later change?

Given our Sustainability Framework, our businesses always look into their operations from the lens of reduction, savings or growth. In the initial two to three years, one of the few priority areas we focused on was operational efficiency. Aiming at a 30% energy reduction meant saving resources but it also meant attaining a 30% benefit from wastage. We reduced energy consumption by 33%, which gave a window to reinvest the money into



Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) meeting organised by ABFRL in Bengaluru, 2017.

larger energy usage plans like having LED and HVAC systems. We design our products adhering to ethical sourcing, energy efficiency, product safety and resource consumption, among other factors. Our raw material has a good mix of BCI cotton, recycled cotton, natural fibres, herbal dyes, green certification, recycled PET fibres etc. We have also collaborated with Cotton 2040 to increase the sustainable cotton consumption.

As part of our sustainable sourcing initiatives and supplier connect, we have instituted Partner Innovation Summits, Quality and Joint Improvement Projects, the Higg Index, the Samanway program, the Green Channel Partnership, among others. ABFRL's Vendor Code of Conduct Process ensures ethical sourcing. We have also developed an efficient mechanism to measure, manage and control chemical consumption, to ensure a safe working environment.

Have ABFRL employees started feeling differently about sustainability with all these measures in place?

We have adopted an integrated communication approach to engage with our employees on sustainability. In the last eight years, we have seen good progress, whether it is in the form of employee participation, business benefit or a socio-environmental impact.

How do you deal with supply chain variables like an unorganized workforce, women or child workers?

ABFRL has an advantage because we make in India and sell in India. A large part of our supply chain is controlled through in-house practices and strategic suppliers. Our strategic suppliers are as good as in-house production teams as they are our long-term partners.

Factors such as credibility and collaboration are strongly embedded in our operations. The Vendor Code of Conduct policy looks at all levels of suppliers—from basic to advance level. We set our own internal supplier rating system where the Code of Conduct is given critical weightage. By default, any vendor who is in the current system and follows basic compliance, is up for periodic assessment. Some of our key vendors are assessed on the Higg Index's Facility Environment Module.

Should India define sustainability in a specific way than pander to global definitions?

On global platforms, India's understanding of sustainability is not well represented in the textile and retail sector. There is a perception that Asian brands are not concerned with these issues. In 2013 at SAC, we proposed an annual sustainability meeting in India but Tokyo and Vietnam were the preferred destinations. Eventually, a SAC meeting took place in Bangalore in 2017. Supply chain issues are critical and so are the consumers' expectations. The millennial consumer demands better ethics and responsible practices from a company, so this was a good transition.

What about reducing waste by tackling packaging processes?

Packaging for men's shirts, for instance, earlier included multiple items like pins, plastic clips, etc. Our teams worked to reduce this by 60%

and saved tonnes of plastic. Reduction, Reuse, Recycle: these keywords came in handy in aligning our actions towards resource efficiency.



Peter England's Earth Chinos manufactured by ABFRL was selected as a case study in sustainable innovation at the UNEP product road-testing platform.

Is there a huge dependence on technology in the pursuit of sustainability goals?

Innovation fuels industry-defining transformations in all parts of the fashion value chain: fibre, fabric, apparel and retail. Increasing digitisation and the usage of technologies like Artificial Intelligence helps the industry eliminate wastage, shorten response times, improve demand predictions, reduce energy and water consumption, increase greening processes and bring down costs. This combination of environment-friendly products at pocket-friendly prices has the potential to mainstream sustainability faster than most people envisage. Thus, at ABFRL, we constantly encourage innovation and invest in technology. ■

ARVIND FASHIONS LTD.

Winging in Change to Redesign the Future

Anindya Ray, EVP and Chief Sourcing Officer

Tushar Jindal, Head, Corporate Sustainability & Responsible Supply Chain

TVOF: How does Arvind Fashions Ltd. (AFL) approach the concept of sustainability?

Anindya Ray & Tushar Jindal: AFL wishes to emerge as a market leader in the sustainable fashion space and leave a conscious footprint across the value chain. We believe this can be achieved by collaboration and innovation across the value chain.

We follow a four-pillar strategy to clearly map our goals and visions. The strategy involves a holistic combination of sustainable fashion, combatting climate change, responsible supply chain and social responsibility.

We have undertaken a number of sustainability initiatives under this four-pillar strategy. U.S. Polo Assn has a line of sustainable clothes, 'Responsible Jeans,' that has launched products with a sustainable fabric mix and non-hazardous chemical wash. Similarly, Flying Machine has a line of sustainable clothes with focus on the usage of sustainable fabrics, especially recycled

fabrics. AFL envisages the use of an increased mix of sustainable fabric, BCI cotton, organic cotton, recycled cotton and polyester in the future.



Campaign image of U.S. Polo Assn Responsible Jeans.

Arvind Fashions Ltd. is home to over 27 distinguished brands across all formats of retail. The company has fueled the country's fashion aspirations since 1980 when it manufactured India's first home-bred jeans, Flying Machine. Among its other popular brands are Gap, Tommy Hilfiger, Arrow, U.S. Polo Assn, UNLIMITED, Calvin Klein.

AFL is also making efforts to increase the mix of renewable energy in its energy portfolio. As of today, 80% of the energy consumed in our corporate office is solar powered. We are also keenly exploring options to shift some percentage of our energy requirement to renewable energy in our stores and warehouses. In terms of retail operations, we operate in small as well as large format stores. We are exploring the possibility of installing solar rooftop panels for the larger format stores, in case sufficient roof space is available.

We also engage with our vendor partners on the sustainability agenda, guide and assist them in identification and implementation of the sustainable projects. One of our vendor partners has installed a solar rooftop of 200 kilowatt capacity for their manufacturing unit.

Our four-pillar strategy involves a holistic combination of sustainable fashion, combating climate change, responsible supply chain and social responsibility.

AFL focuses on resource efficiency and is actively working with vendor partners to reduce water consumption. While some of our vendor partners have already shifted to Zero Liquid Discharge (ZLD) plants, a few of them are exploring water-efficient technologies. Apart from this, we have installed aerators in all the taps at our corporate office, which reduces the fresh water consumption upto 2500-3000 KL per annum.

We organize a sustainability platform on an annual basis that provides an opportunity for vendors to showcase solutions to our product and design teams under one roof. The platform also organizes capacity-building sessions for our vendor partners on the latest sustainable solutions.

How is waste managed?

We are trying to identify opportunities to reduce waste from our operations and also divert the same from going to landfills. There are two streams of garment waste, pre-consumer waste (*chindi*: cut waste generated during manufacturing) and post-consumer waste (rejected/defective clothes and clothes that have reached the end of their life or are no more useful to the customer). We understand that today, most of the *chindi* waste is sold to third parties, who then repurpose and recycle it.

Furthermore, we are exploring avenues of recycling/reuse of the post-consumer waste, and diverting it from going to the landfill.

Another waste management issue is the handling of packaging material waste. Going forward, our aim is to innovate and develop eco-friendly packaging such as using cornstarch as an active material. However, a lack of commercial and scalable availability of innovative packaging solutions is proving to be a hindrance right now.

How do you ensure supply chain checks and balances to safeguard all links in responsible production and manufacture?

We were one of the first Indian companies to have Responsible Supply Chain Guidelines (RSC) that make our expectations clear to the vendors. Further, this also acts as a screening mechanism for new vendor partners who show interest in associating with us while helping us to periodically check their Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) performance. RSC Guidelines have brought about a cultural shift in the operations of a number of factories.

Apart from this, being a licensee of some of the international brands, we are bound to implement their Code of Conduct in the factories producing for them.

AFL is a founding member of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), which launched the HIGG Index, a standardised suite of tools that measures transparency and social and environmental impact of the fashion industry. This system requires some of our vendor partners to use the Facility Environment Module (FEM) and Facility Social and Labor Module (FSLM). Fifty factories of our vendor partners are already on the HIGG Index.

Under the eight parameters of the HIGG Index, it has become easier to transparently review the progress made by the



Women workers carrying out finishing process at one of the production units of AFL.

manufacturers. We also help in aiding their progress by conducting capacity-building sessions, calling in experts and educating them about technological advancements in the global scenario.

What is the role of technology in building a sustainable value chain?

Every organisation today is trying to develop new concepts and innovate on different levels across the supply chain, be it fabric, inventory management or waste management systems. These innovations have to be commercially scalable so that a business can adopt them in the long run.

We are actively working towards making our supply chain digital-savvy and believe that

once the system is implemented, we may be one of the first in the Indian fashion industry to adopt technology to manage an end to end supply chain.

What are the company's short-term goals to keep pushing the target of sustainability?

AFL would like to further build on the sustainability strategy already in place. In the short term, we would like to gain a deeper understanding of technological advances like sustainable chemistry, in order to aid modifications in design and process. Another area of focus would be adopting sustainable packaging. ■

BESTSELLER INDIA

Sourcing Responsibly is a Cost-Intensive Process

Vineet Gautam, Country Head & CEO
Sugam Asani, Brand Head, Jack & Jones

TVOF: When did sustainability become an important subject internally for Bestseller's in-house brands?

Sugam Asani: We have been working on sustainability and responsible fashion in India since 2017. There are three main subjects that we focus on, globally as well as in India: Being climate-positive; fair for all; and circular by design.

Following this, we have picked up apparel categories that are the most polluting and are making efforts towards more responsible and sustainable production of the same. Let's take jeans, as an example. All our manufacturers reuse up to 95-98% of the water generated in the production process by running it through an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP).

Non-denim items, which are not as polluting but still contribute to the environment negatively, are also being put through these processes and starting 2020, about 64% of our cotton products will fall under the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). We are also looking at 100% BCI in categories like innerwear.

Bestseller is an international fashion house doing business in 70 markets worldwide and its three brands, ONLY, Vera Moda and Jack & Jones, have a strong presence in Indian malls. Fashion FWD, Bestseller's global strategy, has sustainability at its centre, and garments get a nod from their international sustainability team before entering the Indian market.

We are at a nascent stage in terms of recycling fibres like viscose, polyester and TENCEL, as the availability of recycled synthetics is not as widespread as BCI. The aim is also to use recycled polyester in categories like jeans and tops in womenswear, starting Spring-Summer 2020.

Have any information sessions or workshops been held to enable the understanding of sustainability for your employees?

We take it upon ourselves to sensitize the brand teams about our ethos and our sustainability goals. The changes are small but effective, like replacing PET bottles with glass ones. We have replaced all plastic packaging used for sending courier packages with cardboard packaging or recyclable plastic packaging, as well as discouraged the use of paper for office work as much as possible.

Can you elaborate on the challenges Bestseller faces in the process of introducing responsible practices?

Transparency and visibility are among our biggest challenges. We have entrusted BCI with creating a responsible value chain for us. However, details of the internal process such as distribution of wages, benefits to grassroot players are not being revealed to us and hence, we can't reveal it to the customer. Sourcing responsibly and getting certifications is a cost-intensive process. Our

factory compliance is far tighter than Walmart and FedEx. There are two types of compliances, social and physical. We require our manufacturers to commit to social compliances such as PF and ESI for employees for two to three years, rather than six months which is the norm. The aim is to work with vendors who have been honest in their business practices. In order to onboard a vendor in India, a global compliance team visits and audits the factory, as well as ensures ethical practices through surprise visits.

That said, we also follow a strong physical compliances policy to produce ethically. Lighting to ventilation and the presence of infirmaries, crèche and pantries, are all vital and part of the basic physical compliances. Fire management infrastructure—fire drill, sprinklers and four entry and exit points—is also an added criteria.

The use of innovative fabrics drives up the cost of the item by 8 to 10%. However, none of our brands have put the onus of bearing it on the customer as we perceive this as our social responsibility and a change that we absolutely need to make.

While manufacturing in places like Bengaluru, Tirupur, Gurugram, Noida, Bhiwandi and Chennai, cities that are already overpopulated with manufacturing units, it is important that these guidelines are followed, in order to claim a responsible value chain.

Are Jack & Jones, Vera Moda, ONLY, making use of technology and innovation to enable future-forward fashion?

We are exploring the conversion of waste water to potable water, which can be used for other activities inside the unit such as the kitchen. Technological advancements in



Manufacturing work being carried out by women employees at the Bestseller factory.

energy generation are also being explored globally and will soon enter the Indian units which are currently working at 85-87% energy efficiency but are still trying to navigate the generation of solar and thermal energy.

One of the biggest innovations is the 'Endless Aisle' technology. A huge range of stock is available on a digital platform for the customer's perusal, in case something is not available in store. This not only gives the customer a wider choice but also reduces unnecessary crowding of the store with products. The idea is to eventually produce only what is required and increase efficiency in inventory management.

Product innovation is also at the core of all brands across Bestseller. Jack and Jones is coming up with the LID (Low Impact Denim), a line of jeans that consumes less water; Vera Moda with the 'Aware' line that is made out of good quality, long-lasting fabrics to increase longevity of the product; ONLY with its 'Life' collection, which uses recycled fibres and regenerated fabrics.

Do the costs of innovation drive up the price of the product?

The use of innovative fabrics drives up the cost of the item by 8-10%. However, none of

our brands have put the onus of bearing it on the customer, as we perceive this to be our social responsibility and a change that we absolutely need to make. A contributing factor to this is also that the Indian customer is neither particularly aware about sustainability nor too happy with an increment in prices of lifestyle items, whether or not they are responsibly sourced and manufactured.

Would Bestseller like to promote its responsible practices among its consumers?

We are trying to make the customer more aware by trying to impart information through labels and our social media handles. We believe that it is necessary to make it an educational initiative rather than just a marketing campaign. It requires us to make the customer aware in order to make sustainability a part of their lifestyle, and not just restrict it to within the garment industry.

What does the company do with pre-waste and post-consumer surplus, defective stock, unsold stock, samples, etc?

One way of managing the waste generated is recycling plastic bags. Since the items are finally sold to the customer in a paper bag, we use recyclable plastic to transport the garment from the warehouse to the store. In terms of garments, the e-commerce platform as well as factory outlets are used to liquidate excess inventory. Whatever is left is sold in other countries.

What short-term goals, according to you, can be logistically achieved in the next six months, to further sustainable production in your company?

We have three short-term goals that we expect to achieve in the coming year:



Effluent Treatment Plant at a Bestseller vendor factory enables water recycling upto 97%.

- Close to 80% of our cotton to be BCI-compliant, starting from 2020
- Make the reused water from ETP potable
- A majority of our womenswear collections to be made out of recyclable products

Does design in fashion get restricted in a brand's pursuit of sustainability?

The only thing that is restrictive is probably the lack of access to technology in terms of recycling synthetics. As far as cottons are concerned, we can make almost everything in BCI.

Do you think there is the need to develop an Indian definition of sustainability, given our cultural uniqueness?

There is a dire need to make an Indian sustainability charter to educate people about the basics of sustainability and understand its significance in our cultural context. Sustainability has always been a part of our brand ethos; putting it down formally in the form of a charter took place about three years ago internationally, and about a year ago in India. We struggle with both the lack of knowledge around this issue and the willingness to acquire that knowledge. ■

FABINDIA

The Livelihoods Mandate

Prableen Sabhaney, Head — Communications & Public Affairs

TVOF: How does Fabindia approach sustainability in its business?

Prableen Sabhaney: Sustainability is at the core of Fabindia. The brand has always been aware of its responsibility as a business model, from its inception in 1960. In the words of the founder, John Bissell, “In addition to making profits, our aims are constant development of new handwoven products; a fair, equitable, and helpful relationship with our producers, and the maintenance of quality, on which our reputation rests.”

Sustainability is an integral driver of Fabindia’s strategic business decision-making, with the creation of craft-based livelihood in the rural sector being a mandate.

Fabindia’s business model and sourcing continues to be taught as a case at Harvard Business School, the IIMs and INSEAD, amongst other business schools. British Council has recognised the company as a significant contributor to creative industries, built around the central idea of sustainability. Academician Shubha Patwardhan’s PhD thesis that explores companies that created their own markets and in doing so changed the eco-system, includes Fabindia.

Fabindia is India’s most iconic fashion brand and continues to be one of the biggest retail chains in the country, with reach in multiple tier markets through more than 300 stores. Founded in the 1960s by John Bissell, Fabindia created its own market and in an unprecedented manner, made artisans and craftspeople its suppliers and shareholders.

While there is no single definition of ‘sustainability,’ Fabindia views it through the livelihood lens—creating sustainable jobs and livelihoods—while working with an average of 60,000 artisans from across the country. Given the nature of craft-focused work, this acts a multiplier.

Conversations around ‘how we source, what we source’ have always been part of the Fabindia focus, as we have one of the most inclusive, diverse, complex and fractalised supply bases in the world.

The company works across the spectrum with individuals in home-based scenarios, cooperatives, collectives, NGOs and producer companies, and with master craftsmen and designers who have come to be closely associated with Fabindia. It deals with varying quantities depending on capacities and skills, to tightly monitored schedules, while retaining the quality and integrity of design elements and the fashion quotient.

How does Fabindia continue to develop an enabling model for crafts communities as the company’s key suppliers?

Fabindia is aware and knowledgeable about the environment in which it functions, having built relationships with suppliers that constitutes a complex and varied supply base, over generations of interactions in some instances. The company has created innovative models to accommodate change and create avenues for crafts communities to enable engagement and generate livelihoods.

To realise its vision, Fabindia works with cooperatives and producer companies, with private entities and government organisations wherever it can. In Odisha, the company works in a public-private partnership model with the state government. Rangсутra, a community-owned company of artisans, is among those Fabindia has invested in. We are also closely associated with Organic India, which works with thousands of marginalised farmers.

Fabindia views sustainability through the livelihood lens—creating sustainable jobs and livelihoods—while working with an average of 60,000 artisans, sourcing from across the country.

Fabindia invests in craft-development and nurturing initiatives. Creating opportunities and providing training, maintaining field offices for constant interaction and feedback, are all part of the investments that Fabindia makes in the sector. For instance, Fabindia is now sourcing over 300,000 *chikankari*-embroidered pieces, where the capacity was limited to a few thousand pieces just a couple of years ago. This embroidery work is largely undertaken by women in home-based scenarios without fixed working hours. This requires strategic planning in terms of work, training, scheduling and consistency—it is the result of engaging with communities, building infrastructure, meeting challenges and ensuring a consistent livelihood.

What are the supply chain checks and balances to safeguard responsible production practices?

Fabindia comprises an enormous repository of knowledge of this sector, built over decades of work. Artisans have the liberty to work in their own environment, in the manner most suited to their lifestyle and production capabilities.

While the sourcing happens from traditional environments, the enabling processes are cutting-edge. Fabindia is tech-enabled and works with AI and machine learning, to ensure smooth functioning and ensure checks and balances. Regular audits and standard operating procedures that govern production practices are an inbuilt part of the supply chain management.

Do sustainable production practices impact product pricing?

When craft is viewed as an inclusive, livelihood-based activity, as it is for Fabindia, price takes on a central role. Many factors impact pricing—design, skill, level of the skill, sustainability of the craft. Craft is luxury in the truest sense; it is unique and has a cultural context, as opposed to being mass-produced. Pricing follows a bottom-up approach at Fabindia. An understanding of what it costs to create a product, both in terms of skill and time involved, plays an integral role.

While the women of Khurrampur, who stitch pyjamas, are paid according to the numbers stitched, with money going directly into their bank accounts, with a large multi-crore, community-owned company like Rangсутra, the focus is on providing sustainable orders for artisans across multiple locations.



John Bissell (centre) with Madhukar Khera (left) of Bharat Carpet Manufacturers (BCM) and a buyer, Ellen Moon (right) visiting the BCM factory in Panipat, Haryana in 1985. BCM was one of the manufacturers of Fabindia.

Do you think consumers are interested in the labels that authenticate the product—Handloom or Craftmark?

Fabindia uses both Handloom and Craftmark tags. Tags answer two needs. They underline the authenticity of the product and provide information about a craft or process. It may be hard to determine how many people buy a product because it is authentic or just go by aesthetic appeal; this information certainly adds to the understanding of a purchase. Fabindia puts tags on its products to inform customers of the true value of their purchase. Descriptions are included to acquaint customers with the value of what they are purchasing. The company acts as a bridge between artisans and consumers, and ensures that no nuance is lost in translation.

The biggest challenges in this sector is that of look alikes being mistaken for the authentic product. While some offerings may look like a craft and mimic the aesthetic, these do not have intrinsic value or the ability to contribute to sustainability by creating craft-based livelihoods. Both the Ministry of Textiles and the All India Artisan and Craftworkers Welfare Association (AIACA) have done stellar work in establishing national certification programmes that certify genuine handmade craft products, produced in a socially responsible manner.

Is gender equality a part of your sustainability attainment charter?

When it comes to enabling women through job and work opportunities in its supply chain and in the markets, Fabindia has been ahead of the curve. The craft sector has a very significant potential to play a major role in empowering women through income generation. We are very proud of the work we are doing in places like Khurrampur, where post training, women are providing 50% of the pyjamas available in Fabindia stores.



Woman artisan embroidering for Fabindia in her home.

Importantly, market linkages and skill development have also acted as impetus for social change, by opening up avenues for significant employment of women. About 45% of our supply base is linked to the work done by women.

Is there a mechanism to manage excessive inventory and manufacturing waste?

Fabindia is one of the very few retailers that does not have end-of-season sales. The approach to inventory management is built on the rigour of very precise projections, and the ability to move stock.

While focusing on contemporary, on-trend offerings, the designs that Fabindia is associated with provide a balance between the classic and the fashion-forward, for greater relevance and longevity. The parameters that govern the production of craft-based products also limit rapid redundancy.

Given the diversity and the nature of the supply base, the way the supply chain is arranged also minimises manufacturing waste. ■

FOREST ESSENTIALS

Local Ingredients, Traditional Processes and Care

Samrath Bedi, Managing Director

TVOF: Does Forest Essentials have a sustainability strategy?

Samrath Bedi: We understand sustainability through internal parameters like customer feedback and external factors like reflection of changing climatic conditions as the global focus shifts towards mindful consumption.

I took to understanding sustainability methodically almost two-and-a-half years ago. It went beyond front-end consumer issues to include packaging, conscious store build-up, and the interests of stakeholders in the value chain. A lot has been achieved in these past years but there is still a long way to go.

What are some of the key initiatives taken?

Our workshops are built to ensure zero carbon footprint. They have facilities like rainwater harvesting; the water harvested is used four to five times before disposal. Groundwater is also replenished in this manner. The workshops receive ample sunlight, reducing energy consumption. A solar energy set-up has been installed and

extra units are fed back into the grid.

We work with locals near our factories in Hyderabad and Rishikesh and source indigenous ingredients. Our products are sustainable for two reasons: the sourcing and nature of ingredients and the process to produce them. Products are made with traditional, eco-friendly methods. For example, when making the sugar lip scrub, we subscribe to old methods of fermentation by putting ingredients underground.

All stages of production are closely monitored and managed in-house. This ensures quality as well as commitment to clean formulations and worker welfare. Besides manufacturing, we encourage sustainable farming and the use of farm produce in our products. Infrastructure is a stumbling block in achieving this target because most farmers have small land parcels.

The welfare of our workers and especially the empowerment of women is critical to create a better work environment and make them financially independent. The company's CSR funds are utilized for the education of the children of workers in Hyderabad and Rishikesh. 'Simple School-Paathshala' is an innovative school transformation program started in 2016 in the Higher Secondary School in Gulardogi village (in Tehri Garhwal district) and focuses on improving the overall quality of teaching and learning in this remote hamlet of Uttarakhand. We also engage our

Forest Essentials was founded as a luxury wellness brand by Mira Kulkarni in 2000 as a modest business with robust principles to promote the values of Ayurveda. It grew exponentially over the years with investment from the global beauty giant Estee Lauder. Besides a stronghold in India, Forest Essentials also sells in the US, UK, Middle East and Australian markets.

workers in awareness-focused conversations to preserve their environment.

Among some sustainable steps adopted in the last few years, one was solar power. It has become more accessible and durable as an energy source and is installed in our production units.



'Simple School-Paathshala', an innovative school transformation program started in 2016.

Can eco-friendly packaging and recycling be a solution to reduce waste?

While the world speaks of the negative impact of plastics, I see that the production of glass or other alternative materials like metal, aluminum, copper, have their own adverse production issues. For example, a glass furnace runs for 24 hours to create bottles and generates a huge carbon footprint.

Last year, a visit to K Trade Fair, the world's premier fair for the plastic industry in Dusseldorf, Germany helped me deep-dive in the subject of recycling plastic. PET is the most recycled plastic in the world, though the reprocessing of the same PET, depending on its quality and country can differ. We sell 100% PET bottles which are completely recyclable and upon reprocessing, can be transformed into a drainpipe, the inner lining of a car, a bedsheet, etc. Globally, 45% of PET gets recycled. In India, it is 90%. The only value rag pickers get out of trash is plastic. So PET is the best way forward.

However, the problem is at the collection and segregation level. Collection is part of the informal sector with rag pickers and now NGOs, collecting plastic. We are progressing well to develop a closed loop system of recycling PET waste, which means that the A to Z of collection—segregation, recycling, selling and recollection—can adopt a circular format and be done ethically. We are developing channels to collect waste from 30 cities. Establishing a system for certification at all stages is critical to measure recycling and its impact.

PET is the most recycled plastic in the world, though the reprocessing of the same PET, depending on its quality and country, can differ. We sell 100% PET bottles which are recyclable and upon reprocessing, can be transformed into a drainpipe, the inner lining of a car, a bedsheet, etc. Globally, 45% of PET gets recycled. In India, it is 90%. The only value rag pickers get out of trash is plastic. So, PET is the best way forward.

Being a pan-India brand, it is a struggle to find organisations to manage sustainable initiatives for us at an all-India level like finding a vendor with the infrastructure to handle recycling on a large scale.

We are looking at ways of using Post Consumer Recyclable (PCR) plastic. PCR means breaking a used plastic bottle into PET granules for reuse. The practice is not prevalent in India; nevertheless, we hope to achieve this goal with the help of global strategic partners.

We have completely eliminated shrink wraps earlier used to protect bottles in transit, thus reducing plastic used by the company by 60%. Secondly, we have stopped using

bubble wrap for online orders. We are working on a project to make our store fit-outs from a certain percentage of recycled materials in the future.

Can certifications ensure responsible practices in a beauty business?

Applying for certifications is not mandatory. In terms of corporate governance and ensure standards, it is important for recycling plants to develop a framework to certify the amount of recycling material collected, recycled and reused for a company. Currently, there is only a recycle logo at the back of the bottle. Once PCR and PET recycling is implemented, they will have their own certification tags. A formal process has to be followed for stakeholders to access relevant information.

Many eco and traceability certifications exist, though most certifications are done by global agencies, and very few by Indian agencies. All our products are certified animal cruelty-free by PETA. Our mother and childcare range is certified by Made Safe, a coveted label that ascertains if the products contain ingredients completely safe for use according to FDA and international standards.

Is the Forest Essentials buyer interested in conversations surrounding sustainability?

The consumer is very interested in this conversation. They are aware of our brand philosophy and our commitment to quality. We informally communicate our initiatives annually through two to three videos.

We have to get to the stage where we can formally communicate with customers and share transformational stories. We have received laudatory messages from customers about eliminating shrink wrap and bubble wrap. More formal communication will take place in our stores and through social media channels and we would like people to know that we are becoming a clean brand.



Forest Essentials product being processed using a traditional technique.

Have there been any initiatives to empower Forest Essentials employees?

Our attrition rates are very low and our staff feel loyal towards the brand. 70% to 80% of the employees in our workshop are still the same lot from when it opened in 2004. We take good care of our employees, educate their children and remunerate them well. We follow the practice of distributing excess stock with the employees.

Is there a Sustainability Officer at Forest Essentials?

There is a CSR committee in place. Presently, I am the Sustainability Officer and I have been doing a great deal of research on the subject. Once the strategy and steps are closely linked to the supply chain, we will bring on board a senior sustainability person. The foundation is being laid by me, as the ethos of responsible production has to be defined by the management. ■

GOOD EARTH

Artisans are the Living Repositories of Textile Know-How

Anita Lal, Founder and Creative Director

TVOF: How does Good Earth approach the concept of sustainability?

Anita Lal: Sustainability has become a term which can encompass all kinds of values. We approach sustainability through the natural fabrics we use, like Mangalgiri. We don't use any polyester-based or man-made fibers except TENCEL or bamboo, but then, those are also natural. The other lens used to gauge sustainability in business is through sustaining a tradition. Our clothes are inspired by the sartorial styles that existed long before us in diverse regions of India, like the *chogas* or the loose, long kurtas. A lot of work goes behind sustaining a heritage; we look for crafts which are not being used to the optimum like they were, like *gota*. We work with the craftsmen to create the finest

Good Earth was founded in 1996 by Anita Lal, a studio potter and entrepreneur. It was among Delhi's few tasteful lifestyle stores, with home décor products created with a distinct focus on Indianness in design. Over the years, Good Earth's repertoire as a sustainable and sophisticated luxury lifestyle brand has grown.

Ten years ago, it added Sustain, a line of homegrown apparel made from natural fabrics that aimed to preserve Indian silhouettes, fabrics and styles. Today, Good Earth is synonymous with modern Indian style, has ten stores in India, more than 550 people, mostly women, in its workforce and a supple growth trajectory that concentrates on the Indian market, with an eye on foreign shores. Sustainability through sustenance of tradition, artisanal skills and ways of working is entrenched in the brand's DNA.

level of *gota*-work. Handwoven, natural dyed fabrics are used for clothing. 60% to 70% of our fabrics are still handwoven and for the rest, we depend on the power loom.

Does working with artisan communities help define the brand's sustainability goals?

Most of our apparel is not created with artisan communities. That happens only with special collections, like the recent Sindhu collection. Ajrakh, however, is used on a regular basis. We have experimented to innovate Bandhini, and both hand and digital hand block prints are used. However, we continuously work with certain crafts and communities on a regular basis, like artisan communities in Bhuj. Innovative additions have been made in these areas, like Ajrakh on velvet. A route to explore newer techniques and fabrics has opened up for artisan communities. Our work with artisans unfolds in the form of a partnership. They are the living repositories of technical know-how, and we help them make their creations market-friendly by assigning designs that consumers will appreciate and enjoy. Our role is really to be the connection between the consumer and the artisan.

What are the challenges you face in the process of making the business sustainable?

For a long time now, we have worked closely with artisans in Machilipatnam, the oldest Kalamkari city. The challenge, often, is their

unorganised method of working. Large orders are placed and since the craft uses natural colours, there are instances of fading and patchy colour. It is difficult to explain to customers that half the kurta is going to be in a lighter shade and the other half in another shade. We have had a lot of problems due to these reasons and had to rework, re-dye, redo. At Good Earth, we never return a reject item to the artisans and though challenging, we find a way to use them by making small, cohesive capsule collections.

Do your teams have conversations with artisan communities at the grassroots level about water management and recycling?

Yes, we have had those conversations and have sanctioned funds for delegating a place for washing and cleaning water, near Vidarbha. We are yet to make a consistent effort towards this issue, though.

At Good Earth, we never return a reject item to the artisans and though challenging, we find a way to use them by making small, cohesive capsule collections.

Are there any checks and balances in place to help monitor responsible production and manufacture of products?

We work with third-party vendors and all mechanisms are in place to ensure wage and work compliances. The fair wages system also contributes to making our clothing more expensive. However, we want to ensure that our vendors are doing that, and the working conditions, hygiene, production environment, is well taken care of. We are a small organisation and don't have many vendors but we pay them more than others, to ensure they align with the rules.



Good Earth's Rozana collection using natural indigo dyes.

Do sustainable production practices impact product pricing?

People don't understand that, but it does. Working in craft clusters spread across the country adds to extra overheads and the cost goes up. We pay our stitching staff more than the standard rate. Compliances add to the overheads.

Are consumers made aware about the relationship between ethical production practices and pricing?

I think we don't communicate it enough at the shop level, which we should. But consumers hardly care; they interpret it as a brand's decision. A lot of our fabrics are hand-woven and are more cost-intensive than mill-made fabrics. These things must,



Good Earth's Katran Collection

ideally, be communicated. Fortunately, sales are doing all right, so it seems our consumers do understand the sustainable component.

Moreover, we believe that clothing should not be so cheap that it can be bought every day. Sustainability is rooted in the value, the quality of the fabric, the work, and the detailing. We refrain from making very trend-oriented clothes. Our clothes are loose, easier to wear, easier to mix and match, and one is good buying a few items. Our Rozana (daily wear) line, for instance, offers simple, non-embellished or less embellished clothing, mostly khadi kurtas which can be paired with white bottoms. The clothes essentially breathe well. Black, white, indigo are the building blocks of Rozana and ensure that consumers don't have to buy excessively.

How is fabric waste managed at Good Earth?

We have a whole section made from leftover cuts called 'The Katran Collection,' which sells very well. Jackets and cushions are made from leftovers.

Can eco-friendly packaging options add to waste-tackling measures?

At the front and back-end, there is no bubble wrap or plastic used at Good Earth. We use paper for packaging. We have machines that crinkle the paper so that it can pad glasses and crockery. There's no foam, either. It is a challenge our team took up, and now, more than 95% of our packaging is without any plastic.

You spoke about the sustenance of the craft through innovation and revival. In that spirit, does Good Earth also archive designs?

I wouldn't call it revival but innovation. We develop Banarasi and Ajrakh fabric with our own designs. We have a library of these designs. This is true for *gota* as well, and everything is archived.

What are the short-term goals you would like the brand to build in the next six months, to advance this constantly moving target?

We are working even more closely with Khadi through Khadi India. The goal is to work more with hand-woven fabrics. ■

HIDESIGN

Greening Hidesign

Dipen Dilip Desai, Marketing Head

TVOF: How does Hidesign approach the concept of sustainability?

Dipen Dilip Desai: Hidesign has three core values: to be natural and eco-friendly, handcrafted, and innovative. The factory building in Auroville was designed by American ceramic artist and architect Ray Meeker. It is made of red bricks baked on-site from the mud dug up to create water bodies around the area. The architecture provides natural light and ventilation with ample space for each artisan, and reflects the values and ethos of the brand.

Hidesign leathers are vegetable-tanned and the hardware is sand-cast in solid brass. Hidesign runs an annual customer engagement initiative called Art of Reuse that promotes upcycling. For almost 16-18 months through 2016-17, Hidesign celebrated The Green Story, an initiative towards afforestation and communicated it through seed tags, paper and cloth bags and our 2016 Diary.

Recently, our factory in Puducherry went fully solar. Along with using renewable energy, we

are also connected to the grid which enables us to contribute the unused solar energy.

How does Hidesign ensure that the leather used is ethically sourced?

The leather varieties used by us are not exotic and are classified as a byproduct of the meat industry or from animals that die a natural death. We do not use leather for which the animal is killed only for its hide. Most of the leather used at Hidesign comes from meat-eating areas like Kerala, and from international farms. To ensure this, we work with a very strictly mapped-out list of registered and compliant vendors.

Our experienced factory workers cut pieces out of leftovers for further use in production. Remaining leftovers are sent for branding, zipper, lining, etc. The last batch is sold to leather scrap dealers, who sell it to leather board manufacturers, which is then used by luxury brands to line their bags.

Hidesign was founded in 1978 by Dilip Kapur in reaction to the synthetic and plasticky bags available in the market in the 70s. It later set up its production unit in a custom-designed green building near Auroville in Puducherry, in 1990. It opened its first retail store in India in 1998 and soon became one of India's leading handbag and leather accessories brand. The company continues to operate on its foundational principles of innovation and community development, and employs Puducherry locals, with 90% of its employee force being women.

How are the other processes of the value chain managed after the leather is is procured?

Tanning is a process of treating leather to stop it from decomposing so it serves someone for a long time, and to prevent it from becoming a health and hygiene problem. The traditional process of vegetable tanning for preservation of leather used plant matter like tree bark and seeds, and was safer for the environment. However, after the Industrial Revolution, ways of hastening this

process were explored and chromium salt was found to be a suitable chemical. With chemical tanning, the time taken to convert hide to leather is reduced from 40 days to about three or four days. These chemicals are known carcinogenic compounds, and leach into soil and water bodies.

The leather used at Hidesign is vegetable-tanned. It's simple: would you rather touch chemically tanned leather or leather tanned with plant extracts? We do not believe in grain correction or painting our leather, and aim to celebrate the natural texture and grain of the leather; this has been part of our ethos from the very beginning. And this is why we have not felt the need to develop a separate sustainability strategy.

The effluents released in the tanning process go through an RO filtration system, and the water after filtration is of drinkable quality and reused in the tannery for the next cycle of the tanning process.

Does sustainable production impact the pricing of products?

The final cost of the material does become higher with vegetable tanning, since the process is time and labour-intensive. Nevertheless, we manage to keep our margins under control as we are vertically integrated, produce all our leather in our own tannery and largely distribute it through our own outlets.

We try to build value into our products and market them in a way that people get to know of the handmade processes that make them unique.

How does Hidesign benefit the local economy of Puducherry?

We are definitely one of the larger private employers, as most of our employees are local. 90% of our employees are women and



A woman employee hand finishing the leather.

work in all sub-structures of the business like the factory, corporate offices, as well as back-end sales offices. Hidesign brings significant innovation to Puducherry, constantly boosting the local economy through its retail outlets and a sophisticated brand of hospitality through its hotels. Hidesign has changed the face of the four Dalit villages surrounding our factory. It has brought prosperity and the chance to move out of poverty in one generation.

What do the Hidesign workers understand of sustainability?

Workers in our factories value nature, as our campus is located amidst green meadows, duck ponds, waterfalls and trees. The lunch hour at Hidesign is spent outdoors, under the trees, sitting on rock benches and tables. The average time our artisans have spent at Hidesign is 18 to 22 years, and we have reason to believe that they have gradually gained an understanding of the company's ethos and core values.

How is manufacturing waste managed at Hidesign?

Our experienced workers in the factory cut



Women staff in the Hidesign factory.

pieces out of leftovers that can then be used in production. Further to this, the remaining leftovers are sent down the line for branding, zipper, lining, etc. The final leftovers are used to produce a unique handmade paper that we have created specially to make the paper bags used in our retail stores. There is no other significant waste, and what there is, goes for recycling.

All the hardware used in our bags is repurposed sand-casted brass, procured from scrap dealers around the area. A lot of the wood used in our offices, factories and even stores, is repurposed, too, for which we have an in-house team of carpenters.

Are alternative materials like vegan leather being used at Hidesign?

Vegan leather has been a questionable concept for us. Since it is a synthetic derived

from petrochemicals, it does not fit into our concept of being natural or sustainable.

Does Hidesign follow sustainable practices in its packaging?

For the past 12 years, all our bags and wallets have been sold in India without the use of plastic packaging. However, as a company we are not yet zero-plastic. When redesigning any of our packaging, our brief has been to restrict plastic and minimise use of ribbons and other embellishments wherever possible. All Hidesign paper bags over the past year have been made using recycled leather scraps which go to make a strong paperboard-like material. Being green extends to everything we do at Hidesign. ■

HOUSE OF ANITA DONGRE

Planet and People: Joining the Dots

Sangita Rohira, Head – Production, Sourcing and Sustainability

TVOF: How does House of Anita Dongre (HOAD) approach sustainability?

Sangita Rohira: The pursuit for sustainability has been extremely important to Anita Dongre, the founder and creative director of the brand, since its inception. She feels strongly about environment preservation and women empowerment. The organization and employees share the same passion and are committed to this goal.

What steps are taken to make the employees aware about sustainability?

A set of core values sets our organisation apart, and helps build our work culture. Responsibility towards sustainability and the environment are one of our core values. Multiple training sessions are held to guide our employees towards maintaining a sustainable work life. Sustainable initiatives taken by the employees are awarded by the top management and shared across the organisation, encouraging others.

House of Anita Dongre (HOAD) is a reputed Indian fashion luxury house set up by designer Anita Dongre and her siblings Mukesh Sawlani and Meena Sehra, in 1995. The company owns five brands: AND (contemporary Westernwear), Global Desi (smart casuals and accessories), Anita Dongre (wedding couture), Grassroot (handcrafted pret) and Pinkcity (handcrafted jadau jewellery). Anita Dongre, Chief Creative Officer of the company, is a global sustainability champion and emphasises that her business integrates responsibility towards both the planet and its people, in its operations.

The following initiatives were undertaken by our employees and highlighted throughout the organisation:

- recycling our hardware and computers
- moving all our training sessions online, saving 75,000 sheets of paper every year
- rolling out biodegradable packaging



Production facility at House of Anita Dongre.

HOAD headquarters are in a green building in Navi Mumbai. How has this helped?

We have an eco-friendly, ergonomically designed workspace set amidst the green hills of Rabale. This has reduced energy consumption by harnessing natural sunlight and ventilation. 67% of our waste water is recycled and aerated fixtures in faucets help us save a further 60% to 70% water consumption. Waste is segregated in dry and wet categories for composting. Our fabric waste is repurposed and the e-waste is recycled. We also take forward these values to our store level by using energy-saving LED lights.

HOAD has been taking initiatives to reduce its overall carbon footprint by planting 25,000 trees in the Bassi Wildlife Sanctuary in Rajasthan.

Do you communicate sustainability as a brand priority to your customers?

Our social media platforms regularly talk about our sustainable initiatives like our tie-up with Lenzing for procuring the Ecovera fabric, as well as our membership in the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI). As part of our core value system, we do not use any leather or fur in our designs. We are pioneers in introducing biodegradable packing for our merchandise.

We are pioneers in introducing biodegradable packing for our merchandise. HOAD is the first Indian fashion house to be a member of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition.

HOAD is the first Indian fashion house to be a member of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition.

Our brand, Grassroot, revives and sustains dying crafts by collaborating with a network of NGOs and skilled artisans to empower them. We have set up tailoring units in villages to train and provide a sustained livelihood to women, and make them economically independent and self-reliant. All these initiatives are highlighted to our consumers through tags and in-store communication.

In what way does your brand consistently engage with women artisans?

Grassroot was born out of the need to provide steady opportunities to India's skilled artisan community. In this pursuit, we closely work with the talented women artisans of SEWA

from Gujarat. Traditional embroideries are revived, to create contemporary designs for global women. We often make collections because a particular crafts' cluster requires work and not because it is time to launch a collection.

Women empowerment and welfare initiatives are also conducted under The Anita Dongre Foundation, the CSR arm of the company. Several tailoring (training and production) centres have been set up in rural Maharashtra, where marginalized tribal women are professionally trained to make garments. Besides training, we also provide them with forward linkages, such as assuring them a regular supply of fabrics, raw materials, tools and organised buy-back of the tailored garments at fair per-piece rates. This has resulted in a profound socio-economic impact amongst the communities being served.

We have five such units right now, in and around different villages of Maharashtra like Charoti, Jawhar, Dhanevari, Kawada, etc. The Foundation envisions 50 such community tailoring centres to be set up across the country in the next three years.



Earth Tee, a sustainable T-shirt made from recycled plastic bottles.

Medical support was extended to our embroidery workers through a recently organised eye camp, as over time their vision gets affected. Out of 550 embroidery artisans who attended the camp, 490 needed glasses! Some were aware about their poor eyesight but couldn't afford the spectacles. Others were unaware of their poor vision. Cataract candidates have been identified and we have arranged for their surgeries.

Are there any supply chain checks and balances in your production eco-system, in terms of safeguarding responsible production mechanisms?

All our raw materials are sourced from large, compliant mills who follow sustainable practices. We are associated with organisations like Lenzing, R | Elan and BCI. In 2018, for World Environment Day, we collaborated with R | Elan to create the Earth Tee, a sustainable t-shirt made from recycled plastic bottles. R | Elan GreenGold fabrics

were also used to create a few styles for the Anita Dongre SS18 Collection.

Do sustainable production practices affect the pricing of the final product?

Sustainable practices do come at a cost. However, as an organization we make a conscious effort to absorb all these additional costs, as we strongly believe in a more sustainable way of conducting business and reducing our carbon footprint.

What challenges do you face while adopting responsible practices in the entire ecosystem?

Every new set of initiatives has its challenges initially. Once our employees and business partners saw the larger vision towards our sustainable initiatives, they started practising these in their day-to-day worklife. We have always tried to ingrain in them our two core values: environmental sustainability and women's empowerment. ■

LEVI'S

Every Action has a Quarterly Milestone

Sanjeev Mohanty, Managing Director - South Asia,
Middle East & North Africa

Internationally Levi Strauss & Co. is committed to sustainability. How does this translate to the brand's India operations?

Sanjeev Mohanty: In the 25 years of Levi Strauss & Co's presence in India, sustainability has been a commitment from the beginning. Responsible production is integrated into the soul of the company. We recognize our role in making an impact on the industry and embrace new, ambitious targets for combating climate change through innovation.

In 2018, a breakthrough happened in denim finishing, a process that had remained unchanged for more than 50 years, and we launched project FLX (Future Led Execution). This year, Future Finish was launched in the US; it delivers new products without making any initial samples. This results in the reduction of wastage and replaces manual technique by automating the jeans' finishing process. It also reduces chemicals used for manufacturing, thus furthering our commitment to zero-discharge of chemicals by 2020. Another important step is the new water strategy announced last year which will help reduce water consumption upto 50% in

highly stressed areas. This builds on Levi's work initiated in 2011 when waterless processes were implemented in design and manufacture. Through collaborations with apparel impact institutes like National Research Development Corporation's (NRDC) Clean by Design Program, several international finance corporations as well as Partnership for Cleaner Textile (PaCT), we aim to help suppliers achieve these goals by 2025.

What is the role of employees in establishing sustainability as a value in the company's ecosystem?

The organisation is guided by a 'profits through principles approach.' When you ask any employee what makes the company different, they will point to four values: empathy, originality, integrity and courage. Last year, globally as well in India, our employees participated in the Climate Action Week. It has happened many times that the junior-most employee and the country leader are part of the same team, working together on projects to reduce chemicals in the production process. We have internal global rewards and teams are recognized by the CEO, the Board and shareholders.

Which policies within Levi Strauss & Co, as well as those shared with suppliers, address worker welfare?

We run a Workers Well-Being Program in garment factories producing Levi's. It takes care of workers' health through regular

A name globally synonymous with jeans, **Levi's** entered the Indian market 25 years ago. In more recent years, the iconic brand has adopted more environmentally-conscious ways of producing denim through leveraging technology, and aims to eliminate chemicals used in manufacturing by 2020.

checkups, hygiene, financial independence workshops, and more. The factories are across the country and the programme runs even in third-party production units and suppliers; it has been structured by the agency Ernst & Young.

Is making the workplace gender equitable important for the attainment of sustainability goals?

Women comprise 80% of the global workforce of the supply chain. The Worker Well-Being Program will be extended by 2020. It was set up through the Levi Strauss Foundation, our philanthropic arm, and will reach 200,000 people in factories around the world, the vast majority of them being women. The terms of engagement with vendors has a zero-tolerance sexual harassment policy and cohesion. In India, a factory called Aquarelle helps with 30% of the business. It was a pilot for the HERproject of BSR (Business for Social Responsibility), a global non-profit which aims to support women in the workplace. The project's finance program provides financial literacy to low-income women while other programmes consist of access to doctors, community fundraising, on-site day care, etc.

Levi's introduced the Screen Chemistry Program which helped reduce chemical dyes by 80%. With FLX technology, dyes are not used at all. Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) have been set up in all production units.

What are the kind of product innovations and R&D the company has invested in, to enable good practices in fashion?

Future Finish is a new, online personalization experience where consumers can customize denims from rips to fades, patterns to patches, using groundbreaking



Future Finish denims employ laser-powered technology to create designs that use fewer chemicals in the finishing process.

laser-powered technology. We are using more sustainable material and have looked at cotton hemp altered to feel like cotton, as it takes 80% less water to produce.

How do you ensure supply chain checks and balances?

A dedicated sustainability team conducts frequent visits and audits, and in countries where we have partners, we promote sustainable production practices. For example, our Screened Chemistry program keeps hazardous chemicals and compounds from entering production from the outset, and has been adopted by many other companies. It also landed us on the Fortune 'Change The World' list for the second consecutive year.

What does Levis do with its waste or defective stock, the surplus, samples?

For leftovers, we have a Recycle Denim Program. We donate to NGO partners like Goonj in India who have a recycling program. We encourage our customers to donate denim, which NGOs upcycle to make denim bags and totes. Samples are sold to friends and families. If the defect in defective stock is minimal, it could be a small mismatch that is upcycled or altered. Eventually, everything is consumed and nothing gets dumped.

What kind of dyes are used for denims and how are they disposed of?

Levi's has introduced the Screened Chemistry program which helps reduce chemical dyes by 80%. With FLX technology, dyes are not used at all. Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) are set up in all production units.

Is the sales employee out front equipped to provide information on these products' sustainability factor?

If you ask any employee on the ground for information of this nature, they may not be able to articulate it the way I am doing but they will eventually guide the consumer to our website, which details the fundamental structure of these projects. We carry many employee training programs internally. The Levi's stores are run by franchisee partners and we are also educating them. This is a work in progress.

Does the pursuit of sustainability restrict design?

Not at all. In fact, the pursuit of sustainability is an enabling factor and the best innovations happen in constraining conditions. As an example, with FLX, what used to take a couple of hours now takes 90 seconds. The technology is probably 100x more agile, softer and deploys a bigger canvas for designers.



Care label in Levi's denim.

Will eco-friendly packaging enhance Levi's sustainability goals?

In India, we reuse more than 60% of our cartons in the distribution centres operations for onward shipments to our customers and going forward we would like to invest in more recycling initiatives.

What challenges are faced by the company in the pursuit of responsible practices?

Any new process or initiative requires change, aligning to stringent measures and training. Heavy lifting is required in investment in the initial phase to scale the processes. Convincing partners and walking the talk has been critical. For example, the Worker Well-Being Program began at our factory and looked achievable. However, taking the program from 3,000 or 5,000 workers to 100,000 workers in vendor factories in remote locations in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Pakistan or on the outskirts of Bengaluru was a big challenge. A long-term agenda was drawn and investment planned. Sustainability or climate change cannot happen overnight. A five to ten years of commitment is critical.

What short-term goals can logistically be achieved by Levis in the next six months?

Everything. There is a business strategy in place for the next five years or more. It is not possible to get going if the company doesn't have a weekly, monthly or quarterly plan. For instance, if 100% waterless technology has to be achieved, a goal to move every five steps quarterly has to be devised. Similarly for reducing hazardous chemical discharge, installing more LEDs in stores, collecting used denim for recycling, targets are set. Every action has a quarterly milestone attached to it and that is how we plan to achieve our goal by 2025. ■

LIFESTYLE

Innovative Sustainability and Sustainable Innovation

Vasanth Kumar, Managing Director

TVOF: When did sustainability become an important subject internally for the Lifestyle brands?

Vasanth Kumar: The way of doing things sustainably has been on our priority list for the past three or four years, and we are just embarking on the journey of trying to come up with innovative solutions that will make our footprint more responsible. With the help of Clothing Manufacturers Association of India (CMAI), we hope to achieve the goal of sustainability in terms of our retail operations, logistics as well as product development, by 2025.

Small changes have been initiated so far, like using recycled bags, charging the customer in order to reduce the consumption of shopping bags and a shift to LED lights in our retail spaces. In terms of logistics, we are trying to come up with solutions for reusable packaging and transportation. Sustainable collections that use organic cotton, as well as fabrics that will require less water at consumer level, have been introduced.

Lifestyle is a retail fashion brand under the Dubai-based retail conglomerate, the Landmark Group, which started its India operations in 1999 with its maiden store in Chennai. Today the company has over 82 stores in 42 cities in India. Lifestyle's portfolio of in-house fashion labels include Forca, Ginger, Melange, Kappa, CODE, Bossini, Fame Forever, Juniors, Color Me, Smiley, Nexus, UCLA and the multi-brand chain features a selection of over 150 national and international brands.

Have there been any information sessions/workshops for workers within the company to enable the understanding of sustainability for employees?

With global brands emphasising the need for the garment industry to become more sustainable, there has been a trickle-down effect on the Indian workforce. They are required to follow these norms when designing, manufacturing and exporting internationally.



Vishal Vij, a differently-abled cashier servicing the customer at the Lifestyle outlet at Rohini, New Delhi.

Presenting our designers with practical solutions and sustainable fibres and finishes, encouraging them to incorporate those in their designs and similarly presenting a viable, responsible solution at every step of the value chain is how we motivate and encourage our employees. Since environmental friendliness is propagated across all industries, we find it to be a product development challenge rather than an awareness challenge.

Can you tell us about the challenges Lifestyle faces, in the process of incorporating responsible practices?

Creating an entire ecosystem that aims to safeguard sustainable practices has been a major challenge. Every step of the value chain must be a responsible one, from sourcing the right fibres to finding compliant manufacturers who can deliver within a certain cost.

How do you ensure supply chain checks and balances, to make sure all the links in responsible production and manufacture are safeguarded?

98% of our materials are domestically sourced, which makes it important to upgrade and align our vendors with the goal of a responsible value chain. To make sure that a balance is maintained at all levels, we have direct links with all our vendors and do not approach them through any agent or intermediary. This is imperative, in order to safeguard physical and social compliances.

With in-house manufacturing of international brands like Kappa, UCLA and Bossini, all our manufacturers are accredited with the CMAI and follow the current compliance laws, in terms of using Effluent Treatment Plants (ETP) and following other safety as well as social compliances. However, upgrading to fibres that don't consume excess water and other such innovative options require a higher

focus on product development, and we are willing to help with and achieve this by 2025, with help and guidance from CMAI.

What does the company do with its waste—pre and post-consumer surplus, defective, unsold stock, samples, etc.?

A lot of waste management is handled at the manufacturing end. As retailers, we also try to do our bit by conducting donation drives for the needy and making the customer a part of this social cause as well. We work with organisations like Goonj to donate clothes and other items, as part of our CSR activities. We are also following a green policy in our retail spaces, as well as corporate offices, by trying to generate as little waste as possible. Since we buy the finished product from manufacturers who manufacture it on order, the issue of excess inventory is not too prevalent now.

Do you think employing responsible production and manufacturing guidelines will increase the cost of the product, thus affecting sales?

The cost of an item produced sustainably will be marginally higher than that of a regular product, as otherwise a sharp increase in

Creating an entire ecosystem that aims to safeguard sustainable practices has been a major challenge. Every step of the value chain must be a responsible one, from sourcing the right fibres to finding compliant manufacturers who can deliver within a certain cost.



Factory workers participating in 'Get Active Camps' organised by Lifestyle, the Landmark Group to create awareness about Non-Communicable Diseases (NCD).

prices can affect consumption levels. To achieve this, we will invest in product development and explore innovative solutions to cater to the value-conscious population of the country. It is only when everyone from yarn manufacturers to dyers and garment manufacturers chip in and work collectively, that we will be able to achieve our pricing goals, because sustenance of business is also a goal that we have to look at simultaneously.

Do you think a reward or motivation system for employees who further sustainable practices should be introduced in a company like yours?

We don't approach reward and welfare

practices through sustainability only in terms of clothing. Employing the differently-abled in our retail stores and offering them a work environment where they can continue to grow, has been a major part of our CSR initiatives. Currently, we employ more than 400 differently-abled executives and make sure that they are retained with optimum support and training for further growth. We are also a part of the government skilling programme and recruit and train the underprivileged as part of our initiative. In this sense, we follow responsible practices by employing, training and sustaining them as active members of the workforce. ■

péro

Holistic Consistency and Regular Work

Aneeth Arora, Founder and Jasmeet Arora, Chief Believer

TVOF: Is there a specific lens through which sustainability is addressed at péro?

Aneeth Arora (AA): For us from day one, sustainability has meant consistently working with the same set of craft clusters and communities, year after year. In my experience, artisan groups look forward to consistent work commitment. They are giving up their craft not due to remuneration issues, but due to lack of regular work. We have taken up the challenge of innovating with the same set of people and giving them work. It is also about generating work for the brand and myself year after year. The idea of sustainability is to holistically sustain something that has been started.

Jasmeet Arora (JA): Not only at the sourcing but also for processing, the brand engages formerly unskilled women who now work as seamstresses. For example, we came across refugees from Afghanistan who did crochet. When there wasn't enough crochet work, we taught them hemming and other more regularly used techniques. Accessories like

recycled fabric hearts, *doris* (strings) for tags and *phoondas* (pompoms or tassels) on bags are produced in scale and provide work to these groups who have been with us for ten years.

All the *katran* (waste) is recycled into fabric hearts. All buttons are hand minted and even though the volume has grown multi-fold, we have continued with the manual process rather than automating it, as that would affect jobs of a hundred female workers. Though the basic cost of manual production as well as time engaged is more, this is in sync with our brand ethos.



Aneeth Arora, founder, péro, celebrating employee's birthdays.

Launched in 2009, **péro** is the brainchild of fashion designer, Aneeth Arora and is internationally hailed for its unique amalgamation of textile based fashion realised through exceptional embroideries and original handloom development. The brand has witnessed exponential growth in the last decade and currently retails in 35 countries across more than 350 stores. péro comprises of sub-brands, péro (pret) and Chota péro (kidswear) and has collaborated with retail giants like Nike, Adidas, Birkenstock and, the Woolmark Company for its various collections. It is recognised as luxury pret in India.

What is the prevailing work culture at péro?

JA: Two hundred and fifty employees are on our payroll. Remuneration of employees and working hours are as prescribed by the government. We have never delayed salaries and all workers are paid on the 7th of every month. All staff members avail of Provident Fund (PF) and Employee State Insurance (ESI). PF is paid on full salary not on basic.

We take everyone out once a year on Labour Day for an overnight trip. The staff is informed about casual leaves, lapse of leaves, and leaves that can be compensated. Information is a major handicap in this industry. We take it upon ourselves to inform our staff about gratuity provision when they finally quit. péro also has a strict anti-sexual harassment policy with a specific committee. There is an open door culture in the company and anyone can come to Aneeth and me with a work-related grievance.

What are the manufacturing processes you follow for sustainable practice?

AA: There is a difference between a purist brand and a practical brand. We work with middlemen but make sure that our vendors adhere to fair practices and pay weavers on time.

All dyeing is azo-free. It is difficult to do natural dyeing, because of the quantities we produce and because of technical restrictions. Only pure materials are used. We do not have in-depth knowledge about where the cotton or other materials come from, but are capable of taking care of everything that happens to the fabric after it is received. This includes how we use waste, manage inventory—number of garments produced, restricting overproduction, finding takers.

At the fibre and fabric level, it is difficult to control information. When I started, I wanted to work with Khadi and organic materials, but trusting vendors with genuine materials was problematic. A compromise is needed for sustaining a practical business. Following sustainable practices is expensive and certificates need to be in order.

How is waste managed at péro?

AA: Since the fabric is handloom and we focus on quality, the scope of rejection is huge. Besides cut fabric, there are bundles of

running fabric lying in the store. There is scope to utilize that fabric in Lazy péro, our affordable line. The fabric is not rejected because the colour bleeds, but because of some spots (a characteristic of handloom) which are not accepted in markets we supply to. Every season, we launch a recycled collection using pieces and specify that no two pieces will be the same when we get orders.

What about recycling water?

JA: Rainwater harvesting facilities have been installed in both our factories now. It is a government compulsion and we have chosen to adhere to all good practices. We do not wash garments in the factory.

We take everyone out once a year on Labour Day for an overnight trip. The staff is informed about casual leaves, lapse of leaves. In case they do not avail casual leaves, we have the provision of paying them for those days. Information is a major handicap in this industry. Staff is not even aware of gratuity provision when they quit a job.

Which other energy-saving practices are followed?

JA: All our lights are best quality LED that are more expensive than the normal LEDs. These are installed in consultation with a light engineer and the angle and quality is such that it does not stress a tailor's vision.

Are péro's domestic and global buyers interested in conversations around sustainable fashion?

JA: The Indian consumer is a value-seeking consumer. There are people who understand that they are buying consciously made garments for which fair wages have been paid. That number is growing but slowly. It is

a long journey and could take another ten years for people to accept the price they pay for the products they want to buy. In the West, handmade has a particular value because of the labour. But then again, discerning customers, however small in number, do exist in both parts of the world.

AA: Our social media channels communicate transparency to the customers. People are asking who made my clothes. We have not hidden the process as well as the hours put into it, are shown on social media. In our factory outlet, sales executives represent the brand to walk-in customers. In stores like Ogaan or other retail channels, we relay information about the journey and process of the garment.

What about observing sustainability in the packaging?

AA: When interns come to us, they think it is a purist brand. When they see us using plastic for storing and transporting garments, they understand the practicality of the situation. At our end, we use recycled plastic and single use polythene is not used. Now we use muslin bags wherever possible.

Can archiving designs and collections contribute to the sustenance of craft techniques?

AA: Fashion was seen as a six-monthly trend. As students of the National Institute of Design (NID), we were taught to never throw anything and to document. We used the landmark of ten years of péro to document our past collections, materials and create a resource centre. Ten years back, we made a collection out of double Ikat. That design is not made today. With the reference in hand, I can go back and redevelop the design.

JA: Every piece ever made by péro in the past seasons – buttons, tassels, garments – has been retained.



A montage of up cycling initiatives by péro.

What short-term goals are you are looking at, in terms of sustainability?

AA: We have collected our waste in the hope of doing something concrete with it like making paper. However, recycling cloth to make paper will use huge amounts of water. The question that needs to be asked is – are we reducing carbon footprint or increasing in this process?

Going forward, we would like to communicate through tags about the journey of cloth—embroideries, fabric, and combination of crafts coming together in one piece. The only paper products in our packaging are the tags, which we plan to replace with cloth in 2020, and the pin to become a brooch.

We have hired a person who will segregate our waste into colour variants and styles. We want to start a home products line. There is huge possibility of making home products entirely out of the waste. ■

RAHUL MISHRA

Seasonal Collections fuel the most Unsustainable Practices

Rahul Mishra, Founder and Designer

TVOF: Is there a sustainability strategy for brand Rahul Mishra?

Rahul Mishra: Something is sustainable when it can sustain on its own with full capacity and nurture everything without disturbing the balance. Sustainability is an evolving conversation, a need-based concept—needed for environment, people, business, society.

Our designing process starts with a sense of purpose, to create a beautiful garment and provide livelihoods. To provide employment, we engage with processes that are slow, consume minimal resources, maximise participation and eventually benefit both the craft and society. For instance, the process of hand embroidery creates ten times more employment than any other artisanal process.

When you launched your label, were these concerns a part of the business model?

I was more focused on craft and livelihood and it is evident in my initial *Bandhini* or Kerala Collection. I stayed away from embroidery all these years and started

Rahul Mishra, founder of his eponymous label launched in 2008, has championed sustainability in his business model through engagement with artisans across India, and an inventive exposition of traditional handmade techniques. The brand sells both in pret and couture forms in India and at global retailers like Barneys, Neiman Marcus, Saks Fifth Avenue, Harvey Nichols etc.

When we start work in a new cluster, we train workers in finances, GST, billing numbers and calculation, through our company's chartered accountant. We have eight to ten active clusters and 50% of the turnover goes in the form of wages to them. Rahul Mishra is a socially audited company. Even though we work in a high-risk country like India, we stock at Barneys in London and Neiman Marcus stores. Everything from sanitation to wages are audited by them.

working with thread embroideries only six to seven years ago. We use rayon, which is 100% biodegradable. Rayon yarns with cotton supplement fibre are used, rather than those with a petroleum base. I do not use sequins from China or *zardozi* wire, as I am not sure what happens to the metal thereafter.

Do you think consumers respond to the idea of sustainable, responsible couture?

Our social media channels communicate the brand's essence. Sustainability is an extra brownie point for the consumer but not a decisive one. For them, art and beauty reigns. It is that lehnga or a jacket that is the focus of the buying decision. We cannot create a socialist side to buying.



Tailoring unit in Rahul Mishra's factory in Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

Do you have an inventory management mechanism in place to reduce waste?

We follow the old-school way of conducting business and focus on creating a captivating collection for potential buyers. Our supply is need based and we avoid overproducing. We don't face situations of tackling surplus where none exists. There are lots of samples from our Paris shows but those are in extra-small sizes and we often alter them to fit friends or family. These become references and are archived. Thirty per cent samples are left with us. Everything else is sold. We do not create seasonal collections. Seasons and trends are fuelling the most unsustainable practices. Our costumers send their pieces back for alterations and we are happy to make adjustments.

In what way has your work with artisans and clusters contributed to local economies?

When we start work in a new cluster, we train them in finances, GST, airway bill numbers and billing calculations, through our company's chartered accountant. We have eight to ten active clusters and 50% turnover goes in the form of wages to these regions. Rahul Mishra is a socially audited company and though we work in a high-risk country like India, we stock at Barneys in London and Neiman Marcus. Everything from sanitation to wages are audited by them. An average wage

of Rs 17,500 goes to the artisans monthly. I am not aware of a fair wage system in handloom and that is the reason I distanced myself from handloom, since I cannot keep track. That monthly income, while staying and working in the village has led to the prosperity of artisans as compared to earning the same wage in Mumbai, where they are away from their families and compromise on the quality of life.

We enabled reverse migration in 2012 with Afzal Zariwala, who worked in a dingy set-up in Jijamata, Mumbai. He is an entrepreneur now, based out of a small village near Kolkata. The company has created 12 to 15 entrepreneurs out of *karigars*. Afzal runs an embroidery unit and distributes work worth a crore of rupees to artisan groups employed with him. This money boosts the local economy.

Another success story is of Hukum Kohli, a ninth-generation weaver from Chanderi. In 2010, after winning the Woolmark Prize, we started working with Hukum. In a few months, he started building his house. After ten years, he owns a laptop, a car, and has a fully functional production unit where his family also works.

What are the checks and balances you have in place?

The most important is the money flow. You have to assure timely payments for the workforce. Salaries go no later than the seventh of every month. Financial empowerment of the artisans and our workforce is ensured and digital transactions through IMPS have become a routine mode of transfer. There is no exclusivity we hold our *karigars* down to and they can work with anyone they want to. Our external and internal workforce has mostly been with us for the last decade and that says a lot about our workplace culture.

What kind of employment welfare policies are in place at Rahul Mishra?

We are government-compliant in the way we function. We registered every worker/embroiderer with SIPP, State Insurance and Provident Fund and the Employees' State Insurance (ESI), a self-financing social security and health insurance scheme for Indian workers earning less than Rs 21,000. It ensures that employees and their families are covered by the government, with a nominal contribution from the employer and employee for medical benefits. Several of my staff members have benefited from this scheme. As employers, we take the utmost responsibility for informing our workforce about the schemes that apply to them. Registration with government through SIPP also ensures a certain level of accountability of all stakeholders in case of a mishap.

What are the challenges you face in the pursuit of sustainable practices in your business?

The workforce defines the contours of the business most of the time. One challenge is that nobody in India wants to work eight hours and if they do, they want overtime. We try to find a middle ground and give them two hours of extra work, thrice a week. The government of India is also pressured by labour unions and has increased overtime hours. If I close my factory at six in the evening, half my tailors will resign. The average salary of my tailors is Rs 18,000 a month. I am conscious of their quality of life and have never extended work till night. But they are keen to stretch hours. Even with ESI and PF, it was a challenge informing *karigars* about the nominal cuts from their salaries to avail of these benefits, as they were completely ignorant of such schemes.

Do you have any smart energy and water management systems in place?

These are rented premises; I would have



Embroidery section in Rahul Mishra's factory in Noida, Uttar Pradesh.

liked to set up solar panels, otherwise. All lights are under five watts, are LED, and fans are under 60 watts as per government mandate. In Noida, as there is an electricity issue, instead of a generator, we have an inverter on every floor. We have safe and efficient wiring on the premises to save electricity.

Our dyeing and washing takes place at vendor locations which are socially audited, pollution-controlled and use azo-free dyes. Dry-cleaning takes place at a third-party vendor location.

What are your short-term goals to advance the constantly moving target of sustainability?

We segregate waste and give it to NGOs and shredding companies. They buy and recycle yarns. We are also very seriously working on an eco-friendly packaging system. The use of plastic will be completely stopped and we are creating a product to package all the garments at all stages of the value chain. This is work in progress. ■

RAW MANGO

Sustainability is about Co-Existence

Sanjay Garg, Textile Designer and Founder

TVOF: How does Raw Mango define sustainability?

Sanjay Garg: In my view, when one person or brand says they are running an ethical business, it is a way of saying others are doing so unethically. In 2020, is there any room for unethical businesses? Sustainability is not something special, it is a primary human need, just like love, affection, sex, hunger. You can term it as responsibility, morality or legal correctness, but I refuse to see it from your lens or that of any Western agency.

Raw Mango is a growing brand. My brand's philosophy and my own, are intertwined. The word 'sustainability' is used loosely by the fashion fraternity. There is little clarity about what are we trying to sustain—culture, craft techniques, colours, motifs, the tradition and habit of wearing a saree, its hundred drapes, or the changing dynamics of handloom. I am yet to fully comprehend the term. We use biodegradable materials and handmade fabrics, if that qualifies as sustainable. Can

Fashion designer Sanjay Garg, founder of the decade old brand **Raw Mango** reinvigorated the nation's interest in handloom drapes and gave a new lease of life to the Chanderi sari by reimagining its fabric, fall and design. His work in Banaras with mashru and exceptional brocade weaving has been noted as a high point of Indian fashion and textile development. The brand (which includes another eponymous line called Sanjay Garg) celebrates design through textiles and through curation of select art objects, a compelling retail environment, cultural events and support of textile projects.

there be a law that an organisation can sell this much stock: would that be sustainable? The idea is relative. I am tired of the word being used loosely. This conversation could be a beginning to define it.

Is there a better word for sustainability in your vocabulary?

Co-existence.

Is working with artisan communities and craft traditions a part of your sustainability dialogue?

Our brand works with traditions that it feels are worthy of consideration in the present times. I question traditions and past practices handed over to me. I share a symbiotic relation with the craft communities and traditions and work so that both my business and theirs witness an upward growth. I would prefer to do this rather than me taking charge of saving their heritage. The DNA of a successful business is to create a win-win situation for its workforce, leverage their skills to its best potential. In my business, artisans and I are both empowering each other.

Success stories in clusters can be understood in the language of wages, looms, techniques. Weavers in Chanderi village, for instance, who had one-room houses when we first engaged with them, now have eight-bedroom houses. A weaver working as a guard due to lack of work has switched back to the loom. One of my weavers has bought a car and that validates my faith in the power of craft. Wages have gone up from Rs 100-120 to Rs 500, which is almost five times. In the last ten years, the loom strength

in Chanderi has increased from 3,500 to 5,000.

Looms in nearby villages of Chanderi were shut before we started our work. Thirty to thirty-five villages have restarted work. A sphere of influence has been created, though I don't want to take credit for this change. Chanderi as a craft has got recognition and consumers speak about Banaras and Chanderi in one breath.



One of Raw Mango's weavers on the loom in Chanderi, Madhya Pradesh.

Textiles such as Kanjeevaram and Banarasi thrived due to their presence in cultural cities. Chanderi as a city does not have a prime geographic location and the textile was not as popular. Over the years, consumers are ready to shell out a decent amount for a Chanderi sari. In Varanasi, our brand's contribution can be counted for reinvigorating the weaving of the *mashru* textile. The last batch of weavers creating *mashru* had been listed in the 1940 census. Today, we have a huge number of people working with us and this has opened a new chapter in India's *mashru*-weaving history.

How do you address the welfare of artisans who work with you?

We work with around 1,000 artisans in Varanasi, Chanderi and West Bengal. They work from their homes, with family members contributing to the product at the reeling, warping stage. This situation is unique to

India and should be communicated to the West. These artisans are not on our payroll but work directly with us. We have never worked with master weavers and started with four weavers and four looms. The weavers buy cotton and silk yarn themselves and dye it. Our intervention is at the design and layout stages. Even the pricing of their products is decided by them. Initially, we had doubts about assuring quality control, as it seemed that it could best be achieved in a factory setting. It has been a long journey but we have cracked the business model. They have started weaving more expensive sarees, and a few weavers earn up to Rs 20,000 per month.

We have not imposed any exclusivity clause, no contracts are signed, and weavers are free to work with anyone. They end up working exclusively with us as they get enough work. This work model is better than a cooperative or NGO to empower craft groups, and some artisans have bought cars and houses. NGOs aim for such goals. These symbols of prosperity say a lot. We have found a solution though creating a healthy model with the right intent and execution. Sustenance of business is sustainability for me. When we add new weavers in the company pool, we never abandon the existing ones. Providing consistent work is critical to our ethos.

We have established our ways of forming a connection with the weavers. For example, while they don't work on bonuses, we have often given them essentials like utensils or tended to a special request like contributing to a dedicated space for warping.

What happens to the leftover fabric?

In the last ten years, we have not disposed of our leftovers or *katrans*. Not even a single centimetre has been treated as waste and thrown. Many of our blouses are made from

wastage as well. In a series of recent developments, we have found a way to upcycle the leftovers through a clothing collection. The Raw Mango pocket squares were also a by-product of the leftover fabric.

Can you tell us about the fabric dyeing processes since it is directly related to environmental conservation?

Dyeing is azo-free and some garments are also digitally printed. Since dyeing is done by the weavers, we don't have sufficient means to control the disposal of effluents. The nature of this industry is unorganised and craftsmen work from more than 500 homes. We are yet to find answers but would like to make efforts towards it.

The word 'sustainability' is used loosely by the fashion fraternity. There is little clarity about what are we trying to sustain—culture, craft techniques, colours, motifs, the tradition and habit of wearing a saree, its hundred drapes or the changing dynamics of handloom.

What are your short-term goals to improve production practices, with sustainability as a key goal?

One is minimising packaging. We have instructed weavers to send all sarees in one packet, rather than packaging them individually in plastic and then cartons. Sizes of boxes have changed according to our clothing. We are planning to source biodegradable plastic for packaging. The other is to minimise waste at the pattern-cutting stage, so that the amount of *katran* is minimal.

Do sustainable production practices lead to an increase in price?

Many factors contribute to pricing—brand experience, design, research and innovation,



Raw Mango's flagship store in Colaba, Mumbai.

fair wages, etc. For us, following responsible practices is just one of the factors.

What would you say are the challenges in establishing a fair model of business in this industry?

Challenges include transparency on working conditions and salaries. Over these years, the salaries of weavers and craftsmen have become higher—something that needs to happen—we have kept up with the hikes. Right now we are working on how to communicate that as a brand. For instance, we launched a collection of *sooti* saris last year retailing at Rs 6,500. We could have priced them higher but all costs considered and with our margins, this was the final price. We didn't feel the need to increase it further unless that was passed on to the weaver and opted to respect their pricing and sell accordingly.

Our business follows slow process of production – designing takes six months and so does production. Within that year our designs get rampantly copied, some even selling before we launch them. However, we never hold the artisans accountable. That being said, some weavers feel that producing the same thing in a different colour is not copying and that requires many conversations with the weavers, which is a long process of learning and unlearning. ■

RITU KUMAR

Environmental Impact Takes Precedence

Amrish Kumar, Managing Director

TVOF: Is sustainability in production being addressed in the business model for Ritu Kumar?

Amrish Kumar: Sustainability as an issue is being addressed to a certain degree, but not as deeply as we would like. We have initiated an internal study to assess our company's footprint, which will inform our future actions. It is under way. At one time, we were looking at the fibres we used and some production mechanisms. However, going forward, we would like to look at the complete ecosystem, and not just a few elements in silos.

One of the key aspects of our production at Ritu Kumar is the materials we use. For Ritu Kumar and RI Ritu Kumar, until very recently we used 100% natural and non-man-made fibres. We now have some man-made fibres which are largely recyclable fibres such as cotton and viscose, but they are seldom used. Even for Label Ritu Kumar, we only use less than 15% man-made fibres. RI Ritu Kumar creations are created in a cottage industry ecosystem by craftsmen. Old techniques of embroideries and printing are used. Then again, there is no getting

away from the use of chemical dyes for colouring the fabrics. In manufacturing, much of what we do does not involve the use of machines or industry-driven processes. Yet a part of our business is industrial, mainly on the management and administration side. In our definition, sustainability in its purest forms has to do largely with environmental impact.



RI Ritu Kumar bridal couture inspired by Mughal motifs.

Ritu Kumar is among India's first fashion and crafts businesses. It was founded in 1969 and continues to be driven by Ritu Kumar, the matriarch of Indian fashion. Today, it has three sub brands—Ritu Kumar (contemporary Indian wear), LABEL Ritu Kumar (Western prêt) and RI Ritu Kumar (bridal, occasion, couture wear)

We have taken many voluntary actions along the way in favour of increasing business efficiency and maximising profit, to address sustainability concerns. There are government-mandated laws for water recycling, ETP plants for dyeing and printing, and rainwater harvesting. These are also a part of statutory compliances. We have invested in solar power in each of our three

manufacturing units in Gurgaon. LED lights have been installed to save electricity, which also helps in increasing business efficiency and saving costs.

What have been your biggest challenges in following sustainability practices in business?

AK: I believe that the government has to make this its mandate by implementing more statutory norms, as some things are beyond our control as a company. These would include feeding solar energy back into the grid, water preservation, etc.

Does your company have employment policies that safeguard the rights of workers?

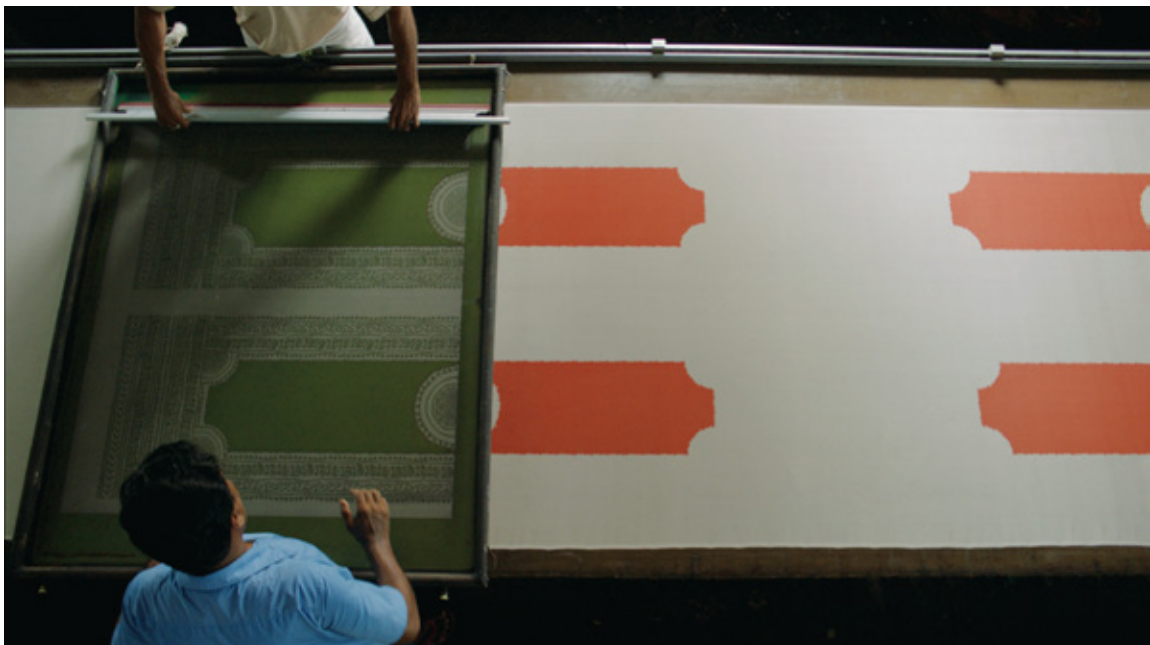
AK: Our entire workforce is organised. Their details are recorded, they are paid provident funds, and we keep a track of their PAN numbers. In a business, these are key elements to bring workers into a regulated market. The informal workforce, however, is self-employed—craftsmen, weavers. They

are not hired by us but are commissioned work. They are mostly from West Bengal. The assigned work is given to an agent; given the way the industry functions, it is difficult to keep track of who exactly is doing the work for a company. Our work stretches up to Murshidabad.

Earlier when the orders were fewer, we knew who was doing what. With expansion, that has changed. However, we are responsible for the compliance of every vendor. There are compliances to adhere to when you are dealing with a small company with few workers, to make sure they are fairly treated. These are statutory requirements for all companies.

What happens to manufacturing waste?

AK: Agents who deal with waste are given this material. It also depends on the kind of waste one is creating. In our case, it is recyclable. Some collections are archived and kept for R&D. We have a bank of archived pieces.



Craftsmen carrying out printing process for Ritu Kumar.

We still have a long way to go before the concept of sustainability has a decision-making impact on the Indian consumer. The concern towards the environment is growing, but how it will translate into the garment matrix is difficult to say. The consumer is more interested in the story of the garment they buy, instead of asking questions about who, what and where of the product

Is the Ritu Kumar buyer interested in conversations around sustainable fashion?

AK: The Indian consumer is usually not too well informed. We still have a long way to go before the concept of sustainability has a decision-making impact on the Indian consumer. Of course, some people are extremely well informed—they travel, read. For the large chunk of India, however, this is not top-of-mind right now. Concern towards the environment is growing but how that will translate into the garment matrix is difficult to

say. The consumer is more interested in the story of the garment or piece they buy instead of asking questions about the who, what and where of the product.

Do you adhere to sustainable practices in the packaging process?

AK: We stick to minimal packaging. An exercise is conducted every six months to monitor savings wherever possible.

What are your plans for the immediate future?

AK: Most are reiterative processes, finding and fixing to reduce our carbon footprint. We are a garment manufacturing company as opposed to a raw material manufacturing company, and footprint and wastage is minimal.

Do you have a sustainability officer in your organisation?

AK: We have a CSR executive who oversees all our CSR initiatives. Our CSR programmes focus mainly on children's education. ■

SHOPPERS STOP

Solar Energy in Retail Spaces is a Goal

Rajiv Suri, Customer Care Associate, MD & CEO

TVOF: When did sustainability become an important subject internally for Shoppers Stop?

Rajiv Suri: Shoppers Stop was an early adopter in many ways. Sustainability has been a part of our DNA since the inception and in fact, has now become an even bigger agenda. We have taken the right steps in identifying the areas and scope of work, and have a detailed strategy in place to address key areas under environmental practices at the consumer, employee and store level.

A few lakh customers visit our stores every day and with a network of hundreds of suppliers, we believe we can contribute in a major way. We have on many occasions, worked with our customers, supply chain vendors, and other stakeholders on such initiatives.

What are some of the steps taken by Shoppers Stop towards adopting sustainability?

There is a lot of structured work that is happening under the following areas:

Shoppers Stop is one of India's first large format fashion and lifestyle chains founded by the K Raheja Corp in 1991. It currently has 89 stores across 42 cities. The focus is now on building a brand equity that is bridge to luxury. The business strategy is evolving to suit market dynamics such as revamping store design, with a focus on building sustainability.

Recycle and Upcycle: We collaborate with foundations that work with women from marginalized backgrounds, giving them livelihood by engaging in activities like jhola bag making, making sanitary pads, etc., from re-usable clothes donated by customers in the stores.

No to Plastics: We are the first large format retailer to implement paper bags. Usage of plastic bags has been completely discontinued in all our stores across India. For NCR, all vehicles have been converted to CNG to reduce pollution. At our offices, we have done away with plastic bottles and now have glass jars and glasses serving water. **Sustainable supply chain management:** Recycling close to one million cartons on an annual basis. Cartons for stocking are re-used for logistics and transport, saving cost and contribute to the overall sustainability agenda.

Sustainable energy practices: Variable Frequency Drivers (VFD) have been installed across 65 retail outlets, which help us to control and save power consumption for the AHU's. Our stores now have LED lights, which are energy efficient and help to reduce carbon emission and power consumption. At our stores, we have implemented good maintenance practices to avoid energy losses and optimize energy consumption. Rationalising power load in 61 stores led to the saving of 957KVA demand load.

Cumulative efforts resulted in the saving of 36 lacs units for like to like stores. This was achieved through consistent monitoring and controlling consumption at optimum level as compared to the consumption of the last year. Besides that various initiatives like LED rollout, VFD's, operational efficiency improvement, adoption of good maintenance practices etc. have been introduced.

Some of our stores also have rainwater-harvesting facility; however, it is only in standalone stores and not in outlets located inside malls.

Materials and fittings from closed stores are used to renovate new stores along with the usage of recyclable materials like aluminum rather than wood for framework.

Back to Earth: Our recently revamped brand, Back to Earth has widened its reach from home and upholstery items to apparel. This brand will be working with sustainable materials and introduces our customers to sustainable and environment friendly products.

Is implementing sustainable practices a cost-intensive process? Is the company willing to make that investment?

We are calling for a mindset change when we ask our suppliers and other logistics partners

Our recently revamped brand, Back to Earth has widened its reach from home and upholstery items to apparel. This brand will be working with sustainable materials and introduces our customers to sustainable and environment friendly products.



Red celebrations at Shoppers Stop.

to use the same cartons for the entire process or ask our retail employees to manage the power consumption. Additionally, IoT (Internet of Things) systems in process of being rolled out monitor and regulate power consumption usage at its optimum in all our retail outlets.

Does Shoppers Stop have short-term goals towards achieving sustainability compliances?

We have already installed solar panels in one of the stores, which generates @80KWH power per day, equivalent to saving energy cost worth Rs 400,000 per annum. We are further planning to introduce solar energy in some of our retail spaces wherever there is a provision of an open terrace.

One of the big goals we have is to eliminate plastics even in smallest ways like making mannequins out of recyclable materials such as bamboo. That said we have embarked on the path of plastic-free stores and offices including initiatives like using glass bottles, re-cycled paper bags, etc.

Have any initiatives been taken to enable and empower employees of Shoppers Stop as part of worker welfare policies?

Absolutely, as I have mentioned earlier, as the largest retailer we have to lead by example. We have a number of initiatives:



Shoppers Stop store.

RED Celebrations: We participate in Retail Employees Day (RED) celebrations and encourage customers to express gratitude to sales executives in stores who provide services to them all year round. Now, hundreds of other retailers also participate in this initiative globally.

Personal Shopper: We have a concept called the Personal Shopper, where a skilled staff member helps customers with shopping needs. This comes with other perks like a Personal Shopper Lounge so that the customer does not have to stand in a billing queue.

As a company, we invest more than 10,000 man-hours in training these personal shoppers and I am happy to say that CSAT scores (that measure customer satisfaction) average 93% for Personal Shopper.

Blood Donation: We also run a program '*Ayushman Ho*' where every year on the foundation day (27 October), we run blood donation drives across our stores pan-India. Employees participate in large numbers.

Policies: We have introduced employee friendly policies such as flexible work timings, working from home twice a month. Our rewards and recognition programs help identify talent that goes beyond the usual work regime and adds or brings more value. ■

SPYKAR

The Denim Industry Consumes Maximum Water

Sanjay Vakharia, Chief Executive Officer

TVOF: When did sustainability become an important subject for Spykar?

Sanjay Vakharia: The brand started close to 25 years ago when sustainability was not a concept people thought about. At Spykar, the first conversation about sustainability started about ten years ago, when one of our colleagues pointed to the amount of waste generated by printouts.

The denim industry consumes the maximum amount of water, as compared to any other garment category. Being a part of this industry made us reconsider if attaining the goal of sustainability would be possible until the entire ecosystem on denim started working towards it.

The last four to five years have witnessed major reforms at all levels of manufacturing, which has led us all to become more environmentally friendly businesses than before. For example, a modification in the washing process has reduced the consumption of water from about 70 litres per every pair of jeans to one glass of water,

in 70-80% of the cases. Advancement in technology has also helped safeguard the workers' safety and health. Processes like rubbing and scraping the fabric have become mechanized; done manually, these are extremely hazardous for workers.

What are the challenges Spykar faces in the pursuit of responsible practices?

Cotton consumption is massive in the garment business, and key efforts are being made to blend cotton and hemp globally. This is being driven by a few mills in Italy. We can only use 15-20% of hemp in our fabrics, as hemp by nature makes the fabric limp, which is not the look and feel we would like to deliver at Spykar. Therefore, we need alternate fibres which are the right match for denim.

Manufacturers who work with international brands are cooperative. However, vendors who work with only Indian brands find this concept difficult to understand.

Since the government's legislation on the Zero Discharge Policy, all manufacturers have put up ZLD (Zero Liquid Discharge) plants. However, there is no framework or rule banning the use of hazardous chemicals in the production process. If these hazardous inputs are nipped in the first place, the quality of the waste generated will be better and will require less energy while being treated.

Spykar, a leading Indian denim brand was launched in 1992 by Prasad Pabrekar. Spykar products dominate the Indian fashion market with a robust online and offline presence. The brand is pushing the limits of eco-friendly manufacturing and leveraging technology to produce its denims.

Many fabrics are now conducive to sustainable treatments. Spykar is opting for compatible fabrics for a part of its product range; of course, this does come with an additional cost that the company has to bear at the moment, as the consumer is not willing to pay more for a sustainable product.

How does Spykar stay abreast of the sustainability movement globally?

In order for information to percolate down the company's managerial structure, it is imperative that company leaders attend events that educate them about the latest technological advancements. This is why these visits have been made compulsory by Spykar. Three to four Spykar officials travel independently twice a year, with the specific intent to understand advancements as far as denim is concerned. We are the only Indian denim players in the market today and have an obligation to stay updated, in order to deal with international competition.

Since plastic bags have been banned and paper bags are being used, we have come up with 'Half a Bag Project' that uses only half the amount of paper generally used in making such bags. A paper bag is cut into two halves. A pair of jeans is rolled and placed inside the bag and closed with help of a button.

Is eco-friendly packaging a viable solution to managing waste?

We are currently at the prototype stage for an innovative packaging solution called the 'Half a Bag Project.' Since plastic bags have been banned and everybody today is using paper bags, we have come up with a design that uses only half the amount of paper generally used in making these bags. We take a paper bag, cut it into two halves, roll a pair of jeans,



Spykar denims are made using Ozone Technology which harness natural bleaching capabilities of O₃, cutting down bleaching time to 15 minutes, saving 50% water.

place it inside the bag and close it shut with the help of a button.

Boxes used in logistics and transportation at the manufacturing end are being recycled and reused close to seven or eight times. We do not support single use packaging. Plastic, compliant with government norms is used for packaging wherever it is considered absolutely necessary.

How do you ensure supply chain checks and balances for safeguarding manufacture and production?

Despite all our production units being third-party, all our vendors are cooperative and pro-technology, and most of them are willing to bear the cost, to make a difference. Spykar has a Vendor Management Team that regularly visits factories for audits. At a social level, Spykar is adopting all compliance practices even if they have not been made compulsory yet. Creches, canteens and all other infrastructure is in place and Spykar is self-complaint through its internal Vendor Management Team.

Would Spykar like to promote responsible practices to the consumer in the future?

Despite a plethora of information being at the consumer's disposal, when it comes to actually spending money, people tend to be shortsighted rather than looking at the larger

impact of their purchase on the environment. No matter how much we try to communicate to the consumer, it is only when the entire supply chain realigns and offers them a sustainably produced item at a decent price, they are willing to buy it.



Spykar denims use laser treatment for developing intricate patterns, eliminating use of harmful chemicals as well as workers' exposure to toxins.

What is the company's waste management policy for managing product samples and post-consumer waste?

Most of the waste generated in the manufacturing process, as well as all the product samples, are sold. If they are not in a state to be sold, they are disposed of to *kabadiwalas* (rag pickers). However, there is no organised way of disposing of that waste yet. Post-consumer waste is generally donated to NGOs. The cut pieces are sold and are being reused as fillings for mattresses and cushions. In that sense, garments have the potential to be reused to their last form.

Has there been any progress in terms of energy efficiency?

Up to 60% of the energy consumed in our factories and process houses is solar generated. The boiler used for washing out

denims, which used the maximum amount of energy at Spykar earlier and ran on gasoline, is now being powered entirely on solar energy.

For our washes, we have stopped using pumice stones which reduce the fossil energy consumption. We have shifted to lasers, which makes the process much quicker and reduce energy consumption at the same time. These machines also make it possible for us to eliminate the usage of chemicals that could be potential allergy hazards for the consumers.

What short-term goals are you contemplating to further improve on sustainable production in your company?

A major innovation that we are looking forward to is the launch of a line of denims that can be worn up to 30 times without washing. We will be launching this the next season.

Our team is also working on a knitwear collection made out of recycled PET bottles which will be coming out soon.

We are working on other innovative options but would not like to reveal much at this stage, as we don't want to portray sustainability as a fad but use it as a means to propagate real change. ■

W

It is a Myth that a Sustainable Product is Cost-Intensive

Anant Daga, Managing Director, Chief Executive Officer

Aarti Ahuja, Head of Marketing

Dharmendra Kumar, Head of Sourcing

TVOF: Is sustainability an important subject internally for W?

Anant Daga (AD): TCNS Clothing has always stood for responsible fashion. It means being true to all stakeholders—investors, employees, factory workers—as well as acknowledging the impact on environment and communities.

The organization is working towards rural development through manufacturing bases. We work closely with units in Nagari village in South India. The organization is conscious about improving the lives of workers and ensuring regular work. These units in backward provide employment to women thus empowering them financially. Two factories in Harur, Tamil Nadu, and Pathankot, Punjab, have a workforce consisting of almost 99% women.

Initiatives like Harit Khadi Solar Charkha Mission, an initiative by the government of India, positively influence the environment

and generate employment opportunities.

TCNS supports the mission by ensuring fashion-forward styles created every season thus raising awareness and demand for Harit Khadi amongst W's target audience.



Harit Khadi spinner giving demonstration at the W store.

What have been the challenges for W in pursuing sustainability as its business model?

AD: Sustainability demands an attitude change. If you tell a mill owner to invest 50 million rupees in a water treatment plant that will benefit them ultimately, they would first check its impact on the profitability graph. Consistent supply of material, training to maintain production capacity is a constant challenge. Ensuring consistency in quality, time and prices requires long term planning.

What are the fabrics primarily used by W?

Dharmendra Kumar (DK): About 50-55% is viscose; 20-25% is cotton; 10-15% is polyester, besides acrylics in knits.

W, the women's apparel brand owned by **TCNS Clothing Company Pvt Ltd**, opened its first store in 2001 in New Delhi. The Indian brand is also sold in Mauritius, Sri Lanka and the Middle East, and has captured the market through its standalone stores and presence in multi-brand retailer and online portals. Besides innovating with bio-degradable fabrics, the company has invested in production units with a workforce predominantly comprised of women.

AD: Polyester was a big part of our range few years back. A conscious call was taken to explore eco-friendly options instead. Livaeco, now forms a significant part of the viscose used in our collections. It is naturally sourced, eco-friendly, saves water and biodegrades faster.

What triggered the use of eco-friendly materials in W's collections?

AD: Our target group is the modern Indian woman who is at par with women across the globe. We take our inspiration from global cues and sustainability is a big topic globally which led us to embark on the journey of Responsible Fashion. Our exclusive association with the Aditya Birla Group for Livaeco helps create fashion-forward collections every season in an eco-friendly manner.

Is there a direct relationship between sustainable practices and pricing?

AD: When we use Livaeco instead of rayon, we pay an extra amount, and I am not sure if the consumer today is willing to pay that extra upcharge. There will always be discerning consumers willing to pay that premium for organic clothing. However, awareness about sustainability varies between Tier I, II, III and IV cities. For Tier I, the understanding of organic and Harit Khadi is profound. In Tier IV cities, where consumers are getting their first taste of fashion, understanding is sparse. We have 2,000 point of sales throughout the country. Narrating the sustainability story everywhere and commanding a premium might not make sense. However, we take this in our stride.

It is a myth that anything sustainable is cost-intensive. When these initiatives are scaled up, costs will fall in line. It is an initial hiccup.

How does the company update itself about global sustainability trends and

agendas?

AD: Every season, our designers and sourcing team visit multiple fairs and exhibitions like WGSN, Premiere Vision in Paris (a global event for fashion professionals), as well as global ramps to take in the latest ideas. Sustainability concepts are relative and on an absolute scale, we may have a long way to go. Gradually though we are building up our pursuit of conscious sourcing and production practices. This year's Spring-Summer 2020 campaign will focus on Responsible Fashion. Conversations will focus on Livaeco, Harit Khadi and other environment-friendly initiatives.

Two years back, all employees were taken to a village called Jyargar for an offsite with an intent to refurbish the village. For three days, we engaged in civil work and painting, recreated the school, community centre, its entrance and gave a sense of identity to the village. The team rated it the best because of an immediate sense of contribution.

Is W trying to differentiate the brand through such marketing campaigns?

Aarti Ahuja (AA): Availability of a 'Fashion Forward', environment-friendly is one of the biggest highlights in our stores today. The literature in the store and guidance by staff ensures the consumer is aware of the products in the collection.

Is it important to make sustainability a directive for all fashion teams—from sourcing, designing, to packaging, retailing?

AD: Sustainability should be integrated into routine process and be thought of as an equivalent to manufacturing imperatives like cost and quality. For sourcing, we work with compliant factories and mills, which can

produce in scale. Design and sourcing work together to chalk out patterns based on fabric availability. To save water, digital printing is used. In one processing unit in Gurgaon, water is used from a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP). ETPs is a basic requirement and all units have it.

We have also been pushing for zero waste. We realised that if we take fabric of the width precisely required for garments rather than the standard width (54 inches), wastage will be minimal and costs will reduce. Cost and sustainability go hand-in-hand even though extensive pre-planning is required to give precision dimensions for fabric width.

DK: We have factories in the same location as the manufacturing units, which has reduced carbon footprint, saving on transportation, as well as providing local employment.

AD: Since the last few months, we have had an e-bill system, to reduce paper usage. Energy-saving lights are used across all stores. Packaging is upgraded to biodegradable polythene and we have plans to switch to fabric carry bags.

What do you do with the waste?

DK: Waste fabrics, trims, etc., are used to make jewellery pouches and bags, and a lot of it is donated to NGOs. There are avenues like selling to third-party vendors who further sell these.

Has the leadership at W initiated conversations with employees to further their understanding of sustainability and allied issues?

AD: At W, the biggest event of the year for employees is the HR offsite. Two years ago, employees were taken to Jayalgar in Uttarakhand with an intent to renovate the village. For three days, everyone engaged in cleaning, sweeping, painting, as well as civil



The Jayalgar Project in Uttarakhand.

works. It ensured a complete makeover for the school, community centre, village entrance and gave a sense of identity to the village. It was the most basic, no-frills offsite but one of the most satisfying ones. The team rated it the best. Following our example, several corporates have now enrolled for a similar experience.

Is gender sensitisation part of W's sustainability attainment goal?

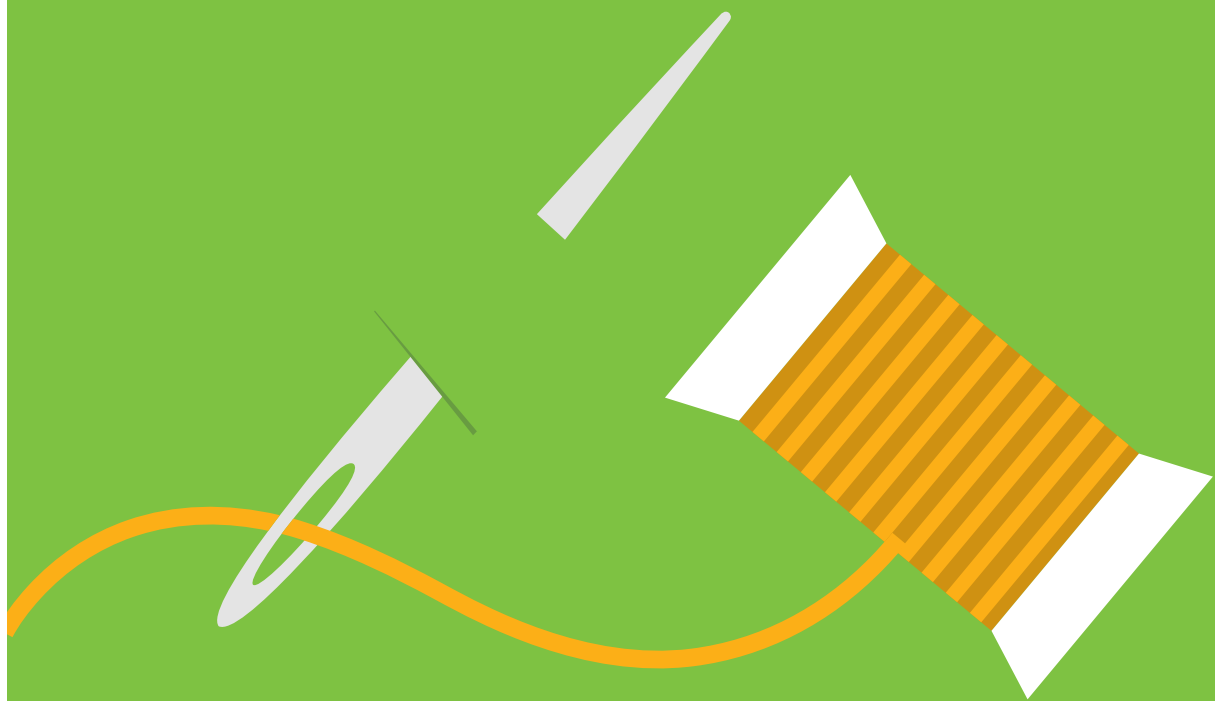
AD: One-third of the members of our board are women. In this organization, it is always 'women first' as women are our consumers and that thought process percolates down in the company. Most of our sales representatives are women, too.

What are the short-term goals the company plans to attain regarding this issue?

AD: Our next campaign on Responsible Fashion will highlight the initiatives taken by the organization. Fifty big W stores today employ a specially abled person. A more enabling system is required to recruit, train and place them in a suitable store and we would like to progress on this front. All our new stores are digital and eco-friendly in terms of lighting, PoS, operations, etc. The idea is to make sustainability commercially successful, create pilots and scale them up. ■

MOVING THE NEEDLE

SHORT STORIES THAT SPARK CHANGE,
OPTIMISM AND MAP THE FUTURE





Sustainability Definitions and Interpretations

“Coexistence.”

Sanjay Garg, Founder, **Raw Mango**

“The idea of sustainability is to holistically sustain something that has been started.”

Aneeth Arora, Founder, **péro**

“Sustainability should be integrated into routine processes and be thought of as an equivalent to manufacturing imperatives like cost and quality.”

Anant Daga, Managing Director, **W**

“One lens used to gauge sustainability in business is through sustaining a tradition. Our clothes are inspired by the sartorial styles that existed long before us in diverse regions of India.”

Anita Lal, Founder, **Good Earth**

Material Library

Spykar uses only 15-20% hemp in fabrics as by nature, hemp makes the fabric limp. The company is exploring alternate fibres which can be the right match for denim.

Rayon is 100% biodegradable. At **Rahul Mishra**, only those rayon yarns are used which have cotton supplement fibre, and not those which are petroleum-based. Sequins from China or zardozi wire is not used, either.

Levi's uses sustainable materials and has considered altering cotton hemp to feel like cotton. Hemp uses 80% less water in its production.

The House of Anita Dongre uses compostable packaging. All garments are packed in a polybag which isn't plastic. No other plastic is used in packaging.

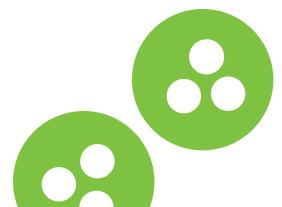
Starting this year, about 64% of **Bestseller's** cotton products will fall under the Better Cotton Initiative (BCI), including categories like innerwear. It aims to use recycled polyester in categories like jeans and tops in womenswear starting Spring-Summer 2020.

Good Earth approaches sustainability through natural fabrics like Mangalgiri. No polyester-based or man-made fibres are used except TENCEL or bamboo, though the latter also falls under the natural category. More than 95% of packaging is done without any plastic.

Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Limited (ABFRL) uses raw material that has a good mix of BCI cotton, recycled cotton, natural fibres, herbal dyes, green certification and recycled PET fibres. It also collaborates with Cotton 2040 to increase the use of sustainable cotton in the products.

Arvind Fashion Limited envisages the use of an increased mix of sustainable fabric, BCI cotton, organic cotton, recycled cotton and recycled polyester, in the future.

At **W**, polyester was a big part of the range till a few years ago. A conscious call was then taken to reduce its use. The new alternatives include Livaeco which is eco-friendly, saves water and has faster biodegradability.



Know and How

Arvind Fashion Limited is a founding member of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC), which launched the HIGG Index, a standardised suite of tools that measures transparency and the social and environmental impact of the fashion industry. The system requires vendor partners to use the Facility Environment Module (FEM) and Facility Social and Labour Module (FSLM).

Since the government's legislation on the Zero Discharge Policy, all manufacturers have put up ZLD (Zero Liquid Discharge) plants. However, there is no framework or rule banning the use of hazardous chemicals in the production process. If these hazardous inputs are nipped in the first place, the quality of the waste generated will be better and will require less energy while being treated.

At **Bestseller**, the Endless Aisle technology is a big innovation. A huge range of stock is available on a digital platform for the customer's perusal, in case something is not available in stores. This gives the customer a wider choice and reduces unnecessary crowding in the store. It reduces the burden of extra stock and facilitates efficient inventory management.

Fabindia's business model and sourcing continues to be taught as a case at Harvard Business School, the IIMs and INSEAD amongst other business schools. British Council has recognized the company to be a significant contributor to creative industries built around the central idea of sustainability.

Hidesign runs an annual customer engagement initiative called Art of Reuse that promotes upcycling. For almost 16-18 months through 2016-17, the company celebrated The Green Story, an initiative towards afforestation, and communicated it through seed tags, paper and cloth bags and our 2016 Diary.

Air, Water, Energy

Shoppers Stop has installed Variable Frequency Drivers (VSDs) across 35 retail outlets, which help control and save power consumption by 5,00,000 kilowatts.

House of Anita Dongre is headquartered in a green area of Thane, Mumbai, next to the hills. The building has ample natural light and air circulation. 70% of water is recycled for use in the washrooms and lawns. Aerators control the amount of water that flows out. Waste is segregated. A recycler comes once a week to collect and divert waste to the correct place where it can be recycled.

All jeans manufacturers supplying to **Spykar** reuse upto 95-98% of the water generated out of production by running it through an Effluent Treatment Plant (ETP).

The **Hidesign** factory in Puducherry recently went fully solar. Along with using renewable energy, the factory is connected to the grid which enables contribution of unused solar energy.

Aditya Birla Fashion Retail Limited (ABFRL) reduced energy consumption by 33%, opening a window to reinvest the money into larger energy usage plans like having LED and HVAC systems.

Arvind Fashions Limited is making efforts to increase the mix of renewable energy in its energy portfolio. As of today, 80% of the energy consumed in its corporate office is solar-powered. The company is exploring options to shift some percentage of its energy requirement to renewable energy in the stores and warehouses, as well as the possibility of installing solar rooftop panels for the larger format stores.

The **Forest Essentials** workshops in Hyderabad and Rishikesh have been built to ensure zero carbon footprint, with facilities like rainwater harvesting. The water harvested is used four to five times before disposal. Groundwater is similarly replenished. The workshops receive ample sunlight reducing energy consumption. A solar energy set-up has been installed and extra units are fed back into the grid.

At **péro**, LEDS are installed in consultation with a light engineer so that the angle and quality do not stress a tailor's vision.

People First

Work at **Good Earth** unfolds as a partnership with the artisans. The brand considers them the living repositories of technical know-how and helps them to make their creations market-friendly.

B. S. Nagesh, the Chairman of **Shoppers Stop** founded TRRAIN, an initiative to train differently abled personnel to work as retail employees.

When **Raw Mango** adds new weavers in the company's pool, they do not abandon existing ones. Providing consistent work is critical to the brand's ethos.

Rahul Mishra works with eight to ten active artisan clusters and 50 percent turnover goes in the form of wages to these regions. An average wage of INR 17,500 goes to artisans monthly. Money is transferred through digital transactions through IMPS. There is no exclusivity clause for karigars.

Levi's Workers Well-Being Programme that affects two lakh workers in garment factories takes care of workers' health through regular checkups, hygiene programmes, financial independence workshops. It runs even in third party production units and is structured by Ernst & Young. The terms of engagement with vendors includes zero tolerance sexual harassment policy.

The House of Anita Dongre recently organized an eye camp for 550 embroidery artisans. 490 were found to need glasses and cataract candidates were identified for surgeries. Some were aware about their poor eyesight but couldn't afford spectacles. Others had no idea they had poor vision.

About 45% of **Fabindia's** supply chain base is linked to work done by women. Market linkages and skill development have acted as impetus for social change by opening up avenues for significant employment of women, both local in home-based and non-traditional environments.

Lifestyle currently employs more than 400 differently abled executives and makes sure they are retained with optimum support and training. The company is a part of the government skilling programme to recruit and train the underprivileged.

At **Forest Essentials**, CSR funds are used to educate children of workers in Hyderabad and Rishikesh. 'Simple School - Paathshala' is an innovative school transformation program started in 2016 in the Higher Secondary School in Gulardogi village (Tehri-Garhwal district in Uttarakhand) and focuses on the overall quality of teaching and learning in this remote hamlet.

péro has a strict anti-sexual harassment policy and a proper committee. Everyone is taken out once a year on Labour Day for an overnight trip.





Waste Management

Shoppers Stop recycles close to one million cartons on an annual basis. Cartons used for stocking are reused in further processes like logistics and transport, saving costs.

At **Spykar**, most the waste generated in the manufacturing or through product samples, is sold. What is not saleable is disposed to *kabadiwalas* (rag pickers). Post-consumer waste is donated through tie-ups with NGOs. Cut pieces are sold and reused as fillings for mattresses and cushions.

Raw Mango has never disposed of leftovers or katrans even once in the last ten years since inception. Not even a single centimetre of cloth has been thrown. The brand has found a way to upcycle leftovers through creating a clothing collection. The Raw Mango pocket squares are also a by-product of leftover fabric.

Levi's observes the Recycle Denim Program and donates to NGO partners like Goonj in India, which has a recycling programme. Customers are encouraged to donate denims which NGOs upcycle to make denim bags and totes. Samples are sold to friends and families of the brand. Nothing gets dumped.

At **Bestseller**, for garments, the e-commerce platform and factory outlets are used to liquidate excess inventory. Whatever is left is also sold in other countries.

At **Lifestyle**, donation drives are conducted for the needy, while making the customer a part of this social cause. The company works with organizations like Goonj to donate clothes and other items, as part of its CSR activities.

Good Earth has an entire section made from leftover cuts called 'The Katran Collection.' Jackets and cushions are made from leftovers.

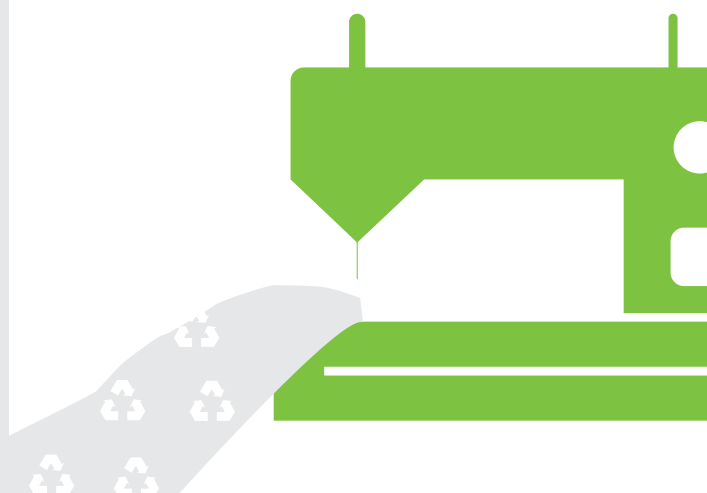
Coming Soon

W believes that its Responsible Fashion thrust will highlight the corporate's initiatives. The brand's 50 big stores employ a specially-abled person, and the company wants to do more in this area. All new stores are digital and eco-friendly in terms of lighting, PoS, operations.

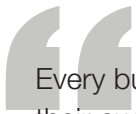
péro wants to communicate the journey of cloth—embroideries, fabric, and combination of crafts coming together in one piece—through tags. The only paper products in the brand's packaging are the tags, which will be replaced with cloth, and all pins will become a brooch.

Arvind Fashions Limited is keen to gain a deeper understanding of technological advances like sustainable chemistry, in order to aid modifications in design and process. Sustainable packaging is another short-term goal.

ABFRL wants to increase digitisation and invest in technology like Artificial Intelligence to help industry eliminate wastage, shorten response times, improve demand predictions, reduce energy and water consumption, increase greening processes and bring down costs.



LAST WORD



Every business organization should have an inherent responsibility towards their own environment footprint and responsible social practices as well as use their influence to drive and change consumer behavior towards responsible consumption. At IMG Reliance, we have built the Sustainability narrative through each of our platforms – Lakme Fashion Week, The Voice of Fashion, Circular Design Challenge and SU.RE. The focus has been to create change at a creator level and communicate it strongly enough for change at the consumer level. The Voice of Fashion has created the largest repository of sustainability content in the country. We hope this white paper created through a scientific research process will provide a start point towards a more sustainable future for major brands to use this information as course correction or inspiration. The journey is long and arduous; will require time and money across all stakeholders. But if there is a legacy that we should leave for our children, this is it.

Jaspreet Chandok

Head, Lifestyle Business, IMG Reliance

Published by
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Concept and Writing
Shefalee Vasudev, Editor, The Voice of Fashion

Research, Interviews and Project Management
Suruchi Khubchandani, Project Manager, The Voice of Fashion

Quantitative Survey
Qualisys

Book Art and Design
Roshini Dhir

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The Voice of Fashion Team
Manpreet Singh
Saumya Sinha
Beenu Arora
Snigdha Ahuja
Sohini Dey

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voice.fashion@imgreliance.com