

Knowledge and Understanding

Fashion: A Global Industry

- [The UK fashion industry is worth £66 billion employs 550,000 people](#)
- [Globally 57.8 million people depend on fashion for employment](#)
- As with all industries, it has an environmental and human impact that must be considered.
- The choices we make as consumers dictate the scale of that impact.



The Labour Behind Our Labels

- News headlines have drawn attention to the exploitative conditions in which our clothes are made. From the farmers that grow cotton for our clothes to the garment factory workers that put in the final stitch, the industry pays wages that fail to cover basic needs leaving many in poverty.
- Environmentally, [Cotton is a very water hungry crop](#) and the dying process releases numerous toxins.
- Such issues have prompted campaign groups, as well as many within the fashion industry, to call for change, that change is ethical fashion and it can improve the lives of workers and farmers around the world.



Garment Workers:

- The clothes we see in UK shops are made in factories across the world from Cambodia to Indonesia.
- Their workers face [hazardous working conditions, forced overtime, low wages, denial of the right to join a trade union and sexual harassment](#).
- [In 2013 the world was shocked to watch the Rana Plaza garment factory in Bangladesh collapse, costing the lives of over 1,100 workers](#)
- Campaign organisations have called for fashion brands that used the factory to pay compensation and also to ensure safer working conditions



Cotton Growers

- [100 million households are involved in cotton production in 70 countries around the world](#). They face rising production costs and a three-decade slump in the value of their crop, leaving farmers in countries such as India, Kyrgyzstan and West Africa are struggling to survive.
- Whilst [subsidies paid to cotton farmers](#) in more developed countries leave farmers in the Global South less able to trade their way out of poverty.
- Fairtrade is trying to address this through minimum price guidelines, that ethical companies such as [People Tree](#) follow, to support farmers and their surrounding communities.



From Wardrobe to Waste

- The Fast Fashion trend conjures images of busy shoppers and cheap clothes tags. However, our increased consumption has also led to an increase in the amount going to waste.
- [In the four years from 2002, we each purchased a third more clothes annually](#). Women had four times as many clothes in their wardrobe than they did in 1980.
- The increase in the amount of clothes people consume is having serious consequences for the environment. [£140m \(350,000 tonnes\) worth of used clothing goes to landfill in the UK every year](#).
- Once in landfill, [man-made fibres take years to decompose](#) (40-50 years for Nylon), while woollen garments decompose but produce methane, a contributor of climate change.



Reusing or Recycling

- Some fashion brands have started to consider the impacts of fast fashion. [Armani Jeans](#) use recycled textiles.
- *From Somewhere* use fabric waste from other manufacturers. [WRAP](#), a UK organisation dedicated to reducing waste, help consumers and businesses find ways to recycle clothing, although recycling has its own environmental impacts. They also promote the reuse of clothing and signpost people to the many charities that collect second hand clothing to sell.
- ['Swishing'](#) has also proven popular in recent years with events designed to enable people to swap items of clothing.



Living More Sustainably

- Campaigners have been finding creative ways to encourage people to consider the impacts of throw away fashion.
- ['The Uniform Project'](#) was a challenge to wear one black dress for a year to raise awareness of sustainable fashion.
- Redress, an organisation that promotes sustainability, is inviting people to join the ['365 Day Challenge'](#) and only wear discarded or second hand clothing for 365 days.



Useful links and further information

Ecological Footprint

- WWF produce the Living Planet Report which includes information on the state of the World's species, the Eco-footprint, the Water footprint etc.
http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/living_planet_report/
- SEI produced a report on The Ecological footprint and water analysis of cotton, hemp and polyester. Includes data and describes the stages of production and processing.
<http://www.sei-international.org/mediamanager/documents/Publications/SEI-Report-EcologicalFootprintAndWaterAnalysisOfCottonHempAndPolyester-2005.pdf>
- The University of Bath produced a database of the embodied energy and carbon emissions of materials. Although primarily a database of building materials, it also includes a number of materials used in clothing, both oil-based and from plant or animal sources. <http://www.circularecology.com/embodied-energy-and-carbon-footprint-database.html>
- The Carbon Trust have done a study on the carbon flows relating to the consumption of clothing in Britain
<https://www.carbontrust.com/media/38358/ctc793-international-carbon-flows-clothing.pdf>
- Information on the water footprint of cotton and leather in the 'product gallery' - www.waterfootprint.org and more detail on cotton production <http://www.waterfootprint.org/?page=files/Cotton>
- Leather production <http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2008/aug/27/ethicalfashion.leather>
- An alternative to buying lots of clothes <http://www.fastcoexist.com/1681388/dont-buy-those-expensive-jeans-lease-them-instead>
- Pollution from factories <http://www.greenpeace.org/eastasia/news/stories/toxics/2010/textile-pollution-xintang-gurao/>
- Info on GM crops and cotton farmers in India <http://newint.org/blog/2012/10/10/india-cotton-farmers/>
- The Problem with Fast Fashion www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2014/aug/13/problem-with-fast-fashion-how-to-fix-it
- From Wardrobe to Waste www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/wardrobe-waste-throw-away-fashion
- WRAP recycling materials www.wrap.org.uk/category/materials-and-products/textiles

Impacts on people in the clothing industry

- Fairtrade Foundation www.fairtrade.org.uk/en/farmers-and-workers/cotton
- Rana Plaza Disaster - one year on www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-27107860

Fashion Industry Response

- Ethical Fashion Forum: Aiming to support fashion and textile industries to be more sustainable through tools, up to date information and research www.ethicalfashionforum.com/the-issues/fast-fashion-cheap-fashion
- A fair-trade clothing company in Wales and the factories they use <http://www.howies.co.uk/thestream/tagged/fabric> and <http://www.howies.co.uk/thestream/tagged/factories>
- Vivienne Westwood has been a leading fashion designer and environmental campaigner for decades. She says we should "Buy less. Choose well. Make it last" "Quality, not quantity. Everybody's buying far too many clothes."
http://www.salon.com/2013/09/17/designer_vivienne_westwood_dont_invest_in_fashion/
<http://source.ethicalfashionforum.com/digital/vivienne-westwoods-ethical-fashion-africa-collection->
- Clothing sector leaders commit to reducing water, carbon and waste
<http://www.wrap.org.uk/content/clothing-sector-leaders-commit-reducing-water-carbon-and-waste>
- Daisy Lowe's visit to Brazil to see how fashion is helping life women out of poverty
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YRefWZbuuBg>