

#BeatPollution



TRANSFORMING THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY

# Partnering for circularity

## The problem

The textile sector is **interconnected and globalized**. To meaningfully reduce the sector's environmental impacts, the hotspots along the entire value chain - meaning areas of high environmental impact and thus where improvements are needed - need to be addressed. But, those areas causing most of the negative impacts and where improvements are most needed might be outside the immediate control of a small textile business. For example, a fabric manufacturer might not feel it can influence the farming practices of its cotton supplier.

This is where **partnerships play a key role in enabling life cycle thinking**—an approach that looks beyond individual stages, like manufacturing, to consider the full range of a product's impacts across its entire life cycle. By **bringing together diverse insights** from across the value chain, partners **help develop solutions** with environmental, social and economic benefits.

## Did you know?

The Kenyan textile industry contributes:

**14%** of national employment

Provides livelihoods for over  
**2.5 million people**

Generates an annual turnover of  
**USD 564 million**

## What is InTex?



The InTex programme, part of the **UNEP Textile Initiative**, works with governments and SMEs in countries where textiles are a key economic driver, encouraging a shift from a linear take, make and dispose process to a more sustainable, circular model. The programme does this by supporting national-level policy changes that enable a shift towards circularity. It also helps companies understand the impact of the resources they are using, spurring them to optimize production processes, reduce environmental harms and change the way they do business. This gives businesses a competitive edge.

**The textile industry is one of Kenya's major manufacturing industries and an important pillar of the country's economy.** Yet, this is an industry with a big environmental footprint, from its use of land and water to the emissions it generates, as well as its impacts on human health. But positive change is happening, and there is a lot of opportunity for real impact.

## By the numbers

To date in Kenya, South Africa and Tunisia



**32 SMEs**

applied UNEP's eco-innovation methodology



**10 LCAs**

conducted following the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) method



**230 company representatives**

trained in LCA and circularity concepts



**5,100 tonnes GHG**

emissions savings estimated in Tunisia and South Africa



**10% hazardous chemicals**

reduction estimated in Tunisia



**25% waste**

reduction on average



**USD 4 million**

estimated savings

*The environmental and financial impacts are annual estimates, assuming full implementation of the measures identified through InTex.*

## What SMEs can do

When SMEs shift their mindsets and adopt eco-innovation and life cycle thinking, often the most impactful actions to reduce their environmental impacts **can be identified and implemented in partnership with actors** that come before or after them in the value chain. Coaching businesses in building and strengthening partnerships that positively impact the environment is at the heart of the InTex programme.

Small businesses can forge these partnerships with their suppliers, governments, research institutions and even their competitors. Such **collaborations** can result in **substantial shared benefits** like reduced costs, lower risks, greater efficiency and productivity, and higher sales, as well as having a stronger value proposition due to the company's environmental efforts.



*Hand weaving of Punonta baskets (2023)*

## Did you know?

UNEP InTex helps SMEs lower their environmental impacts by building partnerships and working with suppliers, research institutions, governments, and even competitors to unlock circular solutions.

## Case study



Punonta representative (standing) and the InTex team during a workshop in Eldoret in 2023



“We’ve created relationships with our farmers, weavers and clients centered around circularity as we recognize the good we can do together. I’m excited about our new network of local NGOs and research institutions.”

*Isaac Mwihia, Punonta CEO*

“Partnerships are key for any business, and forging them based on sustainable principles and circularity is essential, as we learned through the InTex programme.”

*Prof. Josphat Mwasiagi of Moi University, InTex Implementing Partner in Kenya*

### With partnerships, eco-friendly weaving business pushes sustainability throughout the value chain

**Punonta** is a Kenya-based subsidiary of Finnish company Mifuko. It produces handmade baskets and home decor from eco-friendly materials like sisal, palm and elephant grass. Applying an **eco-innovation mindset**, Punonta partners with around 2,000 Kenyan farmers and weavers, mostly women, supporting them to adopt **more sustainable agricultural practices** so they co-produce diverse crops for higher, more stable incomes. Through InTex, the company also recognized the **value of diversifying its fibres**, such as in supporting farmers with banana cultivation to be able to add banana fibres to its portfolio. Doing so has reduced reliance on importing these fibres and lowered its GHG emissions related to transportation.

Punonta is also **establishing a sustainable dyeing unit** for its basket fibres. Through the InTex programme, the team conducted site visits to observe dyeing best practices and carried out laboratory testing, such as colour fastness post dyeing. This **hands-on learning**, guided by local experts, allowed Punonta to address challenges in launching its dyeing house and effluent treatment plant. The company has also expanded its **partnerships** to include local NGOs for trainings, **banks** to help farmers with credit and investment, and Moi University for **research and testing** on natural dyeing and fibre innovations. Following its **Life Cycle Assessments (LCAs)**, Punonta found it needed to **cut its GHG emissions** by shifting distribution from air to sea. This required adjustments to its production line and **negotiations** its primary client – in this case its parent company – which agreed to invest in a larger warehouse, enabling bulk shipments over previous more frequent, small deliveries.

## How SMEs benefit

The SMEs that work with the InTex programme receive **trainings and technical support** to calculate their Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) and innovate their business strategy. Through this process, they expand their understanding of how to better manage waste and reduce other environmental impacts through targeted strategies that could also reflect positively on the balance sheets.

InTex assists companies in shifting their mindset, **helping to forge new strategic partnerships and enabling systemic change** through concrete solutions for participating SMEs and, by extension, the sector overall. SMEs also benefit from exposure to international networks and expertise, learning from the latest developments in circularity and sustainability. The programme results show the real-world potential of low-cost sustainability measures in textiles — proving that environmental action and business profitability can go hand in hand.

**UNEP’s InTex programme**, funded by the European Union and the Government of Denmark, works with governments and textile SMEs to reduce the environmental impact of textile products and the way companies do business, using life-cycle approaches.