

Cascale Annual Meeting 2024

Executive Summary





Reflections on Our Annual Meeting: A Community United

This year, the energy was electric. After months of planning, we delivered our biggest and best event yet, full of packed sessions, hands-on workshops, and interactive moments. But what really stood out was the shared commitment to learning, leading, and shaping the future of our industry together.

It wasn't just about sitting back and listening; it was about getting involved and making a difference. One of the strongest themes throughout the event was the need for unified action. Whether it's through decarbonization, social governance, or transparency initiatives, our industry must cut back on duplicative efforts and focus on measurable goals to truly drive progress.

Our CEO, Colin Browne, challenged us all to step up as leaders—to take bold actions and move beyond simply facilitating. Leadership was a recurring theme across sessions, pushing us to be decisive and impactful.

We focused on targeting key suppliers to address the bulk of our industry's carbon emissions and discussed how to build better processes that allow us to collaborate more effectively.

We also embraced some tough conversations, celebrating the importance of worker-centric approaches, local actions for global challenges, and the innovation needed to create a community we can all be proud of.

A massive thank you to our Board, my colleagues at Cascale, our 600 attendees, 17 sponsors, and 80 speakers, who all helped make these days so inspiring.

Until we come together again in Hong Kong,

Lee Green,
Senior Director,
Communications

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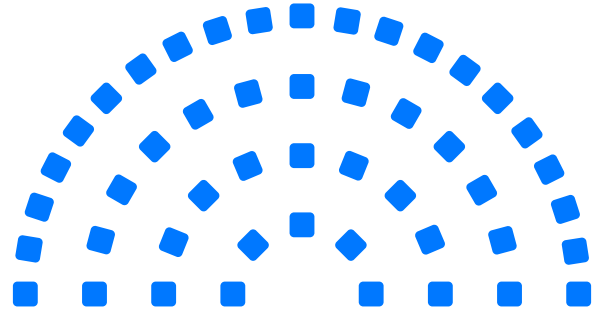
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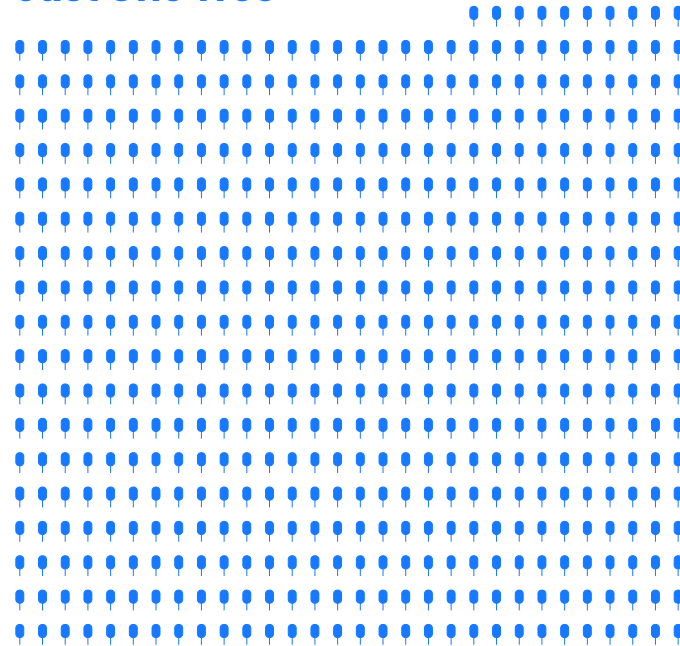


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Welcome to the
**Cascale Annual
Meeting 20**

Day One



Cascade Annual Meeting 2024



Munich

Welcome

Isabelle Kumar kicked off the morning with vigor, good humor, and energy, describing the theme of “A New Era of Unified Impact.” In her opening remarks, she called for an honest and hard look at what has not been done as well as the milestones made. Kumar called for moving beyond words into action for a unified direction from the industry.

Acknowledging a pivotal rebrand and a new CEO, she described Colin Browne as having “boundless energy.”

She made a comparison on the journey ahead as a “marathon and sprint.” Kumar then touched on what delegates could expect from the next two days, including polling for attendees, workshops, and various networking and engagement opportunities throughout the event.

In her call-to-action, Kumar pointed it back to the audience asking, “What questions would you like to have answered at the Annual Meeting?”

Isabelle Kumar,
Award Winning Journalist, Presenter,
Moderator, former News Anchor





Opening Address: Introducing a New Era of Unified Impact

 **Colin Browne**,
CEO, Cascale

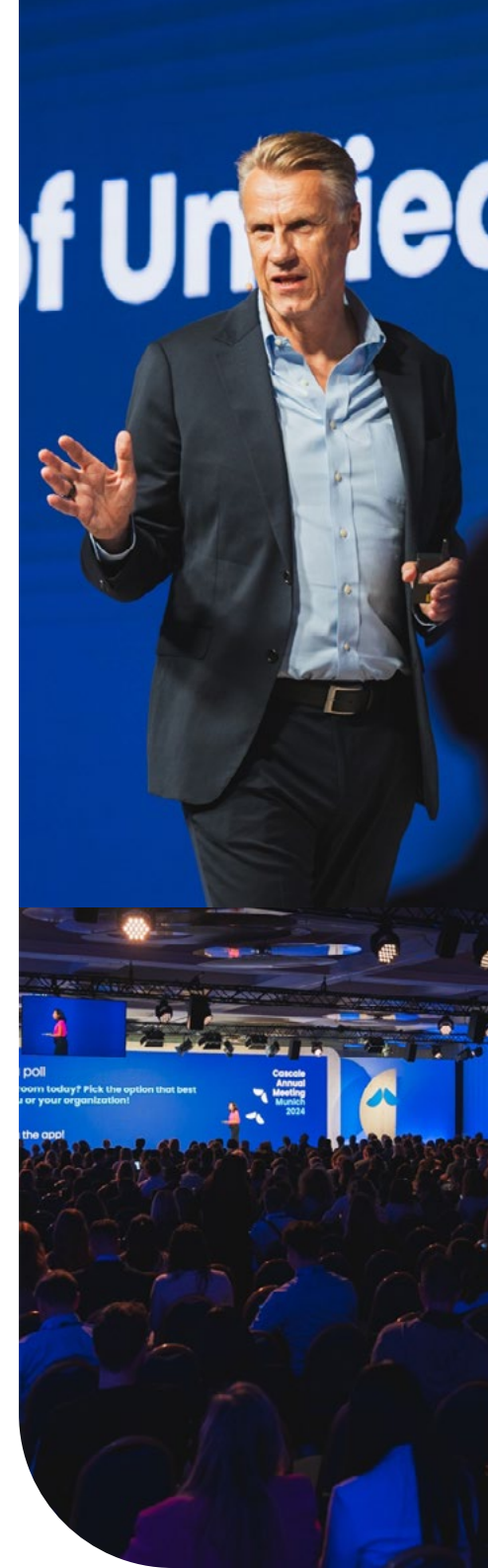
In his opening speech, CEO Colin Browne spoke to the interesting and challenging road ahead as well as the reflections to date. In his first four months, he spoke with many members, manufacturers, brands, retailers, NGOs, affiliates, and the like to uncover the tangible actions Cascale is taking to push forward progress.

Browne then spoke about complexity and fragmentation within the industry. He spoke to “TLAs” or “three-letter acronyms,” such as FEM, BRM, Aii, GFA, FLA and more, before naming even longer four- and five-letter acronyms, like CSDDD and UNFCCC, among others. Browne quipped, “The more serious we are as an industry, the more letters we add.”

His sweeping tour and commitment in these last few months has led him to a dozen countries, more recently in Asia, where he listened firsthand to countless stories from manufacturers. Audit fatigue, overlapping commitments with the science-based targets

and competing efforts all added to the ongoing frustration that many feel. He also gave a callout to collaborative work like The HRDD Academy – another acronym to remember.

Speaking to the origins of the Higg Index and cofounder Rick Ridgeway, he also acknowledged the unique celebration of a never-before-seen opportunity. Ending on a high note, Browne said he is more optimistic about the road ahead than when he started. His reasons included the sweeping evolution of the Higg Index tools, the collaborative efforts of the members and partners, as well as the ongoing quest for data-driven insights that present a meaningful path forward, especially on decarbonization. However, he asked, do we have the courage, capacity and commitment to be the change the world needs?



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Cascale is focused on tangible actions and meaningful progress through direct engagement with members and stakeholders.

We need to address audit fatigue and overlapping commitments by listening to manufacturers.

We should be optimistic, but we must have the courage, capacity, and commitment to make progress.





Opening Keynote: Recommitting to Our Vision

 **Rick Ridgeway**, Author, Adventurer
& Cascale Co-founder

“We’re in business to save our home planet,” was a popular slogan from Patagonia that Rick Ridgeway highlighted at the beginning of his keynote. Ridgeway traced back his origins at Patagonia, developing an environmental scorecard on request from Walmart. From there, the coalition of apparel and footwear companies was born. The early beginnings of the coalition was framed on David and Goliath. The multi-stakeholder format enabled value chain voices to contribute in an equitable way.

Core principles included to always build on existing work (shouting out past colleagues) and to move as fast as we could and never let perfection derail progress.

At the time, Ridgeway and collaborators sent letters to the founding members and the movement expanded from there. The first meeting was in February of 2010.

He then explained how the Higgs-boson particle was the inspiration for the Higg Index. “If the Higgs particle is going to unify the universe, then the Higg Index is going to save it,” Ridgeway said.

He continued his origin story telling how educators like Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and other early collaborators, came to be involved in the journey to decrease environmental impact and increase social good. The framework involved creating business value as well as adopting the Higg Index as the industry standard, and incorporating transparency and accountability into this macro perspective. The result was eight levers from: Higg Index development, Higg Index adoption, roadmap and innovation, supply chain relationships, business case and narrative, investment, leadership and public commitment, and finally, collective action and partnerships. Another addition became government regulation and standards.

In a densely populated slide, Ridgeway highlighted the levers in a colorful systems map from 2012 which still carried its relevance today, as he reflected on the need for transparency and accountability.

Ridgeway left attendees with one renewed vision – Cascale and Worldly working in unison to deliver more business value and action on 2030 emissions reduction targets than the G7 countries combined.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Cascale was built on existing work, emphasizing speed over perfection, with an inclusive approach that values all voices in the supply chain.

Inspired by the Higgs-boson particle, the Higg Index became the industry's standard for measuring impact.

Cascale's goal was, and still is, to drive business value while reducing environmental impacts and increasing social justice.





State of the Industry

 **Colin Browne,**
CEO, Cascale

In his address, Browne referenced London’s 1850s “Great Stink” to illustrate the consequences of fragmented, outdated infrastructure. The crisis led to the creation of a unified, modern sewer system by architect Joseph Bazalgette, which still serves the city today. Browne used this analogy to emphasize the need for bold, unified action in the industry’s decarbonization efforts, warning, “We stink!”

He pointed to the data as clear evidence of the challenge. Starting at 0.889 gigatons in 2019, the industry must reduce emissions to 0.489 Gt by 2030, yet, without intervention, emissions could reach 1.243 Gt.

With a show of hands, Browne highlighted that around 70% of the audience had set science-based targets (SBTs). Within Cascale membership, data shows 67 percent of brands have set or are committed to SBTs, while 46 percent of manufacturers have done the same. However, 33 percent of brands and 54 percent of manufacturers have not yet committed. He urged the audience to reflect on their goals and progress.

Browne expressed optimism, emphasizing the importance of focusing on Industry Strategic Suppliers (ISS), noting that 1,500 facilities, representing 10 percent of the total, contribute 80 percent of the impact. This is based on work Cascale is doing with RESET Carbon and Apparel Impact Institute (Aii).

He then reinforced Cascale’s evolution from facilitator to industry leader, emphasizing equality of voice within the Board and membership. He called for more focus, and less fragmentation, stressing Cascale must not get sidetracked from its core goals of reducing environmental impacts and increasing social justice.

Browne concluded by pointing to tools like the Higg Index and the Manufacturer Climate Action Program (MCAP) as pathways forward, stressing that without collective action at scale, “there is no Cascale.”



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

● Bold, unified action is urgently needed.

● Data-drive solutions are critical to reducing carbon emissions.

● Cascale is evolving from facilitator to industry leader.



Climate Action: A Theory of Change to Accelerate Industry Decarbonization

Isabelle Kumar, Award Winning Journalist, Presenter, Moderator, former News Anchor
- Moderator

Andrew Martin, Executive Vice President, Cascale

Kurt Kipka, Chief Impact Officer, Apparel Impact Institute

Liam Salter, CEO, RESET Carbon

Cascale's EVP Andrew Martin introduced Cascale's Industry Decarbonization Roadmap (IDR), developed in partnership with RESET Carbon and the Apparel Impact Institute (Aii). The roadmap aims to achieve a 46 percent reduction in carbon emissions by 2030, potentially cutting 72 metric tons of CO2. The initiative focuses on Industry Strategic Suppliers (ISS), primarily located in nine countries, with three key steps: identify hotspots, understand levers, and reduce carbon emissions.

Martin highlighted key challenges: progress is too slow, manufacturers lack a clear business case, and there is duplication of programs. The IDR targets 1,500 high-emitting facilities, aiming to improve their efficiency by making a strong business case for carbon reduction.

RESET Carbon's CEO Liam Salter outlined the IDR's major components, starting with the Higg FEM and facility carbon benchmark from Aii and RESET. The process includes facility action plans, solutions implementation, and a monitoring and reporting framework. Market tools and program support, such as fundraising and market

engagement, enhance collaboration between brands, service providers, and manufacturers.

The value proposition is clear: manufacturers benefit from recognition of carbon performance, brands engage with high-volume, low-carbon facilities, and service providers find opportunities to invest in low-carbon solutions through a structured marketplace. Martin emphasized the need for a fundamental shift in the business model, integrating climate impact into financial and operational efforts.

Apparel Impact Institute's chief impact officer Kurt Kipka elaborated on the four key components: standardized technical methodology (e.g., Climate Solution Portfolio), facility carbon benchmark, funding and financing for innovation, and engagement and commitment. The session stressed stakeholder engagement, particularly from those with sourcing expertise, and attendees were encouraged to download data insights. A 2025 pilot is likely, with ISS facilities—mainly mills, laundries, and raw material providers—being seen as opportunities for targeted support.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The Industry Decarbonization Roadmap (IDR) is a collaborative effort to fast-track climate action.

The IDR targets the 1,500 high-emitting Industry Strategic Suppliers (ISS).

Mutual business benefits and sourcing strategies are critical to driving actionable change.





Beyond Apparel

Lisa Domoney, Senior Director, Strategic Growth, Cascale - *Moderator*

Jia Liu, Global Sustainability Director, People and Business Assurance, TÜV Rheinland

Katy Stevens, Head of CSR and Sustainability, European Outdoor Group

Lisa Ly, Senior Sustainability Manager, Dunelm

Scott Raskin, CEO, Worldly

Jonathan Salmon, Head of Sustainability, Li & Fung

Cascale’s senior director, strategic growth, Lisa Domoney introduced the Higg Index as a best-in-class tool for the apparel and consumer goods industries, emphasizing that Cascale is well-positioned to expand into adjacent product categories. Worldly’s CEO Scott Raskin described the tools as a “responsibility” aligned with Cascale’s founding vision, while Jonathan Salmon, head of sustainability at Li & Fung, highlighted the value of building on existing tools and knowledge without starting from scratch.

Long-time Cascale member TÜV Rheinland, represented by Jia Liu, reinforced the importance of collaboration and sharing knowledge, while Dunelm’s Lisa Ly emphasized the potential domino effect for wider tool adoption. The European Outdoor Group’s (EOG) Katy Stevens explained that their members already diversify across apparel, footwear, and hard goods, and pushed for expanding sustainability metrics beyond apparel.

Stevens noted that apparel is ahead of other industries in sustainability measurement,

but a metrics-first approach is essential for engaging other categories. While acknowledging that the Higg FEM isn’t perfect, Raskin reaffirmed its applicability, with Salmon adding that manufacturers need to decide how to act on the data.

TÜV Rheinland’s Liu pointed out that the Higg FEM translates water, energy, and waste data into carbon impact, addressing legislative pressures. Ly and Raskin stressed the potential for the homeware sector to adopt sustainability practices faster than apparel, noting that Cascale’s regional connection events and Worldly’s dedicated staffing are crucial for this progress.

Raskin concluded by highlighting that the future of sustainability is multi-category, with standardization being key to driving progress. Stevens and Ly agreed that smaller enterprises shouldn’t feel isolated in this journey, with 20 to 25 percent of Higg Index users already being non-apparel, a figure that underscores the potential for growth in consumer goods.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The Higg Index is a best-in-class tool expanding from apparel into consumer goods.

Cascale members are ready to accelerate sustainability across new product categories.

Collaborative efforts in fashion sustainability are innovative but often under-recognized.





Navigating Legislation & the Higg Index Tools

Elisabeth von Reitzenstein, Senior Director, Public Affairs, Cascale – Moderator

Joël Mertens, Director, Higg Product Tools, Cascale

J.R. Siegel, Vice President, Sustainability, Worldly

Maravillas Rodriguez Zarco, Senior Director, Higg Index Strategy & Operations, Cascale

Tom Mason, Senior Manager, Public Affairs & Stakeholder Engagement, SLCP

In this session, Cascale moderator Elisabeth Von Reitzenstein introduced the “Navigating Legislation & the Higg Index Tools” webinar series. Cascale’s director, Higg Product Tools, Joël Mertens explained how the Higg Product Module measures a product’s environmental footprint using life-cycle assessment, supporting external reporting. While the module has evolved over the past six years, it is now aligning with regulations such as the Product Environmental Footprint (PEF) and French laws. Mertens emphasized the need for improving product information disclosures to meet regulatory requirements, with the goal of going beyond compliance for broader reporting uses.

Cascale’s senior director, Higg Index Strategy & Operations, Maravillas Rodriguez Zarco discussed the Higg BRM’s role in aiding CSRD compliance, focusing on the European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS). The Higg BRM covers key requirements like double materiality, governance, and sustainability statements, reaching 65 percent alignment with CSRD needs. Zarco also highlighted how the Higg FEM has shifted from performance management to impact measurement, supporting code of conduct compliance and regulatory reporting.

Social & Labor Convergence Program’s (SLCP) Tom Mason detailed SLCP’s Convergence Assessment Framework (CAF) and Higg FSLM, which reduce audit fatigue while focusing on compliance with human rights and labor laws. SLCP’s approach involves legislative analysis, gap analysis, expert feedback, and updates to the tools, making it easier for users to align with evolving legislation.

Worldly’s J.R. Siegel concluded with how Worldly’s Factory Data Manager (FDM) focuses on data sharing, collaborative goal-setting, and data assurance, emphasizing a continuous improvement loop based on metrics, targets, and actions.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The Higg Product Module is aligning with regulations like PEF and French laws, improving product information disclosures.

The Higg BRM helps companies meet 65% of ESRS requirements for CSRD compliance, addressing double materiality and governance.

SLCP’s Convergence Assessment Framework reduces audit fatigue while ensuring compliance with human rights and labor laws.





Higg FEM & Verification Evolution: Member Consultation Insights

Demith Gooneratne,
Senior Manager,
Higg Facility
Tools, Cascale

Dhawal Mane,
Director, Training
and Verification,
Cascale

Erwan Berthou,
Director,
Membership
& Corporate
Engagement,
Cascale

Jeremy Lardeau, Senior
Vice President,
Higg Index,
Cascale

Cascale’s team took the stage to discuss the Higg FEM’s evolution and its role in supporting the organization’s strategy. Cascale’s Sr. VP Higg Index, Jeremy Lardeau explained that the Higg FEM has grown from a performance management tool to one that now supports code of conduct compliance and regulatory impact measurement. This evolution is key to Cascale’s strategic vision, as it provides common measurement, aligns shared goals, supports regulatory compliance, and fosters performance improvement.

Lardeau presented adoption results, showing a steady increase from 13,000 assessments in 2019 to over 20,000 in 2022, with expectations to reach 23,000 by the end of 2023. He noted that verification needs have more than tripled since 2019, necessitating changes in verification methods and data tracking for 2024 and 2025. Apparel leads in Higg FEM adoption, but sectors like footwear, accessories, and home textiles now cover more than 20 percent of verified modules, with other industries representing 12 percent of total adoption.

Lardeau emphasized the need for a modular approach to verification, moving away from a one-size-fits-all model. This shift includes new verification activities focused on foundational practices, performance improvement, and quantitative metrics. Changes for 2024 will include the optional opening of Level 2 and 3 assessments for facilities meeting Level 1 criteria. In 2025, Cascale plans to expand verification methods and improve quantitative metrics data tracking.

Cascale’s Erwan Berthou and Demith Gooneratne discussed governance evolution and feedback from a comprehensive consultation process, which highlighted the need for right-sizing facility question sets and improving the reliability of data tracking. Cascale’s Dhawal Mane outlined plans for Higg FEM 2025, which will include scope expansion and new verification approaches.

Connections Stage

Annual



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The Higg FEM has evolved from performance management to regulatory impact measurement, aligning with Cascale’s strategic goals.

A modular assessment approach is being developed to allow for more flexible verification across industries.

Higg FEM 2024 introduces Level 2 and 3 optional assessments, with further verification expansions planned for 2025.





Networking Moments





Voices of Change: Amplifying Workers' Influence on Industry Standards

Lisa Domoney,
Senior Director,
Strategic Growth,
Cascale - *Moderator*

Alison Ward, CEO,
CottonConnect

Fiona Sadler,
Global Head of
Responsible Sourcing,
Marks & Spencer

Tamar Hoek,
Senior Policy
Director Sustainable
Fashion, Solidaridad

Helen Kuyper,
Director of WE
Program

Cascale's Lisa Domoney moderated the session on change-making and how the women are invested in fostering a just and equitable industry. Fiona Sadler joined from Marks & Spencer and spoke on the increased need for social governance. CottonConnect's Alison Ward said people are expressing the need for more data and more ownership for programs. Solidaridad's Tamar Hoek justified the need for including worker voices in a more constructive way. Helen Kuyper of WE Program spoke to the need for constructive dialogue.

The conversation started with defining the need for worker influence, as well as the need for trust and transparency. In a trial and error scenario, Hoek spoke to the dangers in assuming what's best for others, especially workers.

"We've got to stop dissociating them from workers," said Sadler. She added you have to create an environment that is "safe, secure, open, and trustworthy – and that might be anonymous." She shared an anecdote, describing the mindset shift that occurred for her, "My workers are my biggest asset."

Pushing back on the word "standardized," Kuyper reframed a number of prompts. "What determines

what action is or isn't meaningful? "What I'm asking of you is before you do something – take a breath." She used an example of sexual harassment in the workplace and what the unintended consequences of asking the wrong questions looks like. "How many cases is or isn't enough?," she probed.

Sadler wants to see the reduction of competing efforts, calling on the need to actually reduce audits. She sees the process as the following: correct feedback, action, and progress. Ward highlights the reality of some of the dialogue as it takes time. "If that commercial relationship is right, everything else follows. That's really at the heart of some of these conversations as well."

Speaking of audits, Kuyper called for more reproachful intent. "We're asking individual people to be courageous," Kuyper continued. "We've been doing it for so long, it's ingrained in a process which is the norm," said Sadler of audits. She believes in the need for constant improvement. "There is a place for audits but it needs an add-on."

"It's nice to know what's wrong, but it's better to improve things," said Hoek. She called for equal partnership and the collaboration needed to take things to the next level.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Reduce duplication and audit fatigue by industry data and standardization alignment.

It's essential to foster better inclusivity in the value chain by humanizing one's role and that of workers.

Trust and transparency are crucial to value chain equity.





Decarbonization Program Workshop

Dr. Joyce Tsoi,
Senior Director,
Decarbonization
Program, Cascale

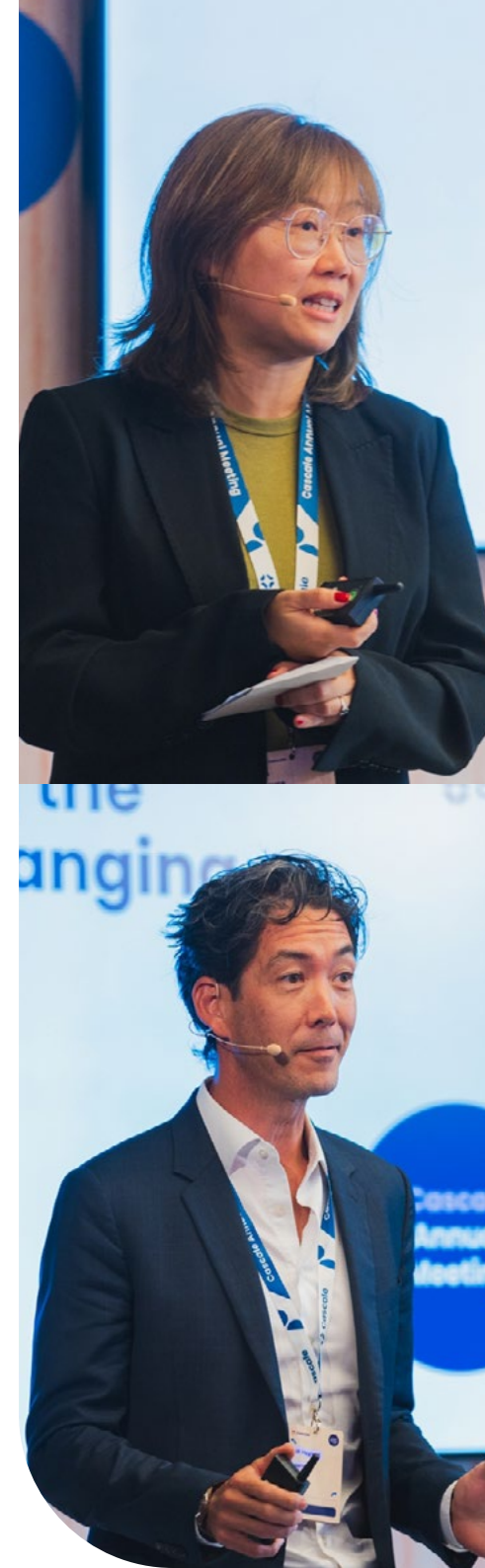
Ash Hegland,
COO, Intensel

After lunch on Day 1, attendees participated in a 90-minute interactive session on the Decarbonization Program, led by Dr. Joyce Tsoi, with contributions from Ash Hegland, COO of Intensel. Tsoi outlined Cascale's goal of achieving a 45 percent reduction in GHG emissions by 2030, emphasizing the program's focus on accelerating Science-Based Target (SBT) adoption across the membership and wider industry. Priorities included peer learning groups, training, and collective action initiatives.

Key announcements included Cascale's partnership with GIZ for solar rooftop feasibility studies in Bangladesh, Cambodia, and Vietnam, with 72 manufacturers and eight brands already involved. Cascale also launched a collaboration with "FASHION LEAP FOR CLIMATE" and opened recruitment for the second cohort of the Manufacturer Climate Action Program (MCAP), which helps manufacturers set SBTs.

Hegland presented the development of the Physical Climate Risk Assessment component of MCAP, highlighting how data collection enables participants to evaluate risks like operational losses. She shared a case study on Vietnam's climate risks by 2030.

In the second part of the session, participants discussed the Industry Decarbonization Roadmap. Concerns were raised about the roadmap's timeframe, pooled funding, and the availability of emission reduction measures. Attendees provided feedback on challenges and opportunities, stressing the importance of a clear timeline and accountability mechanism.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Cascale set decarbonization priorities, offering both partner and Cascale-led collective action initiatives for members.

The FASHION LEAP FOR CLIMATE platform is now available to support members in building capacity.

MCAP participants can opt for climate risk analysis, and the Industry Decarbonization Roadmap is being refined with member feedback.





Elevating Environmental Practices Through Data

Janne Koopmans,
Collaboration Director,
ZDHC - Moderator

Demith Gooneratne,
Senior Manager, Higg
Facility Tools, Cascale

Katrin Perlmutter,
Senior Policy Officer, BMZ
- German Ministry for
Economic Cooperation
and Development

Sophie You, Principal
Consultant, RESET Carbon

During this session, speakers presented "Data for Due Diligence," a joint initiative by Aii, Cascale, ZDHC, and SLCP, and supported by GIZ and the BMZ. As stated by Cascale's Demith Gooneratne: "This project aims to improve environmental performance with the help of clear pathways and reduced resources. By connecting the dots of various programs they should also reduce 'program fatigue'."

While the project is led by SLCP on the social front, the workshop focused primarily on the environmental data collection.

Katrin Perlmutter from the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) highlighted the ministry's objectives to improve livelihoods, reduce environmental harm, and foster circular practices. She also stressed that the current burden of multiple tools and audits on suppliers must be alleviated: "We need to work together in order to establish standards to decrease this burden gradually."

After members discussed in groups, they shared their perspectives on data collection. From the brands' perspective, there is a lot of data available but it is difficult to derive meaningful insights from it. On the manufacturers' end, they highlighted concerns about high performing facilities since the margin for improvement is much smaller than for the ones struggling.

The session wrapped up in a Q&A featuring the workshop's speakers.

Questioned about how the project would contribute to a reduction in audit fatigue, RESET Carbon's You stressed that a significant overlap in data already exists across tools, and efforts should focus on standardizing the process to reduce the administrative load.

The Q&A session ended with a question for Gooneratne who encouraged members to nominate their facilities to participate in the project as soon as possible for it to be replicated over the 20,000 facilities using Higg FEM.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Simplifying data collection for suppliers is essential to improved auditing.

Standardizing data collection improves transparency and accuracy for manufacturers and brands.

This project connects programs to enhance environmental performance, with more engagement opportunities this year for members to nominate facilities or partners.



Advancing Traceability: Insights from Cascale's Intelligence HUB

James Crowley,
Manager,
Transparency
& Traceability,
Cascale

Patricia Jurewicz,
Founder and
CEO, Responsible
Sourcing
Network & YESS

Philipp Mayer,
CPO & Co-
Founder,
Retraced GmbH

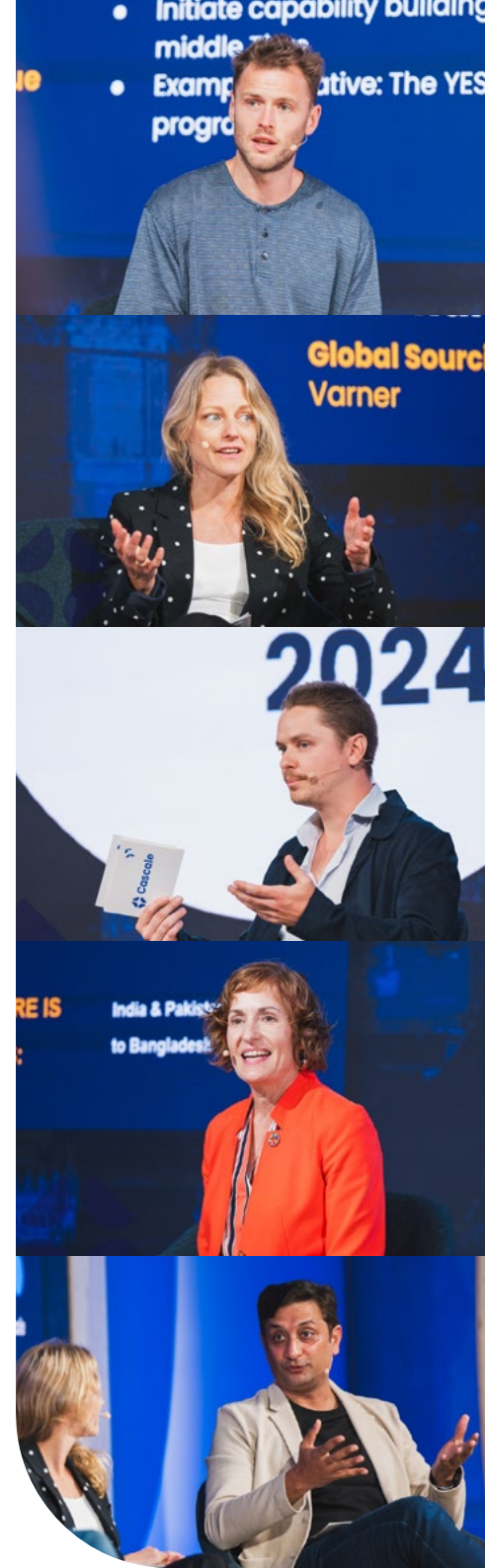
Linn Raj Gjelsvik,
Global Sourcing
Manager, Varner

Saqib Shahzad,
Head of
Sustainability,
Sapphire -
Diamond Fabrics
Limited

Panelists discussed effective approaches to traceability for meeting policy requirements and ensuring human rights and environmental due diligence, drawing on insights from Cascale's Traceability Intelligence Hub. Cascale's James Crowley defined traceability as "the process of creating visibility of materials, products, and information to enable accountability for sustainability claims." Interviews with over 32 members showed that 82 percent prioritize CSRD compliance, with other regulations like the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA) following closely. Currently, 70 percent of respondents have traceability platforms.

Cascale seeks to bridge the gap between traceability and due diligence. A Manufacturer Interview Group will address operational challenges later this year, and the Traceability Intelligence Handbook will be released. YESS' Patricia Jurewicz presented the Yarn Ethically & Sustainability Sourced (YESS) framework, stating, "For us, traceability is the very first step to enable proper due diligence in their supply chains." This framework identifies forced labor in spinning mills and reduces the burden on suppliers.

Varner's Raj Gjelsvik shared the goal of having all products traceable by 2030, although they currently have partial traceability. She noted, "The data is compiled into a spreadsheet to have a clear view of the entire supply chain." Shahzad discussed the difficulty in meeting customer data requests, saying, "From our side, it would be easier to supply this information to all stakeholders," as they consolidate data into a sustainability portal. However, traceability in Tier 3 and 4 supply chains remains "very much undiscovered," according to Mayer.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Some 82 percent of respondents said CSRD compliance is top of mind for furthering this traceability work.

The Traceability Intelligence Hub looks to define the linkage from traceability to due diligence.

Supply chain exploration and validation are two aspects of the ongoing traceability work.





Deep Dive on CSRD Assurance

Mark Vaessen, Partner,
Global Head of Corporate &
Sustainability Reporting, KPMG

Adrian Branco,
Senior Manager, Higg Index
Brand & Retail, Cascale

In this session, KPMG’s Mark Vaessen and Cascale’s Adrian Branco gave an overview of the reporting landscape and how European policy is affecting the consumer goods industry. The ESG reporting landscape is evolving through key initiatives. As outlined by Branco, the SEC’s climate risk disclosure rule (2024) will be crucial for investors assessing financial risks. Additionally, California’s law will mandate Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions reporting by 2026.

According to Vaessen, the CSRD is a far-reaching regulation, harmonizing sustainability reporting across the EU with its “double materiality” approach. The first set of European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS) was issued in 2023. Branco explained that EFRAG is working on sector-specific standards, with industries like textiles and jewelry currently in the draft stage.

Internationally, Vaessen highlighted that the ISSB’s S1 & S2 standards are becoming central to global sustainability reporting, providing a baseline for interoperability. ISSB and GRI are aligning standards for better global consistency.

Assurance in ESG reporting is critical, emphasized by Branco. Limited assurance requires less evidence, while reasonable assurance offers higher confidence. The CSRD mandates assurance but leaves specifics to member states. Auditors must understand internal systems and work closely with stakeholders.

Branco mentioned that sector-specific standards will evolve, with some industries seeing requirements as early as 2028, depending on consultation and feedback.

Speakers addressed concerns about qualified auditors, timing of sector-specific standards, and collaboration between GRI and ISSB.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Regulation is here to stay.

Companies should be going beyond compliance to stay ahead.

Sustainability is imperative.





Traceability in Focus: Digital & Physical Technologies

James Crowley,
Manager,
Transparency
& Traceability,
Cascale

Patrick Strumpf,
CEO, Haelixa Ltd.

Marianne Uddman, Senior
Vice President,
Go To Market,
TrusTrace

People want to verify they are getting what they think they're getting – such is the case for digital and physical technologies.

For Haelixa, the company is tracing 16 million organic cotton products per year. Uddman gave an example related to the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA).

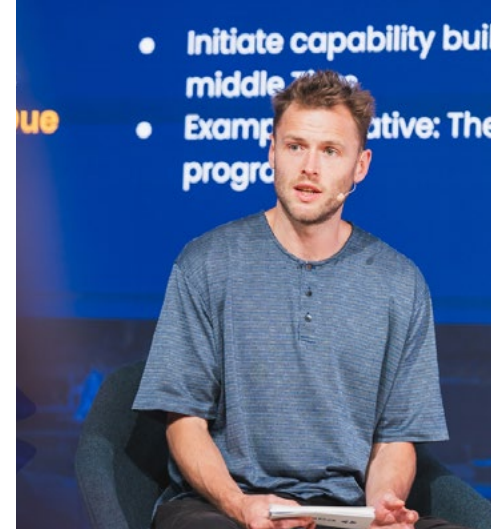
“In case your products do get stopped somewhere, you can immediately prove it does not come from this region,” said TrusTrace’s Marianne Uddman. She compared the relevance of legislation to common use cases today with TrusTrace. The German Supply Chain Act and CSRDD are just two examples of this practical call-to-action.

“High-risk fibers” are one thing Crowley didn’t shy away from acknowledging. Haelixa’s Patrick Strumpf offered a few comments on how organic cotton, and regenerative cotton have demonstrated recyclability at scale.

“It’s all down to the use case on what you want to achieve. What is your most pressing issue right now?”

In the audience Q&A, one attendee brought up the topic of opacity in transparency data. Uddman believes digital product passports will offer a clearer trajectory for how and what data to share.

“Traceability is a segment to enable and communicate impact,” affirmed Crowley.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Traceability enables and communicates impact.

Legislation will play a role in the future of traceability, including the German Supply Chain Act and CSRDD.

Data is paramount.





Fair Process as a Prerequisite for Collective Action

 **Ilishio Lovejoy,**
Independent Researcher

Ilishio Lovejoy presented a case study on fair process as a foundation for collective action. Lovejoy, a recent Cambridge graduate, conducted research on Cascale, analyzing the tensions hindering collaboration within the organization. Her study, based on 25 interviews with staff, affiliates, brands, and manufacturers, outlined three main tensions: structural, functional, and emotional.

Structural tensions arise from differences in organizational resources, decision-making power, and influence among stakeholders, creating disparities that hinder equitable collaboration.

Functional tensions stem from operational differences, such as geographical locations and business capacities, affecting engagement and communication across stakeholders.

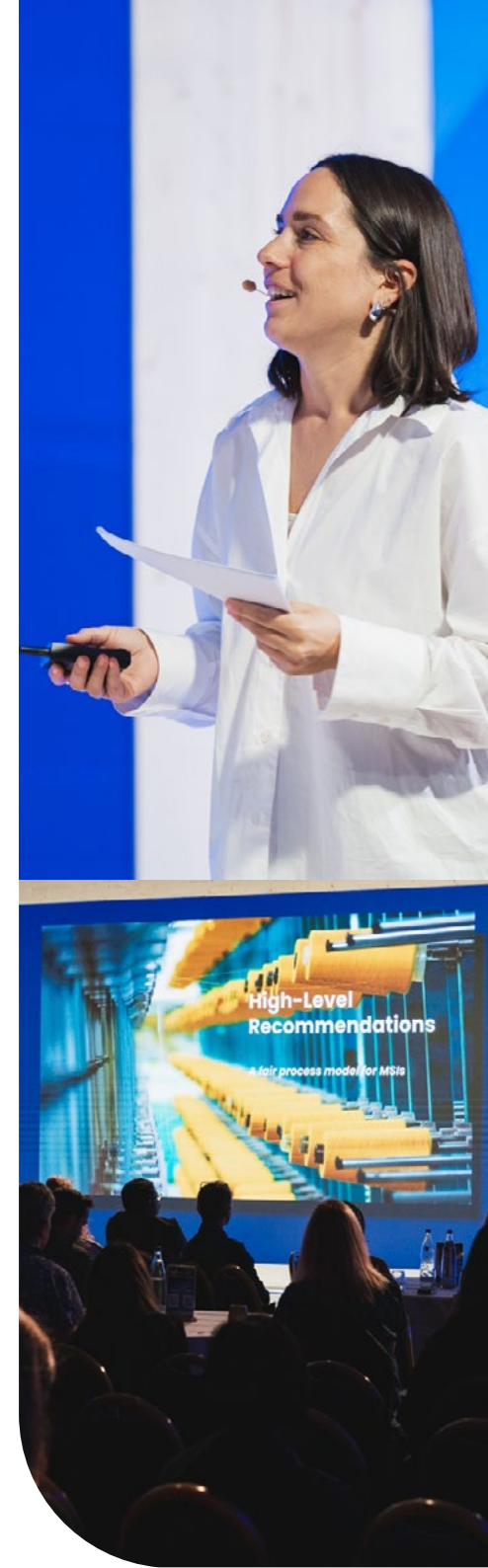
Emotional tensions involve conflicting values, cultural biases, and trust issues, which undermine collaboration and motivation for collective action.

Lovejoy highlighted that the combined effect

of these tensions weakens trust, reduces collaboration, and hampers the industry's ability to drive meaningful change. She emphasized that reduced collaboration could negatively impact Cascale's collective mission and that addressing these tensions is crucial to strengthening collective efforts toward sustainability.

The research also revealed issues with member disparity, voice, and power dynamics, particularly between brands and suppliers, with larger organizations having more influence. Interviewees expressed concerns about Cascale's evolution from a member-led to a more staff-led organization and voiced frustration with the lack of transparency in decision-making processes.

Lovejoy concluded by recommending a fair process model for multi-stakeholder initiatives, calling for greater transparency, bias reduction, and equitable representation in governance. Her insights extend beyond Cascale, raising questions about representation, collective impact, and the process of driving systemic change in multi-stakeholder initiatives.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Collaboration is hindered by structural, functional, and emotional tensions that could reduce trust and impact.

Member disparity and power imbalances between brands and suppliers affect decision-making and representation in multi-stakeholder initiatives.

A fair process model, with transparency and equitable governance, is essential to improving collective action.





Social Justice Through Fair Process – Can We Find Equity?

Colin Browne,
CEO, Cascale
- Moderator

Amanda Tucker,
Vice President,
Responsible
Sourcing &
Sustainability,
Target

Harsh Saini,
Board Director,
Global Fashion
Agenda

Krishna Manda,
Vice President
of Corporate
Sustainability,
Lenzing
Aktiengesellschaft

Ilishio Lovejoy,
Independent
Researcher

In the panel discussion following her research presentation, Lovejoy expressed gratitude for the openness of Cascale members and staff, emphasizing that “if the processes aren’t right, the outcome won’t get there.” Browne thanked Lovejoy for her courageous work and asked about the most surprising aspect of her findings, to which she highlighted the importance of fair processes in achieving meaningful outcomes.

Manda shared his optimism for moving forward together, stressing the need for emotional commitment and creating a safe space for sharing. He acknowledged that engagement, alignment, and collaboration are crucial, while noting that the challenges Lovejoy identified are not unique to Cascale but are reflective of broader industry dynamics.

Tucker, reflecting on the buyer-seller power dynamics, quoted Maya Angelou: “When you know better, do better,” recognizing that the burden of sustainability work often falls on the same manufacturers. She emphasized the need to amplify voices but acknowledged that the urgency for action sometimes overshadows critical listening.

Saini discussed the historical power imbalances in the industry, noting that while brands and businesses in the West have led the conversation, this dynamic hasn’t fundamentally changed. She called for a shift toward more equitable relationships, highlighting the role of NGOs in pushing for systemic change. Saini and Manda both emphasized that listening is essential to moving forward.

Browne concluded by focusing on marginalized members, including manufacturers and smaller brands, urging that their voices be better represented. Lovejoy wrapped up by stating that a trusted and fair process is the key, even if everyone doesn’t agree on the outcome. “If it’s not Cascale, it’s not anybody,” she remarked.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Fair processes are crucial for achieving meaningful outcomes in collective action.

Power dynamics between buyers and sellers need to shift to ensure equitable collaboration.

Listening and emotional commitment are essential for fostering engagement and alignment.





Closing Keynote – 36th July: Lessons of the Revolution

Miran Ali, Vice President of Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA)

BGMEA’s Miran Ali began his presentation with humor, but quickly shifted to sharing the significant lessons learned from his journey. As a major supplier in the apparel industry, Ali acknowledged that he used to avoid challenging powerful brands to protect relationships. However, the Sustainable Terms of Trade Initiative (STTI) has helped level the playing field, ensuring that practices like missed payments and switching suppliers are no longer normalized.

Ali recounted the political unrest in Bangladesh in July 2024, which erupted after young people demanded equal access to jobs and faced severe government oppression. The movement, dubbed the 36th July Revolution, eventually succeeded in removing Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. This pivotal moment, Ali said, offers Bangladesh—one of the world’s

largest garment exporters—a chance to rebuild its industry with a focus on poverty alleviation, decarbonization, and social justice.

Reflecting on his own journey, Ali admitted that for 15 years, he compromised too often in the face of progress. He urged the audience to reject compromises going forward, emphasizing the need for fair purchasing practices, safety, and equal voice in business. He reminded everyone of the universal responsibility to pay workers on time, create safe environments, and ensure fairness.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Worker safety must be prioritized, as with fair purchasing practices and equal voice for ethical businesses.

The political shift in Bangladesh presents an opportunity to rebuild the garment industry with poverty alleviation, decarbonization, and social justice at its core.

BGMEA and Cascale are partnering to increase accountability in Bangladesh’s garment sector, with a focus on social justice and fair practices.





Collaboration in Action: MoU Signing

 **Colin Browne,**
CEO, Cascale

 **Miran Ali,** Vice President of
Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers
and Exporters Association (BGMEA)


Ali announced that BGMEA is partnering with Cascale to create a countrywide database to track the impact of Bangladesh's garment sector, with the goal of increasing accountability and demanding responsibility from brands. He invited Cascale's CEO Colin Browne onstage to sign an agreement between BGMEA and Cascale, formalizing their commitment to these goals.

Browne concluded, stating that Cascale and the industry stand firmly behind BGMEA's efforts for ongoing success.





Closing Remarks

 **Isabelle Kumar**, Award Winning Journalist,
Presenter, Moderator, former News Anchor

In a summary of the day, Kumar took to the stage for closing remarks. “We started off literally in the sewers,” quipped Kumar. “We are brought right back to the present day with this action,” she said, referencing the end-of-day signing of the agreement between BGMEA and Cascale. Speakers walked attendees through jarring calls-to-action, rigorous climate data and insights powered by the Higg Index, and novel terminology and acronyms such as the Industry Strategic Suppliers (or 10 percent of suppliers who contribute to 80 percent of emissions).

Cautious optimism were the words that stood out, as Kumar thanked attendees and sponsors.





Our collective mission is at stake if we don't learn to collaborate more effectively. Focus on the process - an unjust process leads to unjust strategies and outcomes.

Ilishio Lovejoy,
Independent Researcher



Probably 95 percent of our industry does not have climate-controlled factories. If you don't see what is happening on the ground, you think about it differently.

Dr. Vidhura Ralapanawe,
Executive Vice President, Epic Group



This sense of urgency is critical to success...The time for incremental changes has passed, and we need exponential solutions for exponential problems.

Paul Polman, Co-Founder, Fashion Pact



When you chase lower impact datasets you have moved numbers around, but the world didn't change.

Dr. Jesse Daystar, Chief Sustainability Officer,
VP Sustainability, Cotton Incorporated



There's no reason why we shouldn't be sourcing wind and solar together.

Eric Jen, Founder & CEO, REN Energy



There are certain fundamental rights which are universal. One of the fundamental responsibilities we have is to pay attention to the impact of our sector.

Miran Ali, Vice President of Bangladesh
Garment Manufacturers and
Exporters Association (BGMEA)





“

Today, we have not proved that doing the right thing has value for every player in the value chain.

Pascal Brun, VP of Sustainability and D&I, Zalando SE

“

Together we strive, together we thrive.

Shreyaskar Chaudhary, Managing Director, Pratibha Syntex Ltd.

“

If the Higgs Boson particle was going to unify the universe, the Higg Index is going to save our one and only home planet.

Rick Ridgeway, Author, Adventurer & Cascale Co-founder

“

We're all in this together. It's time to do fewer, to go further. It's time to do less, to do more. We have the knowledge, capability, and tools to succeed.

Colin Browne, CEO, Cascale

“

It's important to talk to your suppliers and learn from what they're doing and see how you can implement that in different factories.

Rebecka Sancho, Head of Sustainability, G-Star

“

We need to move away from this narrative of just pitting fibers against each other.

Dalena White, Secretary General, International Wool Textile Organisation





Side Activities





Networking Moments





Day Two





Day 2 Kickoff: Embracing a Unified Impact

 **Isabelle Kumar**, Award Winning Journalist,
Presenter, Moderator, former News Anchor

After viewing the reel from day one, audience members were ready and excited for the day. “Today is set to be pretty much the same,” said Kumar. The contents are all designed to highlight meaningful action, in her words.

Kumar highlighted some details about the venue including the 100-percent clean energy, locally-sourced food, no single-use plastic, and the carbon footprint offset for the entire event. Also, all of the stage will be recycled and is already made of repurposed wood.

She began with a poll to gauge how the audience is feeling, with a word cloud such as “curious,” “inspired,” and “excited.”

Attendees then offered their input on what resonated most from the first day including equity and fair worker panel, research on Cascale, and Miran Ali’s keynote on Bangladesh. The final poll was on what attendees wanted to hear next or take away from day two. Action, clarity, and guidance were some of the requests from the audience.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The journey towards sustainability is complex, with different paces of progress across the industry.

Regional focus and social engagement are essential to driving climate action and creating lasting change.

Manufacturers face conflicting priorities and resource challenges, but unity and collaboration are key to success.



'Together we strive, Together
Together from Siberia to So

Opening Keynote: From Siberia to South Africa: A Manufacturer's Dilemma

 **Shreyaskar Chaudhary**, Managing Director, Pratibha Syntex Ltd.

In his keynote, Pratibha Syntex's Shreyaskar Chaudhary, drew parallels between the long journey of migratory birds and the ongoing challenges in the textiles and apparel industry. Chaudhary used the bar-tailed Godwit, which flies 11,000 kilometers in a span of 9 to 11 days, and the white stork, which takes 30 to 40 days for the same journey, as metaphors for the varying paces at which the industry progresses towards sustainability.

Reflecting on the weight of unmet ESG goals, Chaudhary expressed how, as a manufacturer, he often feels the need to seek forgiveness. He polled the audience on working styles, and the unanimous response favored collaboration. He then posed a second poll, asking whether combating climate change or fostering decent work was a higher priority.

Chaudhary shared his journey over the past 15 years, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19

pandemic. He described the immense challenges of balancing work with the loss of colleagues and friends. The pandemic inspired him to develop a roadmap, titled "ESG Roadmap: Stuck in Siberia," which illustrated the tangled priorities, audit fatigue, and resource imbalances manufacturers face. His workers' feedback was clear: they wanted more joy at work.

He highlighted the positive results from organic farming initiatives led by two women, Gaura and Mamta, demonstrating the power of social engagement to drive meaningful change. Chaudhary reiterated that regional focus is critical to achieving climate action, and despite losing customers, he maintained that action must happen on the ground.

He closed with a powerful message of unity, "Together we strive, together we thrive, together from Siberia to South Africa."





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Equity in the supply chain is crucial for driving decarbonization and achieving shared climate goals.



Systemic change and financial empowerment are needed to ensure a just transition and board-level support for sustainability efforts.



Involving investors, policymakers, and consumers is essential to building a business model where sustainability benefits all stakeholders.

Is Value Chain Inequity Hindering Climate Action?

Kim van der Weerd,
Intelligence Director,
Transformers
Foundation -
Moderator

Sean Cady,
VP Global
Sustainability,
Responsibility, Trade,
and Government
Affairs at VF Corp.

Pascal Brun,
VP of Sustainability
and D&I,
Zalando SE

Dr. Vidhura Ralapanawe,
Executive
Vice President,
Epic Group

Krelyne Andrew, Head
of Sustainability,
Sappi Verve, Sappi

Transformers Foundation's Kim van der Weerd moderated a panel focused on equity in the supply chain and the role of collective action in driving sustainability. Panelists Sappi's Krelyne Andrew, VF's Sean Cady, Zalando's Pascal Brun, and Epic Group's Vidhura Ralapanawe emphasized the urgent need for equity across the supply chain to accelerate progress on decarbonization. They agreed that inequity has stalled progress and stressed the importance of partnerships and collaboration in achieving sustainability goals.

The session highlighted key definitions, including climate action as the response to the climate crisis, collective action as shared responsibility, and value chain inequity as the need for equal footing across stakeholders. Sappi's Andrew pointed to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals as guiding principles, emphasizing climate adaptation and action as priorities.

Zalando's Brun and Epic Group's Ralapanawe called for system change and partnerships to ensure shared value across the industry.

Ralapanawe, reflecting on his journey from climate researcher to industry leader, expressed urgency about the shrinking window for achieving the Paris Agreement goals. He noted the dissonance between sustainability demands and the industry's reliance on "cheap coal" and unsustainable working conditions for factory workers.

VF's Cady underscored the role of investors and policymakers, who are often excluded from discussions but are essential to achieving shared responsibility. He also remarked on the declining consumer interest in paying for sustainability. Andrew emphasized the importance of financial empowerment, noting that decarbonization efforts must demonstrate a return on investment to secure board approvals.

The panel concluded with a focus on redefining the business model to ensure sustainability benefits everyone in the value chain. Ralapanawe closed by urging the audience to reflect on the human impact: "Go to the people who make your garments, and ask if their children are sleeping safe."





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The conversation around fibers needs to move beyond binary comparisons; a more nuanced understanding of their environmental and social impacts is essential for progress.

Investment in renewable energy and recycling is crucial, but challenges like recyclability and overproduction need industry-wide collaboration and innovation.

Overproduction and overconsumption require both legislative action and education to resolve, alongside greater collaboration to foster sustainable practices.

Fiber Forward: Collaborating for a Sustainable Future

Andrew Martin, Executive Vice President, Cascale - Moderator

Dalena White, Secretary General, International Wool Textile Organisation

Lena Staafgard, Chief Operating Officer, Better Cotton

Simon Whitmarsh-Knight, Sustainability Director - Textiles, Hyosung

Cascale's Andrew Martin opened the conversation by addressing the oversimplified narratives surrounding fibers, emphasizing the need for a more nuanced understanding. The panelists explored how different fibers—wool, cotton, and elastane—can be improved to benefit both the environment and social good, while discussing the industry's action (or inaction) on fiber and how to foster collaboration on shared goals.

Dalena White, speaking on behalf of the wool industry, noted that comparing fibers against each other is counterproductive. She highlighted ongoing improvements in wool manufacturing, particularly in China, where air quality and clean energy initiatives are gaining momentum. She also emphasized the need for a biogenic carbon life-cycle assessment for wool to showcase its full environmental benefits.

Simon Whitmarsh-Knight, representing Hyosung, the world's largest elastane producer, spoke about the company's investment in renewable energy and textile-to-textile recycling. He pointed to Hyosung's \$1 billion

investment in "bio" businesses and responsible purchasing practices for sugarcane inputs.

Lena Staafgard of Better Cotton focused on the importance of traceability in agriculture, describing it as "capturing the potential in agriculture." She also highlighted carbon sinks as a key measurement area requiring further attention and clarity, a point echoed by White.

The panelists discussed the challenges of fiber production, recycling, and overconsumption. White expressed concern that the industry has lost its basic design principles, while Whitmarsh-Knight raised the "comfort conundrum" of elastane, which offers comfort but complicates recycling efforts. Both agreed that overproduction and overconsumption would need legislation and education to address effectively.

The conversation concluded with a call for greater industry collaboration, with Staafgard suggesting that "speaking the same language" could unlock potential for innovation.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Collaboration across the industry is essential to scaling renewable energy efforts and achieving shared climate goals.

Tools like the Higg FEM can help identify energy hotspots and improve resource efficiency in renewable energy adoption.

Supplier engagement is critical to achieving renewable energy targets and must be integrated into sourcing strategies and investment plans.

Global Energy Trends: A Focus on Renewable Energy

Dani Baker,
Senior Manager,
Community
Engagement,
Cascale –
Moderator

Eric Jen,
Founder & CEO,
REN Energy

Markus Wieser,
Climate Team
Leader, W.L. Gore
& Associates

Stefan Seidel,
Senior Director
Corporate
Sustainability,
PUMA SE

Veronique Rochet,
Senior Director
Sustainability,
PUMA SE

Abrar Sayem,
Founder & CEO,
Merchant Bay Inc.
Director BGMEA,
Founder and
President of BAYLA

The panel discussion on renewable energy highlighted the opportunities for industry collaboration. REN’s Eric Jen emphasized the potential for joint sourcing of wind and solar energy, stating, “There’s no reason why we shouldn’t be sourcing wind and solar together.”

PUMA’s Stefan Seidel pointed to PUMA’s leadership role in the UN Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action (UNFCCC), stressing that the fashion industry plays a crucial part in scaling legislative actions and creating the right frameworks for renewable energy adoption.

Markus Wieser, from W.L. Gore & Associates, discussed innovations like electric boiler technologies and the company’s free online tool for driving renewable energy adoption. He emphasized the need for resource efficiency and highlighted how tools like the Higg FEM can help identify hotspots and accelerate renewable energy progress.

BGMEA’s Abrar Sayem shared Bangladesh’s progress in adopting renewable energy and urged for manufacturers to be involved from the outset to align financial and technological resources for renewable goals. He noted the country’s bullish approach to environmentally friendly practices and the importance of practical collaboration.

Veronique Rochet of PUMA celebrated achieving 22 percent renewable energy, on track for their 25 percent target, and stressed the importance of clarity in integrating renewable energy into sourcing strategies and investment plans. She underscored the need for supplier engagement, noting that PUMA works closely with 18 key suppliers to set realistic and achievable goals.

Jen closed by emphasizing that businesses can start now, noting that collaboration is critical, but the challenge lies in supplier engagement. He credited Cascale’s collaborative model as an inspiration for driving renewable energy adoption at scale.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Establishing an industry-wide definition of foundational environmental performance will align expectations and foster collective progress.

Broader supplier representation, including lower-tier suppliers, is critical for a balanced and inclusive industry approach.

Multi-sector engagement, including NGOs, brands, and policymakers, is vital for aligning industry practices with global standards.



Improving Higg FEM Foundational Performance

Jeremy Lardeau, Senior Vice President, Higg Index, Cascale

Carolina van Loenen, Director, Stakeholder Engagement, Cascale

This workshop addressed foundational environmental performance, current performance data, collective action and data access, and stakeholder engagement. Speakers emphasized the need for an industry-wide definition of base standards, which would align brands' expectations and foster a collective focus on improving environmental performance. Gaps in water supply monitoring and poor performance in air emissions and wastewater management were identified, reinforcing the need for joint industry efforts.

The importance of data availability was highlighted, with Cascale members able to access aggregate reports via the Member Analytics Portal (MAP). Stakeholder engagement emerged as critical, with collaboration across industry groups, including non-corporate partners like Textile Exchange, necessary to align foundational principles and regulatory perspectives.

Before the workshop, participants stressed the importance of respectful dialogue, particularly recognizing the perspectives of those without access to Higg FEM tools. The workshop then

explored three key questions: how insights on 'acceptable bottom line' performance resonate, who should be involved in these conversations, and which standards or organizations to include.

Attendees discussed industry alignment, social compliance, and continuous improvement, while highlighting challenges in representation. Broader supplier inclusion was deemed essential to diversify perspectives and accelerate progress. Systemic industry issues, such as foundational environmental practices and performance evaluation, must be addressed.

To drive meaningful progress, multi-sector engagement is critical, involving NGOs, brands, manufacturers, and adjacent industries. Key stakeholders, including policymakers, regulators, and factory workers, should be part of the conversation to ensure alignment between industry practices and government standards, and to benchmark available resources against environmental practices. A collaborative approach is vital to developing sustainability standards across the entire value chain.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS



The new Theory of Change outlines how LCA data drives sustainable improvement at the farm level, guiding the cotton industry towards more impactful environmental practices.



The focus should be on improving farm-level practices, not just chasing the lowest-impact datasets, to create real-world change.



Collaboration between buyers and growers is crucial, with LCA data facilitating conversations that lead to tangible sustainability progress.

Industry-Aligned Cotton LCA Methodology

Joël Mertens,
Director, Higg Product Tools, Cascale - Moderator

Deepika Mishra,
Standards and Data Lead, U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol

Dr. Jesse Daystar,
Chief Sustainability Officer, VP Sustainability, Cotton Incorporated

Lars van Doremalen,
Director Impact, Better Cotton

The session began with Cascale’s Joël Mertens outlining the key objectives of the Cotton Expert Team: developing an industry-aligned LCA methodology to accurately reflect the environmental impacts of cotton farming, ensuring LCA datasets are consistent and region-specific, and educating users on the appropriate use of these datasets.

U.S. Cotton Trust Protocol’s Deepika Mishra introduced the Theory of Change, explaining how LCA data drives sustainable change by informing decision-making and enabling continuous improvement at the farm level. She emphasized that the methodology serves as a roadmap toward a more sustainable cotton industry. The panel agreed that focusing solely on the lowest-impact datasets would not drive real change, as the key to impact lies in improving practices at the farm level.

Cotton Incorporated’s Jesse Daystar pointed out that “chasing lower impact datasets” without changing farm practices doesn’t create

actual progress, while Better Cotton’s Lars van Doremalen warned that aiming for the lowest numbers could trap the industry in a “prisoner’s dilemma” where no one benefits in the long term.

The panel also discussed the challenges of collecting detailed primary data from millions of farmers in diverse regions. As data collection becomes more complex, farmers are increasingly asking about its tangible benefits. To address this, the methodology aggregates data at the program level to facilitate conversations between cotton buyers and programs, and includes an economic allocation method to ensure impact is allocated based on economic reality.

The session concluded with a focus on user education, emphasizing that LCA datasets should reflect farm-level practices and drive collaboration between buyers and growers. The first LCA datasets will be published with the next Higg MSI update in October.





Networking Moments





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Collaboration and data-driven insights are critical for effective sustainability implementation across the supply chain.



The Higg Index is a valuable tool for identifying gaps, but engagement with suppliers is necessary to translate data into action.



Shared responsibility and trust between brands and suppliers are essential for driving long-term sustainability improvements.

Operationalizing Sustainability Workshop

Kaley Roshitsh, Director, Editorial, Cascale - *Moderator*

Quentin Thorel, Group Head of Sustainability, CIEL Textiles

Rebecka Sancho, Head of Sustainability, G-Star

In this workshop moderated by Cascale's Kaley Roshitsh, CIEL's Quentin Thorel and G-Star's Rebecka Sancho shared insights on their internal approaches to sustainability, emphasizing collaboration across departments and the importance of using data to drive decisions. The speakers highlighted the significance of the buyer-supplier relationship in achieving industry success.

Sancho explained the benefits of working in a small, close-knit team at G-Star, which enables a holistic approach to sustainability. Thorel described how CIEL integrates sustainability KPIs across all departments, not just the sustainability team, ensuring company-wide accountability. Both emphasized the importance of the Higg Index, with Sancho sharing how G-Star uses Higg FEM and FSLM to inform sourcing decisions, and Thorel highlighting how CIEL uses it to identify gaps and opportunities in their factories.

While data is crucial, both speakers stressed that it must be coupled with direct engagement and strong relationships with suppliers to

drive real improvement. In discussing Facility Improvement Plans (FIPs), they agreed that understanding on-the-ground realities is essential to implementing changes. Sancho noted the importance of building relationships with suppliers, while Thorel pointed out how CIEL's extensive data helps target areas for improvement.

When addressing responsibility in the supply chain, both speakers emphasized collaboration and shared responsibility with suppliers. Sancho stressed that sustainability is not a competition and encouraged peer-to-peer sharing among suppliers. Thorel added that aligning requirements across the supply chain yields greater impact.

The workshop concluded with a discussion of operational challenges such as data quality, regulatory hurdles, and internal alignment. Participants suggested solutions like integrating sustainability KPIs, fostering supplier collaboration, and enhancing capacity-building efforts within the supply chain.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS



Both CAF and Higg FSLM play an important role in human rights due diligence.



Workers must be involved in the data collection process.



Structural and collaborative solutions are essential to influence change.

Higg FSLM Zero Tolerance Improvement Workshop

Orine D'Souza, Senior Manager, Higg Facility Tools, Cascale

Lisa Süß, Head of Industry Alignment, Fair Wear Foundation

Tom Mason, Senior Manager, Public Affairs & Stakeholder Engagement, SLCP

Veronique Rochet, Senior Director Sustainability, PUMA

Debbie Shakespeare, Senior Director, Sustainability, Avery Dennison

This workshop session focused on zero tolerance for legal non-compliance and improving worker conditions across the industry. The session began with a presentation on the Convergence Assessment Framework (CAF), followed by a panel discussion and roundtable conversations. The objective was to provide insights into tools and frameworks that uphold strict zero-tolerance standards.

SLCP's Tom Mason led the session, explaining how the Higg FSLM integrates with CAF data through the Worldly platform. In 2023, over 9,000 facilities reported legal non-compliance data to CAF, with 94 percent of assessments identifying at least one non-compliance. The most common issues related to health and safety, working hours, and wages and benefits. While the data showed year-on-year improvement, smaller facilities faced higher instances of non-compliance due to resource constraints.

The CAF is aligned with International Labor Standards such as the ILO's Fundamental Rights at Work, covering issues like discrimination, forced labor, and child labor. Excessive overtime and minimum wage violations were frequent challenges. According to SLCP data, 45 percent of legal non-compliances in 2023 involved an ILO Fundamental Right at Work.

During the panel, attendees discussed the challenges of social audits, with Avery Dennison's Debbie Shakespeare addressing the reality of audit fatigue. Fair Wear Foundation's Lisa Süß urged participants to consider whether their sourcing strategies contribute to these issues, highlighting that enforcement, rather than labor laws themselves, is often the main gap in common sourcing countries. Living wages and freedom of association were noted as critical areas for improvement.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Higg BRM aligns 65 percent with EU CSRD/ESRS, focusing on impact materiality over financial materiality.

Materiality assessments and gap analysis are significant challenges, with Higg BRM offering tools to help identify critical gaps.

Future workshops will focus on improving Higg BRM integration into CSRD reporting, including practical guidance and tool enhancements.

Higg BRM and CSRD: Simplifying Your Reporting Journey

Adrián Branco,
Senior Manager,
Higg Index Brand
& Retail, Cascale

Maravillas Rodríguez Zarco,
Senior Director,
Higg Index Strategy
& Operations,
Cascale

This Higg BRM presentation and workshop focused on the tool's alignment with the European Union's CSRD and ESRS compliance efforts, highlighting a 65 percent overlap in ESG taxonomy as of 2024. Although further alignment is expected in 2025, full compliance isn't feasible due to the Higg BRM's role as a sustainability performance tool rather than a financial reporting tool. The Higg BRM supports impact materiality but isn't suited for addressing the financial aspects of CSRD/ESRS.

The session outlined how Higg BRM can help organizations navigate various reporting steps, including materiality assessments, gap analysis, data collection, and drafting sustainability statements. Participants identified materiality assessments and gap analysis as the most challenging aspects of ESRS compliance, and while none currently use Higg BRM for impact materiality, many expressed interest in exploring its potential to identify critical gaps.

A key suggestion from participants was to include ESRS numbering directly in the tool to simplify the mapping of Higg BRM questions to ESRS standards. Additionally, there were calls for greater consistency in question wording and the integration of Higg FEM and Higg FSLM into the Higg BRM to enhance its functionality. Practical guidance for using Higg BRM in CSRD reporting is being developed, with follow-up workshops planned for further input.

During the Q&A, it was noted that CSRD compliance won't fully cover the Higg BRM since CSRD is industry-agnostic, while Higg BRM is industry-specific. Cascale's involvement in sectoral standards development with EFRAG will help improve alignment once those standards are finalized.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS



Vietnam has become a leader in supply chain capacity building for the Higg FEM, advancing sustainability efforts in the region.



The session highlighted the need for collective action and collaboration among brands, trainers, and facilities to drive sustainability.

Practical tips were shared on pooling resources to improve understanding of key environmental areas like energy, GHG emissions, water, and waste.

Scaling Collective Action for Environmental Performance

Dhawal Mane, Director, Training and Verification, Cascale - *Moderator*

Bien Vu, Regional Manager, Leadership & Sustainability

Saskia Anders, Team Lead Sustainable Supply Chains and Circularity, GIZ Vietnam

Linh Cao, Sustainability Project Manager, On AG

Minh Nguyen, Senior Manager Compliance, Facility Engineering and Sustainability, Hanesbrands Inc.

The session “Scaling Collective Action for Environmental Performance” was a shining example of Vietnam’s leadership in undertaking supply chain capacity building programs for Higg FEM. GIZ Vietnam’s To the Finish Line of Higg FEM training program was discussed at length by representatives leading this initiative. Speakers discussed how the program has been implemented, its reach, and how the industry can adopt such collective action programs in different sourcing regions.

TFL is implemented by the Initiative for Global Solidarity (IGS) project under GIZ on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and sustained by TFL Vietnam, building partnerships to develop and deliver impactful training that drives environmental improvements for the Vietnam apparel supply chain.

The session was intended to plant a seed amongst the audience members - to bring regional industry stakeholders (including brands, trainers, and facilities) together. This session provided practical tips on pooling financial and time resources to collectively elevate supply chain’s understanding on various Higg FEM environmental aspects, such as energy, GHG, water, and waste.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Login, use, and help inform the MAP's future.

Only use the data internally – not externally.

Acknowledge the use cases and explore more.



The Member Analytics Portal (MAP): Higg Index Tool Intelligence to Help Guide Your Sustainability Strategies

 **Aaron Di Silvestro**, Director, Higg Products, Cascale

In this data-driven session, Cascale's Aaron Di Silvestro guided members on how to use the new Member Analytics Portal (MAP), which allows members to access aggregated data for their analyses. The platform addresses ad hoc data requests, providing access to Higg FEM data, though Higg BRM data is not included.

Di Silvestro walked members through the login process at portal.cascale.org, emphasizing that members are responsible for the accuracy of their analyses and conclusions. He stressed that the data is not intended for public communication and that the platform's main use cases are for benchmarking, guiding action, and filling data gaps.

MAP offers an easy-to-download, aggregated view of Higg FEM data on energy use, climate impacts, and foundational question performance, broken down by countries, facilities, and production volumes. Di Silvestro noted that while the data is useful, errors may occur

due to manual entry, and unverified data is excluded. He gave specific examples, such as analyzing which foundational question was most frequently missed in Bangladesh.

In addressing frequently asked questions, Di Silvestro explained that while MAP can't build Scope 3 footprints directly, it can assist when combined with primary data and the Higg MSI tool. Other topics covered included high percentile facilities and evolving use cases for the platform.

He encouraged members to use the portal actively, ask questions, and provide feedback to help guide future enhancements. Audience questions touched on measurement updates and the cadence of updates, which are dependent on the close of the verification cycle.

"We need you to tell us what you need in the portal," Di Silvestro urged, inviting further engagement from members.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS



Cascale partnered with FASHION LEAP FOR CLIMATE, offering 25 free spots to help members set science-based targets (SBTs).



SBT adoption among members remains an area for improvement.



Learning programs like FASHION LEAP are essential for driving decarbonization and organizational alignment.



FASHION LEAP FOR CLIMATE

Philipp Meister,
Global Lead Fashion & Sporting Goods,
Quantis - *Moderator*

Erwan Berthou,
Director,
Membership & Corporate Engagement,
Cascale

Magnus Dorsch,
Head of Corporate Sustainability,
About You

Elena Stecca, Team Lead Environmental Sustainability,
Zalando SE

Gregg Meyer, Chief Sustainability Officer,
Steve Madden

Alexandra Nikolin,
Environmental Coordinator,
Hunkermoller

Cascale’s Erwan Berthou opened the session by referencing the previous day’s discussion on leadership, where Cascale’s CEO Colin Browne highlighted that only 67 percent of Cascale corporate members had set science-based targets (SBTs). Berthou introduced the panelists, including Magnus Dorsch from About You, who helped develop the FASHION LEAP FOR CLIMATE program. Dorsch described the program as a learning platform designed to accelerate SBT adoption. Starting with a pilot involving 10 brands in 2022, the program has grown to 120 brands by 2024, featuring a modular, self-directed system with continuously updated content.

Panelists Elena Stucco from Zalando SE and Alexandra Nikolin from Hunkermoller praised the program’s structure, emphasizing how it facilitated their companies’ SBT adoption. Nikolin shared how the platform provided the language needed to align the entire company behind their decarbonization goals. “This was not the CSR team’s pet project but something everybody needed to care about for it to succeed,” she noted, explaining how the program helped secure board approval.

Berthou announced Cascale’s new partnership with FASHION LEAP FOR CLIMATE, offering 25 free spots to members as part of an effort to support brands in setting SBTs. He noted that 33 percent of Cascale’s members—around 70 brands—have yet to set targets, and Cascale’s pledge is to ensure these brands aren’t left behind. Attendees were encouraged to sign up for the program via QR code, with Berthou also sharing details of upcoming peer-to-peer sessions.





KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Cascale celebrated significant achievements from staff, members, and partners, with attendance at the Annual Meeting up 30 percent.

Cascale's Board remains dedicated to driving the organization's growth and goals.

Partnerships and collaborations, such as those with CIEL Textiles and Worldly, continue to play a vital role in advancing sustainability efforts.

Celebrating Our Collective Achievements: A Year in Review

Hilary Strickland, Chief of Staff, Cascale - Moderator

Cascale's Hilary Strickland opened the session with reflections on Cascale's achievements over the past year, noting a 30 percent increase in attendees at this year's Annual Meeting compared to the previous year. She also shared that 60 percent of media coverage for Cascale in the past year was positive.

Dr. Delman Lee, Vice Chair, TAL Apparel Limited

Solidaridad's Tamar Hoek highlighted the organization's rebrand, which she described as demonstrating Cascale's "new energy and passion," as well as the appointment of Colin Browne as CEO. She emphasized Cascale's growth from 12 members in 2012 to 303 members in 2024, underscoring the momentum generated by effective partnerships.

Krishna Manda, Vice President of Corporate Sustainability, Lenzing Aktiengesellschaft

VF's Sean Cady, reflecting on his time as interim CEO, praised the passion and expertise of the staff. He highlighted the role of manufacturers in bringing Higg FEM 4.0 to life, noting that it was named a runner-up in Fast Company's "World Changing Ideas" award in 2023.

Sean Cady, Vice President, Global Sustainability, Responsibility, Trade and Government Affairs, VF Corporation

Building on this, TAL's Delman Lee spoke about Browne's "listening tour," where he visited manufacturers and staff around the world to identify barriers the industry must overcome. Lee pointed to the Annual Meeting as evidence of Browne's learnings, celebrating the collective problem-solving efforts of those in attendance.

Tamar Hoek, Senior Policy Director Sustainable Fashion, Solidaridad

The Board also recognized key achievements from CIEL Textiles, which implemented Higg FSLM across all 19 facilities with a verified score average of 85 percent, and Sappi's Cloquet Mill, which demonstrated best-in-class use of the Higg Index. Cotton organizations, such as Better Cotton and Cotton Incorporated, were also praised for their contributions to improved data gathering.

Lenzing's Krishna Manda made a surprise appearance to commend the Board's Transition Taskforce for their collective sacrifices and dedication to Cascale's mission.



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

Fashion needs true leadership, uncomfortable conversations, and scaled efforts to create the change needed.

Cascale's leadership with the Higg Index and accountability is unique and admirable.

Higher moral standards are required in business today.

Leading the Charge: A Message from Paul Polman

 **Paul Polman,**
Co-Founder, Fashion Pact

In a special video message, Polman shared his hopes for fashion and consumer goods ahead of the dinner reception. In it, he championed the learnings, visions, and hands-on work needed to achieve transformative change. He highlighted the need for true leadership, uncomfortable conversations, and scaled efforts.

He also spoke of the Fashion Pact he founded which convenes some 60 CEOs from across the industry, as well as the legacy and vision of Rick Ridgeway for his work in Cascale and the Higg Index. He also spotlighted the work of Colin Browne, who recently joined Cascale.

"The industry can be an enormously positive force," he said, naming off certain hindrances such as low wages, microplastics, egregious waste, and more that prevent progress.

He continued, "This is an exciting moment in the fashion industry." In this new era, Cascale

– rebranded and reinvigorated – will play a "central role," per Polman, in helping the industry navigate ethical decision-making and sustainability. "This sense of urgency is critical to success...The time for incremental changes has passed, and we need exponential solutions for exponential problems."

He called on the importance of Cascale's data leadership through the Higg Index, as well as higher standards, policy, trust, and transparency. "What we need now is a concrete mindset change."

In a final moment, Polman shared a quote from Wangari Maathai: "In the course of history, there comes a time when humanity is called to shift to a new level of consciousness, to reach a higher moral ground."



KEY TAKE-AWAYS

The Cascale community is embracing more open and courageous conversations around sustainability and leadership.

Cascale leadership is evolving, with a focus on inclusivity and the broader sustainability landscape.

The 2025 Cascale Annual Meeting will take place in Hong Kong.

Friends in a Biergarten: Cascale Annual Meeting Reflections

Isabelle Kumar,
Award Winning
Journalist, Presenter,
Moderator, former
News Anchor

Andrew Martin,
Executive Vice
President, Cascale

James Schaeffer,
Chief Strategy
Officer, Worldly

Rüdiger Fox,
CEO, Sympatex

In a lighthearted conclusion to Cascale’s Annual Meeting, Cascale’s Andrew Martin, emcee Isabelle Kumar, Worldly’s James Schaeffer, and Sympatex’s Rudiger Fox took the stage to reflect on the event’s insights. In a surprise entrance, Cascale CEO Colin Browne entered the stage – wearing very traditional attire for Munich.

Schaeffer humorously commented on Browne donning lederhosen to serve beer to the executives, joking about “servant leadership.” He also highlighted Rick Ridgeway’s continued involvement with Cascale and his system roadmap as standout moments.

Martin built on these reflections, noting that this year’s meeting encouraged more open and courageous conversations within the community. He referenced the various metaphors used by speakers, such as Browne’s Great Stink analogy and Manda’s reference to Winnie the Pooh, while Kumar jokingly added that at times, the event felt like “group therapy.”


Fox reflected on how leadership remained central to Cascale’s mission, despite challenging times. He emphasized that while there is still much work ahead, Cascale has successfully maintained its leadership role in the industry. Schaeffer plugged the Worldly Customer Forum that was to take place the next day, while Fox called for the search for standout leaders or “unicorns,” and Martin stressed the importance of greater inclusivity and broader representation from stakeholders, policymakers, and workers.

Looking ahead, Fox mentioned the need for a “fundamental cultural shift” toward circularity, while Schaeffer highlighted the importance of incorporating reporting requirements. Kumar and Martin both called for enhanced member engagement, with check-ins for ongoing programs and a focus on inclusion. The session concluded with Betty Li, Senior Manager, Membership APAC, making a separate surprise appearance to announce that the next Annual Meeting in 2025 will be held in Hong Kong.





Farewell

 **Isabelle Kumar**, Award Winning Journalist, Presenter, Moderator, former News Anchor

In her final remarks, emcee Isabelle Kumar took the stage to share one last heartfelt message, and a special gift for all attendees. Cascale, in a move away from more traditional gifts, is giving back in a meaningful way by planting a tree on behalf of every attendee in Munich.

This choice reflects Cascale's commitment to environmental care and community support. By planting trees in Peru, the Cascale community is helping restore vital forests that enhance biodiversity, strengthen climate resilience, and support local communities, creating a lasting impact long after the event has ended. This is part of the Just One Tree initiative.

Kumar concluded by thanking everyone, as well as the event sponsors, for their energy and engagement across the two days, and promised everyone a treat later that evening, with the official dinner taking place at the historic Augustiner-Keller biergarten.





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A special thank you to our partners at Worldly, whose invaluable expertise and exclusive hosting of the Higg Index continue to support our mission. Congratulations on hosting the inaugural Worldly Customer Forum, held right after our Annual Meeting—a testament to their leadership and commitment to our shared vision of reducing environmental impact and increasing social justice in the industry.

About Us

Cascale (formerly Sustainable Apparel Coalition, or SAC) is a global, non-profit alliance of 300 leading consumer goods brands, retailers, manufacturers, sourcing agents, service providers, trade associations, NGOs, and academic institutions. Our members represent every link of the global value chain for apparel, footwear, and textiles; home furnishings; sporting and outdoor goods; bags and luggage.



**See You in
Hong Kong in
September!**

**Hong Kong
Sept. 15-17**

**Cascale
Annual
Meeting
2025**



Cascale.org



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