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Topic 1: Promoting a Circular Economy in the Textile Sector
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The textile industry is one of the most globalized industries in the world, providing essential products such as clothing, footwear, and household materials, while creating job opportunities.[1] However, the industry's production and consumption practices have led to serious environmental consequences. All textile production leaves a carbon footprint, and the size of that footprint depends heavily on the type of fabric used and the production process. On average, natural fibers have a lower carbon footprint than synthetic fibers, which require more energy and chemicals to be produced.[2]

Through the spinning, dyeing, and transporting of fibers, the textile sector accounts for about 2-8% of global greenhouse gas emissions.[3] Without effective intervention, these consequences will intensify. These impacts have surged in recent years largely due to the rise of fast fashion.[4] Fast fashion is encouraged by digital media's rapidly changing trends, often utilizing high-carbon-emitting synthetic fibers, and other unsustainable materials. Due to limited durability and short-lived trendiness, fast fashion garments are produced, consumed, and then discarded after short periods of use. Thus landfills and waste management systems cannot keep up. Every year, nearly 92 million tonnes of textile waste are generated globally.[5] Additionally, synthetic fibers shed during washing and wear account for an estimated 9% of the microplastic

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1 https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/00405175241236971?casa_token=ljQrtcwE3D8AAAAA%3AGn_6zgM8K7y6VHOAkh15SK4o1DaHb1nhIsI08OgltZsHTiUSqvlE8n1xFxVfRw5brcRvllOmtGbJdco
2 Ibid.
3 https://wedocs.unep.org/items/4c1fd2bd-857c-4f20-ba04-49d6e46f4803
4 https://www.unep.org/en/news-and-stories/technical-highlight/governments-call-global-textiles-policy-dialogue
5 https://www.unep.org/en/news-and-stories/press-release/unsustainable-fashion-and-textiles-focus-international-day-zero

polluting the world's oceans.[6] Between 2000 and 2015, clothing production has doubled, and the average number of times a garment was worn has decreased by 36%.[7]

This sharp growing demand for new clothing has forced companies to overproduce in an attempt to keep up. Many companies churn out more clothing than their customers ultimately purchase, leaving unsold items to be discarded without ever being worn. This cycle wastes valuable resources and increases the environmental impact of textile production.

UNEP is working toward creating a circular economy in the textile sector. A circular economy aims to keep garments and materials in use for as long as possible by remedying unsustainable consumption patterns, improving practices, and investing in proper infrastructure.[8] UNEP states that its main strategies in advancing sustainable development are, "countering misinformation, reducing messages perpetuating overconsumption, redirecting aspiration to more sustainable lifestyles, and empowering consumers to demand greater action from businesses and policymakers."[9]

Some questions to consider when doing your research:

1. What role does your country play in the global textile industry?
    a. Are you a producer or consumer, an exporter or an importer, or a combination?
    b. How much does your economy and workforce depend on the textile sector?
2. Does your country already have programs or policies in place to curb overproduction and the textile industry carbon footprint? If so, what are they?
3. Has your country previously supported or opposed any UNEP initiatives related to sustainable development or production. If so, which?
4. Who is responsible for addressing the environmental consequences of the overproduction in the industry: governments or corporations? If the corporations are responsible, what should be done to ensure compliance?

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[6] https://wedocs.unep.org/items/4c1fd2bd-857c-4f20-ba04-49d6e46f4803
[7] https://www.unep.org/en/events/unea/connecting-threads-coordinated-policy-response-transform-textile-value-chain-and-offer
[8] https://buildingcircularity.org/textiles/
[9] Ibid.

5. How can developing countries, who depend heavily on textile manufacturing, transition toward more sustainable production without sacrificing economic opportunity?
6. What specific initiatives would your country support? How can these initiatives be funded?

Some guiding sources:

https://www.unep.org/en

https://buildingcircularity.org/

https://www.unep.org/en/what-we-do/chemicals-and-pollution-action/circularity-sectors/unep-textile-initiative

https://neptjournal.com/upload-images/(51)B-4077.pdf

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If you have any questions or thoughts, please do not hesitate to reach out to me at slinden@mail.yu.edu. I am looking forward to meeting all of you and having an amazing conference!

Sincerely,

Sabrina Linden

Chair, United Nations Environment Programme

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