

A close-up portrait of Bastiaan Mohrmann, a middle-aged man with short, graying hair, wearing glasses, a dark suit jacket, a light blue shirt, and a dark tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a neutral expression.

‘BGMEA is really conscious about the importance of having a sustainable industry’

Bastiaan Mohrmann is the Chair of the Steering Committee of Bangladesh Partnership for Cleaner Textile (PaCT) and Co-Head of the 2030 Water Resources Group (2030 WRG) for Asia and the Middle East. He has been deeply involved in ensuring environmental sustainability in the Bangladesh garment and textile industry for several years. *The Apparel Story* talks to him about different aspects of PaCT and 2030 WRG.



The PaCT is a cluster of partners where the BGMEA is an extremely important team member with IFC and Solidaridad. We have also got brands and partners. It's a team effort aimed at transforming the sector. PaCT has so far taken a number of initiatives such as Cleaner Production Program, Textile Technology Business Center (TTBC), cluster approach, etc. All these programs are raising awareness in getting tools, resources and knowledge for decision making and, implementation of the decisions.

Bangladesh's Garment Industry has been working in the area of environment and sustainability for quite a few years. How do you assess the current position of the country's garment industry?

Bastiaan: If we look at sustainability – there are two types: social and environmental. In the environmental section, since we have been active here, there have been some noteworthy changes in the last 3-4 years. There is rapid adoption of good practices. It's heartening to note that nowadays, most of the leaders of the industry are very advanced in adopting best practices. However, the waterways of Dhaka are still being polluted, which means we haven't turned the tide as yet. So, there is ought to be an effort to understand – why the rest of the sector is reluctant to come on board. Naturally, a huge job remains to be done.

Bangladesh Water PaCT has been working for environmental sustainability. How will you evaluate the contribution of PaCT to the industry?

PaCT, I will say, has been kicking the ball significantly forward. The PaCT is a cluster of partners where the BGMEA is an extremely important team member with IFC and Solidaridad. We have also got brands and partners. It's a team effort aimed at transforming the sector. PaCT has so far taken a number of initiatives such as Cleaner Production Program, Textile Technology Business Center (TTBC), cluster approach, etc. All these programs are raising awareness in getting tools, resources and knowledge for decision making and, implementation of the decisions.

PaCT is getting a lot attention from factories, which means it's achieving the objectives.

The PaCT program will expire in December 2016. Will we see an extension?

I certainly hope so! We already had a brainstorming meeting with key partners, including BGMEA, brands and others, in understanding what the key features of PaCT-2 could be. There is broad agreement on the usefulness of PaCT-2. It will be a different program from two angles. PaCT-1 is an open platform. But essentially, in terms of partnership, it was 'one size fits all'. So a partner

was engaged in all the mechanisms of PaCT.

But I think that PaCT-2 might have a different configuration. BGMEA will step up its role in the overall drive and coordination as a core actor, with close support from IFC. Donors like the Netherlands Embassy and others will contribute.

There should be greater flexibility to structure partnerships around certain topics; may-be it is how to bring cleaner production to smaller factories or tier-2 factories which do not have sophisticated management system as the leaders in the sector'. This is one area that really needs to be tackled. Another area might be the question of finance. The third issue might be on heightened brand collaboration. Then one partner might not be associated with all parts of the program. Clearly, there is a need and urgency for PaCT-2.

The PaCT-2 will reach the year 2021 when the industry touches the milestone of \$50 billion in RMG exports. We might have reached 30 percent or so of clean textile sector transformation at the end of PaCT-1 and after PaCT-2 we may reach another 30 percent of that goal. By 2021 when Bangladesh celebrates her 50th anniversary, the vast majority of the industry should have adopted the culture of cleaner production.

Pease tell us about the plans of IFC as regards to 2030 Water Resource Group.

While PaCT-2 is focusing on the sector, going deep in the industry and operating at the firm level, including technologies, finance, management systems, procuring practices of brands, mainstreaming sustainability in the operations, the 2030 Water Resource Group (2030 WRG) is operating at the macro and medium-level.

2030 WRG is not limited to the textile industry only, rather it is improving water resource management across the nation. It is a multi-stakeholder partnership where the industry is collaborating with the public sector, the government and the civil society.

In consultation with key stakeholders we have tentatively identified three focus areas: 1) restoration of the Greater Dhaka Watershed; 2) agri-water efficiency (particularly in North West region);

and 3) water governance and policies. The first work-stream offers considerable opportunities to collaborate closely with PaCT-1 and PaCT-2, with BGMEA as a vital partner and stakeholder.

Green factories are coming to Bangladesh and already 18 factories have been LEED certified by the US Green Building Council (USGBC) while 67 have been enlisted in the USGBC. How do you see this development?

This is indeed a positive development. But I am concerned that sometimes it only delivers a partial answer, giving the false impression of a complete solution. For example, when a green factory is certified, no evaluation of effluent treatment is included.

There is considerable focus on water and energy efficiency, which is of course excellent. But it does not indicate how efficiently the effluent plant is being operated.

Operating ETP is a real challenge for a lot of entrepreneurs because it is costly and complicated. So while it is good to have a green building or factory, we must not forget that this does not cover all the environmental aspects.

How do you see the role BGMEA has been playing in the area of environmental sustainability?

I have noticed that the BGMEA is constantly growing and evolving in its role. For the last 4-5 years it has been associated with a marked transformation of the industry.

Today, BGMEA is really conscious about the importance of having a sustainable industry. However, there are still rooms for it to expand.

Since BGMEA has a cordial relationship with BKMEA and other associations, it can utilize its leverage for overall sector transformation.

However, there are smaller factories which don't have sophisticated engineers and other resources, and there is no pressure point for them to improve.

There are a lot of supply chains outside the arena we are discussing; the question is who will tackle them and the staggering pollution they are creating? These factories are still extracting a lot of groundwater; then there are factories who are not producing for either buying agents or the established brands.

All these aspects need to be addressed!

BGMEA should think how it can

expand its role as the premier industry association and find partners inside and outside to tackle the more difficult actors of the industry.

Bangladesh formulated rules and regulations regarding environment. Do you think they need any amendment? How strong are our environment laws?

The environment laws are not a major constraint for effecting sector transformation. But important factors are the method of their implementation plus the capacity of the Department of Environment.

There is often an imbalance between resources of the industry and polluters on one hand, and the public sector and enforcing agencies on the other. Leaders of the industry, including BGMEA, should be concerned about improving that balance to create a level playing field for the whole sector.

Transparency and public disclosure, as practiced in current day China with support from civil society initiatives like IPE, should be explored and promoted to strengthen compliance with environmental laws.

I think the optimum approach should be to have an industry lead partnering with the government.

