THE UNECE BLOCKCHAIN PILOTS

What? Results are now coming in from pilots launched in January 2020 to develop a blockchain system for traceability and due diligence in the cotton and leather value chains. Essentially tools to track products such as a t-shirt or handbag from raw components to point of purchase.

Why? The purpose of these pilots is to test, in a blockchain environment, the UNECE-UN/CEFACT traceability and transparency approach and standards adopted in late April.

Who? Brands, manufacturers, cotton cooperative, leather producers, farmers, standard and certification bodies, DNA markers providers all took part, with representatives in Egypt, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, the UK and the USA as well as discussions launched with bodies in Asia, Australia and South America.

How? The blockchain system is an open-source Ethereum blockchain, which allows for the running of smart contracts and use of DNA markers. It is designed to guarantee data confidentiality in compliance with applicable regulations. Importantly, the application runs in both a web version and is being optimized for mobile applications to ensure accessibility to all partners in the value chain – including farmers and producers in emerging economies equipped with a smartphone.

The pilot tested our approach for identification and coding of key data at critical data points in the supply chain, to create an inter-linked and immutable record of provenance and composition.

What have we learned?

1. Commitment and collaboration in the value chain is key.
2. Open source, inclusive solutions and building capacity is essential - especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).
3. Policymakers and regulators have a role to play. They should:
   - Create the necessary ecosystem for engaging all stakeholders, enhance market access for small actors and vulnerable groups
   - Devise tailored policies and regulations to support competition and facilitate the connection to other key technological developments such as AI, IoT, cloud computing
   - Develop the necessary supporting frameworks for data security, privacy and governance
   - Foster the use of data models for standardized information exchange, such as the UN/CEFACT e-business standards
   - Set-up the right infrastructure to help build applications in a cost-effective and interoperable manner
   - Support investment in education for entrepreneurs, civil servants and the general public.

UNECE is providing the tools and a framework of action that is free, open-source and ready for implementation to help the garment and footwear industry play a stronger role in making its contribution to the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda and the transition to the circular economy.
Worldwide some 26 MILLION FARMERS are growing cotton in 75 COUNTRIES worldwide.

High environmental costs like pollution, pesticides and waste
Complex value chains with potential for the exploitation of people
Negative social impacts, like workplace injuries, exposure to hazardous substances, low wages, forced and child labour and gender inequality
Damaging and overuse of the planet’s finite resources

Leather making is responsible for employing millions of people worldwide, producing approximately 24 BILLION SQUARE FEET OF LEATHER and generating in excess of US$ 80 BILLION each year.

Who Benefits?

CONSUMERS
Increased trust in sustainability claims.

PRODUCERS
Can embed provenance data into the raw materials they produce.

BUSINESSES
Cost efficiency led by digital archiving, reduced auditing, facilitated documents sharing.
Enhanced trust and communication with business partners and customers.
Immutable and trustworthy data storage with distributed access.
Interoperability with existing data management systems (based on APIs).

INVESTORS, FINANCIAL OPERATORS
Enhanced visibility and accountability for impact investment decisions.

REGULATORS
Improved visibility and access to reliable information on compliance with policy and regulatory requirements for sustainability and due diligence.

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