

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Solutions to fashion's sustainability problems lie in supply chains

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Kering continues its sustainability efforts by launching a new regenerative fund with Conservation International. Image courtesy of Kering

By SARAH RAMIREZ

Sustainability is a balancing act for luxury fashion brands that want to continue selling clothing, but examining supply chains is essential to addressing the industry's harmful impacts.

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During a panel led by Vogue Business senior sustainability editor Rachel Cernansky at the [Vogue Business and Shopify Sustainability Forum](#) on May 26, experts addressed the environmental and social costs of the fashion industry. While there is currently a lack of transparency around brands' sustainability efforts, changes in supply chain can make positive impacts.

"Currently we're exceeding planetary boundaries," said Dr. Helen Crowley, head of sustainable sourcing and nature initiatives at [Kering](#), Paris. "So when you think of it like that, it's not just about reducing our negative footprint, or a negative way of doing things.

"[Sustainability] is actually restoring, protect, regenerating and rebuilding the health of the Earth," she said.

Fashion's responsibility

Both fast fashion and luxury fashion brands contribute to environmental issues, including pollution, a heavy reliance on synthetic materials, excess waste and more. As consumer awareness around sustainability grows, labels are touting their eco-friendly practices.

However, there is limited transparency and knowledge around the subject, both at the brand and consumer levels.

"What we're seeing right now is a lot of what is known as greenwashing," said Hadeel Osman, creative director and researcher at [Fashion Revolution Sudan](#). "There's a lot of like PR fluff going on about what sustainability can be, and what it's becoming.

"The true background of sustainability is three pillars: social, economical and environmental," she said. "What we're see is a lot of emphasis on the economical in terms of how these brands and how the industry as a whole is profiting we're not looking at the societal value of it."

One linchpin of many brands' sustainability strategies is circularity, including secondhand resale. While high-quality luxury apparel can be sold secondhand to other affluents interested in accessible pieces, the reality is most used clothing ends up in African countries for recycling and eventually ends up in landfills.

According to Ms. Osman, however, there is no exact data about how much secondhand clothing is taken back by brand programs to eventually be exported. Dr. Crowley agreed that recycling and upcycling programs cannot be the sole solutions to sustainability in fashion efficiency is essential.

As Ngozi Okaro, founder of [Custom Collaborative](#), pointed out, overproduction is not solely a fast fashion problem.

Luxury brands including British label Burberry have been criticized in the past for destroying overstock, a practice seen as wasteful, to avoid having products sold on the "gray market." In recent years, luxury brands have discontinued this practice amid consumer and government scrutiny ([see story](#)).

"Businesses have to figure out the demand and actual supply," Ms. Okaro said. "One thing that some companies are doing some relatively smaller companies, but I think that it can extend to others is making things to order.

"In fact, even making clothes to order would also help with the way our clothes fit; clothes could also be made to measure," she said. "We have so much technological capability, but I think especially in luxury.

"There is no need for overproduction, we can really match people's desires to what we produce."

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