

## Sustainability Certification

Options and issues associated with the development of a sustainability standards for hard fibres

### **Abstract:**

Consumers in the economically developed countries are increasingly wanting to know the origins of the products they consume or use. Not only that, they also want to know how the products were made and under what conditions. At least this is what is suggested. But the slow market penetration of ECO/BIO products and Fair Trade products seems to contradict this. One reason could be the pricing strategy of companies involved in these "niche" markets. Irrespective of this consumer based argument, the increasing world population and consumption habits of both the developing and developed economies will exert high pressure on the earth's ability to meet these growing demands caused by (over) consumption practices. This has led to initiatives called "Sustainability".

At present Sustainability Reporting and Certification is related to high volume, high profile materials such as biomass, cotton, fish, wood etc. and also is focused on large corporations. However it could be speculated that there could be trickle-down effects towards what can be called minor commodities such as Hard Fibers, Jute & Kenaf. Therefore Sustainability Certification (People, Planet & Profits) could become a requirement to do business in certain international markets.

Since the Hard Fibers, Jute and Kenaf are produced in developing countries, the attention of the producers have been on trying to maintain and improve their profitability and to maintain market share. The different producers of the same fiber maintain different technical standards for fibers, assuming that this would provide them a competitive advantage. However at present the competitive advantage originates from innovation and value addition rather than an array of simple fiber technical specifications that only confuses users. Given the present state of the various fiber industries little attention has been paid to harmonizing technical standards of fibers and look ahead at the current emerging trends in (sustainability) certification systems.

The key policy challenge is for the fiber producers to recognize that "Meta Standards" could lay the foundation for cost effective collective action. In this respect Sustainability Certification could combine the various technical, economical, social, ecological and environmental standards that would be suitable and realistic for the sector. Based on the generalized Sustainability framework (Meta Standards/principles) each country and fiber sector could develop and implement schemes to suite the local conditions. The legitimacy of the system will be achieved by internationally recognized accreditation and audits conducted by certified auditors. Therefore the governance structure will be important to the acceptance and ultimate success of the Sustainability Scheme for Hard Fibers, Jute and Kenaf. The Sustainability Certification Scheme for the Hard Fibers, Jute and Kenaf could be based on so called Voluntary Certification but each country could decide which sections of standards it would make mandatory locally. On the short term each fiber sector could decide on harmonizing the technical standards, initially at bulk fiber level. The International Natural Fiber Organization (INFO) is playing a facilitating role in these important developments.

## **Curriculum Vitae: Dilip Tambyrajah**

Dilip Tambyrajah (1953) is the Managing Director of Zylyon International B.V., based in The Netherlands. Zylyon develops, manufactures and markets natural fibers and other products such as Ceylon Tea. Dilip was born in Sri Lanka, lives and works in The Netherlands since 1977. He studied Environmental Engineering at the University of South Bank, London and holds a Master Degree in Business Administration (MBA) from the British business school Henley Management College/Brunel University, U.K. In addition studied Marketing Management at the Institute of Social Sciences, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Dilip worked for several years in the field of mechanical engineering and contracting in Switzerland and The Netherlands. He was involved in many innovative international projects in Energy Systems. The technical work specialization is in energy conservation, renewable energy and energy management systems in the build environment and industrial systems such as drying, heating, cooling, solar systems and combined heat & power generation.

In 1988 joined the employers' federation of the building services contractors of the Netherlands, VNI (now UNETO-VNI) as Secretary of Economic Affairs and Business Development. At that time the federation had 3500 companies as members, providing employment to 40.000 persons, generating an annual turnover of some EUR 2500 million per year (year 1988). The responsibilities included industry policy, strategy and marketing concept development.

In 1991 onwards founded own companies Eco-Coir International, TR Management and Zylyon International B.V. The focus of activities is on international business development. The initial activities were mainly related to business consultancy and training projects in Sri Lanka. These were in collaboration with Erasmus University of Rotterdam and DFCC Bank, the premier development bank of Sri Lanka. During the period 1992/93 introduced the local natural resource of Sri Lanka: Coir Fiber. Developed coir based geotextiles and implemented several high profile projects in the Netherlands, including the protection of man-made islands on the world famous Delta Works, The Netherlands. In 1996 participated as a member of the Dutch national technical committee, under auspicious of the Ministry of Civil, Water and Road Works to stimulate the use of Bio-degradable geotextiles in the Netherlands.

From 1996 onwards developed and marketed coir products including for the Horticultural segments. Also engaged with the European automotive industry for use of coir in car seat production. At present developing Natural Fiber Composites (NFC) for a wide range of applications. In July 2010 initiated and launched the NFC platform with the support of the Ministry of Economic Affairs and Innovation and the Technical University of Delft, The Netherlands.

From industry policy perspective actively involved in encouraging R&D activities and capacity development of coir production, internationally.

Active member of the FAO Inter Governmental Group on Hard Fibers. Member of the UN-FAO international steering committee responsible for the International Year of Natural Fibers 2009. Initiator and founding member of the International Natural Fiber Organization based in The Netherlands in 2009.

Expertise included R&D into coir fiber, coir fiber production and applications. Commercial experience and expertise in product development and international business development, Industrial Policy and Strategy Development.

Dilip is married to Bernadette and has two daughters Lauren (19) and Louise (16). Lived in Sri Lanka, India, Germany, UK, Switzerland and at present lives in The Netherlands. Speaks English, Dutch, German, Singhalese and Tamil. Supports Sustainability and Equity in the world.