

Chester World Development Forum

Minutes of Forum Meeting held on Tuesday 14 March 2023, 7pm at The Unity Centre

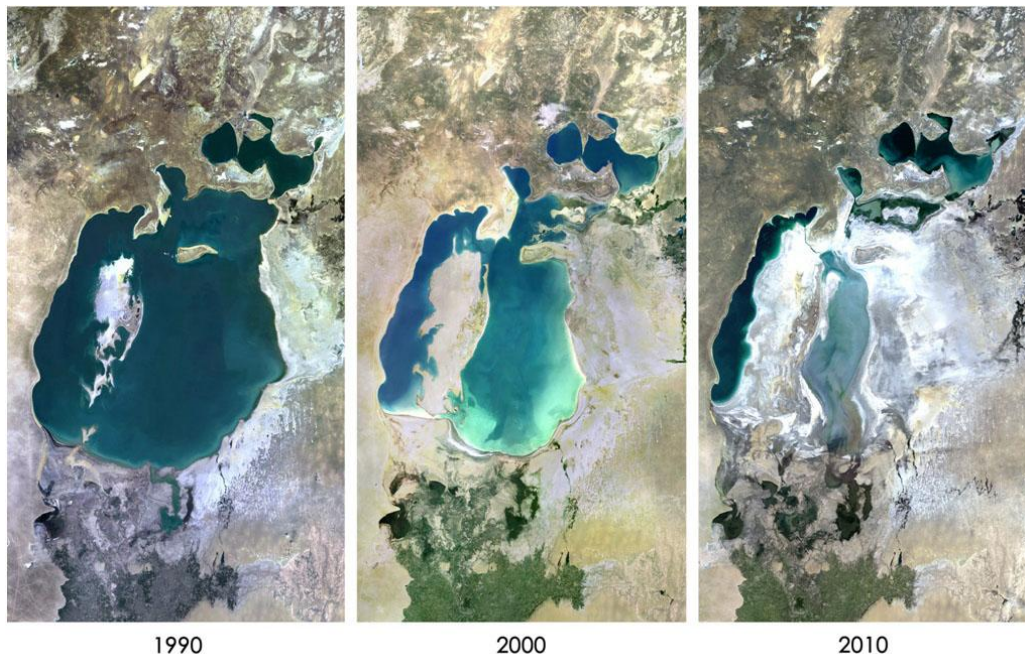


Prior to the business meeting, Dr Rebecca Collins, Senior Lecturer in Human Geography, University of Chester, gave a talk on “Current Trends and Challenges in the Global Fashion Industry”

According to a 2019 UN report, global clothing production **doubled between 2000 and 2014** which has led to significant social and environmental impacts.

Environmental impacts:

- The industry is “responsible for 20 percent of total water waste on a global level”.
- Water depletion: it takes 2,700 litres to produce enough cotton to make ONE T-shirt. For context, modern toilets use about 5 litres of water per flush, older ones use about 10. So anywhere between 270 and 540 toilet flushes of water just to make one T-shirt.



Aral Sea on the border of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan – showing water depletion

- Use of pesticides – it is estimated that around 8 ~ 10% of global pesticide use is related to the production of cotton. In developing countries, around 50% of all pesticides used are for cotton cultivation. (WWF 2013).

Excessive, unsustainable extraction of water and increased pesticide use both contribute to habitat and biodiversity loss and soil degradation.

Social impacts:

- Pesticide related sickness – in Pakistan around 50% of cotton farmers report pesticide related sickness in their families. This clearly affects workers’ livelihoods.
- Gender inequality – many of the workers are women.

For more detail: <https://ergonassociates.net/publication/social-impacts-of-cotton-production/>
However, the “Better Cotton Initiative” (BCI) has been introduced in some countries and aims to improve working conditions and environmental stewardship.



Countries in which the BCI is working

There are other organisations tackling the negative social and environmental impacts of clothing production in general across the globe. Two such organisations are “Labour Behind the Label” and “traid”.



Labour Behind the Label supports garment workers’ efforts worldwide to improve their working conditions and change the fashion industry for the better. They represent the Clean Clothes Campaign in the UK.

For more information visit: <https://labourbehindthelabel.org/what-we-do>

traid tackles the negative social and environmental impacts of producing, consuming and wasting clothes by:

- Increasing our use of second-hand clothes
- Providing people with reuse services to stop wearable clothes being thrown out into the waste stream or left unused
- Putting wearable clothes back into use in charity shops
- Running education programmes and campaigns to raise awareness of the socio-environmental impacts of clothes, and to persuade and inspire people, businesses and policy makers to take action to keep clothes in use for longer. This includes wearing more second-hand rather than new, passing on unworn clothes for someone else to use, buying less, buying better quality, caring for and repairing clothes
- Funding, supporting and promoting global projects to establish more sustainable production and safer, fairer conditions for people in the supply chains making our clothes: supporting organic cotton production and stopping child and bonded labour

This work, in close collaboration with UK and global partners, is striving to:

- Reduce consumption
- Reduce the overuse of increasingly scarce natural resources
- Reduce waste and carbon emissions
- Extend the life cycle of wearable clothes
- Source clothes in more socially beneficial ways
- Support and champion the creation of a safer, fairer and more sustainable clothing industry

For more information visit: <https://www.traid.org.uk/our-vision-and-mission/>

The Global Garment Economy: explained through the Garment Value Chain.

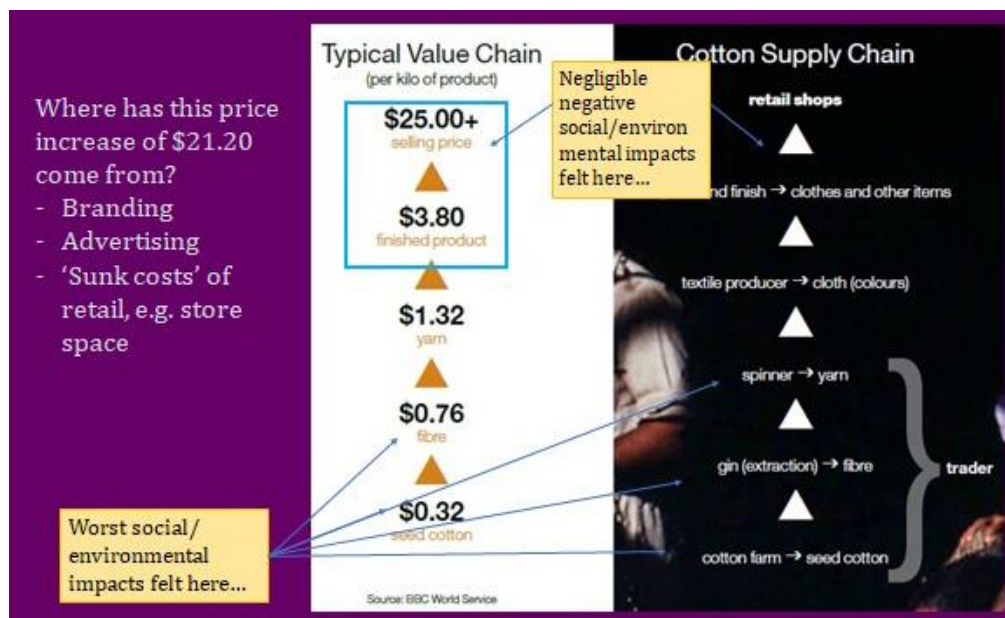
Capitalists (capitalism is the current world economic system) want to turn raw materials into finished goods in order to make a profit. With cotton, picking the cotton is just the start of the global garment journey...

Which is worth more – raw cotton, spun cotton, cotton fabric, T-shirt? Through each stage, more value is added. As a garment moves through stages of production to becoming jeans, a t-shirt, etc, there is more money to be made...

Global **commodity** chains trace the movements of raw materials through production processes to the point of consumption.

Global **value** chains go a step further, identifying **how additional value is produced at each stage in production.**

The following diagram shows a typical value chain.



Clearly the worst social/environmental impacts are felt in the early stages of production, coupled with the least added value – usually in the global south. At the top of the chain, where the social/environmental impacts are negligible, is the highest concentration of wealth – in the global north. This “value” creation comes from the use of “branding” and advertising – the idea of “I must have.....” – and “how soon can we make our customers dissatisfied so that they will look to buy something else”.

The accumulation of material goods is part of our culture, but increasingly the trends in “Fast Fashion” and “Haul Culture” are contributing significantly to global inequality – in addition to the environmental and social impacts already mentioned.

Rebecca has been researching ‘esteem’ as a critical kind of ‘value’ to young people, and how we might refocus this. There is a pervading mentality that “people have seen pictures of me wearing this, so I can’t wear it again”. It’s a sort of showing off.

This mentality results in an estimated £140 million worth of clothing being sent to landfill in the UK each year (WRAP 2022). In weight terms, that’s about 336,000 tonnes and would fill about 28,000 double-decker buses.

So how do we cast more light on closing the gap between ‘esteem’ and using clothes for longer? What happens to clothes we put away for a bit? Do we forget about them? How can we renew the novelty and promote re-use?

There are initiatives/companies aimed at “Divesting in Global Garments” such as “Vinted, eBay, depop, freecycle, marketplace, and Gumtree. These companies have become culturally accepted. And of course clothes can be resold in charity shops. But much of the stock from charity shops is exported to low-income countries. Take the case of a pair of jeans...

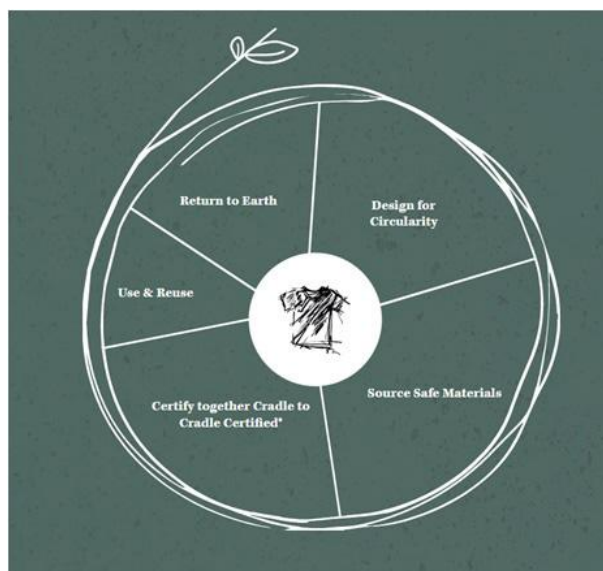


Source: *The Journey of Jeans: An Infographic*
 Katelyn Toth-Fejel and Andrew Brooks

This reselling of our discarded clothes has meant some local factories in the global south have closed after being undercut by cheap second-hand imports from the global north! So whilst there are undoubtedly some good things about the 'charity shop' economy for garments, we shouldn't paint an overly-rosy picture, because our good intentions can also have unexpected negative impacts.

There is still, however, an awful lot of clothing going to landfill, and it is creating a problems on a global scale. Synthetic fabrics, or natural fabrics treated with chemicals, can take 200+ years to biodegrade and can be as toxic as discarded tyres or plastic materials.

Looking to the future, there is cautious optimism with research going firstly into using different materials to make clothing such as pineapples, coffee, mushrooms, spider's webs and orange peel which of course are all biodegradable, and secondly into future systems such as the "Design for Circularity".....Source safe Materials.....Cradle to Cradle Certified.....Use and Re-use.....Return to Earth



The need is to ensure that, whilst environmental impacts are embedded in via 'design for circularity', processes don't continue to contribute to unequal and unjust systems of production...

<https://teemill.com/circular-fashion/> - designing products and systems for product return

Want to find out more?

Visit these websites:

bettercotton.org

fashionrevolution.org

fashionfictions.org

mistrafuturefashion.com

wrap.org.uk/takingaction/textiles

Business meeting

- Welcome:** TG chaired the meeting and welcomed all members.
Present: Terry Green, Bernard Payne , Lindsay Lloyd-Cussons, Annemarie and Niall Macfadyen, Gill Miller, Peter Speirs, Heather Swainston, Ann McCarthy, John Tacon, Linda Shuttleworth, plus Arnold Wilkes via Zoom.
Apologies: Katy and Brian Rowe
- Finance update**
We have around £400 in bank at present. Our Treasurer is waiting for a fresh bank statement.
- Website/social media update**
BP has included GM's talk on our website in 3 different ways. BP will get in touch with Mike Roberts to find out ways of counting the numbers of people visiting our website. No new posts on social media.
- Future CWDF events**

 - **09 May:** CWDF Annual General Meeting. Steve Hughes, Chair of Chester Sustainability Forum, will give us an overview of local initiatives, campaigns and events currently happening or being developed by members of CSF.
 - **13 July:** Meeting with City of Chester MP, Sam Dixon – details subject to final confirmation. Please note the change of day from Tuesday to Thursday.
- CWDF 30 Years Anniversary in June 2023 – how should we celebrate?**
Getting an appropriate speaker has not proved to be possible. The Committee has made the decision not to have a celebration event in June, but we will have a small celebration at our last Forum meeting later in the year.
- Future of CWDF**
It now seems very likely that, sadly, CWDF will cease operating in its current format at the end of this year.