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ESG Outlook: Talking Sustainability with Akanksha Himatsingka, CEO of Himatsingka

By Lauren Parker

CREDIT: Sourcing Journal

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ESG Outlook *is Sourcing Journal's discussion series with industry executives to get their take on topics from their company's latest environmental, social and governance initiatives to their own personal efforts toward sustainability. In this Q&A, Akanksha Himatsingka, CEO, International Operations (Home Textiles) of India-based integrated global textile firm Himatsingka, explains why intent is what truly sets genuine products apart from the average product carrying a sustainability message out there today.*

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Akanksha Himatsingka, CEO of Himatsingka

Name: Akanksha Himatsingka.

Title: CEO, International Operations (Home Textiles)

What do you consider to be Himatsingka's best ESG-related achievement over the last 5 years?

Implementing sustainable business models is among the most urgent issues that businesses face today. Himatsingka is committed to participating and contributing to the transformative journey that global value chains across industry must embark upon to create a more sustainable world. We continually orient our strategies to ensure we are completely aligned to sustainable practices. Rationalizing our energy, water and waste footprint, embracing green energy and complete recycling of water resources are central to our businesses. We take all necessary measures to reduce waste generation, usage of hazardous chemicals and GHG emissions.

During the past few years, we have worked on reducing our energy footprint. The share of green (renewable) energy in our total energy portfolio has been increasing over the past few years and is now at 40 percent. Our best-in-class zero liquid discharge (ZLD) water management facilities clock a 99.1 percent recovery rate on total discharged water. We have rationalized the quantum of annual energy consumption by approximately 5 percent and continue to drive other green initiatives, including promoting sustainable packaging solutions for our products and planting over 12,000 trees in and around our campus. Together, our sustainable initiatives have led to the reduction of approximately 100,000 tons of CO2 emissions.

Lastly, being leaders in the cotton traceability space, our patented technology platforms are powering global traceability value chains. With a considerable amount of cotton tagged over the past few years, our partner farms in America remain committed to producing the world's purest cotton using the highest farming standards.

Looking ahead, what are your company's latest sustainability-related initiative?

We are working on several new product innovations and offerings that include recycled fibers, natural finishes and adoption of technology and materials that rationalize the use of natural resources in production.

What is your personal philosophy on clothes shopping as it pertains to sustainability?

I have always enjoyed and shopped brands that care for the environment and make garments with natural materials and dyes, with comfortable casual silhouettes. Well-made products are long-lasting and can be sustained over a period of time.

The brands I like to buy have remained consistent with their quality and have continued to evolve with time. There is no compromise on the ingredients used, which makes for longer wear and tear. It is important to shop better and know what you're buying into.

My inherent nature is looking for depth and intent in how a product is made. This does not apply to fashion alone, but everything I choose to invest in. The philosophy and the process matter as much as the aesthetics. Brands with a greater cause attract me naturally.

What would you say is the biggest misconception consumers have about sustainability in fashion?

Sustainability is much more than just a tag or callout. It encompasses every element in the process of creation, right from thought to product. Most important is intent. And I say this because that's truly what sets good and genuine products apart from the various sustainably tagged products out there today. Every detail matters—the reason to create, the energies infused in the making, the choice of materials, the openness to continue to evolve, to gracefully accept criticism and feedback, and to constantly update and stay true to creating sustainably. It's meditative in nature. Our actions and choices impact the lives of many, our planet and its resources, and as creators we should all be mindful of the responsibility we hold.

What was your company's biggest takeaway from the Covid crisis?

The crisis unfortunately continues, and the learnings are many. This time has been a much-needed pause to reflect and know that better needs to be done daily. Sustainability has gained more traction through this time and the world now has a different point of view. For those of us who value creating with care, this time has only reinforced that belief and is expediting a much-needed change.

What is the apparel industry's biggest missed opportunity related to securing meaningful change?

There is a shift, but it needs to be wider and deeper. We all know that change isn't easy, especially at scale. This is where a difference needs to be made. The industry holds the responsibility to reject what cannot be sustained and rethink how, why and what we create redefines value for the consumer.

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