

ORGANISATION NAME:

H&M

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H&M is a family-owned Swedish multinational retail-clothing company. A resource-intensive value chain that comes with challenges like access to land, water use and energy use, sustainability is at the core of the business and is considered crucial to the company's long-term success. The company's aim is to use its scale to create systemic change within the industry. Together with colleagues, customers, stakeholders, business partners and peers, H&M wants to bring about massive change, all the way from improving the livelihood of the cotton farmer to lowering the environmental impacts of consumers using its products.





***1.** Tripartite partnership in Cambodia to provide capacity building for suppliers, make the business case and then work with ILO on a national level.

***2:** Donation to UNICEF to support anti-child labour measures in India.

H&M has a long tradition of sustainable engagement as part of its company culture and believes in doing the right thing while also remaining profitable.

The company believes that it is possible to make a case externally for sustainability, but it is often met with considerable scepticism when trying to work on initiatives that go beyond profit. Big businesses are often seen as ‘bad guys’, even if they are already very active in promoting sustainability in their supply chains.

H&M is also clear that its role in development is not to replicate the work of the UN, governments or trade unions but the company has partnered

with UNICEF to address issues within its supply chain that it cannot do alone, such as child labour.

There are significant differences between public and private sector initiatives. A partnership with the ILO focusing on working conditions and labour relations was a valuable learning experience for the company. H&M has found that international organisations work to much longer timescales and often have very different objectives from the business. However, once on the ground, the company has found that projects do work, as long as the public and private sector share the same broad goals.

“We find it extremely fruitful to work with the UN on a systemic level – rather than only providing an airbag in the car, we are working to prevent a collision in the first place,” Hanna Hallin, Global Social Sustainability Manager at H&M said. “Despite the time and differences involved in partnering with the UN, we’ve remained committed. We know it’s worth it. The impact created through such partnerships has exceeded our expectations.”

SUPPORTING THE SDGS

The following are two illustrative examples of initiatives that are supporting the SDGs.

Fashion Supply Chain

Partners: UN (ILO), Swedish Trade Union

H&M is dependent on stable and predictable purchasing markets. The company has carried out a unique tripartite project in Cambodia that will soon be replicated in Myanmar and Ethiopia. It has worked with the UN, ILO in particular, towards the aim of well-functioning industrial relations at factory, industry and national levels through capacity building for governments, suppliers and supplier employees.

H&M searched for partners because they felt it was not an appropriate role for a foreign buyer to step in to educate government officials and the labour market parties; their role is to build the capacity of suppliers, make the business case for them and only then team up with ILO to work at national level. They have also involved a Swedish trade union that is working on capacity building of local unions. H&M finds it extremely fruitful to work on a systemic level.

Another important collaboration began in 2013 with a training and skills development project in Bangladesh. The project aims to improve the quality of work and productivity in factories and to enable workers to document their skills and have them formally recognised.

The more comprehensive and strategic partnership under the new agreement will promote a wide range of activities at the global, national and enterprise level in a larger number of countries, until the end of 2018.

The partnership is intended to establish a positive and innovative model for other brands and create a global alliance to promote the ILO's Decent Work Agenda in the supply chain of the global garment industry.

Child Labour Prevention

Partners: UNICEF

Cotton growing and child labour are two of the main development issues in the fashion supply chain. H&M previously invested in a more philanthropic way: for example, UNICEF set up a programme with the state government in Tamil Nadu, India, to prevent parents from sending children to work in the cotton fields, to give victims of child labour access to education, to educate the community on the importance of sending children to school, and putting together an emergency team that could extract a child found to be in forced labour conditions. This was not an investment that they were putting proactively into a cause with a clear business return, but was nonetheless a human rights issue H&M felt strongly about and contributed in that way. In addition, H&M has raised the awareness among customers through the All For Children collection to support UNICEF's work for children's rights.