



Textile value chains – An overview of activities and approaches of the UNEP Economy Division

The Economy Division of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is working on accelerating the shift towards sustainable consumption and production patterns, including through circularity, and sound chemicals management in different sectors, including the textile sector.

Ongoing and planned initiatives are focusing on chemicals management across their life cycle and on a value chain approach to the textile sector, as described below.

CURRENT PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES RELATED TO THE TEXTILE SECTOR:

The **Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)** focuses on sound management of chemicals and highlights emerging policy issues. One of them is chemicals in products. The SAICM Chemicals in Products (CiP) Programme – approved in 2015 – includes a set of objectives and methodologies which facilitate stakeholders' access to information on the chemical content of manufactured products. It is being applied in the textile sector, in China, through the GEF-funded project: "**Defining and Demonstrating Best Practices for Exchange of Information on Chemicals in Textile Products**". The project aims to identify and demonstrate best practices and stakeholder roles and responsibilities for chemicals information exchange in textile products.

Complementary to the project in China, a **review of the textile supply chain** through a life cycle analysis has been conducted, under the SWITCH-Asia Regional Policy support component of the European Commission. Results from this study will enable a focus of eco-innovative solutions in the most problematic stages of the lifecycle (plantation of cotton and dyeing stages for cotton textile, and fibre production and dyeing stages for polyester textiles).

Acknowledging the current lack of knowledge about chemicals used in the production of and remaining in textile products, another proposal will be re-submitted to GEF-7 entitled "**Reducing releases of POPs, POP candidates, and other chemicals of concern (CoCs) in the textiles**



sector", for implementation in

Bangladesh, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Viet Nam. The proposal recognises the undesirable effects leading to exposure of humans and/or the environment to, and harmed by, Persistent Organic Pollutants (POPs), POP candidates and other priority Chemicals of Concern in relation to production, use and disposal of textile products. It includes one component on the identification of alternatives, one **on the implementation of eco-innovative strategies in the private sector, towards a non-toxic sustainable and circular approach in the textile value chain**, and one component on compliance and support for countries to meet Stockholm Convention reporting obligations.

By 'value chain', UNEP refers to: "The entire sequence of activities or parties that provide or receive value in the form of products or services (e.g. suppliers, outsource workers, contractors, investors, R&D, customers, consumers, members)." The value chain runs in parallel with the product life cycle, in order to cover all stages, from raw material extraction, to end of life, including waste management.



In early 2019, UNEP convened an **expert consultation workshop** with representatives from the fashion and textile industry, governments, international organisations, advocacy groups and fashion institutes, to discuss and reach a common understanding on the textile value chain, its key impact drivers as well as intervention strategies for a more sustainable and circular textile value chain. A report, which will be published by end 2019 – beginning 2020, will capture the outcome of this consultation. The UNEP Consumption and Production Unit continues to convene this community of experts for exchange and collaboration.

SUPPORTIVE METHODOLOGIES AND APPROACHES:

Current approaches promoted by the Economy Division and relevant for more sustainable and circular textile value chains include:



Life Cycle approach: Life cycle assessment of the textile value chains highlight the most problematic products, processes and stages that cause the most environmental and social impacts (called “hot spots”). In addition, based on the experience of the Life Cycle thinking team of UNEP, indicators, tools and comparative analysis can be provided to conduct a life cycle assessment for the textile sector. As a result, it can guide the selection of the most appropriate alternative material, product, business model or intervention strategies, by comparing the respective impacts (human and eco toxicity, depletion of resources, damage to ecosystems).



Eco-innovation: Eco-innovation is a methodology that develops new business models and strategies which incorporate sustainability through life cycle thinking and cooperation across the value chain. Eco-Innovation is not only actively working with companies but also offers support to governments in developing policies based on life cycle thinking. It is specifically designed to be applied also by small enterprises and can be seen by large brands as an effective way to engage companies, especially small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), of their value chains and help those comply with their requirements. It has been implemented in developing countries in companies working on the chemicals value chain, including dyeing and spinning companies from the textile sector. It has also been implemented in the agri-food sector. The global Resource Efficient and Cleaner Production network (RECPnet) supports the outreach to companies, especially SMEs in developing, manufacturing countries.



Consumer Information: Consumer information tools, such as ecolabels, voluntary standards or marketing claims, aim at enabling consumers to take more sustainable decisions regarding product purchase, use and end of life. It is important that information provided is accurate and reliable. Therefore, UNEP, together with the International Trade Centre has developed international Guidelines for providing product sustainability information.



These can guide and encourage producers and other actors in the textile sector to make reliable claims about their product's sustainability performance. The Guidelines are a key output of the One Planet network Consumer Information Programme, and have been tested in specific sectors, including textiles.



Sustainable procurement: Buying more sustainable goods and services can help drive markets in the direction of sustainability, reduce the negative impacts of an organization and produce positive benefits for the environment and society. Combining business-to-business collaboration with a demand drive through government procurement can really

help scale this transformation to a much wider range of companies. UNEP has published in 2018 a paper: [Building circularity into our economies through sustainable procurement](#), which aims to introduce the role that sustainable procurement can play to bring circularity in value chains, including in the textile sector.



Sustainable lifestyles: People have the power to positively impact the planet via their daily lifestyle decisions covering food, mobility, housing, and leisure – which includes

consumer goods (like fashion and textiles) and tourism. As contributions to the One Planet network Sustainable Lifestyles and Education Programme, UNEP has developed: [the science around lifestyles and climate](#) and how and what motivates people to change behaviour, guides on how sustainable lifestyle initiatives can be developed in [cities](#) and in [offices](#), with menus of actions to consider; and [communication materials](#) and [social media kit](#) to motivate and activate people for positive climate action. Fashion is an element in all materials as the 2-3 billion new consumers soon to come on line will mostly be urban youth who get their information and aspirational messaging from social media. Youth set today's trends and are tomorrow's decision makers. In the recent media tool kit [Fashion slow-down](#) was a core action that asks people to buy better and avoid fast fashion that mass produces at the cost of environmental and human justice.

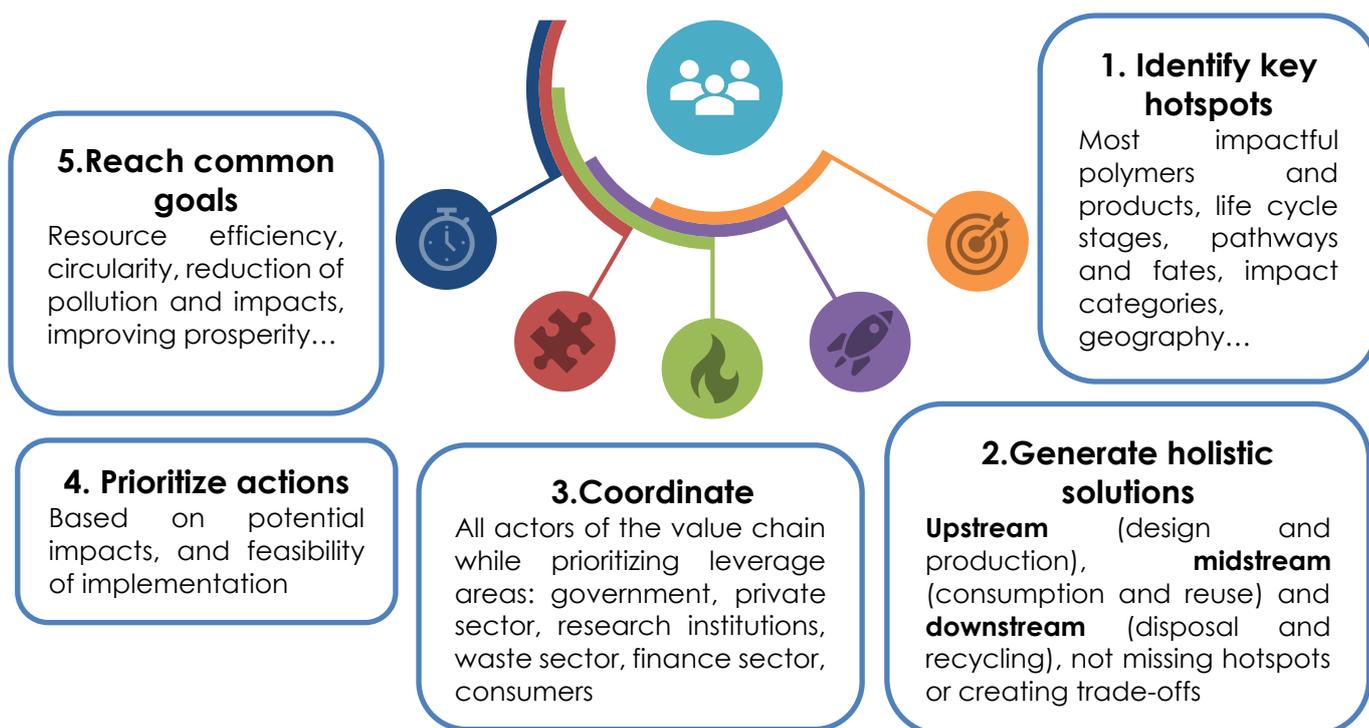


Trade: *Green Markets and Global Value Chains* constitutes one of the [Environment and Trade Hub's](#) principal work streams, aiming to enhance the design and uptake of sustainability standards and to facilitate market access for sustainably produced and certified products in order to green global production and consumption. In this context,

the Hub provides training on sustainable value chains and trade for textiles as part of the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) project in the province of Jiangsu – one of the leading regions for textile production and export in China – presenting standards, tools and best practices. The Hub offers a variety of methodologies and resources related to sustainability standards with relevance to the textile sector, including a *Guide for the Assessment of the Costs and Benefits of Sustainability Certification*, a handbook on *Trade and Green Economy*; and an analysis on *Green Economy and Trade – Trends, Challenges and Opportunities*, among others.



Why a value chain approach?



AREAS OF POTENTIAL FUTURE WORK FOR UNEP's Economy Division:

Based on the experience of current projects and work on global value chains, the UNEP Economy Division aims to provide leadership and convene partners to develop knowledge and solutions to advance towards sustainable and circular textile value chains, while supporting sound management of chemicals.

The future work is expected to:	
❖	Consolidate scientific mapping and understanding of hot spots in value chains of key textile, garment and leather products, as well as role and responsibilities of different actors;
❖	Increase the engagement of large companies of the textile sector along their supply chains, and continue to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to transition towards circularity;
❖	Develop a coherent policy framework to support the developing countries private sector's uptake of eco-innovative strategies, including by leveraging sustainable procurement practices;
❖	Facilitate the establishment of financial mechanism to support SMEs and supplier companies' shift to sustainability;
❖	Consumer engagement and strengthening consumers' capacity to make sustainable choices.

