



PARTNERING FOR SUSTAINABLE FASHION

OUR APPROACH TO SUSTAINABLE FASHION

Solidaridad Network has more than two decades of experience working in the fashion sector and is currently active in 14 producing countries. We work throughout the supply chain, from cotton production to textiles and leather factories, and buyers and fashion brands. With a strong presence in the field, we work with tens of thousands of cotton farmers, and textiles and leather manufacturers in producing countries, including Bangladesh, India and Ethiopia.

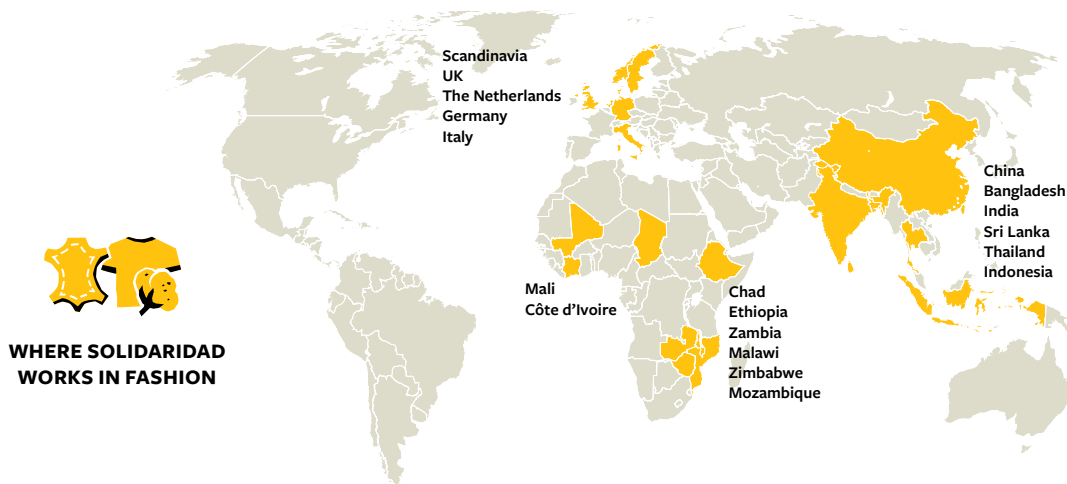
Solidaridad works closely with companies to introduce improvements in their supply chain. Our approach is aimed at working constructively together. Moreover, we have representatives in important multi-stakeholder organizations such as Cascale, Organic Cotton Accelerator and Better Cotton, and our role enables us to effectively advocate for sustainable fashion through our policy influencing work.

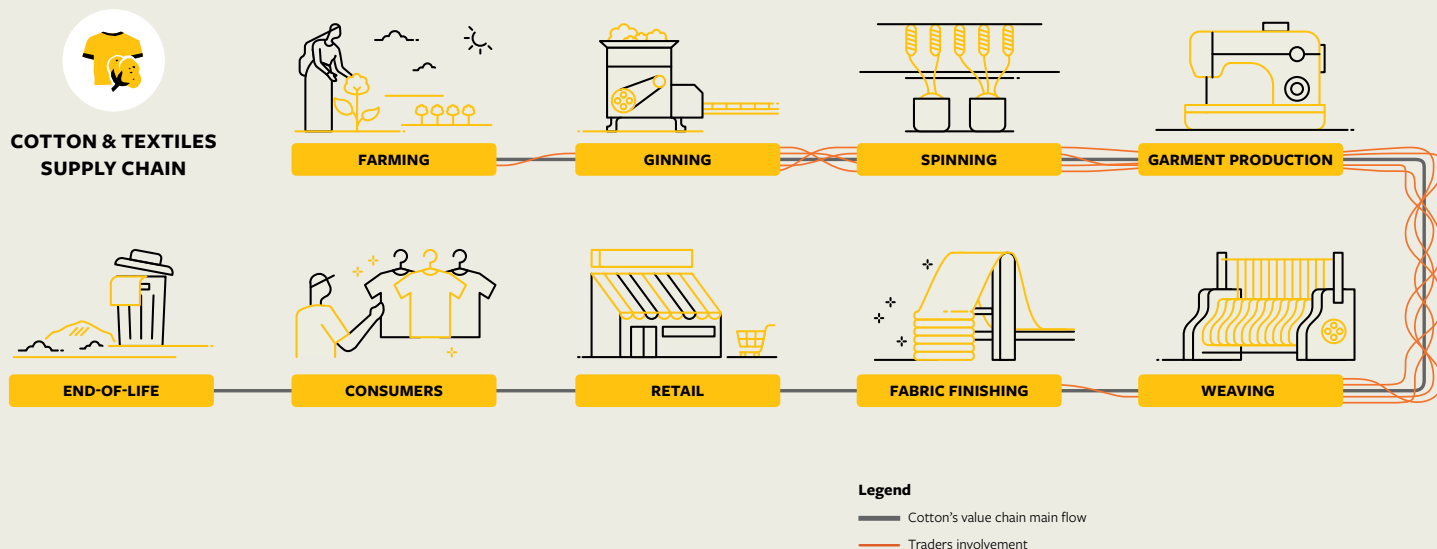
As part of this, we publish the Cotton Ranking, an in-depth look at the sustainability of brands sourcing cotton worldwide, as well as the **Cotton Papers** on the Sustainable Cotton Hub platform, a series of publications that explore the local, national and global dimensions of the cotton sector.

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES IN FASHION

In an ever evolving and challenging landscape, it is crucial to recognize the importance of all stakeholders in the fashion supply chain. By working together, we can restore the true meaning of sustainability and strive to ensure that the people who produce these goods earn a living income or a living wage; that natural resources are managed sustainably; and that working conditions are fair and safe. Solidaridad brings expertise to the table to work together on some of the main challenges currently prevailing in the sector, such as:

- Unsustainable sourcing practices
- Inadequate working conditions (i.e. overtime) and low wages
- Disadvantaged position of women and minorities
- Environmental impact of dying and finishing of textiles and leather
- Consequences of climate change and conventional farming
- Limited access to innovative technologies





SOLIDARIDAD'S FOCUS IN FASHION

Thanks to our wide scope of work, Solidaridad has a unique position in making the fashion supply chain more sustainable. We work closely with fashion retailers and brands on the following:

- **Reduction of environmental and social risks:** Solidaridad implements projects together with brands and their supply chain partners (at both factory and farm level), aimed at reducing the environmental impact and improving the social impact.
- **Purchasing Practices:** Support and training on improved purchasing practices based on the Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices (CFRPP). We also link responsible purchasing practices to the situation at factory and farm level, to make sustainable improvements for both brands and producers.
- **Introduction of sustainable innovations to textile and leather production:** (Small-scale) manufacturers at the beginning of the supply chain often experience a lack of access to innovative solutions. Solidaridad works with innovative technology companies to improve the sustainability of textile and leather production.

OUR TRACK RECORD

RESPONSIBLE PURCHASING PRACTICES

Solidaridad supports brands with reviewing how sourcing practices relate to the issues found at manufacturer level, and with making improvements through training for a brand's staff, including sourcing and CSR teams. The positive effects of responsible purchasing practices help to boost productivity, stabilize workforce and build resilience in supply chains. They contribute to preventing harm and facilitating social and environmental improvements. When CSR and purchasing teams work together on realizing these improvements, it can bring about significant change.

Our work on this is mainly based on the **Common Framework for Responsible Purchasing Practices**. As of 2022, Solidaridad is part of the learning and implementation community of the Common Framework, and guides Hema, Hunkemöller and O'Neill in applying the framework to their own operations.





Solidaridad's work in fashion & Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Young people, women and minorities in the fashion supply chain often experience disadvantaged treatment, while they make up for a large proportion of the workforce, especially in the **Ready Made Garment sector, where it's up to 60% women**.

Some of the challenges they face in particular are exclusion from the formal supply chain, facing gender-based discrimination and violence, pay inequity and limited job opportunities.

Solidaridad supports the improvement of the position of women and minorities in the fashion supply chain by:

- Supporting the creation of female-led farmer cooperatives;
- Establishing community gender support networks;
- Implementing upskilling and reskilling programmes for workers, focused on increasing the number of women in management positions;
- Creation of GESI tools for factories to assess their inclusivity and GESI strategies.



BETTER MILL INITIATIVE

(BANGLADESH, ETHIOPIA AND CHINA)

Solidaridad launched the Better Mill Initiative Bangladesh in 2022. In collaboration with four Dutch fashion brands and funded by the Netherlands Enterprise Agency (RVO), the project works to improve the environmental sustainability performances of wet processing manufacturers in Bangladesh.

Factories in the programme go through a holistic 6-step business model to improve their policies and procedures related to environmental management. Technical training is also part of the programme. In addition, Solidaridad supports the brands in the programme with improving their environmental policies and practices.

In its previous phase in Ethiopia (2016-2022), the BMI programme supported the livelihood options of garment workers and strove to increase family income for 30,000 workers. The project focused on creating sustainable and inclusive growth of the Ethiopian textile industry in line with international standards for production. Our BMI programme was also active in China. Launched in 2013, the initiative has supported 43 wet processing factories and 675 improvement measures have been implemented by the end of 2016. The project ran until mid-2017.



TACKLING POLLUTION IN LEATHER MANUFACTURING (SOUTH (EAST) ASIA)

Facilitating a more environmentally-friendly leather supply chain is a priority. To this end, since 2017 Solidaridad has been working closely with micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in the sector to embed sustainability in their operations. Our joint interventions address core issues such as lack of waste management, inefficient use of water, untreated effluent discharge into river systems, and inadequate training of workers at the units to mitigate occupational health and safety risks.

One of the interventions in our projects in South and South East Asia, is the introduction of a Smart Water Saving System (SWaSS). In MSME tanneries, water feeding systems are usually manually managed and controlled, resulting in wastage of fresh water and increased risk of human error in tannery operations. Solidaridad's team introduced SWaSS, a water optimization technology for tanneries. It is a programmable logic control (PLC)-based, tannery-specific integrated water management system developed to optimize fresh water usage. Using this system, a specific amount of water is fed into the drums to optimize freshwater usage, resulting in a 25-30% saving in freshwater.



STEERING THE COTTON SECTOR TOWARDS CLIMATE RESILIENCE (ZAMBIA)

Jointly with Planboo, Solidaridad is implementing a project geared at improving agricultural practices across the **cotton sector in Zambia**. With this project, we aim to build smallholder farmer resilience and contribute to combating climate change.

Across Zambia, cotton is a primary source of income for more than 300,000 smallholder farmers, but cotton production is at its lowest in decades, down by 50% from 2012. This is due to many factors, including severe drought and soil degradation. The **application of biochar to the soil** can be a key solution to improve this: the soil increases its water and nutrient holding

capacity, acting as a carbon sponge for rain and an alternative to chemical fertilizers. Solidaridad's experience in the cotton and agricultural sectors is hereby complemented by Planboo's digital MRVin platform to support smallholder cotton farmers in Zambia to produce and adopt biochar.



PROMOTING REGENERATIVE FARMING PRACTICES (INDIA)

With the aim to tackle the effects of climate change, the most pressing challenge affecting cotton farmers in India, Solidaridad is supporting small-scale farmers to transition from conventional to regenerative agricultural practices.

As a result, cotton growers in India are turning over a new leaf. In Maharashtra, 17,000 farmers are regenagri-certified with 25,893.37 hectares of land under regenerative farming. Efficient farm and water management practices and greater use of on-farm bio-inputs instead of chemicals have already led to 12 percent reduction on production costs and a positive impact on the yield.

TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE FASHION SECTOR

Fashion can mean something different for many people. For Solidaridad, it means striving towards a more sustainable and inclusive fashion sector, including cotton, textiles and leather, whereby the rights and livelihoods of the farmers, producers and manufacturers are prioritized, and the environment is protected. Sustainable fashion can and should be the norm, and it takes the whole supply chain to achieve this. Join us on this journey!



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