



Dialogue on Enhancing Climate Action in the Fashion Sector

**16-17 January 2018
Report**

Background and Purpose

The Dialogue on Enhancing Climate Action in the Fashion Sector, hosted by UN Climate Change in Bonn, Germany, on 16-17 January 2018, brought together fashion industry stakeholders to discuss the impacts of climate change and the Paris Agreement on the sector. The goal was to develop a common understanding and agree on next steps toward the fashion industry contributing to global net-zero emissions by 2050 and adapting to the impacts of climate change. Participants shared practices and lessons learned, and worked to identify common priorities and barriers to climate action in the sector. This Dialogue represented initiation of a broader work programme by UN Climate Change to engage the sector.

Summary of Discussion

The companies and organizations represented expressed recognition that the fashion sector is a significant source or driver, through actions of its supply chain, of greenhouse gas emissions. This includes, but is not limited to, emissions generated through textile manufacture, processing and through the transport, use and disposal of finished products. Participants also recognized that climate change could have implications for the sector through supply-chain disruptions, materials availability and shifting consumption patterns.

It was acknowledged that while unilateral emission-reduction commitments from fashion brands may be a helpful signal of intent, effective action would require multi-stakeholder dialogue and engagement due to the diverse and dispersed nature of the business. This reality requires policymakers, brands and suppliers to engage in a collective and mutually supportive effort to reduce emissions and their drivers.

Day one of the dialogue focused on establishing an industry view of the climate challenge. Stakeholders agreed there is limited direct pressure on the fashion sector to address climate change. Pressure from mostly western consumers, channeled through environmental NGOs, has stimulated the creation of some successful, noteworthy programmes centered around sustainable production. In addition, the overall challenge of increased demand for textiles, could be addressed by considering new business models.

The participants agreed that the fashion sector would benefit from a coherent, unified position with respect to its climate action (for example as can more readily be seen in the automotive industry, albeit recognizing that industry's more consolidated manufacturing and simple policy levers, i.e. limits on tailpipe emissions).



The largest part of the fashion sector's climate footprint is in its supply chain, emissions over which the fashion brands have limited control. Thus, discussion and eventual cooperative action with producers, most of which are in Asia, are essential for success in achieving net-zero emissions in the fashion sector.

Voluntary climate action is happening, but only on a limited scale. Regulation, standards and economic incentives are required to help transform the industry. Connecting the diverse stakeholders in the fashion industry, including raw material producers, textile producers and contract apparel manufacturers, as well as scaling of existing initiatives that connect the value chain could lead to significant reductions in emissions and might help the broader textile, clothing and fashion industry move faster toward a holistic climate commitment.

A comprehensive narrative, illustrating how climate change threatens the fashion sector – there is no future but a sustainable future – would make a strong case for action. However, the direct impacts from climate change, such as its effect on cotton production, seem too far away from the brands or consumers to trigger a response. UN Climate Change could help, by assisting in the development of a clear, common narrative on the causes, impacts and scope for action against climate change. This includes data on consequences of climate change on raw material supply. With this, sustainability officers working in the fashion sector could make a case, internally and externally, to all relevant stakeholders, including consumers, for meaningful climate action.

On the second day of the dialogue, discussion moved to identifying possible cooperative climate action in the fashion sector, as well as possible barriers or challenges. One challenge identified was the low priority the sector places on climate action, even as the sector clearly understands and has experience engaging, to varying degrees, in sustainability initiatives, such as efforts to promote sustainable cotton production, or child welfare projects. This low priority for climate action was ascribed to the size and complexity of the sector. As was suggested on the first day of the dialogue, it was agreed that an industry-wide approach, with a clear purpose and goals, could be a strong signal for the industry and could help ensure converting existing dialogue between stakeholders across the value chain into concrete action and positive outcomes from the work. This also involves efforts to include stakeholders who are currently not participating in the discussions but are crucial to enable change towards a different, cleaner future.

Participants saw as obvious partners direct fashion sector actors, also investors, policymakers, suppliers and consumers. The current lack of a global forum where diverse stakeholders linked to the various phases of the fashion sector's operations – textile and chemical companies, transport, etc. – is a barrier to necessary discussions around climate impact and action.

The UN Climate Change aims to work with the full spectrum of existing environment and sustainability related initiatives already set up, to complement them and enable greater information sharing and collaboration by focusing, in particular, on climate action under the Paris Agreement. It was suggested that UN Climate Change could help integrate climate change in the agendas of the associations representing the diverse industries serving the fashion sector globally. This would place climate change prominently on the fashion sustainability agenda, as something that both brands and suppliers would need to address.



Dialogue Conclusion

UN Climate Change could use its convening power and technical knowledge to support the fashion sector as it plans and implements climate action aimed at aligning the sector with the goals of the Paris Climate Change Agreement.

Work should be anchored in a global Platform for Fashion and Climate Action, established with the goal of collective action to achieve a pathway towards net-zero emissions by 2050. The Platform could support the achievement of this goal through, inter alia, information sharing and active collaboration, bringing together all relevant stakeholders and initiatives in the fashion and broader textile sector. This platform could be launched and made public at COP24 in Katowice, Poland.

The Platform is intended to be a vehicle that would enable global climate dialogue and climate action with the overarching goals to:

1. Set short-term or medium-term targets for climate in line with the goals of Paris agreement
2. Facilitate collaboration with relevant stakeholders to enable the sector to achieve these targets
3. Provide recognition for the achieved targets

The following initial streams of work were identified for the Platform:

- **Enable “within-sector” collaboration:** The Platform could be used as a focal point to recruit a broader range of actors across the sector, from both production and final consumption, into the global dialogue on climate action and to distill and amplify messages regarding the sector’s progress and challenges in taking action, as well as regarding the support needed from other sectors and actors;
- **Facilitate engagement between policymakers and other stakeholders:** UN Climate Change’s position as the leading global authority on climate policy could be utilized to build upon the identification of challenges within the sector to create a forum where these could be discussed and addressed with other stakeholders, such as the finance community, and relevant policymakers;
- **Catalyze action and provide recognition:** Many actors within the sector are already taking ambitious actions to address climate change and are committed to doing more. Many industry associations, NGOs and their various initiatives are making efforts to catalyze system change. UN Climate Change would ensure that these actions, commitments and best practices are shared, highlighted and recognized to help drive climate action forward. A dedicated Platform for Fashion and Climate Action could make effective use of a range of existing UNFCCC tools, could help guide further development of these tools, and could support the development and deployment of new tools and systems for the sector, as appropriate.