

FASHIONING A SUSTAINABLE ROADMAP FOR A GREENER TOMORROW

The textile and fashion industry has an outsized impact on the environment. It is responsible for about seven per cent of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the aviation and shipping sectors combined, consumes 1.5 trillion litres of water per year and accounts for 23 per cent of all chemicals used worldwide.

To put the industry on a greener footing, Textile and Fashion Federation (TaFF), the official association for it in Singapore, launched a sustainable programme in November last year to galvanise and support eco-friendly efforts.

Earlier this month, it started a six-week campaign, called Be The Change, with initiatives for businesses, consumers and communities.

To develop the measures, TaFF commissioned PwC Singapore to produce a report that outlines the industry's sustainability footprint, existing policies and projects to curb its emissions, opportunities for progress and challenges that must be addressed. It also details Singapore's sector as a case study.

The report found, for instance, that a larger middle class and rising e-commerce are expected to drive the international industry's compound annual growth rate of six per cent in the next five years. In Singapore alone, the industry would need to halve its emissions in 2019 by 2030 to align with the Paris Agreement's goal of keeping global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

By the time someone buys a piece of clothing in Singapore, 66 per cent of its emissions have occurred in cultivating and extracting the raw materials, developing the fabric and assembling it. But a significant portion of its lifetime emissions – 28 per cent – happens during its use too, in washing, drying and ironing it.

“This is why advancing the green agenda in the fashion industry requires collective action,” said TaFF president Wilson Teo. “With our Be The Change campaign, we aspire to a movement that permeates every sector of society and closes the fashion loop.”

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Consumer pressure

The campaign, which lasts from July 6 to August 18, has three main components, called Enable The Change, Shop The Change and Fashion The Change. These are aimed at firms, consumers and communities respectively.

To kickstart the campaign, TaFF held an inaugural Enable The Change – Fashion Sustainability Summit on July 6 at the Hilton Singapore hotel in the city-state. This brought together industry leaders, enterprises and the Singapore

government for speeches and panel discussions on how businesses can work towards a greener fashion ecosystem.



Singapore’s Minister for Sustainability and the Environment Grace Fu, the guest-of-honour, noted in her keynote opening address that the country’s recycling rate for textiles and leather remains low, at four per cent in 2021. “We need to do more to encourage responsible fashion consumption and production, and re-use of clothing that is still in good condition,” she said.



Erik Solheim, former Minister of the Environment and International Development in Norway, former executive director of the United Nations Development Programme, and advisor to the pulp and paper giant APRIL Group which produces the viscose from trees used in rayon fabric, added in his keynote speech that embracing sustainability can unlock business opportunities.

“Consumers increasingly want to know everything about a product, from where it was made to the dyes and chemicals used. Businesses that believe and invest in sustainability have an enormous opportunity for growth and new markets,” he said.

Other speakers shared their insights and strategies during two panel discussions, on how the fashion sector can shrink its environmental impact, and how Southeast Asia can lead the way in fashion innovation. To avoid over-production and waste, Singaporean womenswear label Ginlee Studio gives discounts to customers who pre-order its clothes.

During the summit, TaFF announced a raft of measures to empower firms too. It debuted a toolkit for them to identify their green gaps and prioritise actions to fix them, and will start offering industry-relevant training in sustainability later this year to boost their capabilities.

It is working with banks and fintech firm STACS on green financing for fashion industry, and will be the fashion industry’s sectoral lead for government agency Enterprise Singapore’s upcoming Sustainability Open Innovation Call 2022.

In this role, it will work with companies to solve problem statements.

Channelling the power of consumers and communities

Beyond the summit and businesses, TaFF aims to bring consumers and communities on board the sustainability journey too. As part of its Shop The Change initiative, it has partnered with sustainable fashion and lifestyle brands in Singapore to curate their products for sale at the Design Orchard store until August 18.

It is also presenting innovations from Singapore Airlines’ Upcycling Project, where designers develop items using recycled aircraft parts, at the store during the same period. These include aviation tags and bags made from retired aircraft fuselage and life vests, respectively.



Singapore Airlines’ senior vice president of customer experience Yeoh Phee Teik added: “Aviation enthusiasts, fans and customers will be able to find products - created by students through our

partnerships with local educational institutes.”

People can also visit TaFF’s **new sustainability website** to learn more about the fashion sector, including how they can limit their environmental impact through more conscious purchasing, better washing and caring practices, and mending, swapping, renting, donating, upcycling and recycling clothes.

Teo stressed: “Businesses cannot foster change alone. Consumers play a big part in enabling sustainable fashion, and educating people to spur more voluntary adoption of circular fashion products is key. We hope to achieve that with our new consumer portal.”



Fashion The Change, the last component of TaFF’s campaign, has platforms for communities to steer the industry towards sustainability. On July 6, TaFF joined forces with schools, youth volunteer groups, student volunteers and youths participating in corporate collaborations to organise a

Youth-Led Exhibition and Programme in Singapore.

This featured clothes that use recovered and repurposed materials, and demonstrate the core principles of reduce, reuse and repurpose in tackling waste.

It will give appropriate items to Dress for Success, a non-profit group that helps women to attain economic independence, including by providing them with professional attire. The rest will be used for recycling research.



TaFF chief executive Semun Ho said in her closing remarks at the summit: “All of us, from the government to companies, communities and individuals, must come together and be united in developing a sustainable fashion industry. That is how we can become better.”