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Centre for Sustainable Fashion

Volume 6.0

Steps towards Sustainability in Fashion: Snapshot Bangladesh
A resource for fashion students and educators



Acknowledgements

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Centre for Sustainable Fashion

Volume 6.0

Steps towards Sustainability in Fashion: Snapshot Bangladesh
A resource for fashion students and educators

March 2011

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**Centre for
Sustainable Fashion**
London College
of Fashion



1. Introduction

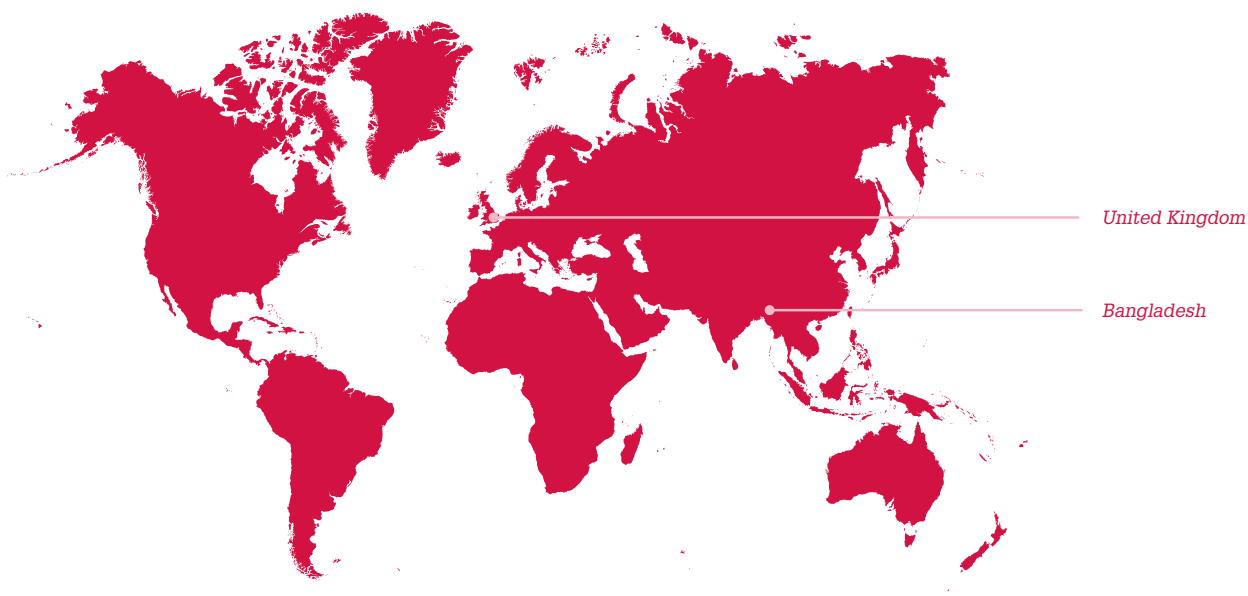
In the last fifteen years there has been a revolution on the British high street with fashion becoming available to the masses at rock bottom prices. A significant number of these clothes are produced in Bangladesh, a country known within the fashion industry as the world's factory for basic, cheap clothing. The reality is that these clothes are often produced with significant cost to the people involved in making them and to the environment. However, the seeds for creating a vibrant, more sustainable fashion industry in Bangladesh have started to be sown. There are opportunities to build on the small emerging steps towards sustainability and to create a garment industry that isn't based on poverty wages, but one that is set apart by forward-thinking practices that reflect a spirit of humanity, relating to the specific skills and resources available and supporting global and local environments.

The case studies discussed in this report illustrate some of the different ways sustainability is being approached and interpreted in Bangladesh by individual companies. Each case study focuses on how the company is addressing a particular aspect of sustainability. The case studies are not intended to be a blueprint for more sustainable practice. Rather, we hope that they encourage critical and creative thinking about the current fashion system, the barriers that are currently hampering sustainability practice and the opportunities for overcoming these challenges.

Sustainability?

Sustainability is multi-faceted and can be approached in different ways by different people. The considerations relating to fashion include environmental protection, social justice, economic fairness and cultural vitality. Considering sustainability raises many questions. Which issues are more important, water consumption in cotton production or the use of oil in polyester? If we reduce consumption, what does this mean for the jobs in developing countries? Whose information do you believe? How do we treat the symptoms but also address the root causes? Is it possible to create a different model of producing and consuming clothes?

Many of the concerns overlap and can seem contradictory and new information is constantly emerging. These complexities shouldn't stop you taking the first step on the journey as exploration and enquiry is essential if we are to find ways to live and work in a prosperous fashion industry of the future.



2. Foreword

The fashion business both reflects and contributes to society and culture, economic development and constraint, and our changing world environment. Its current business models, whilst widely practiced, are unsustainable as they are predicated on an imbalanced set of criteria. We have developed these models through our skills, knowledge and experience, but our thinking minds can respond to the challenge of our current imbalance to build new ways to address both how we work and what we make. This requires us to open our doors to share what we know, understand the collective challenges and possibilities and to realise that what affects you has an impact on me, thereby finding a sense of shared prosperity.

What do we need to make this happen? Well, its more than a checklist and there's no one blueprint for prosperity, but by exploring examples of business that see beyond their boundaries, be they geographical, cultural or economic, we can learn more about what we can do better.

This publication offers you both some answers about ways to do better, but also guides you towards asking the right questions when you are working in the fashion sector. Keep asking, keep sharing and we can individually and collectively gain and move towards prosperity for all.

Dilys Williams,

Director, Centre for Sustainable Fashion at London College of Fashion

The textile and ready made garment industry is the most significant export sector in Bangladesh and is emerging as a key player in the global textile and clothing market, particularly supplying brands and their retailers in Europe and UK. The industry is evolving from low to higher value added products through improving functions such as fashion design, reducing lead times, responding to market demands, and improving compliance with health and safety working conditions and labour standards, as well as addressing environmental concerns.

This project has enabled academics to develop teaching and learning tools around the specific issues of sustainable fashion challenges in the UK and Bangladesh. The project has been directed by Dr Lynne Hammond of the Department of Enterprise and International Development at London College of Fashion working with a team of experts on sustainable fashion, and a number of industrial and development organisations active in Bangladesh. The contribution of sustainable fashion consultant Liz Parker to the writing of the present booklet has been significant and invaluable, as has support and coordination received from Munira Rahman and John T. Smith, UNIDO representatives in Dhaka, and Rushmita Alam, Head of Fashion Design and Technology at the BGMEA Institute of Fashion and Technology. In addition, this report has been possible thanks to the important contribution of the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at London College of Fashion and the Fashioning an Ethical Industry project team.

Lynne Hammond,

Manager of International Educational Consultancy at London College of Fashion

3. Using the case studies in fashion education

The case studies are a snapshot of the actions being taken by UK and Bangladeshi companies towards addressing sustainability in their businesses. Educators and students can explore them from design, business and apparel management perspectives. A useful starting point is to consider what questions you may want to ask yourselves in order to understand more fully the scope of your work. Listed below are some ideas to get you started.

What must be remembered is that there is a wealth of possibilities. Interpreting sustainability in fashion can be both complex and multifaceted. There is often more than one great answer. The clue is to ensure that your investigations are always rigorously carried out, critically reflected upon and that you are clear about the parameters around your work, albeit with fuzzy edges.

I. The why before the what?

When you set out to develop an idea, product, service, partnership or communication tool, ask why are you doing it. Why have others done it this way? Why are they using these materials, processes and methods?

II. Then what is the need?

What need are you satisfying? This may lead you to innovate new products and services, new ways in which to develop your products or communication tools along the supply chain. What skills do you and those working with you have and what is distinctive about your offer?

III. How are you creating a better option than the ones that exist?

You may wish to consider your pillars of sustainability and where your ideas sit on the gauge. At the Centre for Sustainable Fashion, we use wellbeing, water, waste, energy and biodiversity as our touchpoints. For further information see Centre for Sustainable Fashion publication *Tactics for Change*: www.sustainable-fashion.com/resources/

IV. Who with?

Have you considered the makers all along the chain; the retailers; the wearers? Fashion is a team sport, often involving numerous parties. Look at ways in which you can empathise, connect and share with others, as the wisdom of the maker can inform the buyer, the designer, and the wearer in ways that make the piece stand out, offering creative possibility and stronger links across the whole cycle.

V. Your strategy and benchmarks

Map out your strategy, mark the key points along the way. How are you going to assess your progress? What criteria do you work by? Are you using qualitative or quantitative tools, and which are more appropriate to the situation? This can be an evolving process, but one that will allow you to see how far you have come from the starting point towards more sustainable ways of working. You may wish to use existing benchmarks such as International Labour Organisation's Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, World Fair Trade Organisation standards or Oeko-Tex standards. What is important is to apply the most appropriate tool to the situation.

- 1 /
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Economist in South Asia
Finance and Poverty group.
[www.bhclondon.org.uk/
TradeN_Commerce.htm](http://www.bhclondon.org.uk/TradeN_Commerce.htm)
- 2 /
[http://blogs.worldbank.
org/endpovertyinsouthasia/
financing-living-wage-
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garment-industry](http://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/financing-living-wage-bangladesh%E2%80%99s-garment-industry)
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Zahid Hussain, Senior
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Finance and Poverty group.
[www.bhclondon.org.uk/
TradeN_Commerce.htm](http://www.bhclondon.org.uk/TradeN_Commerce.htm)
- 4 /
Mintel: Clothing Retailing -
UK - October 2010
- 5/
Mintel: Clothing Retailing -
UK - October 2010
- 6 /
The Cooperative Bank
(2009) Ten years of ethical
consumerism 1999-2008
- 7 /
[www.fairtrade.org.uk/
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cm_docs/2010/f/2_fairtrade_
cotton_factsheet.pdf](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/includes/documents/cm_docs/2010/f/2_fairtrade_cotton_factsheet.pdf)
- 8 /
Soil Association (2010)
Organic Market Report 2010
[www.soilassociation.org/
LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=bTX
no01MTtM=&tabid=116](http://www.soilassociation.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=bTXno01MTtM=&tabid=116)

4. Bangladesh & UK garment industries

Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a rich history of textile production, and many of these skills remain alive today. Bangladesh's export economy relies on the ready made garment (RMG) industry, having grown from US\$6.4billion in 2005 to US\$12.5billion in 2010 and accounts for 80% of the country's export earnings¹ and 14.5% of national GDP. Many brands and retailers found on the UK high street source ready made garments from Bangladesh, including Marks and Spencer, H&M, Next, Gap, Zara, Tesco and Asda-George. The UK is one of the most important markets for Bangladesh and 80% of imports from the South-Asian country are garments². It is estimated that 3.5 million Bangladeshis work in the RMG industry³, the majority of whom are women.

Bangladesh textile and ready made garment companies are working hard to move from a low cost source of supply to an industry that can offer higher added value products with reduced lead times. The industry bodies are investing in education and training to improve skill levels and the ability to provide better quality and service. One of the key challenges for the industry is the need to improve labour and safety standards as low wages and poor working conditions are widely reported in Bangladeshi factories. More progress also needs to be made with environmental concerns such as water use and pollution caused by textile processing.

UK

In 2009, consumers in the UK spent £41,085million on clothing⁴. Whilst the growth in clothing sales is slowing down, British consumers are still spending more than ever on their wardrobes. They are also buying more garments at even cheaper prices - according to Mintel, clothing prices have been falling steadily for more than a decade⁵. The environmental impact of this model of fashion consumption isn't only about the mountains of textiles that are discarded and left in landfill. The amount of energy used in washing, drying and ironing clothes for some products far exceeds the energy used in making the clothes.

Nevertheless, consumers in the UK are showing concern about where their clothes come from. The market for ethical clothing increased from £4 million in 1999 to £172million in 2008⁶. Twenty million garments made from Fairtrade labelled cotton were sold in 2008⁷. In 2009, UK organic cotton sales were worth £100million and the UK makes up about 10% of the global organic cotton market⁸. Whilst these sums of money are tiny compared to the total amount of money spent on clothes, they illustrate that this is an important emerging area of concern for consumers, and a growing consciousness of a need for change within fashion.

5. Case study 1

People Tree: Designing differently

People Tree, the British-Japanese fair trade fashion company, have a design process which sets them apart from other fashion brands. Their trend conscious designs are built around traditional skills and utilise hand-weaving, hand skills and organic cotton to maximise employment. They commit to increasing orders from their network of producers year on year to build continuity and community and start their design process with these producers' skills in mind. They work one season ahead of the mainstream, meaning that the producers can plan production with plenty of time to fulfil orders and maintain a steady stream of work in the marginalised communities in which they work.

Background

People Tree began life as Global Village in Japan in 1991 and launched its UK operations in 2001. The ethos of the design is to creatively explore ways in which to balance wellbeing of makers with delight for wearers. They are manufacturers of fashion and accessories for men, women and children. There is a simple idea behind the company *'For every beautiful garment People Tree makes, there's an equally beautiful change happening somewhere in the world'*⁹. The driver behind the brand is founder and CEO Safia Minney who has been awarded an MBE and has been recognised in the Asian Business Awards for her work with Asian producer communities. The company was also awarded the WGSN Global Fashion Awards and High Street Fashion Best Ethical Fashion Awards in 2010 for fashion and accessories.

The company has offices in Japan and London, responsible for design, sourcing retail and producer capacity development. Their core customers are 25-40 year old females, however they also sell a significant amount of organic cotton babywear, kids & teen tees, and men's clothes. The company's main outlets are its online store and selling product through 600 fair trade shops in Europe and Japan, as well as in Topshop and John Lewis on the UK high street. People Tree has three flagship stores in Tokyo and hopes to have one in London soon.

People Tree and fair trade

'Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South.'

World Fair Trade Organisation

People Tree is a design-led company that sees clothing as a vehicle for poverty alleviation. Thus its focus is on community centred sustainability through economic stability, skills preservation and low impact production methods. The company aims to maximise use of local skills (handwoven fabrics, hand screen printing and hand embroidery) to create employment.

The company is a member of the World Fair Trade Organisation. It works closely with fifty fair trade groups in marginalised communities across fifteen countries including Bangladesh, working along the supply chain from growing cotton to weaving and embroidery to stitching. People Tree producers are also involved in community development and training for workers. In Bangladesh, they work with the community projects Swallows, Artisan Hut, Folk Bangladesh, Kumundini and Action Bag¹⁰.

Alongside a focus on the wellbeing of the people involved, focus is given to ecologically sensitive methods of sourcing and production. 50% of their cotton is organic and Fairtrade certified by Fairtrade International. The business further focuses on reducing the environmental impacts of their business through transportation. More than 98% of People Tree's products are imported by sea from their fair trade producers in the developing world.

9 /

www.peopletree.co.uk/about-us/

10 /

www.peopletree.co.uk/content/producers.php

Useful resources /

People Tree /
www.peopletree.co.uk

World Fair Trade Organisation /
www.wfto.com

This case study is based on interviews conducted with the People Tree design team in July 2010 and information available on their website.

Collection development – the People Tree approach

The design process starts with a 'kick off' meeting between the People Tree teams in the UK and Japan, who work collaboratively to plan fabrics, colour palettes and share inspiration. Designs are inspired by trends, but more fundamentally by the producers they work with. People Tree design, production and technical teams regularly visit producers to get to know their capabilities, check quality and resolve any problems. This is crucial for effective flow in the system and in building capacity, trust and reliability of orders and production. People Tree have a commitment to increase orders from each producer group year on year. Many of the producers they work with have rich textile histories and use traditional techniques, providing inspiration and an identity for designers to work with. The designers start the process by thinking about the skills of the people they will be working with. How can those skills be best utilised? Will there be a market for those products? How can the design process enhance and develop the skills of the producers? People Tree invests heavily in promoting Fair Trade and awareness of the environmental problems with conventional fashion to build customer awareness.

Essential to the balance between buyer and maker is the prerequisite timescales. Preparation for a new collection starts up to eighteen months ahead, a whole fashion season ahead of the high street. This means that producers can plan their production, preventing the bottlenecks prevalent in mainstream fashion that can result in unpaid overtime to fulfil orders and insecure employment due to peaks and troughs in orders. People Tree designers order their fabric from source, right down to ordering specific cotton plants to be planted to provide the perfect cloth for their collection. Long lead times create challenges at the distribution end as this means that staggered drops into stores are needed. People Tree staff are used to this kind of problem solving. As Head of Design Tracy Mulligan says, 'There's always a way to make it work – it's a lot of fun and it's important to have a sense of humour when trying to overcome challenges. There's a lot of laughter in the People Tree office'.

Following the 'kick off' meeting, patterns textile designs and garment patterns are produced in the UK and sent to producers with specifications for samples. They must be carefully considered before they are sent off as the setting up of handlooms is a time-consuming process. The producers then send over sample lengths of fabrics to the UK.

Designs are then signed off and orders with producers are placed. These orders are staggered over the year so that there can be continuous employment throughout the year. To enable financial stability producers are paid 50% of the order value in advance and the balance is paid on delivery. Most fashion companies pay up to three months after delivery. The garments are then shipped for 3-6 weeks to the UK and Japan for quality control and distribution.

Close working relationships between design and production, sales and marketing enable existing skills utilisation as well as new skills development. A knowledge of the potential customer in terms of aesthetic and quality demands, alongside practice based skills and working environments that are aligned to People Tree's values, offers a framework for product development and capacity building. This forms creative possibility rather than constraint, and adds an element of surprise and uniqueness to the collection as it is not produced in the same way as other competitor brands.

Creating a cohesive collection from such varied producers can be challenging, but this creates an individual design aesthetic for People Tree. Designers also benefit by developing a personal relationship with the people that bring their creations to life and seeing the people evolve. The design process, and quality of the garments is a source of satisfaction to designers.

6. Fair trade

The term *fair trade* is open to interpretation. As it is based on a moral judgement of what is fair and what is not fair, it cannot be considered to be an absolute. Whilst there is no single definition of fair trade relating to fashion products there are two main fair trade bodies internationally: Fairtrade International and World Fair Trade Organisation.

Most consumers in the UK will be familiar with the Fairtrade label that can be found on coffee, tea and bananas as well as on clothes made with Fairtrade cotton. The Fairtrade label for cotton is an independent product certification label guaranteeing that seed-cotton farmers who meet Fairtrade International social and environmental standards receive a fair and stable price for their cotton, as well as a financial premium for investment in their community, receive pre-financing where requested and benefit from longer-term, more direct trading relationships. The label is applicable only to cotton production, and not to the other stages of textile and garment manufacture. The label is applied to products rather than signifying that the entire company is fair trade.

In contrast, World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) does not certify products, but its members are mainly small and medium sized companies that are driven by fair trade values. WFTO is a global network of organisations that seeks to enable producers to improve their livelihoods and communities through fairer trade. Members of the network can include producer cooperatives, export companies, importers, retailers and individuals, and a number of members are involved in textiles and fashion. Members sign up to adhering to World Fair Trade Organisation's principles that relate to fair prices, working conditions, child labour and the environment. Many use cotton bearing Fairtrade International's Fairtrade Mark for Cotton in their products as well.

Useful resources /

Fairtrade Foundation /
www.fairtrade.org.uk

World Fair
Trade Organisation /
www.wfto.com





7. Case study 2

New Look and Echotex: Addressing long hours, low pay and buying practices

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Kantar Worldpanel 24
w/e 5th September 2010

Acknowledging, like other leading fashion brands in the UK, that there is room for improvement of working conditions in their supply chain, New Look is running projects to find ways to address the root causes of workers' rights infringements in its supply chain. New Look developed a new working plan with one of its suppliers Echotex, which has received national awards for its environmental work. Echotex is based in Bangladesh, a country where industry wages are amongst the very lowest in the world. The New Look-Echotex project aims to reduce excessive overtime, whilst increasing pay for the people involved in manufacturing their product. The strategy includes New Look itself addressing its own buying practices to ensure the benefits of the project are felt into the future. By working towards a greater understanding of the parameters and pressures on their businesses and through closer dialogue, the two companies can work towards a mutually beneficial position.

New Look background

New Look was founded over forty years ago by Tom Singh OBE as a ladies fashion retailer based in the South West of England. Its identity is about delivering fashion excitement, newness and value. It now sells clothing, lingerie, shoes and accessories in over 1000 stores worldwide, in the UK and Republic of Ireland, Europe, the Middle East, Singapore, Russia and Poland. The company is a market leader in fashion (womenswear, footwear, accessories and teen ranges) and has a growing market share in other areas (menswear and childrens). New Look is currently the number two womenswear and accessories retailer by value in the UK, with 6.0% market share¹¹. In 2009, 355 million customers visited New Look either online or in one of its stores. The company directly employs over 20,000 people globally and in 2009 worked with 331 suppliers covering 1016 factories across 32 countries. New Look publicly voices a commitment to ethical trading and animal welfare, as well as a pledge to limit its impact on the planet by reducing the waste to landfill and reducing energy consumption. Their main production is in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, India, Turkey, Vietnam and Moldova. This sourcing network is managed by the UK head office working through UK and Singapore distribution hubs.

Echotex background

Echo Sourcing was established in the 1990's by Shafiq Hassan and his design partner Para Hamilton as a 'design to delivery' organisation. Together with their Bangladeshi friends they envisioned building a garment manufacturing plant based in Dhaka which would create employment for 500 people and contribute towards true change for Bangladesh and its employees. They now collectively own three factories which employ 11,000 people and produce upwards of two million garments per month, supplying major UK High Street retailer New Look amongst other notable fashion outlets. Echotex is the largest of these three factories and was established three years ago. It alone employs over 5000 people in its vertical production operation manufacturing knitted jerseywear fashion items. Echotex has its own on site knitting, dyeing and production plants as well as an effluent treatment plant (ETP) which has already won a national environmental award. Committed, forward thinking and people-centred management is employed to help bring to fruition the vision of its directors of creating commercially viable production sites with excellent systems of people management, industrial engineering, modern equipment and technical expertise to deliver better lives for workers and their children.

New Look and ethical trading

New Look's Leaving a Legacy report outlines their approach to ethical trade. The company is a member of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) – a UK alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations, working in partnership to improve the working lives of people across the globe who make or grow consumer goods. Their code of conduct is based on the ETI's Base Code and covers trade union rights, health and safety, child labour, living wage, working hours, discrimination, regular employment, harsh and inhumane treatment. Their code also covers environmental considerations.

In 2009 the company carried out 200 social audits (factory inspections) to diagnose problems in their supply chain. These highlighted health, safety & hygiene, wages and working hours as the key issues needing to be addressed.

In common with other leading companies in ethical trade, New Look publicly accepts that working conditions in their supply chain may not always meet the standards they require, and that infringements of workers' rights are sometimes found in factories supplying them. One of New Look's ethical objectives is to:

'Continuously improve: our intention is to improve everything we can at every opportunity, however we recognise that we cannot solve all of the problems in our supply chain overnight. Where big changes are practical we want to make those changes and make them stick. Where that isn't practical we always work to make little changes that will make a difference¹⁴.'

New Look ask all their suppliers to take ownership of any problems, to work with New Look to tackle problems and to be open and honest. New Look also acknowledges the potential impact of their buying practices on working conditions.

'Our work with our suppliers has shown us that the way we buy can sometimes make it more difficult for factories to meet our ethical standards. If we confirm our orders late, make late changes in design, change the size of orders or are slow in completing paperwork, product turnaround times are increased, reducing a suppliers' ability to provide decent jobs for workers'.

To address this, they train design, buying and merchandising staff on the implications of their decisions for workers.

New Look goes beyond auditing in delivering its ethical strategy and uses this merely as a 'temperature gauge' of progress. The company's main ethical thrust is in piloting projects in different countries to explore ways to tackle the root causes of poor working conditions by working with other retailers and/or their own suppliers. The company acknowledges this is a work in progress, but they:

'hope that by sharing our programme, incomplete as it is, we will encourage our customers, stakeholders and others to respond and make further suggestions'.

Addressing long working hours and low pay in Bangladesh

An example of a New Look collaborative project to promote sustainable ethical change in its supply chain is a three-year project in Dhaka, Bangladesh (2006-9). The project was facilitated by Impactt Ltd¹⁵, a specialist ethical supply chain consultancy, and sought to address long working hours and low pay in one of New Look's key supplier factories. The partner supplier was Echo Sourcing with whom New Look have a long-term relationship and they shared the project costs 50/50. The project centred on the Echotex factory and its smaller predecessor.

At the start of the project, working hours were often high (sometimes more than 70 hours per week) and wages low and far from representing a living wage (the lowest 'helper' grade workers earned an average of £20 per month). Workers needed to work extra hours to top up their basic pay.

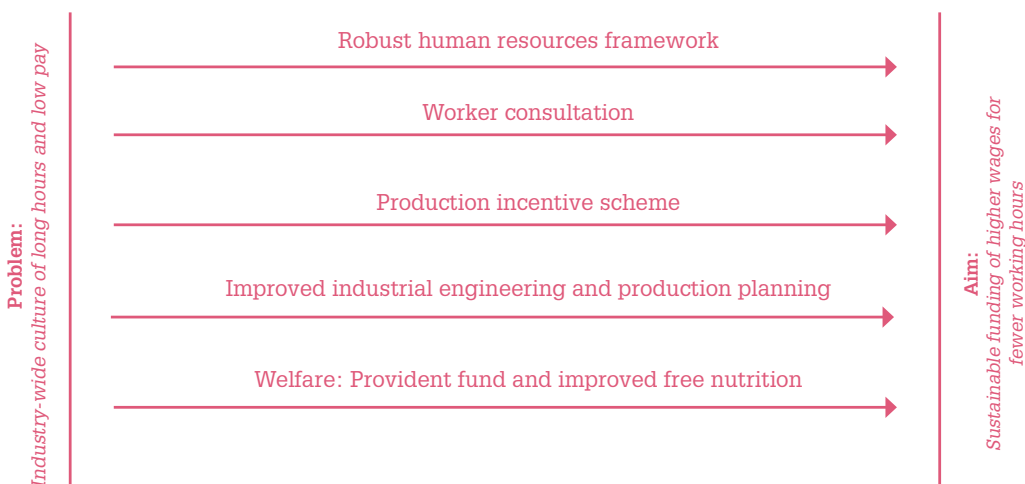
'On top of that, management systems were under-developed, efficiency and productivity were low and management was unsure of how to value its workers.'

Within Echotex, the project had a number of elements:

1. Worker consultation to listen to the concerns of the workers.
2. Human resources management, including the introduction of a means for workers to discuss their concerns with management.
3. Production incentive scheme where workers are given a bonus linked to productivity.
4. Improved industrial engineering and production planning.
5. A provident fund to provide workers with a means to save money to reduce their vulnerability in case of hardship.
6. Free lunch for all workers aimed at improving nutrition.
7. Enthusiastic backing to the project from senior management. There were regular meetings between supplier representatives and buying teams to discuss the project.

In addition, New Look addressed its own practices. It identified ethical champions amongst its buyers who understand the issues and help make change, and addressed its buying practices to support the project including improved forecasting for forward vision of order flow/volume to enable the factory to plan its production schedule. New Look also guaranteed a minimum volume contract for the supplier, giving confidence to invest in improvements.

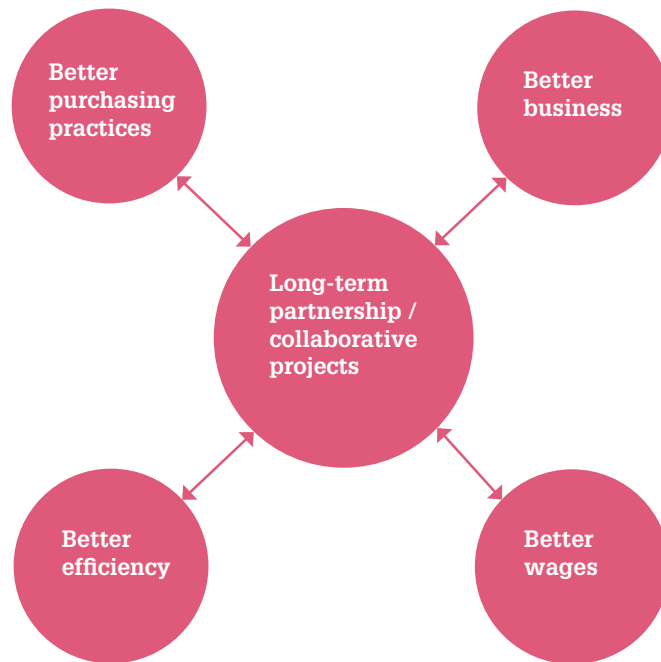
The project returned a 45% reduction in overtime working within six months of project start and a 25% increase in take home package for workers. This helped to improve employee retention, reduce absenteeism as well as improve quality of product. Freedom of association for workers to choose whether or not to join a trade union to represent them has not been fully addressed within the project although an active workers' committee was established.



This case-study is based on interviews with New Look staff in July 2010, Leaving A Legacy and New Look Retailers Ltd Our Ethical Aims downloaded from the New Look website, July 2010.

New Look's analysis of the reasons for the success of the project are:

- > The vision and enthusiasm of the supplier organisation and factory leadership;
- > Communication, particularly keeping the workforce informed;
- > Investing in high calibre, engaged factory management;
- > New Look's willingness to review and improve its purchasing practices to support ethical running of factory;
- > A collaborative approach based on transparency and trust, with supplier AND customer management improvements;
- > The understanding that the business partnership was there for the longterm.



The project has identified a framework to work with suppliers to move towards meeting the standards outlined in New Look's code of conduct, whilst acknowledging the need for further collaboration and longterm working. New Look and the factory continue to work in this way and maintain a good working relationship. They still share data that highlight key issues as they arise. New Look has now taken this model for sustainable change and rolled it out as part of an ongoing programme in other garment factories around the world. New Look is now collaborating on a project part-funded by the UK government with Marks and Spencer, Arcadia, Tesco, Sainsbury and Mothercare to improve wages and reduce working hours through improving worker/management communication, human resource management and productivity. In year 1 the project will be rolled out to ten factories in Bangladesh and India and to 100 factories in year 2.

8. Living wage

Wages in any garment workforce vary according to the skill and responsibility of a worker. Most workers' monthly earnings around the world average a little higher than the national minimum wage for the country where they work. When governments set minimum wages, they balance the interests of workers with what they see as the need to remain competitive in the global market and pressure from companies to keep wages low. As a result, minimum wage rates often bear no relation to the cost of living, and fall far short of what many argue is a living wage. In many garment-producing countries, the minimum wage actually leaves a family below the national poverty line, even though this is also set by the government.

Minimum wages often remain unchanged for years while the cost of living rises, which means that the real value of the workers' pay falls. For example, the government of Bangladesh did not adjust its minimum wage for twelve years until 2006, during which period the real value of wages halved. When the minimum was finally raised, it was still well below its 1994 value in real terms. The legal minimum wage had to be raised again in 2010 by as much as 80% for many workers after worker unrest about the low wages they were receiving. The new minimum wage for the lowest scale garment workers is 3000 Taka, just one third of the value of a living wage estimated by the Asia Floor Wage campaign.

Because of the issues associated with minimum wages the industry best practice is to ensure that workers receive what is called a living wage. Labour Behind the Label defines a living wage as:

A wage that enables workers to meet their needs for nutritious food and clean water, shelter, clothes, education, health care and transport, as well as allowing for a discretionary income. It should be enough to provide for the basic needs of workers and their families, to allow them to participate fully in society and live with dignity. It should take into account the cost of living, social security benefits and the standard living of others nearby. Finally, it should be based on a standard working week, before overtime, and apply after any deductions [for example social security payments].

There are two key ways of calculating a living wage: by calculation or by negotiation. At present, estimates of a living wage made using calculations differ. Technical discussions about how to calculate and measure a living wage can be avoided by applying the negotiated approach. Allowing workers and their managers to set wages through bargaining between themselves not only avoids definitional issues, it also empowers workers to start to take their working conditions into their own hands.

16 /
www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/jul/29/minimum-wage-workers-bangladesh-protests

Useful resources /

The Asia Floor Wage
www.asiafloorwage.org/
and *Fashioning an Ethical Industry* (2008)

The Living Wage www.fashioninganethicalindustry.org/resources/factsheets/issues/factsheet19/



9. Case study 3

Aranya Crafts: Pioneers in natural dyes

Aranya has pioneered a revival in natural dyes in Bangladesh for handmade textiles and clothing. The company is headed up by Ruby Ghuznavi who has over thirty years experience in researching natural dyestuffs and their application to textiles. Aranya supports over two thousand artisans in Bangladesh and is a member of the World Fair Trade Organisation.

Background

From its beginnings as a research project set up to revive the making and use of natural dyes in Bangladesh, Aranya has moved on and is now a fair trade micro enterprise working on development and marketing of natural dye products. Aranya was set up in its current form in 1990; its aim was to establish the commercial viability of natural dyes and promote their use in the handloom sector. There is an Aranya showroom (shop) in Dhaka and the company also exports about 20% of production, notably to Chandni Chowk in the South West of England, Ganasha in London, as well as previously to retailers Conran Shop, Selfridges and Liberty. Aranya employs thirty people in the Dhaka workshop and works with between 2,000 and 3,000 weavers, embroiderers and artisans.

Aranya produce hand-woven, hand-printed, hand-tailored and hand-dyed textiles and clothing using vegetable dyes and traditional textile techniques such as jamdani and kantha embroidery. The company also produces a significant amount of hand-block and hand-wax printed products. The latter is a technique that involves the application of wax onto the fabric using a block (unlike batik, where the wax is applied by hand). The different techniques Aranya use allow them to utilise a wide range of natural dyes.

Aranya and natural dyes

Ruby Ghuznavi is the Managing Director and founder of Aranya. Disturbed by the pollution of rivers caused by the run-off from industrial dyeing she witnessed in rural Bangladesh, Ruby began to research natural dyes in the 1970s. The river water was contaminated, it couldn't be drunk and people had no choice but to wash themselves, and their clothes in it. Even today, rivers in Bangladesh can be an unnatural colour as a result of the synthetic dyes used in the clothing industry. Natural dyeing traditions were virtually wiped out in Bangladesh during the 1800s with the discovery of synthetic dyes and their introduction in the Indian sub-continent by the British during colonial times.

In the 1980s, Ruby was responsible for a three-year natural dye project for the governmental Small and Cottage Industries Corporation. During this period she and her team revived fifteen dyes from locally available plant sources. In the second phase of the project, funded by UN-FAO, they took this knowledge to the Forestry Department to persuade them to introduce dye producing plants and trees into afforestation programmes, alongside wood, fruit and other value adding trees. To this day, dye producing trees and plants are included in afforestation programmes.

Through her research, Ruby experimented with different colours and processes to develop optimise ways of working with the dyestuff, going beyond reduction in chemical use. She found out, for example, that you can save fuel by taking the dye bath off the fire earlier than the recommended time and still generate the same results. She has developed a palette of thirty natural Bangladeshi dyes that are colourfast and economical to use. The palette includes the vibrant blue of indigo, the strong mustard yellow from marigold and the pale green from frangipani. This offers shades that are locally specific in origin and hue.

More detailed information about natural dye techniques and processes can be obtained from:

www.sharedtalentindia.com/skills/dyeing-printing/craft/

Ghuznavi, S. R. (2002) *Rangeen: Natural Dyes of Bangladesh, Dhaka: Aranya Crafts.*

This case study was based on interviews with Ruby Ghuznavi in July 2010 and her book Rangeen: Natural Dyes of Bangladesh. (Ghuznavi, S. R. (2002) Rangeen: Natural Dyes of Bangladesh, Dhaka: Aranya Crafts.)

There are many more vegetable dyes available and Ruby continues to experiment, but many of them are not colourfast and therefore not commercially viable for textiles. The herbs Aranya use are high quality herbs that are ayurvedic, meaning they could be used for medicinal purposes. With the exception of madder, all the dye products are sourced from Bangladesh. Many of these dyes are sourced from raw material; onion skins, marigold and sawdust, collected from sawmills, weddings and flower shops. Between 1% and 5% of the inputs in Aranya's dyeing process are minerals or chemicals for mordants, that bind the colours to the fabric. Ruby explains that this is a trade off with being commercially viable. Natural mordants do not create standardised colours. Cow's urine was traditionally used, but she laughs as she explains that today's market won't tolerate this.

Ruby's passion for natural dyes is evident, as is her desire to share her knowledge and experience. She says, *'It is my life's achievement. I want it to continue after I go.'* Aranya regularly run training workshops for groups of students, professionals and artisans who can attend for free. She allows students to use the centre at cost price including yarns. Her book, Rangeen, instructs the reader on how to use the dyes and she is working on a new manual for producers that will leave a legacy for sustainable dyeing well into the future¹⁷.

Aranya's market

Ruby explains how producing for the export market can be hazardous. For example, in the past buyers have demanded lengths of fabric that are longer than the lengths traditionally produced, but have then failed to order further quantities in that length, despite the significant work involved in changing looms to produce different lengths. Ruby points out that supplying too much for the export market means there is not enough stock for her own successful shop and the demand for some of her products, such as kantha embroidery, is so high in Bangladesh that there is no need to export it. This dual market gives an understanding of demand by selling through her own domestic market and benefits of access to new customers through her export market. This offers her resilience to the vulnerability often caused by the relative powerlessness of supplier in bigger volume export markets, whilst offering the opportunity that being able to access international markets brings to the business.

Aranya is entirely self-financing. Ruby turned down funding on the basis that the company would not know its true costs if it was dependent on external funding. Ruby admits that her prices are relatively high within Bangladesh but insists that this is the price it costs to make labour intensive natural dye products in small volumes. She is unable to benefit from economies of scale since everything is hand-processed and takes the same time to produce whether it be one garment or 1000. She riles against buyers constantly trying to reduce prices, arguing that the price reflects the work put in. Handwoven fabrics are labour intensive: six yards of kantha embroidery can take three months to produce. An additional concern is that the price of silk and cotton yarn have risen by 30% reducing demand and resulting in loss of work for weavers around the country.

Ruby says that Aranya isn't a fashion brand, by which she means she can work outside the constraints of trends, even though Aranya collections remain relevant to her market. She only works in jute, silk and cotton and her beautiful, handcrafted textile products are timeless pieces. Being free of the treadmill created by being tied to seasonal collections means Aranya does not have to be overly concerned about production schedules, a constraint well avoided when working with a network of more than 2000 producers.

10. Signposts:

Where to go next for ideas and information

The following book and websites provide you with an excellent introduction to fashion and sustainability, and have links to other reports, background information, student opportunities, teaching materials, films and much more.

For updates and more information about the project, fashion and sustainability in Bangladesh and the UK see:

www.sustainable-fashion.com/resources

Fletcher, K., (2007) Sustainable Fashion and Textiles - Design Journeys, Earthscan

Centre for Sustainable Fashion at London College of Fashion

The Centre for Sustainable Fashion is a global leader in design-led solutions to ecological, social and cultural issues explored through research, business and education in the fashion sector.

www.sustainable-fashion.com

Fashioning an Ethical Industry

Fashioning an Ethical Industry is a Labour Behind the Label project that works with students and tutors on fashion related courses to give a global overview of the garment industry, raise awareness of current company practices and of initiatives to improve conditions, and inspires students - as the next generation of industry players - to raise standards for workers in the fashion industry of the future. FEI organise events, produce resources and support curriculum development.

www.fashioninganethicalindustry.org

11. Report background

Sustainability thinking has increasing visibility in the fashion sector in Bangladesh. Steps to Sustainable Fashion contains case studies of companies that are making decisions that strengthen their business in terms of economic viability, compassion towards people and the environment. This publication is aimed at inspiring students and teachers of any fashion discipline that there are opportunities for great products to be designed and made that meet the growing UK and Bangladeshi market for ethical and sustainable fashion.

The British Council funded Development Partnerships in Higher Education (DelPHE) project has brought together London College of Fashion (LCF), the BGMEA Institute of Fashion Technology (BIFT) in Dhaka and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) to deliver research that explores better practice and ways forward to improve the competitiveness of the Bangladesh manufacturing sector to add value in this area. This publication is one of the outputs of this project, and is being published in collaboration with Fashioning an Ethical Industry and the Centre for Sustainable Fashion at LCF.

Fashioning an Ethical Industry (FEI) has worked with fashion courses at over 30 institutions, including London College of Fashion to support the integration of sustainability and ethics into teaching and learning. Department for International Development (DFID) are currently supporting FEI to share their expertise and experience with universities and colleges in Scotland and develop a self-sustaining Scottish Ethical Fashion Education Network. Fashioning an Ethical Industry is partnering with those involved in the DelPHE project to disseminate materials from the project through their network to fashion tutors and students.

The Centre for Sustainable Fashion at London College of Fashion takes a holistic, interdisciplinary, multi-levelled approach towards design for sustainability, relating to the fashion sector. It places faith in the cooperative abilities of people and nature to solve ecological issues. Its aims and purpose are facilitated through research, curriculum development, business and collaborative partnerships. It takes a solutions-based approach: seeking out, developing, nurturing and communicating ways in which design for sustainability in fashion can contribute to a more prosperous and equitable world for us all.



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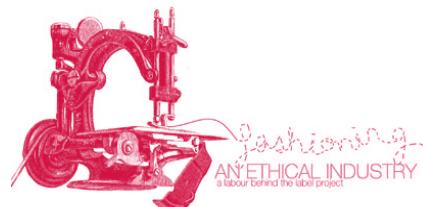
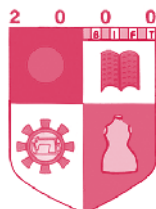
Disclaimer:

This publication is issued as documentation of the project run by London College of Fashion and BIFT and does not necessarily express the views of the University of the Arts London. The case studies are based on the information provided by the companies and have not been verified or investigated. Every effort has been made to check and verify other data referenced within this publication. It was correct, to the best of our knowledge, at the time of going press (March 2011).



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DelPHE

DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

British Council in Dhaka:
www.britishcouncil.org/bangladesh.htm



UKaid

from the Department for
International Development



United Nations Industrial
Development Organization:
www.unido.org