How we change fashion: The Green Button celebrates its fifth anniversary | 09/09/2024

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Five years ago, the government-run label Green Button was introduced by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) as the first label of its kind in Germany. Since then, the Green Button has pursued the goal of making the textile industry more sustainable. After all, 90% of our textiles are produced in countries of the Global South - often under inadequate conditions. An estimated 75 million people worldwide are involved in the production of textiles, the majority of whom are women. Unpaid overtime for seamstresses and the use of hazardous chemicals in production are still commonplace. To change this, (textile) companies must fulfil their due diligence obligations and proactively address risks and grievances in their supply chains. For the past five years, the Green Button has shown which companies fulfil their responsibility for people and the environment in their textile supply chains and recognises their sustainable products.

Since its launch in September 2019, the Green Button has achieved quite a lot: More than 100 companies have implemented the Green Button standard in the past five years and have undergone independent audits. On the fifth anniversary, Head of Secretariat, Christine Moser-Priewich looks back on the development of the Green Button and emphasises the pioneering role of the label: "It fills us with great pride that the Green Button, as a pioneer, has been able to make an important and acknowledged contribution to anchoring due diligence. Today, it is undisputed that the Green Button has been able to demonstrate two things: Firstly, companies of all sizes can implement due diligence and take responsibility for compliance with human rights and environmental standards in their supply chains. Secondly, these due diligence obligations can be verified and certified - numerous players are now following our example. The Green Button has thus paved the way for corresponding legislative initiatives in Germany and Europe."

Further development of the requirements

With the introduction of a revised standard version (Green Button 2.0) in August 2022, the requirements were increased. For example, the Green Button now also sets requirements for progress towards living wages and demands greater involvement of those affected in the production countries. More than 60 companies are currently licensed with the revised standard and fulfil its more ambitious requirements.

Impact beyond its own label

The Green Button also has an impact beyond its own label and beyond the textile industry via the so-called meta-label approach. In the meta-label approach, the Green Button has recognised (certification) 20 trustworthy labels - including labels from Fairtrade, OEKO-TEX® and the Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS). With these recognised (certification) labels, companies prove that they and their suppliers meet the Green Button's requirements for sustainable production. On the way to recognition, the labels have worked with the Green Button to raise their requirements in key areas. These stricter requirements, e.g. in the areas of child labour, maternity protection, chemicals and labour rights, apply to all companies certified by the 20 labels. This benefits workers in over 27,000 factories worldwide, including in India, Bangladesh and Türkiye. This not only contributes to social justice, but also conserves resources worldwide and promotes a more sustainable global economy.

The Green Button is everywhere

The Green Button has not only made a name for itself in the corporate and labelling landscape. The Green Button is also recognised by large sections of the public: According to a recent representative survey by the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK), the Green Button is the third best-known textile label in Germany. As many as 47% of people are familiar with the label, and over half (60%) of them have consciously bought at least one item of clothing with it. Trust in the Green Button is particularly high at 68%. From hats to socks, from tents to fan scarves: sustainable products with the Green Button are now available for every occasion and every budget. Since its introduction in 2019, over 425 million textiles with the Green Button have been sold.

The Green Button has also become an integral part of the public sphere: whether on bed linen or towels in hotels and hospitals or on uniforms on trains and at supermarket checkouts – the textile label can be found everywhere. "The success of the Green Button shows that consumers want to consume more sustainably. The government-run textile label gives them the opportunity to make a contribution for better working conditions and environmentally friendly production when shopping," says a delighted Moser-Priewich.

About the label

The Green Button was launched on 9 September 2019 by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). It aims to achieve decent working conditions and environmentally friendly production along textile supply chains. As a scheme owner, the BMZ is thus further promoting the protection of people and the environment in global supply chains.

The special feature of the Green Button is that its requirements are divided into two pillars: The requirements of the first pillar examine whether a company assumes responsibility for compliance with human rights and environmental standards in its textile supply chains. These are the requirements for corporate due diligence processes. The second pillar of the Green Button includes the requirements for production processes in the supply chain. To verify these, the Green Button recognises other labels via its so-called meta-label approach. These labels must fulfil recognition criteria. A product can therefore only be labelled with the Green Button if the requirements from both pillars are met.

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