

"COLLABORATION IS CRITICAL TO TACKLING SOME SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES, COMING UP WITH MEANINGFUL SOLUTIONS, AND BUILDING A ROBUST COMMUNITY."



PERSPECTIVES WITH MS NICOLE VAN DER ELST DESAI, CHAIRPERSON OF SUSTAINABILITY STEERING COMMITTEE, TAFF

Q1. What do you see are the main challenges as TaFF embarks on the sustainability journey for the industry in Singapore and the region?

There are many challenges for the industry – in Singapore, Southeast Asia, and globally – but I'm convinced the Ecosystem approach is the best way forward.

I believe the complete supply chain must be involved, so we've made sure the Sustainability Steering Committee includes representatives from all textile and fashion supply chain sectors. It's a multi-disciplinary approach, as issues affect different players differently. We have to allow for diversity to find the best answers to these challenges.

We see changes with manufacturers like investments in renewable energy, reusing water, and adopting better/safer chemistry. Brands and retailers are adopting new business models, offering resale and rental options. The consumer has a significant role in the way it uses and disposes of its textiles and garments.

And though it is tempting to focus on one aspect, like the nature and source of a particular material, for example, cotton. It's essential to evaluate how sourcing, production, distribution, consumer use, and end of life of all textiles and garments impact these challenges. The answer to all this is to think holistically and circularly.

We can only meet the challenges and the opportunities of sustainability in thinking via a regenerative, circular lens. At TaFF, we have three key drivers, Technology & Innovation, Sustainability, and Asian Craftsmanship. Collaboration is critical to tackling some sustainability issues, coming up with meaningful solutions, and building a robust community.

Q2. The five R's you identify - Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose, Recovery and Resource - require consumers to act, along with the whole industry ecosystem. Where do you start?

Change is all around us. Consumers are adopting positive practices, like renting, sharing, swapping clothes, and not accumulating so much on their own. Some brands and retailers are initiating more sustainable practices, like encouraging consumers to return garments for resale, recycling, and repurposing.

There will also be a resistance to change, both among companies and consumers, as some might prefer the status quo. But there is an increase in consumer demand, and companies are offering newer approaches to meet the need for more sustainable textiles and fashion.

An additional R to look at is 'Risk.' Every business will need to identify its areas of risk and change. The UN SDG 12 sums this up: "Sustainable consumption and production aim at doing more and better with less, increasing net welfare gains from economic activities by reducing resource use, degradation, and pollution, while increasing the quality of life."

And while textile and fashion businesses and consumers may all be at different stages of the journey, there needs to be a renewed commitment to do more. TaFF aims "to champion programs that build capabilities and expand Singapore's fashion and textile businesses internationally while promoting environmentally-friendly business practices."

We are not where we want to be, but for sure, we are not where we used to be.

