

EXPERT INTERVIEW

FAIRTRADE TEXTILE STANDARD & PROGRAMME

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is Environmental, Health and Safety expert in the Fairtrade Textile Programme and recognized expert in this area with [Zero Discharge of Hazardous Chemicals](#) (ZDHC) and brands programmes. The company Sustex Solutions is part of one of the leading producers of dyestuffs Dystar.



What is your background and your relation to Fairtrade?

I work at Sustainable Textile Solutions in Mumbai, which is an independent division of DyStar. I am an intermediates and dyestuff technologist from the University of Mumbai, institute of chemical technology, and currently engaged in environmental protection, chemical management stream and chemical ISEAL compliance areas. I am engaged with Fairtrade as a chemical compliance expert for implementing the Textile Standard within the supply chain partners. I work on the restriction of the substances list, which ensures quality and will also be a chemical compliance requirement for brands and retailers, so I am working on the chemical compliance and the ISEAL compliance for the fabrics or garments which they are producing.

Why is there a need for Fairtrade within the textile industry?

The textile industry has a very complex supply chain, as we all know, and it is important that every part of the supply chain is engaged with fair and good practices. Often, not every supply chain partner is engaged with the rights and best practices and it is for this reason that Fairtrade is needed for improvement with regard to the human factor. People are intensively working on the fabrics and the commodity that is produced, at all parts of the supply chain. But the way in which the commodity is produced is not being taken care of. And that is where Fairtrade is coming into picture, where they focus not only on producing the right things correctly, but also producing them in the right manner, and also ensure that the people who are working on the production are treated in a fair way. I think this is a very important issue where Fairtrade has to step in and work on. There are already various other people working in a segmental manner but I think there is a need for one standard and one organization which can work on all the aspects in a broader manner.

What are the most important issues which should be improved in the factories regarding environmental protection and health and safety issues?

We all need to focus on training our capacity to create awareness on the chemical aspect; awareness on the chemicals which people are using, knowingly or not knowingly, because this is one area which is currently either kept under lock as know-how from big companies or not a part of the know-how of smaller facilities at all. The right usage of chemicals and awareness of what is in the product concerns safety as well as health issues. This necessary awareness as well as the corresponding communication is a part of the challenge which we are facing. Communicating all information about the chemicals and their hazards, as well as personal protective equipments (PPEs), their right selection, the use, adequacy, when it

should be changed and how it should be disposed, is important. These aspects need to be improved in the factories, because at this stage, what we are seeing is that the procurement of the PPEs is generalized and not specific. Furthermore, there are still deficits regarding chemical management in case of disasters or accidents. These are aspects which need improvement.

Regarding the implementation of standards, what are the challenges within the implementation?

In order to implement a standard within a textile production factory, creating awareness and communicating the requirements is the most important aspect in order to engage the facilities to work on the necessary improvements. This means that we need to create awareness fast within the right people and ensure that they are fully aware of what has to be improved. Furthermore, it is important that the requirements are well understood and that a global benchmarking, and therefore the best practice, is communicated to them.

The focus should not be on what is done currently, but on what the best in class, with regard to benchmarking, is. People need to know the target and how to achieve it instead of focusing on the current practices. Right now, they are only aspiring to be compliant, but that is not what we are aiming for in a bigger picture. What we aim for is that everyone aspires to be the best in the class. It is therefore important to create awareness of what is achievable and what is the best in the class, so that people can make their own road map to achieve it. These are important aspects; and making people understand the requirement for the best practices is the main challenge in implementing the standard. Instead of only trying to be compliant, we need to go beyond compliance. This is very important.

What are the challenges for auditors and why is it so difficult to do an audit, and how do you cope with the challenges?

It is important to understand that every facility is unique. There is a reason why someone is doing that job in that particular manner and an auditor needs to see the reason behind, why that particular task is being undertaken in that manner only. It's the job of an expert to understand this and then find the gaps between the current practices and what is to be achieved. The expert has to make the people understand why the current practices may not be correct and how to better perform the required task. This is a big challenge, because the auditors, who are mainly available, currently are not experts and treat every factory the same. The current auditors have one general solution for non-compliance, which is being imposed on every single factory. This is not the correct manner. The biggest job of auditor experts is to first understand why and how they are doing what they are doing. Only then, they can make them comprehend the correct way in which it should be done. As a result, not only every factory, but also every solution will be unique and that is the reason why there is a bigger challenge for us. We cannot predict, that, what works in factory A will also work in factory B, even though the problem is the same. Factory A is not the same as factory B, even though they are both producing the same thing. It's comparable to cooking. Two people might cook with the same ingredients and the same recipe, but both meals will taste different, because they are different, they are unique. This aspect needs to be understood well, and we, as experts, need to create a solution which is usable, workable and scalable to that particular facility. This is the biggest challenge which an auditor will face and it's only possible with the expert auditors. They know how to communicate and give solutions which are workable and create a feeling of "Oh, it's that simple!". Most of the time, solutions are simple, and finding these simple solutions is the task of expert auditors.

What differentiates the new Fairtrade approach from other existing standards?

The new Fairtrade standard is viewing the entire parts of the supply chain coherently which are currently observed separately; right from the crop to the production, into the factory; it is an improved version. Furthermore, it's not just a standard which tells you what to do; it also tells you how to do it. It makes people understand and gives the factory time and information regarding the right resources in order to make them understand how to achieve the goals rather than just telling them how to do this. It's not a checklist or corrective action plan programme, but it is much more evolved. The experts are involved in the training and the communication of what is needed and give their people solutions with regard to what is achievable for them. It is a complete coherent process rather than just a corrective action plan programme.

Is there anything else you would like to mention?

I would like to mention that training, communication and communicating expectations from the standard are main aspects that need to be communicated to the facilities, which are involved. Training is the most important aspect, which involves training on expectations, requirements and understanding of the gaps. It's not just a training module, which is applicable to everyone. The experts need to ensure that the facilities don't just jump into the standard implementation programme directly. In order to ensure a successful implementation, the experts first have to communicate what is needed, what is expected, and then bridge the current gap through communication and training. As a result, people will be happy to be involved and happy to improve. I think Fairtrade would be much appreciated as a partner because with their help, they will improve a lot.

Thank you very much for the interview.