

YOU CAN CHOOSE ANY COLOR, AS LONG AS IT IS GREEN - CHALLENGES, SKILLS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF GREENING THE ECONOMY

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Globalization has reached the semi-arid region of the State of Pernambuco, with significant positive impact upon the number of jobs available in the garment industry in Toritama, a small town with a population of 35,554 inhabitants (according to Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics – IBGE 2010). A center of jeans production for fashion-conscious middle-class Brazilian consumers, the current production of Toritama's 2,500 industries amounts to some 3 million pairs/month. Together with 60 small and medium-size laundries specialized in washing, and developing new patterns and styles, the industry has been influencing jeans fashion trends (Toritama Commercial and Industrial Association-ACIT, May 2010), yet the main fuels being firewood (69,4%) and textile scraps (29,15)

In fact, an examination of socioeconomic statistics reveals remarkable economic growth allied to poverty reduction, showing a raise in GDP of 9,23% p/year (2002-2005). Formal-sector proved an increase in 62% of jobs and 56% in wages paid with jeans production and marketing, over the past 13 years. However, the sharp increase in formal-sector total income (3.207,74% - 1196-2008), was due to raise in number of jobs, rather than in sums paid to individuals. Indeed, rates of pay are among the lowest in the entire jeans industry: R\$ 459,30 = US\$288 p/worker (Annual Social Information Report – RAIS, 2008). In spite of the decrease in poverty, such growth has been accompanied by significant environmental impacts, particularly to the State's water.

The State Environment and Water Resources Agency (CPRH) reports, in 2005, about 90% of the water used in industrial process was carried by 7 thousand tanker trucks from regional reservoirs, and costs ranging between US\$ 1.28 (1.000 liters), to as much as US\$ 8.48 in dry season. Regardless of local government efforts otherwise, the waste water, a mixture of bleach, dye and detergents, discharged straight into the Capibaribe River basin, is prior contributor to the pollution of the State's main river.

The non-dissociable systemic characteristic of sustainability determines an ongoing criterion for environmental governance. For the present case-study, there is no alternative to sustainable development, unless there is the acknowledgment of jeans production process, to reduce waste and effluents and promote energy efficiency. At the same time, best practices must be adopted, in order to set trends and face challenges, with a view to benefiting companies and communities.

Social responsibility cannot be disregarded when setting commercial objectives. Ensuring that the value chain is sustainable and creating sustainable products and services, need to be a liability.

The challenges, skills and opportunities for sustainability within such context enhance, at least: (i) the imperative acknowledgment of the value of jeans productive chain and the promoting changes; (ii) grasp of good practices, awareness of tendencies and challenges; (iii) environmental responsibility in commitment to long-term competitiveness and innovation, a conditioning variable in the generation of economic and socio-environmental value.

The first rule is quite simple: do not start from the present; it's worthier starting from the future.