

## SUMMARY OF ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION “CREATING MOVEMENT TOWARDS A CIRCULAR FASHION IN HONG KONG”



Roundtable Co-hosted by Redress and H&M  
Roundtable facilitated by Susan Evans  
On Wednesday 22 April 2016 at H&M Showrooms, Hong Kong

**Redress and H&M co-hosted a roundtable discussion with stakeholders representing 25 organisations who are active in circular fashion systems, academia or policy making in Hong Kong to identify ways to scale a bottom up movement towards a more circular fashion system in Hong Kong with specific emphasis on reducing waste - creatively.**

### **Setting the scene**

Hong Kong, like many cities in the world, is experiencing a positive increase in the range of organisations established to drive a circular fashion system, where clothes are kept within the fashion loop for longer instead of entering landfill. From start-ups, social enterprises to student activities, this local flurry of new interest includes clothing rentals, online and physical secondhand clothing shops, swapping events to up-cycling designers. These encouraging activities are much-needed on a global and local level, as was introduced during the roundtable by Hanna Hallin, Sustainability Manager, Sales Market Greater China, H&M, and further detailed by the roundtable facilitator Susan Evans, Adjunct Professor at Tongji University, Design and Innovation and Christina Dean, Founder and CEO Redress, who discussed the overriding need:

- We are in an environmental crisis and tackling climate change is urgent

- The fashion and textile industry is the world's second most polluting, after oil
- Clothing consumption rates are high; reports claim that up to 150 billion new garments are produced every year
- Western consumers are thought to buy 400% more clothes than two decades ago
- Clothing waste rates are high and landfills contain high textile waste rates
- Hong Kong's landfills receive an average of 293 tonnes of textiles per day (2014)

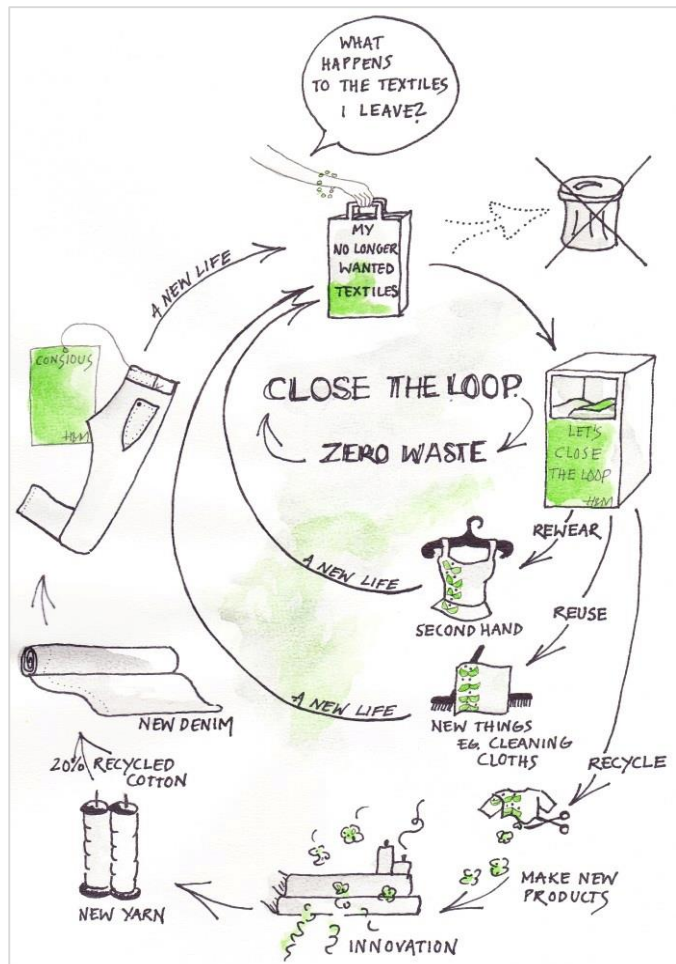
### The need to close the loop on waste

The need to close the loop on textile waste - so that instead of it becoming 'waste' the resources are put back into the circular fashion system - is well documented.

This diagram, provided by H&M, was used as a starting concept to demonstrate the various possible loops for clothing and its waste streams.

For the roundtable discussion, the inner loops of 'Rewear' and 'Reuse' were mainly focused on.

- 'Rewear' focused mainly on secondhand sales, from luxury to mass market, through physical and online stores and swaps
- 'Reuse' focused on up-cycling into products of higher quality and reconstruction into 'new' fashion items.



### Roundtable Discussion

Working in small groups, the participants were tasked to identify obstacles and solutions facing the following local organisations; The Hula (an online secondhand shop for branded clothing), Jupyeah (an online and event based swapping community), Style for Good (a styling and secondhand clothing sales initiative), Green Ladies (a social enterprise of physical secondhand shops and upcycling workshops) LastbutnotLeast (an up-cycling designer) and Redress (an NGO working to reduce waste along the supply chain from industry to consumers)

Take-aways from the discussions have been broadly broken down into the following:

#### 1. PERCEPTIONS IN HONG KONG: CAN THEY BE CHANGED?

Participants discussed how Chinese culture plays a big part in the values of Hong Kong consumers. Wearing secondhand clothing still has a negative stigma attached to it. Hong Kong consumers still question who wore their clothes before them and make negative assumptions about why the clothes were passed on, or they have concerns about hygiene.

## POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS DISCUSSED:

- ✓ Rebrand the term 'secondhand' and replace it with a term that brings positive connotations. 'Pre-loved clothing' and 'Repurposed' were suggested.
- ✓ Create a selling mechanism where the garment's secondhand nature becomes a selling point; for example by highlighting positive stories about when the item was first purchased, who owned it, why it is special etc
- ✓ Provide more access to special luxury secondhand goods that have a second useful life and a story. Create a hashtag or campaign, similar to #FashionRevolution, that can be shared by consumers in Hong Kong to improve the perception of secondhand clothes
- ✓ Educate, educate, educate about the issues around waste

## 2. LIMITED SPACE IN HONG KONG IS AN OBSTACLE

Participants discussed how Hong Kong's limited space, witnessed everywhere from within people's closets, homes or landfills, means that generating so much waste is creating even more of a problem. The lack of space and high rents were also cited as challenges to find venues for used clothing sorting or swapping events, and as such became an obstacle towards creating a more circular fashion system.

## POTENTIAL ROUTE FORWARDS:

- ✓ Request subsidies from the government for venues or seek discounted rates from private sector to open up more spaces for clothing swapping events and used clothes sorting.

## 3. THE FASHION SYSTEM IS COMPLEX AND CROSS-SECTOR COLLABORATION IS NEEDED

Participants discussed how closing the loop on fashion waste was recognised to need multi-stakeholder involvement and collaboration, which would be key for scaling up and driving the ideas and initiatives forwards.

## KEY STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR INFLUENCE IDENTIFIED:

- ✓ **The media** influences Hong Kong and the Asian market. Journalists, bloggers, printed publications and news providers have significant reach and can be very effective influencers. Social media movements give some of this power to the consumers to influence others.
- ✓ **The Government** has a huge role to play in driving change in Hong Kong and it could effectively do this through shaping how organisations operate. The Government has a responsibility to create a framework to identify the economic benefits of more circular fashion systems in order to highlight economic, social and environmental benefits that Hong Kong could gain by adopting circular systems. Participants noted the need for cross border collaboration and policy review between the HKSAR and China's central government to allow 'clothing waste' to be imported into China for recycling, although the challenges of successfully achieving this were duly noted.
- ✓ **Consumers** themselves could adjust their purchasing patterns to be more responsible. By demanding sustainable, high-quality products, over low cost, mass-produced items, retailers and suppliers will be more incentivised to adjust the products they offer.
- ✓ **Retailers** have a direct connection with the consumers and therefore have the ability to bring to market actionable ideas for change, in a large scale and faster way. Retailers should team up with social enterprise, startups and innovators to find the best solutions that are scalable. Retailers should also offer more take back programmes.
- ✓ **Start Ups** have the upper hand over large retailers and corporations as they can be more proactive in bringing about new solutions, through prototyping and pivoting their business

models. They can be more reactive to what works and what does not and therefore have the ability to find the most successful business models, whilst also satisfying the circular fashion objectives.

## Conclusion

The lively and well-engaged roundtable successfully provoked concepts around more action-oriented activities required to amplify Hong Kong's potential to upscale its existing sustainable fashion activities. Involving multi-stakeholders in this journey is crucial. There are many ways we can work together to reduce the level of waste. A simple quote, shared during the roundtable, taken from Will.i.am highlights the underlying concept around circular fashion systems is: **“Waste is not waste - until it is wasted”**.

## Acknowledgements

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Thanks to the participants from (in random order); Sustainable Fashion Business Consortium, Institute of Textiles & Clothing The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, HKRITA, LastbutnotLeast, Jupyeah, Friends of Earth, Greenpeace, The Hula, WWF, Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong Design Centre, Style for Good, St James Settlement (Green Ladies), The EcoChic Alumni brands Angus Tsui and Wan & Wong Fashion, Sharewear, Raffles Design Institute, BASF, Business Environment Council, Environmental Bureau of the Hong Kong SAR Government, The Office of Hon. Felix Chung Kwok-Pan, Member of Legislative Council, City University of Hong Kong, Sharewear.

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