AID BY TRADE
FOUNDATION

# ANNUAL REPORT 2024

## INTERVIEWS

# “It Is All About Fair Information for Consumers”

In November 2024, the Aid by Trade Foundation joined the Make the Label Count initiative, an alliance of natural fibre producers, manufacturers, brands, standards organisations, and environmental groups that is committed to making sustainability labelling for textiles in the EU fair and credible. In this capacity, Make the Label Count is responding to the development of new EU regulations for determining the ecological footprint of textile products, known as the “Product Environmental Footprint” (PEF). We spoke to Elke Hortmeyer, a spokesperson for Make the Label Count, about what the initiative has achieved so far and why PEF methods continue to put natural fibres at a severe disadvantage.

*We spoke with*

**Elke Hortmeyer**
Spokesperson
Make the Label Count

**Ms Hortmeyer, what does the EU want to achieve through the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF)?**

The EU introduced the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) as a method to assess and communicate the environmental performance of products in a standardised way. It’s designed to provide a scientific basis to substantiate green claims, helping prevent greenwashing, and to guide more sustainable product design as required by the upcoming Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR).

**Why are you campaigning against PEF?**

We are not against environmental labelling or sustainable product design; on the contrary, we fully support transparent, science-based approaches that empower consumers and make the fashion industry more sustainable. However, the current PEF methodology falls short of its own ambitions. It does not equitably compare products made from natural and synthetic fibres because it omits critical impacts of fossil-based materials, such as microplastic pollution and plastic waste ending up in landfills. This skews results in favour of fossil fuel–derived fibres like polyester and, more importantly, risks misleading well-intentioned consumers—effectively greenwashing plastic textiles.

**What has Make the Label Count already achieved?**

Make the Label Count has brought global attention to flaws in the current PEF approach. We’ve built a broad coalition—including natural fibre producers, brands, and NGOs—and helped shift the public debate. Our collective advocacy has prompted EU policymakers to revisit the PEF methodology, opening the door to more comprehensive indicators in the review of the EU’s Environmental Footprint (EF) methods for apparel and footwear. Despite this progress, PEF is still embedded in key EU documents like the Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation (ESPR) and the Green Claims Directive. The 2025 revision of the EF guidelines is a crucial opportunity to secure fairer treatment for natural fibres and the inclusion of indicators like microplastics, circularity, and biogenic carbon. We must stay agile and engaged; our advocacy remains vital to ensuring that EU policy reflects true sustainability and a level playing field for natural fibres.

**What changes are still needed for the PEF programme to really protect consumers from greenwashing?**

To ensure fair and meaningful information for consumers, PEF assessments must include indicators for microplastic pollution, plastic waste, and circularity; these indicators must also be assigned meaningful weight in the overall PEF score in order to align with EU environmental goals. Another essential change is revising how garment lifetime is estimated. Currently, the PEF category rules for apparel and footwear equate physical durability with actual use time, based on the assumption that stronger garments are worn for longer. However, studies show that about two thirds of clothing is discarded while still functional, whether due to changes in style, fit, or preference. This leads PEF calculations to overestimate the lifespan of synthetics and underestimate that of natural fibres, thereby favouring synthetics in scoring. A more accurate, evidence-based approach could be enabled by the Digital Product Passport (DPP), which supports the EU’s goal of putting fast fashion out of fashion.

ABTF INTERVIEW

# “We Work to Generate Positive Change”

With the foundation's 20th anniversary on the horizon, we spoke with two people who have significantly shaped the Aid by Trade Foundation's work over the past two decades: Prof. Dr Johannes Merck, a former managing director who laid the groundwork for AbTF's success, and Tina Stridde, the current managing director guiding its ongoing evolution and leading the foundation into its next chapter. Join us as we explore AbTF's journey and uncover the story behind its beginnings.

*We spoke with*

**Prof. Dr Johannes Merck**
**General Representative**
**Foundations Michael Otto**

**Tina Stridde**
**Managing Director**
**Aid by Trade Foundation**

**Mr Merck, AbTF was founded on the principle of not relying on charity. Instead, starting with CmiA back in 2005, it took a new approach to development cooperation. What was the reasoning behind this decision?**

Our goal was to make the contributions of African smallholders more visible in the textile value chain, ensuring that the created value is shared more equitably with them. We focussed on two factors: firstly, that smallholders could increase productivity through practical support like advice and training and, secondly, that informed consumers would seek labelled products from African smallholders. The ultimate aim was to increase productivity while improving prices, meaning that everyone would benefit.

Both approaches have worked, albeit only partially. Productivity gains were lower than expected, but the training and social projects have succeeded in strengthening rural structures and in building up smallholders’ resilience to fluctuating market conditions, a problem only exacerbated by climate change. However, while consumer demand has grown, with major retailers distributing CmiA products and paying licensing fees, there has been no price effect for the end customer.

**Having a good idea is one thing; implementing it is quite another. How has AbTF overcome the initial challenges in this regard?**

We expanded significantly, all the while taking care not to lose sight of our core concern: improving the living conditions of smallholder families. As we keep adding to our training offerings and to our portfolio of social projects delivered directly to the communities, the number of people we reach through CmiA will only grow.

**Reflecting on your time as the first managing director of AbTF, was there a specific moment when you came to believe in the foundation’s success?**

Securing DEG (Deutsche Investitions- und Entwicklungsgesellschaft mbH) as a close partner in establishing our initiative was of great significance. DEG provided not only financial resources but also





expertise and connections with local cotton companies. When we finally secured the first CmiA order from OTTO—for 400,000 T-shirts from a supplier in Mauritius—I thought, “This is going to work! The supply chain is functioning, and demand is starting to grow.”

**What do you personally remember most from your time at AbTF?**

My time at AbTF gave me countless insights and personal contacts that have greatly enriched my professional life. In particular, my interactions with cotton farmers in their fields and villages taught me about what can and cannot be achieved in traditional communities. On another note, I was initially surprised—and frankly disappointed—by how little impact the desire to improve smallholders’ situations had on consumers’ choices. Based on various surveys, we had hoped for significantly more. This highlights a broader issue: sustainability still plays a secondary role in consumer behaviour. Systemic solutions, like those offered by the Aid by Trade Foundation, can help counteract this market failure.

**Ms Stridde, how do you envision AbTF addressing the challenges faced by today’s textile industry, particularly in light of climate change and the CSDDD?**

AbTF’s original goals remain, unfortunately, just as pertinent as they were 20 years ago; protecting ecosystems and achieving social justice—to name just two—are more relevant than ever. That is not to say that nothing has changed. Two decades ago, few companies valued supply chain transparency; today, consumers and businesses want to know how and where products are made, and lawmakers are enforcing this. Our standards meet this growing demand for transparency, especially with the introduction of our new Transparency Standard.

**Since you took on the role of managing director, the organisation has grown to encompass four standards for cotton or cashmere. What is the mission driving this expansion?**

The overarching goal is made plain in the name of the Aid by Trade Foundation: we work to generate positive change by activating market forces. With 20 years of experience and a wide network, we significantly contribute to transforming raw material production and enhancing supply chain transparency. Our standards are not one-dimensional environmental or social standards, instead addressing both to create genuine win–win situations. Only when standards benefit both trade and production can they find broad success and fully realise their effectiveness.

**How else do AbTF’s standards distinguish themselves?**

Our capacity for innovation is essential and represents our core competency, both in the fields and throughout the textile value chain. Projects utilising satellite data and e-learning platforms illustrate how we leverage technology to promote sustainable practices. This innovative spirit is vital for tackling climate change and enhancing producers’ resilience. At the same time, we pursue long-term partnerships because working with committed cotton companies, retailers, and cashmere producers is essential for putting our goals into action.

**Finally, looking to the future, what do you think will shape the development of AbTF?**

The launch of the Biodiversity Fund on the occasion of the foundation’s 20th anniversary already provides one answer: preserving biodiversity in our project regions. In addition to continuing with this important task, we want to promote education, whether through agricultural training or the expansion of school infrastructure, since it remains a crucial factor in sustainable positive development. Finally, digital transformation will play a central role. For instance, we plan to further develop our e-learning platform and create digital tools to enable producers to optimise their practices.

# “CmiA Meets Our High Standards”

For over 125 years, CWS Workwear has made a name for itself as a leading supplier of durable, stylish, and functional workwear. Since the spring of 2024, the company has been a partner of Cotton made in Africa®. As Leonie Biesen, the sustainability lead at CWS Workwear, tells us, this decision was not made on a whim.

*We spoke with*

**Leonie Biesen**
Sustainability Lead
CWS Workwear

**Ms Biesen, your company is a European leader in workwear, combining functionality with sophisticated design and innovation. Does sustainability enter into its calculations as well?**

Sustainability plays a key role in our company and is an integral part of our corporate strategy, which is based on a circular model. Since our inception in 1899, we have focussed on developing innovative solutions that are both stylish and functional as well as environmentally conscious. Today, we combine our experience with a sense of responsibility for the future, using sustainable materials and processes to make a positive contribution to society and the environment.

**What were the key factors that prompted you to choose Cotton made in Africa® (CmiA) to meet your sustainability goals?**

The decision to choose cotton from Cotton made in Africa was based on several factors. Firstly, we are conscious of the negative environmental and social effects of cotton production and processing, so we want to practise corporate responsibility by establishing a fair and sustainable supply chain. For its part, the CmiA initiative meets our high standards of social and environmental responsibility. CmiA promotes sustainable cultivation methods that minimise the use of water and chemicals while improving the living conditions of cotton farmers in Africa. This synergy of environmental protection and social responsibility supports our goal of building a responsible supply chain while contributing to the creation of fair working conditions.

**How do you market the topic of sustainability, and more specifically of Cotton made in Africa®, and how is this received by your customers?**

Both sustainability and our partnership with CmiA are key elements in the marketing of our brand. Through transparent communication on our website, in our marketing materials, and on our social media channels, we inform our customers about the positive impact of the sustainable materials we use, especially those from CmiA. We will also provide a full account of this topic in this year’s edition of our annual Responsibility Report. Our customers appreciate this commitment, as they increasingly value products that are environmentally friendly and socially responsible.

**Will you expand your sustainability strategy in the future, and what specific goals will you be pursuing in the coming years through your partnership with Cotton made in Africa®?**

We will continue to expand our sustainability strategy over the coming years, with the aim of continuously increasing the lifespan of our materials and the proportion of responsibly manufactured materials in our products. One of the keys to achieving this will be collaborations with trusted partners such as Cotton made in Africa®. Our long-term goals are to further reduce the environmental impact of our entire production chain, fulfil our duties of social responsibility, and reduce emissions in supply chains. In addition to furthering our sustainability goals, this helps to promote responsible and sustainable economic models around the world.

# Growing Benin's Organic Cotton Sector

*We spoke with*

**Emmanuel Dossoumou**
**Cotton Farmer**
**CmiA Organic (Benin)**

As part of an international joint project with a combined budget of more than EUR 1 million, the Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) spent three years supporting smallholders in making the transition to organic cotton cultivation, specifically under the Cotton made in Africa Organic standard. This project was implemented by AbTF and OBEPAB (Organisation Béninoise pour la Promotion de l'Agriculture Biologique), with funding from BMZ (the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development) and in collaboration with GIZ (an internationally operating service provider for international cooperation in sustainable development and international educational activities that supports the German government's international cooperation goals), the Pesticide Action Network (PAN) UK, and cotton-trading company Reinhart. As a measure of its success, the number of organic cotton farmers within the project more than doubled by the end of 2024, reaching nearly 9,000. One of the cotton farmers who benefited from the project's broad array of measures is Emmanuel Dossoumou from the village of Aklampa. He tells us why the project was so beneficial to him and his village.

**Mr Dossoumou, why did you decide to start growing cotton according to the CmiA Organic standard?**

Because, unlike other organic standards, Cotton made in Africa Organic does not limit its focus to agriculture. CmiA Organic also wants to improve the conditions facing people in cotton-producing communities, including women and children as well. Another unique aspect of CmiA Organic is its support for constructing new schools and wells and establishing businesses, which strengthens cotton communities and raises our standard of living.

**Looking back on your many years of experience as a cotton farmer, would you say that cotton farming today is harder or easier than in the past?**

It's harder. Environmental conditions have largely deteriorated considerably; it used to be easier to predict when rain would fall and how much; meanwhile, soil fertility is decreasing and pest infestations are increasing.

**I know you participated in the project "Growing Benin's Organic Cotton Sector". Did you find it helpful for overcoming these agricultural challenges?**

Yes, CmiA Organic and OBEPAB organised a whole series of training sessions, workshops, and events as part of the project. We learnt how to optimise our cotton farms and make them more profitable, meaning that our harvests, and consequently our incomes, are now higher. Apart from that, organic cotton allows for a higher net income than conventional cotton due to its moderate production costs combined with a selling price that is 20 percent higher than that of conventional cotton.

**You initially mentioned the broader approach of CmiA Organic, which addresses not only ecological but also social issues. Was that reflected in this project as well, for instance, in relation to women's empowerment?**

Yes. In fact, that was a priority for project activities. They changed a lot of things for the better for women, for example, by improving collaboration between men and women. In addition, as women took part in training activities and meetings, it became progressively easier for them to gain access to land and cultivate it. Another difference is that women no longer have to finish work in their husbands' fields before tending to their own. Some 30 percent of decision-making bodies are now made up of women, compared to around one percent a few years ago. Women are creating new sources of income for themselves as well, for instance, by preparing soya or peanuts to sell on.

**So, would you recommend growing CmiA Organic cotton to your neighbours too?**

Yes, at the very least because this form of production does not use synthetic sprays or fertilisers that are harmful to people's health. It also introduces you to environmentally friendly cultivation practices, including the use of organic fertilisers that maintain or restore soil quality.

# “CmiA Organic Goes Beyond Conventional Organic Certification”

Since 2023, BESTSELLER’s brand ONLY has more than doubled the volume of its organic cotton sourced from African farmers and verified under the CmiA Organic standard. BESTSELLER is committed to increasing its investment in preferred materials over the coming years, viewing this as essential for driving transformation in the fashion industry. We had the opportunity to speak with Jonas Meier Sørensen, ONLY’s buying manager for denim, and Danique Lodewijks, the raw materials manager at BESTSELLER. Both took part in a field trip to CmiA Organic cotton fields in Tanzania and shared insights into their work and upcoming developments at BESTSELLER.

*We spoke with*

**Jonas Meier Sørensen**
Buying Manager for Denim
ONLY

**Danique Lodewijks**
Raw Materials Manager
BESTSELLER

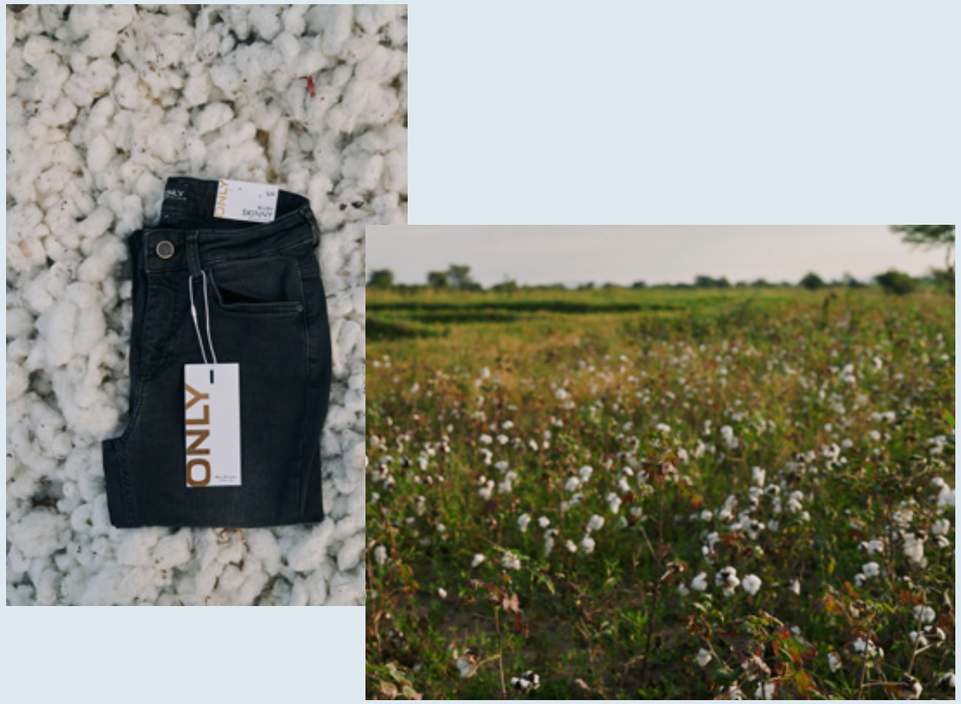
**Mr Meier Sørensen, doubling the volume of CmiA Organic cotton you use marks a significant milestone. What inspired ONLY to prioritise CmiA Organic cotton in its sourcing strategy?**

Our goal for 2025 is to ensure that at least 30 percent of all the cotton used in our products is organically grown. Since ONLY was founded as a denim brand, denim has remained at the core of our cotton sourcing strategy. Given that some of our most used denim fabrics are produced by denim mills in Egypt and Pakistan, CmiA’s operating region south of the Sahara offered a good match for us from a logistical point of view. At the same time, organic cotton from Africa has relatively long fibres and is carefully picked by hand, ensuring that the raw material is of high quality. However, our strongest motive for prioritising CmiA Organic is that the standard goes beyond conventional organic certification. For us, it wasn’t just about cotton sourcing; it was also about collaborating with a partner whose core values include providing social and economic support to African farmers and their communities.

**When you look back on the history of your partnership with the Aid by Trade Foundation, what has impressed you the most?**

The field trip to Tanzania in 2023 undoubtedly left the biggest impression on me. Meeting the people who grow our cotton, forming personal connections with them, and seeing with my own eyes the positive impact of our collaboration with CmiA is definitely something I remember with pride.

It was also great to experience how CmiA provides support at challenging times when things don't go as planned. For instance, we had initially intended to source most of our cotton from Tanzania, but political considerations ultimately made it impossible to export cotton directly from Tanzania to our partner mill in Egypt. Fortunately, we were able to work together with CmiA to find a viable solution, which is why we now also source some of our CmiA Organic cotton from Benin.




**Ms Lodewijks, how has BESTSELLER’s direct-to-farm approach contributed to this success, and do you plan to pursue this strategy in future?**

Like any other large retailer or brand, BESTSELLER operates within a deeply layered and intricate value chain. Achieving full traceability back to the raw material producers is essential for obtaining reliable location data for all commodities at a sub-national level. The typical structure of procurement systems and the dynamics of textile fibre markets make it difficult to obtain farm-level data for raw materials, and sourcing locations can also vary from season to season.

The direct-to-farm model enables us to develop strategic, season-long plans with stakeholders throughout the value chain, working from one harvest to the next. This allows us to source organic cotton with the highest standards of integrity and to take effective action on the ground. Not only does this approach ensure the production of high-quality organic cotton, it also supports farming communities economically. In addition, we have integrated new technologies into the system to enhance traceability and efficiency. We will continue to expand our direct-to-farm approach in the future, especially as legislative and regulatory changes create incentives for us to go beyond traditional sourcing practices. This strategy aligns with our broader goal of ensuring both sustainability and regulatory compliance.

**What can we expect from BESTSELLER in 2025 and beyond, in terms of transforming the fashion industry?**

We are already working towards our 2030 goals by broadening our focus beyond greenhouse gas emissions and adopting a more comprehensive approach to our impact. For our cotton portfolio, this means achieving 100 percent traceability and making significant progress in transitioning raw material production. We are also directing investments towards fashion initiatives that seek to reduce waste and enhance recycling within the industry.

We have developed a holistic sustainability strategy that works with nature to shift from an extractive material production system to a model that supports supply chain resilience and that benefits communities (including farmers and other producers). We will continue to implement and support on-the-ground programmes with key partners like CmiA in order to build a more inclusive and resilient supply chain by engaging with local communities and our stakeholders.

# Down to Earth: A Successful Soil Project

One of the partners involved in the CAR-iSMa project was SAN-JFS, a CmiA-verified cotton company based in Mozambique. We spoke with Ivans Popinsky, the director of production at SAN-JFS, about the project and its impact on the ground. Ivans Popinsky holds a degree in agronomic sciences and a master's degree in soil and sustainable agriculture.

*We spoke with*

**Ivans Popinsky**
Director of Production
SAN-JFS

**Mr Popinsky, could you briefly outline what you consider to be the key outcomes of the CAR-iSMa project?**

A key outcome was the successful introduction of bokashi composting, which increased cotton yields by over 30 percent in our demonstration plots. The results were most significant in seasons marked by weather extremes, and this highlighted the practical benefits of using regenerative farming methods. We also introduced other techniques—such as biochar, composting, agroforestry, and intercropping—across more than 100 demonstration plots. In addition, a new tree nursery was established with the capacity to produce 200,000 seedlings per season, thereby contributing to soil restoration, biomass generation, erosion control and improved nutrition.

**Large-scale projects can fail to account for local conditions. Did CAR-iSMa do things differently?**

A key factor in this project's success was that it took local conditions seriously and designed its activities accordingly. For example, in many areas, farmers had no access to animal manure. Rather than forcing a one-size-fits-all solution, the project introduced bokashi, a method that uses locally available materials instead. Farmers appreciated this flexibility, and the increased yields convinced them that it was worth adopting. Another example was training. Rather than through formal, top-down training sessions, the project was delivered using visual tools, local languages, and field-based demonstrations. Trainers also worked closely with community leaders and lead farmers, which helped to embed knowledge within the communities and encouraged wider adoption. Feedback from farmers also played a direct role in shaping activities; for example, when women's groups showed interest in composting as a collective activity, we organised specific training tailored to their needs.

**What do you think was the secret to the success of CAR-iSMa?**

The combination of peer learning among cotton companies and of input from external scientists and consultants created a powerful catalyst for innovation and adaptation. Throughout the project, there were joint learning events, field visits, and virtual exchanges with other cotton companies, which allowed us to benchmark our progress, reflect on challenges, and adjust our activities quickly. The culture of mutual respect and openness helped foster a cohesive community of practice that will endure beyond the lifespan of the project. It also allowed us to make faster progress, avoid costly errors, and co-create solutions that were both technically sound and locally effective.

**How do you think the new techniques introduced by CAR-iSMa will impact small-scale farmers in Africa?**

Looking ahead, the momentum generated by AbTF is set to not only continue but grow, helping to bring climate-smart and regenerative agriculture into the mainstream among small-scale cotton farmers across Africa. These techniques are being adopted because they have proven themselves to be profitable, so it is important for us to show that regenerative farming can be good for business, not just for farmers but for the whole value chain. As the global market increasingly expects production to incorporate traceability, certification, and climate action, Africa has a chance to be a leader. In short, our vision is to build a system where small-scale cotton farmers are no longer at the mercy of climate and market shocks but become leaders in sustainable, resilient, and profitable farming practices.

# Witnessing the Shift in Farmers' Mindsets

The Regenerative Cotton Standard is ushering in a new era in sustainable cotton standards. We had the opportunity to speak with Vijay Shah, a partner at Vijay Cotton & Fibre Co. LLP and our partner in India, and Riyaz Haider, the founder and CEO of BioSustain, a cotton company verified under both CmiA Organic and RCS in Tanzania, who shared exclusive insights into their work on the ground.

*We spoke with*

**Vijay Shah**
Partner
Vijay Cotton & Fibre Co. LPP

**Riyaz Haider**
Founder and CEO
BioSustain

**Mr Shah, what motivated you to join and implement the Regenerative Cotton Standard?**

The decision to implement the Regenerative Cotton Standard was driven by our commitment to sustainable agriculture and to enhancing the livelihoods of small-scale farmers. This aligns well with our long-term vision of fostering resilient farming systems while addressing the challenges posed by climate change.

**Was it an easy sell among farmers, or did you face any challenges in gaining their support?**

Initially, many farmers were sceptical about adopting regenerative agriculture practices. However, through sustained awareness-raising campaigns, field demonstrations, and capacity-building initiatives, they gradually began to appreciate the benefits. Ultimately, many farmers showed increasing interest, particularly those who noticed improvements in soil conditions and water efficiency.

**Mr Haider, what opportunities does RCS open up for the future of Africa's cotton industry?**

RCS is an appealing standard for smallholders who use conventional farming methods but are becoming increasingly aware that using synthetic fertilisers damages the soil in the long term. RCS offers solutions for avoiding chemical fertilisers, such as applying compost or cattle manure and implementing crop rotation to enhance soil fertility.

**What is it about the RCS that leads you to recommend it to other cotton companies?**

Reflecting on the last two seasons, the most compelling aspect for me has been the noticeable rise in market demand for cotton verified under CmiA and RCS. Farmers have also reacted positively, observing how their soils have regenerated and their yields have increased. For us as a cotton company, this has translated into greater productivity and cost savings by embracing natural methods rather than relying on costly chemical solutions.

**Mr Shah, looking back at the implementation process, what experiences or moments stand out for you?**

One of the most impactful moments was witnessing the shift in farmers' mindsets as they experienced tangible benefits, such as improved soil fertility and lower input costs. The turning point came when farmers began voluntarily experimenting with regenerative practices beyond the demonstration plots. This made it clear that the initiative was on the path to success.

**Looking ahead to the next season, what do you expect to achieve?**

In the short term, we plan to expand the number of demonstration plots to continue building the confidence of farmers. Another aim is to establish input centres offering organic fertilisers, biochar, and other regenerative farming inputs. We also want to strengthen community engagement through targeted training sessions and farmer field schools. In addition, we will collaborate with research and development partners to test methods for enhancing yields and building climate resilience through regenerative agriculture.

# A Strong Focus on Pragmatism and Service

Knowing the origin and production methods of their raw materials is essential for brands and retailers to establish transparency in the textile supply chain, building trust, and avoiding greenwashing from the bottom up. For many years now, AbTF has collaborated with the IT consulting company Direction Software LLP, based in Mumbai, India, to develop robust tracking systems for its sustainable cotton and cashmere standards. We had the chance to interview Rupali Vagal, a project manager at Direction Software LLP, about the impact of the tracking systems, the daily endeavours to meet high quality requirements, and the latest developments in the field of transparency and traceability.

*We spoke with*

**Rupali Vagal**
**Project Manager**
**Direction Software LLP**

**Ms Vagal, reflecting on your long-standing cooperation with the Aid by Trade Foundation, how do the established tracking systems help partnering retailers and brands ensure traceability of CmiA cotton throughout global supply chains?**

In today's textile industry, transparency, security, and reliability are paramount, and the expectations for tracking systems are evolving rapidly. Including its latest updates, the Sustainable Cotton Tracker (SCOT) enables participants to trace the journey of CmiA-verified cotton throughout the entire textile production process, right up to the final product. With this system in place, retail and brand partners can ensure compliance and traceability in their supply chains and respond to the tightened regulations and laws at the international level.

**What sets your established tracking systems apart from other market solutions?**

It is our strong focus on pragmatism and service orientation. For years, we have developed these systems specifically for AbTF and its partners within the global textile supply chain. This long-standing experience has allowed us to deepen our knowledge and expertise in tracking technologies. Today, we are well equipped to implement digital solutions that not only meet current standards but also offer customised options for our partners. The system is regularly updated to address the changing needs and expectations of individual partners and of the textile industry as a whole.

**What shows you that the SCOT system is gaining traction among fashion brands and retailers?**

The number of partners, orders, and volumes has grown steadily over the years. Currently, over 2,700 companies in the textile supply chain are utilising our tracking systems, with new international retailers and brands continuously joining. To me, these numbers are the best proof of our systems' success and a testament to the value of our work!

**Artificial intelligence (AI) is coming to permeate all aspects of business operations, including in the textile sector. What opportunities do you foresee for AI to enhance tracking systems in the future?**

AI presents significant opportunities for tracking systems across all sectors. It elevates transparency and traceability to new heights. Not only will AI improve user-friendliness in the textile supply chain, but it will also enhance data security and reliability. By implementing automated reliability checks, AI can help prevent misinformation and detect fraud. I am genuinely excited about the impact AI will have on our work and its role in building trust in tracking systems.





# "Traceability Isn't Just About Tracking"

In 2024, the Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) and TextileGenesis™, a Lectra Group company, announced the continuation of their successful partnership to further enhance traceability for fibres verified under Cotton made in Africa® (CmiA). This new collaboration aims to reinforce supply chain transparency in line with CmiA's commitment to traceability in the textile supply chain. We spoke to Amit Gautam—who is the founder and CEO of TextileGenesis™ as well as the driving force behind the organisation, which boasts more than two decades of expertise in digital innovation, supply chain transparency, and sustainable materials—and we heard why he believes that trust is now the key currency of the global textile industry.

*We spoke with*

**Amit Gautam**
**Founder and CEO**
**TextileGenesis™**

**Reflecting on the first year of your collaboration, how would you say that TextileGenesis™ and The Good Cashmere Standard® (GCS) have enhanced transparency in the textile industry?**

TextileGenesis™ has opted for verifiable, tamper-proof traceability for GCS-verified fibres—ensuring brands can authenticate where their cashmere comes from with an up-to-date, digital proof of origin. By digitising transactions across the value chain, we prevent unauthorised blending, mislabelling, and greenwashing, giving both brands and consumers confidence in their sustainability claims.

**How does the technology of TextileGenesis™ address traceability challenges in the textile industry?**

Traceability isn't just about tracking—it's about proving authenticity and safeguarding against adulteration. TextileGenesis™ replaces self-reported claims with third-party-verified, immutable digital records, ensuring that transparency and credibility are maintained from fibre to finished product.

**The partnership recently expanded to include Cotton made in Africa®. What benefits does this offer to brands and retailers?**

With Cotton made in Africa® now being integrated into TextileGenesis™, brands can confidently verify the sources of their supplies, ensuring that the cotton was farmed under the strict sustainability and social impact standards upheld by CmiA. This collaboration enables us to provide proof of the authenticity of materials throughout the textile value chain, preventing false sustainability claims and offering end-to-end supply chain visibility, from farm to finished product. Additionally, it ensures a level of traceability that enables brands to meet regulatory and due diligence requirements.

**What are some key future challenges for implementing traceability, and what role will TextileGenesis™ play in meeting them?**

As regulations tighten and scrutiny intensifies, brands must move beyond making declarations to providing data-backed proofs of origin. The challenge lies in ensuring full transparency throughout the supply chain while protecting against mislabelling, substitution, and blind spots. TextileGenesis™ is at the forefront of this shift, providing tamper-proof digital traceability that eliminates supply chain opacity, offering authentication at each stage to ensure that materials retain their integrity, and incorporating compliance tools to help brands meet due diligence laws. Trust is the new currency in sustainability, and TextileGenesis™ is setting the benchmark for fibre-to-retail transparency.

# How to Shockproof Soil Against Climate Change

To meet the diverse challenges facing small-scale farmers in cotton cultivation, the Aid by Trade Foundation (AbTF) works closely with experts like Dr Hamouda Aichi, a soil health expert at Société d'Exploitation Cotonnière Olam (SECO) who holds a doctorate in soil science and is accredited to supervise academic research. Before joining SECO, he served as an associate professor, overseeing research and outreach activities related to soil surveys.



*We spoke with*

**Dr Hamouda Aichi**
**Soil Health Lead**
**SECO**

**SECO has employed you as an expert in soil conservation. Can you describe the key challenges facing farmers in northern Côte d'Ivoire in particular?**

The impacts of climate change are becoming a reality, and small-scale cotton farmers are experiencing erratic rainfall when planting their crops as well as excessive rainfall during harvests, resulting in problems such as soil erosion. Farmers who use synthetic chemical fertilisers and do not supplement them with enriched compost face declining yields year after year. What we are seeing in the Tchologo region is that soils are becoming acidic, resulting in low yields and poor fibre quality, which in turn undermines farmers' productivity and livelihoods.

**You are responsible for introducing innovative methods that make use of local resources. Which ones have been introduced?**

To mitigate climate change and improve soil health, SECO is spearheading a transition in cotton production towards a regenerative farming system. Our key priorities focus on improving farmers' livelihoods and sequestering carbon in the soil through regenerative agricultural practices. We are actively scaling up the production and use of biochar and bokashi. Combining these methods offers a cost-effective and sustainable solution for improving soil fertility and crop yields while also improving farmers' economic prospects.

**Which techniques do you consider to be particularly promising?**

We are focussing on two soil improvement techniques: biochar and bokashi. Biochar is produced by subjecting harvested cotton stalks to pyrolysis in open pits, thereby transforming the biomass into carbon. When applied to the soil, it improves its ability to retain moisture and nutrients. It also removes carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. The other method is bokashi, which is an organic compost that takes as little as two weeks to prepare; during this time, organic matter in the bokashi pile is activated by anaerobic bacteria and fungi. Bokashi promotes healthy soil by stimulating microbial activity, improving the soil's structure, and enriching it with bioavailable nutrients. The combined method, known as "biokashi", has been adopted by cotton farms in the Tchologo region, where it has the potential to reduce chemical runoff and soil erosion while improving the soil's structure and its ability to retain water. Healthier soil leads to more resilient crops, lower input costs, and increased yields. Biokashi has the potential to increase farmers' profits.

**What feedback have agricultural advisers and farmers given about your innovations?**

The field teams have shown consistent dedication to implementing regenerative agricultural practices while prioritising respect for both human beings and the environment. Producers have expressed a strong interest in acquiring new skills that would enable them to reduce their reliance on synthetic fertilisers and other agrochemicals for enhancing their crop yields. They are proud of their efforts to improve the health of the soil, and they are aware of the direct benefits this brings for their households' well-being.

**Do you think the CmiA-supported Innovations Club could be a vehicle for spreading soil preservation methods, like the ones you have developed, to other cotton-producing regions?**

Yes, indeed. The Innovations Club serves as a forum for the exchange of ideas among scientists, development agencies, and leading producers, thus playing a pivotal role in the dissemination of innovative techniques. When I personally attended a session of the Innovations Club in 2024, I found it to be a valuable learning experience that gave me the opportunity to exchange ideas with colleagues, compare local initiatives with those implemented by other organisations, and expand my professional network.

# “Responsibility Without Compromising Quality”

Since 2024, Mango, one of Europe’s leading fashion groups, has been advancing on its path to sustainability by incorporating cashmere verified under The Good Cashmere Standard (GCS) into its product lines. We had the pleasure of talking to Teresa Pérez, an environmental manager at Mango, to get an insight into the role of sustainable cashmere within the company.

*We spoke with*

**Teresa Pérez**
Environmental Manager
Mango

**Ms Teresa Pérez, what are the key objectives behind your decision to partner with The Good Cashmere Standard?**

At Mango, our sustainability strategy is built on three pillars; our partnership with The Good Cashmere Standard® aligns with all three, reinforcing our dedication to environmental responsibility, ethical labour practices, and sustainable materials.

Under our Committed to Planet pillar, we prioritise animal welfare. Since GCS sets a benchmark for ethical cashmere production, ensuring the well-being of goats and promoting responsible land management, our Animal Welfare Policy recognises GCS as a key standard for sustainable sourcing.

Equally important is our Committed to People pillar, which focusses on improving the livelihoods of people in our supply chain. By supporting GCS-verified cashmere, we help ensure fair working conditions for herders and their communities.

Finally, through our Committed to Product pillar, we are continuously expanding the use of lower-impact materials in our collections. GCS-verified cashmere meets sustainability and ethical criteria, so it offers a responsible alternative without compromising quality.

**Reflecting on your journey with GCS, what key milestones have you achieved so far?**

In 2024, we reached a milestone in terms of the cashmere used in our collections, specifically within our knitwear lines for men and women: 50 percent now comes from GCS-verified farms. Additionally, 35 percent of the cashmere we used was recycled, reinforcing our efforts to reduce environmental impact and promote a circular economy.

**How does Mango communicate its commitment to sustainability and responsible fashion to customers?**

We do this through multiple channels to ensure that our customers are informed and empowered to make active choices. Firstly, we provide detailed information about our sustainability path on our corporate website. Secondly, we focus on customer education through our "Handle With Care" videos, which guide customers on how to care for their garments properly. And finally, in our physical stores, we emphasise the value of responsible materials like cashmere through informative displays, to ensure customers understand the benefits of choosing high-quality and ethically sourced products.

**Looking ahead, what is your vision for the future of your cooperation with The Good Cashmere Standard?**

Our vision is to deepen our commitment to responsible cashmere sourcing and expand its use throughout our collections. As part of our Sustainable Vision 2030, our goal is that 100 percent of the cashmere we use will be more responsible by 2030, whether it comes from GCS-verified farms or is recycled. This year, we will expand the use of GCS-verified cashmere beyond knitwear to include new types of products, such as scarves, gloves, and hats. As we delve deeper into understanding and prioritising our relationship with biodiversity and nature, we are convinced that GCS is a crucial partner for improving our impact on both animal welfare and biodiversity. Furthermore, we see this partnership as an opportunity to achieve better traceability and supply chain transparency for our cashmere products. Our collaboration with GCS will help us make it even clearer where our cashmere comes from.

# “We Can’t Blame Local Communities”

Inner Mongolia boasts vast grasslands that are renowned for their size and beauty. They also serve as key grazing areas for livestock and play a crucial role in the region's ecosystem. How can we protect these grasslands while maintaining sustainable cashmere production and supporting herding communities in becoming more resilient to the impacts of climate change and the loss of biodiversity? We posed this question to Dr Adam Cobb, the founder of the Holobiont Hub. He discovered his passion for plants, microbes, and soils while visiting New Zealand 17 years ago; since then, his career has taken him across the world as he taught numerous university courses, contributed to more than 20 research publications, and engaged with agricultural and ecological projects around the world.

*We spoke with*

**Dr Adam Cobb**
**Founder**
**Holobiont Hub**

**Dr Cobb, what are the main drivers of biodiversity loss and land degradation, which are harming the grasslands upon which herders rely?**

From the top down, climate change is the biggest threat to biodiversity—especially the loss of precipitation predicted due to hotter and drier global patterns. This presents a double danger because rain that used to fall over several months, during a wet season, may now fall in a shorter timeframe, causing floods and even mudslides.

From the bottom up, humans are driving a lot of grassland biodiversity loss, especially of plant species, because we often overexploit ecosystems beyond their capacity to regenerate. Overgrazing commonly results in the deaths of individual plants and a loss of fertility over time. However, we can’t blame local communities, which are facing increasing economic pressure, when international, profit-driven priorities are the root cause.

**What positive impacts do the protection and restoration of biodiversity and healthy grasslands have on animal husbandry?**

In fact, nearly 60 percent of the species on planet Earth live in soil, and even more species—including humans—are directly dependent on healthy soil to meet their fundamental needs. Biodiversity is a critical goal, and it must be maintained, increased, and protected. Across the Earth, regenerating biodiversity ultimately results in greater productivity, especially of plants that animals rely on for foraging.

**What measures could be implemented by herders to restore degraded grasslands and achieve a favourable balance between effective agriculture and resilient habitats?**

There are three main actions that can make a huge difference. Firstly, carefully planned and managed grazing. We humans need to create movement schedules for domestic livestock to make sure they don’t overconsume resources at any particular location. Secondly, even with the best management of herds, some key plants (like legumes) tend to become rarer in an area after a few seasons. So, as humans, we need to observe changes in the plant community and, for example, reseed to maintain biodiversity. Finally, there are usually opportunities to make small interventions that can boost the productive capacity of grassland areas. Perhaps that involves a little enrichment with certain nutrients, rechannelling a stream to prevent erosion, or some planned burning. People can relearn how to be mindful caretakers of the ecosystem, something that many Indigenous communities never forgot!

**Do you think herders can reap direct benefits from implementing the above-mentioned measures?**

Absolutely. The functions and productivity of grasslands need to be maintained and kept above a certain threshold; otherwise, herding communities will no longer be viable. Instead of watching grasslands degrade under the weight of overgrazing and other environmental threats, we could get busy, across every agricultural supply chain, creating the incentives and other key conditions that would support biodiversity and ecological land stewardship. It is our only choice for a positive future.

# Managing a Breakthrough for Animal Welfare

In 2024, The Good Cashmere Standard® introduced the Animal Welfare Assessment (AWA) and undertook a pilot project to test it. The assessment equips GCS auditors with essential tools for evaluating a range of animal welfare indicators, from the physical health of goats to the quality of their living conditions. It delivers valuable insights into various aspects of animal welfare, going beyond standard verification procedures. We spoke with three experts involved in the pilot: Vanessa Löwenich, a project manager at the Aid by Trade Foundation; Edward Xu, an auditor at LRQA (an independent verification body commissioned by GCS); and Anna Heaton, the lead for animal materials at Textile Exchange.

*We spoke with*

**Anna Heaton**
Lead for Animal Materials
Textile Exchange

**Edward Xu**
Auditor
LRQA

**Vanessa Löwenich**
Project Manager
Aid by Trade Foundation

**Mr Xu, how would you judge the impact of the Animal Welfare Assessment on how the conditions of goat herds are recorded and analysed?**

As far as I am aware, GCS represents the first large-scale application of this tool in the cashmere goat herding community. By pioneering this assessment, GCS not only defines specific parameters—such as nutrition, the environment, health, or land management—but paints a more complete picture of the goat herd's condition. It helps to detect both short-term challenges and potential long-term issues related to the overall well-being of the herd. When analysing the data, this integrated approach allows you to make a more accurate assessment of the root causes of problems you observe—at the level of individual animals.

**How are seasonal variations accounted for within the evaluation process?**

We adapt data collection and monitoring methods to address seasonal vulnerabilities, conducting more frequent inspections during critical periods, such as checking for frostbite in winter and heat stress in summer. We also use sensors to monitor environmental parameters like temperature and humidity, which helps herders tailor health measures based on seasonal risks. The process can also be adapted to the time of the year by monitoring for indicators relevant to health interventions, veterinary controls, and vaccinations when particular diseases or parasites are more common.

**What other benefits does the AWA provide to herders?**

Animal welfare assessments boost animal welfare while also gaining economic benefits and improving resource efficiency. For example, systematic assessments enable herders to identify health risks quickly, leading to reductions in both treatment costs and mortality rates.

**Ms Heaton, the combination of animal welfare assessments and standards is still unusual and innovative within the industry. Why has it not yet been widely adopted?**

Animal welfare assessments go beyond simply confirming the provision of resources to ensure animals receive proper nutrition, maintain good health, and live in good environments. They take a much closer look at whether these resources really are being used to deliver better welfare. By their nature, animal welfare assessments are much more complicated, and additional auditor training is required so that the assessments can be carried out effectively. But they can be a supporting factor when determining non-conformance and can also be used to get an overview of herd or flock welfare on the certified farm.

**Do you believe the assessments can accelerate improvements in animal welfare?**

Yes. I think the training and learning that come along the assessments will help to increase farmers' understanding of their animals' welfare. When an animal welfare assessment is carried out, the farmers or herders will have had the process explained to them. This can help them better understand the behaviour of their animals and the ways in which this is linked to animal management. This should make them more alert to any problems at an early stage. If this kind of understanding can be spread amongst the farmer or herder community, there is the potential to improve animal welfare on a larger scale.

**What stands out to you the most when reviewing the initial results from the pilot project?**

It was great to see how widely the pilot was being undertaken and how much take-up there "was: over 70 farms with more than 2,000 goats. The initial results were broadly very encouraging and helpfully raised more questions about the future development of welfare assessment. For example, in the the latency-to-first-contact assessment, very few goats approached the assessors, but this test may be better carried out by seeing if the goats approach the farmer or herder who will be familiar to them, rather than a stranger.

**Can the Animal Welfare Assessment provide a reliable overview of the overall condition of the entire herd, rather than just reflecting its state on the day of inspection?**

Many of the outcome assessments look at longer-term results of management input. For example, overgrown feet or thinness do not happen overnight but are indicative of longer-term management. The animal welfare assessments can therefore support other observations about the resources that are provided to the animals as a reflection of overall herd condition.

**Ms Löwenich, what motivated the Aid by Trade Foundation to create the Animal Welfare Assessment?**

At AbTF, our commitment to animal welfare is unwavering. The AWA pilot project positions us to lead by example and drive meaningful progress in goat welfare. It's an important tool that not only pays attention to the condition of the herd but also collects quantifiable data at the level of the individual animals—data that are shared with herders and used by us to constantly improve ourselves and identify emerging challenges.

**What additional features does this tool offer that go beyond the current GCS standard?**

Animal Welfare indicators can be categorised into three types: resource- and management-oriented as well as animal-based. The AWA closes the gap in animal-related issues, and that is what makes it special. The animals themselves are included in the assessment, rather than just focussing on the man-made environment. Additionally, it not only pays attention to the condition of the herd but also collects quantifiable data at the level of the individual animals—data that are shared with herders and used by us to improve and identify emerging challenges.

**Looking ahead, how does the Aid by Trade Foundation plan to use these findings?**

We are particularly interested in the influence of seasonal variations and methods of management on animal welfare. We have therefore decided to carry out a follow-up project in 2025 to increase the size of our database generally, to focus on some seasons more specifically, and to document management routines practised on the farms. In the medium term, we hope to generate data that can be used both to guide and support implementation at the farm level.

We look forward to another year of supporting producer communities, protecting nature, and shaping futures.

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