

Remaking Fashion by Regenerating Cotton: In conversation with Niccy Kol

By Wayne Visser

This is a summary of a conversation from my podcast Thriving: The Breakthrough Movement. You can listen to the full episode [here](#).

I was delighted to talk with Niccy Kol about what sustainable fashion looks like - and whether we can go even further towards regenerative fashion. Kol has worked in the textiles and fashion industry her whole life, spanning the boutique and mainstream mass market. But it was during her time in Africa, working with traditional fabrics, that her perspective shifted. "It made me realise that it is possible to have a completely different view on how we dress."

That shift led her to working with the Circular Fashion Games and recycled textiles. She realised that it was "absolutely one step already into that more sustainable direction" but "that it has to go much further than that." For Kol, that means regenerative agriculture, and more especially regenerative cotton farming.

What does that mean? It's about "where cotton is grown, under which circumstances, through which people, how important those people are, and how much we neglect them in our part of the world." Her solution is Radis Cotton, aimed at building "the world's first regenerative cotton value chain."

In practice, that requires revitalising nature and people from the soil up. "What kind of weather conditions do we have? What kind of other crops have a symbiotic relationship? What kind of intercropping are we going to do so that the soil is covered throughout the year?" In their model, no chemicals are used. Farmers learn to make their own natural fertilisers. But it's also about flipping the traditional supply chain.

"We convince brands to take their own responsibility - to invest from the seed onwards."

Radis asks for an annual acre fee paid a year in advance, plus 70% prepayment when cotton is harvested — providing economic security to farmers and eliminating those in middle. "It's clean, it's transparent," Kol says.

The relationship between brand and farmer is central. "As soon as you have a relationship with people, then it's easier to take responsibility," she insists. In contrast to the current fragmented, certification-heavy textile industry, Radis Cotton is about "shared responsibility for environment, for humans, and for the company."

On certification, Kol is pragmatic. While supportive of frameworks like Regenerative Organic, she's critical of their cost for small farmers. "We are developing a way to create peer reviews ... peer farmers can check each other ... so that the small farmers can benefit." And she's not convinced by the proliferation of labels like the Better

Cotton Initiative. “We use the standard as a guide,” she told me, “but we don’t necessarily pay for that final label.”

The central challenge, we both agreed, is: how to make regenerative options scale when the market is saturated with cheap, unsustainable products. “Of course, if I see a t-shirt costing \$2,” she says, “we should not even offer it. We need to value the things we wear.” This is where Kol’s passion shines through.

“That’s where our name comes from — Radis: Radical Disruptive. Because we need to get radical in those companies.”

Kol challenges brands to break their internal silos and rethink their spending. “Take your CSR money, take your marketing money, and put it in your own value chain ... and then it’s not marketing anymore. It’s mattering.” This approach has led Radis Cotton to work with pioneering brands such as Hugo Boss and Umber & Ochre.

As to what gives Kol hope, she says without hesitation: “My relationship with the people in India. It’s a very open and honest relationship.” She also sees hope in younger generations who she regards as entrepreneurs. “They are my heroes,” she concluded.

As we closed our conversation, I was struck again by Kol’s unwavering energy and determination — her ability to weave vision, values and systems thinking into something deeply human and profoundly transformative. We are, as she reminds us, at a pivotal moment — and it’s going to take radical, relational leadership to thread the needle of a thriving future.

Listen to the full conversation on my podcast *Thriving: The Breakthrough Movement*

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