

## Sustainable Textiles for Sustainable Development, India

This four-year project will reduce poverty and improve the quality of life among artisans in the textile industry in Rajasthan, India.



What problem or need is the project addressing?

Small businesses have had a positive impact on economic development in many countries. However, this has brought with it a range of problems, including increased pollution. The textile industry is highly labour intensive with great opportunities for employment. However it is also one of the most polluting. While not all small textile businesses are polluting, it is clear that many ecosystems are now under threat, and the livelihoods and health of tens of thousands of people are being affected.

This project is primarily being implemented in Rajasthan, India. The textile industry is of vital importance to Rajasthan – a state where poverty is widespread and incomes are significantly below the national average. Increasing population, a hostile physical environment, frequent drought, inadequate infrastructure and low productivity contribute to this widening gap.

Despite the high percentage of people employed in the textile sector (10% of the state population) and increasing export earnings, most textile artisans live in poverty. Their working conditions are unsafe and a serious risk to their health and that of their families and community. Pollution of drinking water through chemicals released from production processes is the gravest threat.

What is the project doing?

The project will play a vital role in improving the environment and health of workers in the textile industry, by reducing contamination of drinking water sources and improving practices that currently affect the health of local communities (such as the use of hazardous dyes).

The project will establish a model eco-friendly textile park that will set an example to 29 other textile parks across India. It will bring together a range of partners - including technical service providers, textile producer groups, small textile businesses and local government representatives - to provide low cost technological solutions to reducing pollution from craft and textile production activities.

Through the textile park, the project will support small textile businesses to become less polluting, thereby reducing damage to environment and health. Specifically it will support small businesses to source sustainable raw materials, adopt eco-friendly production practices, access appropriate low-cost technology and develop eco-friendly products. It will also support them to market these products to consumers.

The project will initially target 550 small textile businesses based around Jaipur, where block printing is predominant. These units employ over 25,000 artisans and provide a crucial source of employment and income. Learning will then be disseminated to thousands more small textile businesses throughout India.

What impact has the project had?

The project is still in its early stages so it is too early to measure impact. However we expect it to result in

- More sustainable textile production amongst small textile businesses
- Reduced pollution of the local environment and water sources
- Improved quality of working conditions for artisans and workers

Construction of the model eco-friendly textile park has begun and installation of three pilot effluent treatment plants is underway. A training workshop has been held for textile producers on organic and sustainable textile production, and a database of organic cotton and natural dye suppliers is being developed which will be a useful resource for any producers seeking to produce environmentally-friendly products.

Skills development training is also underway for 1,000 block printers, so they are ready to move into the park once it is completed. Various occupational safety devices have been designed and tested for the block printers, to reduce health and safety risks. Modified looms for weavers are also being piloted, which take up less space and should help alleviate the back, knee and shoulder ache and breathing problems associated with traditional looms. Leaflets have also been used to disseminate information on health and safety hazards to artisans. The leaflets have helped them to become more aware of the reasons for their illnesses and conscious about addressing these problems.

An international designer and eight domestic designers have been working with participating textile-related enterprises to help them develop collections of eco-friendly products for showcasing at international trade fairs. A study into the market for eco-friendly and related textile products has also been completed, which will help producer groups to formulate appropriate marketing strategies.

We are also looking at the policy environment for textile production. Policy briefs have been developed, and advocacy activities are underway to try to influence the Indian government and industry to adopt a set of basic standards relating to occupational health and safety practices.



#### Our local partner

Traidcraft Exchange is implementing this project with [All India Artisans and Craftworkers Welfare Association \(AIACA\)](#). AIACA works to enhance the competitiveness and incomes of crafts producers through policy research and advocacy, enhancing market access and exploring more sustainable livelihoods.

#### How is this project funded?

The project is funded by the European Commission ([SWITCH-Asia](#)), the Indian Government, and [TRAID](#).

