



Factory support programme:

Continuous improvement of labour conditions in Tamil Nadu, India



Background

The collective project '[Factory support programme: continuous improvement of labour conditions in Tamil Nadu, India](#)' aims to improve working conditions in the south Indian state by addressing social issues. The focus of the in-factory training programme is twofold: creating awareness of worker rights and responsibilities, and establishing functioning worker-management committees in compliance with Indian labour laws and regulations. To those ends, the project includes trainings on worker-management committees, training programmes in workers' hostels, and thematic workshops for factory management. Additionally, the project involves activities on the improvement of policies and practices of the participating companies and strengthening a regional level helpline for garment and textile workers in Tamil Nadu. Central themes to the project are discrimination & gender, child labour, forced labour, freedom of association, living wage, and health & safety in the workplace. The project started in September 2020 with seven AGT signatories which in September 2021 were joined by another AGT signatory, Erve Europe.

The eight **AGT** signatories that participate in the project are: [Euretco](#), [Fabienne Chapot](#), [HEMA](#), [O'Neill](#), [Prénatal](#), [The Sting](#), [WE Fashion](#) and [Erve Europe](#), will cooperate with their suppliers and with [Arisa](#), [Mondiaal FNV](#), [SAVE](#) (a Tamil Nadu based NGO) and the [AGT Secretariat](#) to address risks in their supply chain. The project is funded by the Dutch government's Fund for Responsible Business (FVO) and by contributions of the participating companies. The project started in September 2020 and will run for three years.



In-factory trainings

In the first year, the participating companies nominated a total of 29 suppliers (incl. 12 suppliers beyond CMT) for the in-factory training programme. By 1 December 2021, six of these suppliers had started the training programme, which consist of trainings to the top management, middle management and the workers. After the trainings, worker committee elections are organised, followed by capacity building for the elected committee members regarding the processing of complaints.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic hitting India extremely hard, in-factory trainings were put on hold between March and August 2021. Yet, at one of the CMT suppliers the training programme was completed in year 1. Its management was trained on how to anticipate on complaints, and workers were informed about their rights. At the end of the programme worker-management committees were formed which successfully addressed complaints on working hours, health and safety, and the provision of wage slips. According to the factory management the training programme and improved functioning of committees also resulted in a decrease of worker absenteeism (approx. 20 to 6 per cent) and a reduction of re-work (27 to 12 per cent).

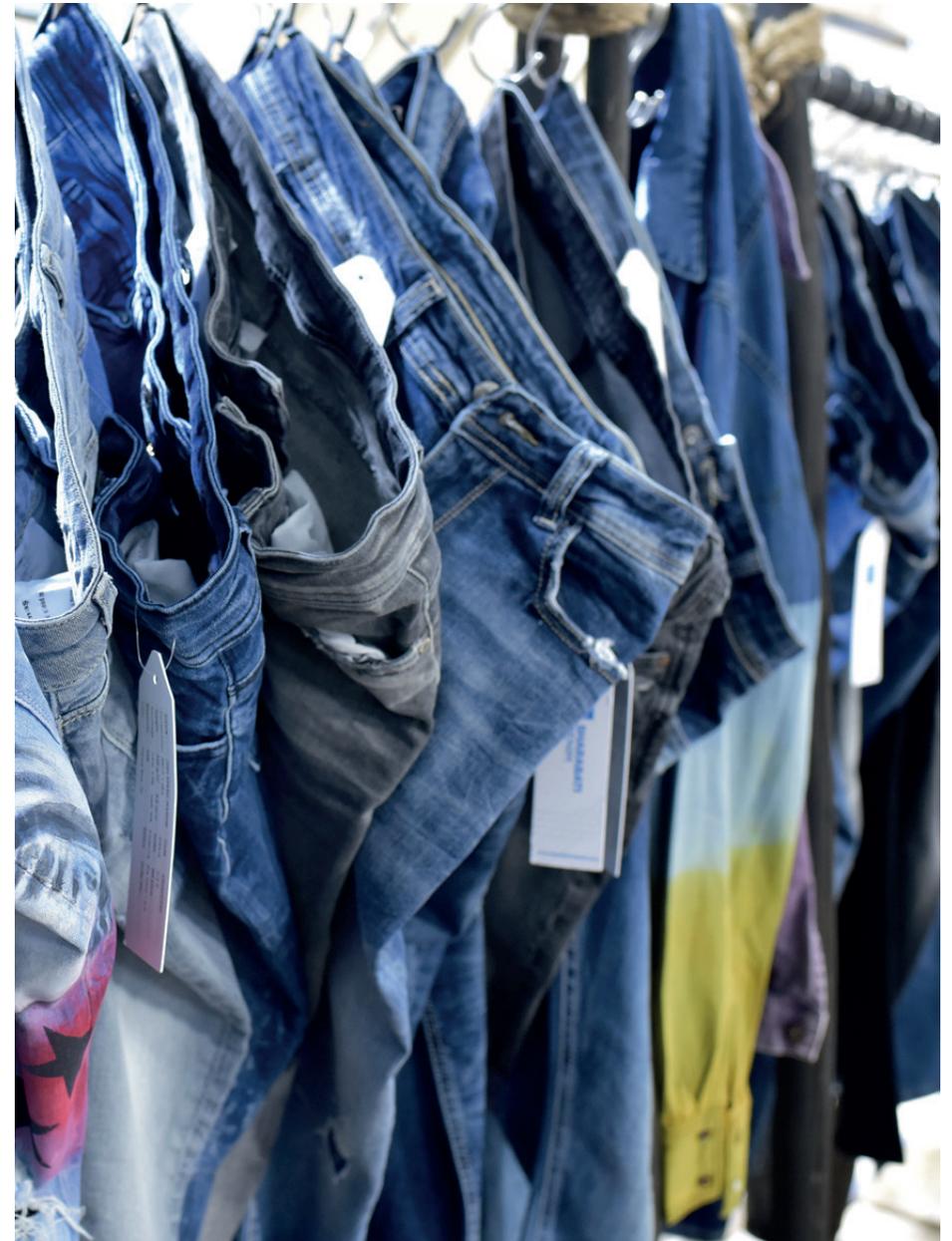
Viyakula Mary, Executive Director SAVE (left), during an in-factory training



Insight in supply chains and engagement with suppliers

Not only suppliers actively participate in the project. Since the project's inception, participating companies have been working on supply chain mapping, and improving their systems to manage supply chain data. Companies have closely engaged with their suppliers, stressing the importance of workers being free to file complaints, which subsequently need to be addressed. This dialogue with suppliers is a continuous effort. In the first project year, learning sessions about e.g. contract labour and labour law revisions were organised for the participating companies and their suppliers. On top of that, all project partners participated in quarterly (online) meetings, and had separate meetings with their suppliers, SAVE and/or Arisa. Arisa regularly shared updates with brands on the Covid-19 situation in Tamil Nadu. In accordance with those updates, brands contacted their suppliers to see whether any action was needed.

The project results are monitored through a digital system. Information about the project and results (at aggregated level) is shared on the website www.fasupro.com.



Workers' helpline

One of the project aims is strengthening the regional workers' helpline that is run by SAVE. SAVE promoted its helpline in neighbourhoods in Tirupur where garment workers are living. In year 1 a total of 416 calls were received by the helpline. Almost half of the complaints, 201 in total, were solved successfully, with the outstanding cases still being handled. Common topics of complaint are: access to social security, health insurance and pension schemes, and lack of freedom of movement, and excessive

working hours. Complaints about suppliers who produce for AGT signatories will be communicated with the respective signatories, to contribute to their risk analyses, and where needed for their support for the remediation of complaints. With the support of Arisa, SAVE is reviewing its grievance handling procedure and is drafting a formal policy document on the handling of grievances filed via the helpline.



Alignment with other initiatives

Several other supply chain responsibility initiatives are active in The Tamil Nadu region. Alignment with these initiatives was actively sought. Calls were organised with the German Partnership for Sustainable Textiles (PST) and Freedom Fund (including the Tamil Nadu Alliance). The PST strives to improve conditions in global textile supply networks, from the production of raw materials to the disposal of textiles, while Freedom Fund primarily fights against modern slavery. During the joint calls, the content of the different programmes was discussed, as well as possibilities for alignment and collaboration. Training tools and programme documents were shared. The regular exchange with the PST resulted in a joint workshop with SAVE and trainers of a German brand to exchange learnings and challenges regarding in-factory trainings on worker-management committees. And in the participation of the PST in a webinar on the labour law revisions in India.

In the summer of 2021 a [support letter](#) for the wage negotiations by the newly formed Minimum Wages Committee in Tamil Nadu was shared with the committee members. Signatories of the letter were the AGT, most of its affiliated companies that source from Tamil Nadu, trade associations and NGO's. They welcome the establishment of this committee and a positive outcome of the negotiations for the workers and textile industry in Tamil Nadu.





Key lessons learned

Participating brands mentioned to have learned a lot from the first year of their participation in the Factory support programme: improved insight in recent developments in the Tamil Nadu garment and textile sector, for example about the labour law revisions; effects of the Covid-19 pandemic on employers and workers; and an improved understanding of contract labour practices. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, brand representatives could not travel to Tamil Nadu, while they do consider this essential for taking forward the communication with suppliers on critical topics such as contract labour. It is also important for doing due diligence beyond CMT suppliers and the nomination of sub-suppliers for the in-factory training programme. The project partners hope to be able to visit Tamil Nadu in the second year of the project.

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