



THE GOTS BUZZ!

BINDU GOPAL RAO reports on the Global Organic Textile Seminar which was held in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The global textile industry is in flux and is increasingly turning more ecologically sensitive with time. In fact, it can be said that this is the time when the industry is the most conscious as far as sustainability is concerned. The green movement is being led by leading brands, NGOs, governments and consumers, who are now looking for innovative ideas and solutions for sustainability in textiles. Bangladesh has the largest apparel export industry in South Asia and, at 6.4 per cent, the largest market share of global apparel exports amongst South Asian countries. The apparel industry is extremely prominent in the country's economy, accounting for 83 per cent of the total exports. In 2015, GOTS organised the first International GOTS Conference in India with the theme 'Strong Partnerships for Success'. This was a huge success and was attended by 250 people from 12 countries and the second edition concluded recently in Bangladesh. And it is towards this end that a National Seminar on GOTS Certification—Business Case for Sustainability with Organic Textiles—was held recently in Bangladesh. Bangladesh is a country with the fifth highest number of GOTS certified facilities worldwide. Today, out of the more than 3,800 facilities which are GOTS certified worldwide, more than 400 are in this country. In his welcome address, Sumit Gupta, GOTS Representative in Bangladesh & India, appreciated the Bangladesh Textile Industry for their



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perseverance and consistent efforts to achieve both quality and quantity parameters in their products and exports. The industry has been successful in maintaining consistent growth in their export numbers from the last several years. In fact, Sumit mentioned the ambitious target of the local textile industry to achieve the figure of US\$ 50 billion in readymade garments exports and encouraged the industry to use sustainability and GOTS as a tool to help them achieve this goal.

SETTING STANDARDS

The Global Organic Textile Standards (GOTS) is the stringent voluntary global standard for the entire post-harvest processing (including spinning, knitting, weaving, dyeing and manufacturing) of apparel and home textiles made with organic fibres (such as organic cotton and organic wool), and includes both, the environmental and the social criteria. Key provisions include a ban on the

while requiring strong social compliance management systems and strict waste water treatment practices. GOTS was developed by leading international standard setters—Organic Trade Association (US), Japan Organic Cotton Association, International Association Of Natural Textile Industry (Germany), and Soil Association (UK), which formed an International Working Group to define globally-recognised requirements which ensure the organic status of textiles. GOTS is a non-profit operation. For more information on the Global Organic Textile Standard, please see www.global-standard.org. The Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS) is a not for profit organisation based in Germany with regional representatives in major sales markets such as USA/Canada, Germany/Austria/Switzerland, Japan, United Kingdom, and in important processing countries like China, India, Bangladesh and Turkey. The Standard—GOTS—is recognised and endorsed by IFOAM—Organics International. The Standard has





end of 2015, more than 3,800 facilities were certified to GOTS in 68 countries. Globally, more than one million people are working in GOTS certified facilities.

GOING GREEN

The GOTS national seminar for the organic textile industry in Bangladesh has the theme 'Business Case for Sustainability with Organic Textiles'. "In last few years, the brands' and manufacturers' focus on compliances has significantly increased. Our seminar will show feasible solutions for the journey of the Bangladesh textile industry towards sustainable textile processing and manufacturing," says Sumit. The event was attended by representatives of brands, senior management of manufacturers and exporters, professionals from field of compliance, regulation, quality assurance, green chemistry and chemical management and technical experts along with the media and trade associations. The conference was seen as an opportunity where all attendees benefit by means of gathering new knowledge and insights in the fields of environmentally holistic and socially responsible textile

processing and gain a better understanding of related problems and possible solutions. Speakers from leading brands and various experts spoke about the business case for sustainability with organic textiles, best practices in manufacturing, social and environment issues. Rahul Bhajekar, GOTS Director Standards Development & Quality Assurance, made a presentation and moderated a session. There was also a panel discussion on the challenges and opportunities in a sustainable textile supply chain.

THE CONFERENCE

Four sessions of the conference addressed the various dimensions of GOTS as an instrument of sustainable supply chain management. In the first session, 'Business Case for Sustainability with Organic Textiles', the speakers' statements included emphasis on the benefits from GOTS, including better worker retention, higher productivity, and investments in sustainability leading to financial benefits. Key results included commitments from brands on and off the dias to increase their share of GOTS certified organic textiles in their respective supply



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chains. Session two on 'Quality Assurance through GOTS Certification' saw the experts share views on common non-compliances and also gave examples of the best practices prevalent in the local industry. Key results included the need to create more training and awareness amongst staff and workers for better implementation of standards at the workplace. Session three which was on 'Leading the Way to Best Practices' was a versatile session where participants spoke about labelling requirements, developing a chemical management system in dye houses and initiatives of the Bangladesh Government to cultivate organic cotton in the country. Participants became aware of latest developments in their respective fields and learned to implement them in their respective sites. Session four discussed the 'Challenges in Sustainable Supply Chain and Opportunities with GOTS'. In this final session, panellists shared their experiences about implementing sustainable practices in their respective businesses. Importance of sustainability was stressed again and all agreed that though sometimes challenging, sustainable textile production, compliant with international standards like GOTS, is the way to go for long term business gains.

EXPORT FACTOR

India is a significant exporter of organic cotton yarn and woven fabrics to Bangladesh. Bangladesh, incidentally, is the second largest exporter of readymade garments in the world which indicates that this is a large export market for India. Also, global textile brands have committed to increasing the organic cotton consumption and Indian exporters must try to grab this opportunity. In fact, India and Bangladesh have a complimentary relationship to a large extent as several Indian units are setting up shop in Bangladesh. Also, the R&D on new styles is far quicker as it is possible to import fabrics in three days as compared to 10 days in India. Bangladesh is now an attractive destination for Indian readymade garment manufacturers as well as the country offers the ease of doing business and importing-exporting is faster. India's garment exports stagnate at US\$17 billion a year and Bangladesh's apparel exports are growing in double digits and are likely to touch US\$27 billion this year. India's garment exports were US\$15.49 billion between April and February 2015-16, up only by 1.5 per cent over the corresponding period, last year. Bangladesh clocked US\$18.12 billion in apparel exports between July 2015 and February 2016, growing by 9.52 per cent over the corresponding period last year. For the past four months, its exports have been between US\$2.2 billion and US\$2.6 billion per month. A bilateral agreement with the European Union, which links foreign investment from EU to duty-free exports of garments from India, can grow exports to Europe by three to four times, to US\$24 billion-US\$26 billion in three years, from US\$ nine billion, today. ■