

Fairtrade not fashionable in Government's Unsustainable Clothing Action Plan

Submitted by: People Tree
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LONDON 23.02.09 As Fairtrade Fortnight begins, the Government's newly launched Sustainable Clothing Action Plan is being accused of superficiality and lack of focus, ignoring the real issues of sustainability and poverty reduction.

Safia Minney, founder of international Fair Trade fashion label People Tree, made the accusation at the launch of the People Tree Foundation, a new charity which aims to bring benefits to an even greater number of farmers and artisans through scaling up and promoting fair and sustainable fashion. With Safia at the launch was Jo Wood, founder of Jo Wood Organics, who has just returned from a fact-finding visit to People Tree suppliers and garment factory workers' slum dwellings in Bangladesh.

Safia said that in order to achieve an industry ready to tackle social and environmental justice, people should be looking to 100% Fair Trade fashion for direction.

"The model of sustainable fashion has been pioneered by us at People Tree for 15 years, but while the Government has given millions in grant funding for producer capacity building in foods, the people creating these new models for the fashion industry have not yet received any financial support," said Safia Minney. Jo Wood concurred that there is significant demand from consumers, saying "It's great that Fair Trade fashion is getting it right: it is sexy, attractive and fun, and it is something that people want to be part of."

"By promoting hand skills and low-carbon processes like hand-weaving and organic cotton growing etc., 'Slow Fashion' can generate livelihoods for people on a large scale, while protecting the environment," said Safia. "In Bangladesh, one of the areas the People Tree Foundation will work and a major producer of western fashion, men and women have to leave families in their home villages as they search of work – all too often ending up in the city sweatshops. Using hand-production and supporting local artisans not only keeps families together and out of the slums but saves 1 tonne of CO2 per year per handloom.

"Employing 10 million Fair Trade handweavers to produce our fashion would not only provide a clean, ethical and sustainable supply chain but also avoid 10 million tonnes of CO2 emissions each year."

"The Sustainable Clothing Roadmap should start with a genuine vision of fashion as a tool to alleviate poverty and protect the environment." When cotton is grown through Fair Trade and organic systems, farmers can sequester 1.5 tonnes of CO2 per acre per year, and reduce the water footprint by more than 60%. Cotton clothing does not sit in landfills for hundreds of years. Through our work with partners, we have proved that all this can be done.

"The government's roadmap presently looks only at meeting standards within the supply chains which ought to be a 'given' anyway, and does not even scratch the surface of what can be achieved." While People Tree Foundation welcomed the British Government wanting industry sector change it was suggested they should address the fact that building of supply chains and public awareness for Fair Trade foods has

had grant support in the millions, while the far more complicated supply chain of Fair Trade fashion has been built over the same period without any.

Despite malpractices being exposed within retailers' supply chains in the last year, sales of 'fast fashion' are up 18%, suggesting more consumer education is needed. As Fairtrade Fortnight begins Safia said it would have been an ideal time to shout about the huge impact Fair Trade fashion is already having to alleviate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Consumers should be encouraged to support ethical and Fair Trade fashion pioneers at London Fashion Week, and government has an opportunity, now, to offer ways to help them scale up their businesses.

Over the past 15 years People Tree has been successfully working with 3,000 artisans and farmers in developing countries. The Fair Trade partnership helps them to access technical training, credit, market exposure, capacity-building for design, quality, and strengthening their management to meet deadlines in the time-sensitive fashion market.

The People Tree Foundation is calling for the 'Sustainable Clothing Roadmap' to be redrawn, to go somewhere towards sustainability, by addressing head on issues of poverty alleviation, social and environmental justice, noting that "The British government has no business launching such a Roadmap without the Millennium Development Goals being central to it."

ENDS

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2) The People Tree Foundation is an independent charity, working alongside People Tree the Fair Trade Company. The Foundation will bring benefits to an even greater number of farmers and artisans through scaling up training, technical support and environmental initiatives and through raising awareness and campaigning for fair and sustainable trade.

3) Raihan Ali, Project Director at Fair Trade producer group Swallows in Bangladesh has seen the benefits of this model throughout the community by working with fashion brands like People Tree. "People Tree showed us how to improve quality so more women get job opportunity to work in our organisation. Our production centre is the only place where rural women can work and earn a good income to maintain their families. We have received donation from People Tree to run our primary school. In our school we have 296 students getting 5 years of primary education. People Tree supports 50% of school running costs. We received support to build our Day Care Centre, where 45 babies and young children can stay and get basic education. Mothers feel safe to know that their children are in the day care centre when they are working in the handicraft production centre. We also received support to send out two staff to get training on how to grow and cultivate organic cotton in our area. We believe the launch [of the People Tree Foundation] will help Swallows help hundreds, even thousands more people."