

SUSTAINABILITY IN TEXTILES

- * SUSTAINABILITY
- * ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY
- * SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS
- * INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

There are many definitions of sustainability, but one commonly encountered is in the 'Bruntland' definition of 'Sustainable Development':
 "(development that) meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs"
 [Our Common Future (the 'Brundtland Report'), United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) 1987.]

SETTING STANDARDS FOR SUSTAINABILITY

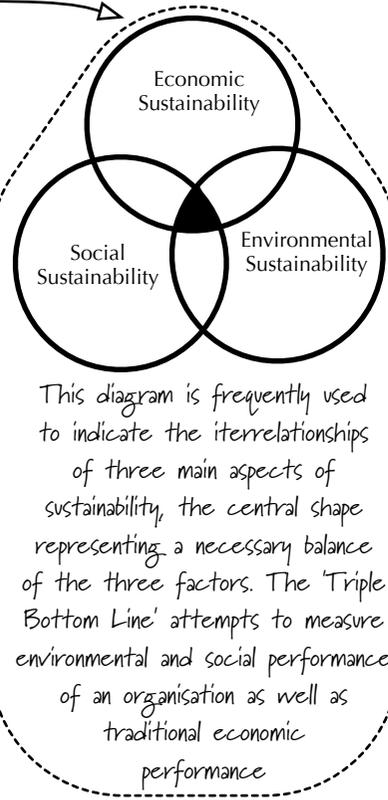
In common with some others, the textile industry is characterised by consisting of:

- a very large number of organisations
- suppliers and users of many types of product
- companies located in all parts of the world
- very large organisations as well as sole traders

Given these factors, maintaining consistent operational standards throughout the supply chain is difficult. This has led to the introduction of internationally-recognised 'Management Standards' to which organisations can register and be independently assessed. The following is a selection - there are many others.

- Soil Association - organic growing, including cotton
- Fair Trade Foundation - promotes fair prices for producers
- Forest Stewardship Council - wood products, including viscose raw material
- International Standards Organisation (ISO):
 - * ISO 9001 - Quality Management Standard
 - * ISO 14001:2004 - Environmental Management Standard
 - * ISO 26000 - Guidance on Social Responsibility (New Standard, in 2010 under draft circulation for comment)

Note - much of the emphasis of standards in the past has centred on economic and environmental sustainability rather than social matters



'Environmental Impact of Textiles'
 K Slater, Woodhead, 2003
 'Sustainable Textiles'
 R S Blackburn (Ed), Woodhead, 2009
 'Ecotextile News' (www.ecotextile.com)
 (Accessed April 2010)
 Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)
 (<http://www.globalreporting.org>)
 (Accessed April 2010)
 Networks on improving social sustainability
 (not textile specific)

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TEXTILE LIFECYCLE STAGE	ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES	SOCIAL ISSUES
RAW MATERIAL FOR FIBRES (ARTIFICIAL)	Mostly sourced from non-renewable oil, extraction of which can be very damaging to the environment	Pollution of land and watercourses can result in human and animal disease as well as the inability to grow enough food
RAW MATERIAL FOR FIBRES (NATURAL)	Can be associated with excessive use of pesticides & herbicides. High use of scarce water for crop irrigation in some areas.	Pollution of land and watercourses can result in human and animal disease as well as the inability to grow enough food
FIBRE PRODUCTION & PROCESSING	Uses large quantities of energy, usually from non-renewable sources. Wet processing effluent can pollute watercourses	Poorly paid work in unsafe conditions is common in some fibre producing countries
FABRIC & CLOTHING ASSEMBLY	Cutting garment components from flat fabric produces high waste levels. Part finished garments are frequently transported from country to country for different stages	Poorly paid work in unsafe conditions is common in some clothing and textile producing countries
WEARING & CLEANING	High energy and water use. Cleaning chemicals can pollute watercourses	Poor practices in garment cleaning, particularly in large cleaning plants, can render drinking water unsafe
END-OF-LIFE DISPOSAL	Very large amounts of textile items end up as landfill	Substances released from landfill, both to air and water, can cause damage to human populations
ECONOMIC sustainability often underpins an organisation's approaches to other aspects of sustainability - but good ENVIRONMENTAL & SOCIAL sustainability can help to improve economic performance		