

## **Textile industry requires lowering of carbon footprint**

The textile industry is a significant contributor to India's industrial output and employment. The industry is highly fragmented in India, and the government is giving thrust to developing economies of scale in order to make the industry competitive, and raise its dwindling share in international trade. However, while doing so, we need to be cognizant about the environmental and social aspects of increasing output, and give emphasis to recycle and reuse.

UNCTAD has in a recent article on 'Seizing the opportunities of a circular economy in textiles' suggested that, "While socially important, the textile industry is a major source of pollution and waste. It's characterized by overproduction and overconsumption of low-cost clothes, often produced under poor working conditions and ending up in landfills.

In the quest to make the textiles sector more efficient and less polluting, one answer lies in circular economy approaches connecting downstream and upstream segments of this global industry. This means using more renewable and safe inputs, increasing clothing durability, reuse, or turning used garments into new ones... The resulting expansion in circularity, through reuse, repurposing or recycling could reduce 33% of the carbon dioxide emissions embedded in textile products.

Another important social dimension for a circular textiles industry is jobs... Some sectors might experience significant job losses, as the main components of textiles and apparel - cotton and polyester - come primarily from agriculture and petrochemical sources. These will likely face long-term decreases in employment levels as agriculture meets automation and climate change curbs investments in petrochemicals... Textiles need to flow back to reprocessing sites in smarter ways, involving extended producer responsibility systems that avoid driving people into low-value-added occupations of manual material separation.

Textiles and apparel operate today at scales only possible because of international trade... Reworking textiles abroad can be a pricey endeavour. The average import tariff for used clothes was 19.2% in 2018, making it expensive for companies to repair garments in foreign workshops. Import rates applied on used textiles are higher than the equivalent for other secondary materials such as scrap plastics, which faced 6% entry duties on average... For the industry to mainstream cross-border, circular textile trade, a level of policy alignment across countries is needed.

For businesses, making textiles circular involves three aspects: technology, business models and understanding how to get buy-in from customers... Mature technologies already exist to recover and upcycle various natural and synthetic materials used in textiles, such as cotton, rayon, wool, polyester, and even leather. There is still the problem of unequal economies of scale - linear production takes place at very large scales, achieving economics hard to match by smaller-scale circular operations... Buyers need to develop the perception that responsibly produced textiles are worth buying. The growing share of ecolabels, with textile standards ranking fourth in the world in 2020, show progress in this direction."

At a time when leaving a positive environmental footprint by various industries is increasingly getting prominence, and the social impact gaining importance, the textile sector too needs to be sustainable and welfare-oriented in the longer run.

## **Notifications**

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