

SUSTAINABLE
FASHION
OR
IS IT ONLY A LIP SERVICE

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Courtesy of: Financial Times - Illustration by Graham Tuckwell

During the past four years, the numbers of clothing and accessories jumping on the bandwagon and described what they have vowed to do as "sustainable" have been absolutely rubbish. Fashion is definitely unsustainable, and it is putting a lot of pressure on our planet Earth.

We have reported so much about this subject and everywhere we turn we would come across articles talking about sustainability. And this time we have found out that the Covid-19 has hit the fashion industry significantly, supply chains have broken. Due to the lockdown, retail sales have dropped, unsold stock has been piling up, retail shops have closed and some have even gone out of business. On top of all these, consumers' behaviors have changed and also their attitudes. A major change is needed.

That is why we are back again to explore more about this fashion business which has been claimed as a \$3 trillion business. It is also a business where a lot of people have been depending on it.

Rebuilding the Sustainability of Fashion

Let us go back and reexamine what sustainable meant in the first place. We are looking in many aspects, such as:

- Living wages of the workers in the developing world
- Carbon reduction across all areas
- Organic and recycle fibers used in the fashion industry

If we have to address this seriously, we have to reexamine the supply chain and make sure that everyone involved is playing a role in it.

Earlier on, it was predicted that fashion and footwear would increase by 81% to 102 million tons in 2030. We can blame most part of it to the fast fashion. But lately even the luxury brands are publicizing their effort to reduce their carbon footprint. We have not to forget that their business is also growing tremendously in the last two years.

For materials to claim for reducing the carbon emissions and water pollution should be taken in a more serious manner to quantify its real situation. We have to understand the majority of the counterparts who are still using non-organic and non-recycled materials and be able to distinguish them and to know the true benefits from a more scientific approach.

Consumers would welcome fashion applying the sustainable approach, but this is normally a lip service. From the statistic we come to know that 45% will say that sustainability can influence their purchasing behavior. We need to realize that usually the end-products using recycled materials or organic are slightly more expensive. Would they be ready to take up the premium or is it a gesture only? It can be easy to tell as in many instances the consumers would forget about their initial preference or intention when come to the price.

We all know that carbon emissions lead to climate change and it is almost inevitable we are entering into a vicious chain reaction that they are all linked together.

We can perhaps blame this to the complicated supply chain that we have developed over the past 30 years. Gone were those years when everything was produced by the manufacturers who owned every operation, like the spinning of the yarns, the knitting mills, the dyeing and finishing plants, the sewing operations, the whole purpose was to produce almost everything under the same roof. But decades of globalization, trade policy, pricing structure led to the competitiveness, have encourage the brands to outsource production and surrendered ownership of their supply chains.

To trace the products through the supply chain is almost impossible as everyone is a subcontractor to the next in line, many of these subcontractors are nameless and are not even compliance to the labor law for instance, let alone for them to become sustainable. Most of the brands are clueless in these days for where their productions are coming from.

Very often the factory owners are unwilling to reveal their textile suppliers, and the textile suppliers would cover the trace of their fiber suppliers for instance. To give out this trade information would mean the loss of competitiveness.

To bring the conscience into this business is probably not going to happen today. To have the correct approach, you are most likely to talk about Utopia. Starting the powering of the production plant, by using the renewable energy like solar and wind power, reducing the using of water for dyeing, and the recycling afterwards, paying the living wage to the workers, selling the clothing using the slow fashion rather than the fast fashion for instance, recycle the used garments and do not end them in landfills, all these are not only tedious but also unmanageable.

At this time during the pandemic, global sales of clothing and footwear sales are expected to fall 27 to 30% this year. Not only the consumers are cutting back their spending, but the brands are cutting back their production and have to deal with the inventory that is still sitting in their warehouse since the beginning of the year.

This pandemic has a tremendous impact on fashion retail and closing of the stores is happening throughout the year. The joblessness has reduced the desire for spending and this has a very negative impact on the fashion business. It will probably take many years for the market to return to where they were but this should not stop us from planning for the sustainable fashion business using this opportunity. What took the industry so many years to change would perhaps happen in these few months.

We should not take the sustainable fashion as the PR and marketing tactic, but take it as a matter of fact. To establish the block chain and use it to keep track of the supply chain is a method to adopt.

Fast fashion with thousands of factories probably is no longer sustainable because the buying habit of the consumers are yet to be seen. People should be readier to change now.



The above chart is showing us that upstream is generating 71% of the greenhouse gas emissions, the brand operation for 6% and product use and end-of-use is 23%.

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion

In our 2019 October issue, we published an article—Sustainable Fashion: The Way to Approach in UK. At that time, I read that the members of the parliament, MPs, were criticizing the UK fashion businesses for not prioritizing sustainability in their company policy. This time we found that Catherine West, a Labor MP, who is chairing this All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) and has released a full report setting out a more sustainable path for this sector.

APPG is calling for the UK government to invest in research and development to boost investment in UK fabric-recycling facilities, to invest in skills to bring more manufacturing jobs back to the UK, and to support the start-ups for green business models. The information will be use in labeling about the sustainable fashion to inform and educate consumers.

This is the approach asking for the government to help the fashion industry to rebuild sustainability.

Sustainable Fashion Brands for Underwear and Fashion

There are twelve brands being recommended:

Organic Basics - us.organicbasics.com

Cosabella - cosabella.com

Pact - wearpact.com

Boody - bodywear.com

Brook There - brookthere.com

Knickey - knickey.com

Proclaim- wearproclaim.com

Uye Surana - uyesurana.com

Warp + Weft - warpweftworld.com

Reformation - thereformation.com

Azura Bay - azurabay.com

Tomboyx - tomboy.com

For the fair trade and ethical clothing brands, there are a few of them and we listed them as the following:

Boden from London, UK and it started in UK 30 years ago and it is now going worldwide.

Patagonia from California, USA is known for the safeguard of environmental approach in activewear industry.

Pact from Colorado, USA is known for their organic cotton. It is a B Corp certified.

Eileen Fisher from New York, USA is known in the fashion industry is set for reduce its greenhouse gas emissions 25% in 2025.

Sézane from Paris, France began online as a way to cut out the middlemen and focus on production that is responsible and close to zero waste as possible. The company also created a philanthropic initiative, DEMAIN, to help disadvantaged child to access education and equal opportunities.

Able from Tennessee, USA is for a feminist brand supporting women. It is a B Corp certified.

Tradlands from California, USA believes in ethical production using natural and sustainable materials and make high-quality essentials for women inspiring by classic menswear.

Outerknown from California, USA believes in fair labor and have fair trade products.

iApparel Journal

Alternative Apparel from Georgia, USA goes for both ethical and sustainable production.

Kotn from Toronto, Canada is for organic, safe and fair labor standards. It is a B Corp certified.

Reformation is from California, USA is for Made in the USA, sustainable fabrics, purchases carbon offsets.

Levi's California, USA is for ethnically produced and sustainable practices and best for children's denim.

Thought Clothing from London, UK is using affordable organic cotton and it is an all-natural clothing company.

United by Blue from Pennsylvania, USA is good for eco-friendly outdoor clothing. For each product sold, it removes one pound of trash from oceans and waterways through clean-up initiatives. It is a B Corp certified.

Vetta from USA with its LA-based manufacturing partner is known for creating its capsule wardrobe pieces using sustainable materials, ethical production practices and recycled packaging.

Hackwith Design House from Minnesota, USA is Made in the USA, made to order and inclusive sizes.

Fair Trade Winds from USA carries a wide range of fair-trade brands for women's men's and children's apparel and accessories.

Fair Indigo from Wisconsin, USA and Chiclayo, Peru is using organic cotton, and earth-friendly dyes, paying fair living wages and give-back program.

Aday from New York, USA is using recycled materials and solar power.

Back Beat Co. from California, USA with Made in USA using fabrics in recycled cotton, hemp and Tencel.

Cuyana in California, USA for slow fashion, support craftspeople and give-back program.

Petite Studio in New York, USA is known for ethical and small batch production using sustainable fabrics.

Encircled in Toronto, Canada, is using eco-conscious fabrics, upcycle and small batch production.

Lacausa from California, USA, is practicing ethical manufacturing, partners with charities, gives back.

Dôen in California, USA supports and promotes gender equality, natural fabrics and gives back program.

Indigenous from California, USA is an artisan-made clothing using organic and natural materials, It is B Corp certified.

People Tree in London, UK has a fair-trade certified collection using organic cotton and biodegradable materials.

Whimsy + Row in California, USA is Made in the USA, using deadstock materials, fair labor standard, and limited-run batches.

Amour Vert in San Francisco, USA is Made in the USA, it is using sustainable raw materials, small batch production and gives back.

MATE the Label from Los Angeles, California, USA is using natural materials, organic cotton and linen with low-impact dyes, Made in the USA.

Vege Threads from Australia is using eco-friendly materials and dyes, in limited batches.

Tonlé from Cambodia and California, USA is practicing zero waste, fair trade production, handcraft and natural dyes.

B Corp is dedicated to doing what is best for people and the planet before, during and after production.



The above is extracted from The Good Trade and you can reach it at www.thegoodtrade.com

Conclusion

There are roughly 40 million garment workers in the world today, many of them are working in the developing countries and do not share the same rights or protections as those in the developed countries.

China is still the largest country for textiles and garments. This is followed by Bangladesh.

I hope that it is no longer speaking about sustainability but the industry should put it more towards the action.

If we can treasure more on the ethnic manufacturing and switch our purchase to slow fashion then there is the hope to have sustainable fashion. But this will need a lot of determination and effort.