



case 1-429-374
February 19, 2014

Interface's Net-Works Program: A New Approach to Creating Social Value through Sustainable Sourcing

Introduction

Miriam Turner couldn't help but feel heartbroken after learning of the devastation in the Philippines caused by a strong earthquake in October 2013, which was soon followed by Typhoon Haiyan in November 2013. As assistant vice president (AVP) of co-innovation for Interface, Inc., Miriam was involved in creating collaborations designed to drive growth and achievement of Mission Zero[®], an initiative aiming to eliminate all negative impacts Interface has on the environment by the year 2020. One of these initiatives was the ReEntry[™] program in which Interface reclaims and recycles post-consumer carpet into new Interface carpet tile. Yarn vendor Aquafil sources recycled raw materials from which to make nylon carpet fiber. These sources include post-consumer fiber fluff, commercial fishing nets, and rigid textiles. The co-innovation team posed a question. "What if we could build a truly inclusive business model – buying discarded fishing nets from local fishers – giving them extra income – and clean up the beaches and oceans at the same time?" Seeing a chance to design a new way of sourcing fishing nets for Aquafil, and, in doing so, create an inclusive business model that would benefit vulnerable coastal communities, Net-Works[™] was born. This pioneering raw material-sourcing strategy collects discarded fishing nets from fishing villages across the Danajon Bank, a large double-barrier reef system in the central Philippines, and recycles them into raw materials to manufacture carpet tiles. This pilot site was selected by Net-Works partner, the Zoological Society of London (ZSL), who has a long history of implementing marine conservation projects in the region. The recent environmental disasters in the central Philippines brought new challenges to Interface's efforts to infuse its Mission Zero environmental goals with the creation of social value. Also, as Interface continues to grow and demand for the company's products increases, other challenges will undoubtedly arise. Though Net-Works supplies a very small percentage of the total recycled materials in the global ReEntry program, Net-Works has captured the minds and hearts of Interface's customers, inspiring them with how a company can derive business value, reduce environmental impacts, and tackle social issues in the world's most impoverished areas. Miriam and the Net-Works team know that they must find a way to scale the Net-Works program, developing it into a self-sustaining business model that can be adopted in other communities around the world. The Net-Works pilot has been successful thus far, but challenges remain as Interface's ultimate goal is

Published by WDI Publishing, a division of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.

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The authors would like to thank Interface's Miriam Turner, Nigel Stansfield, Heather Dietz, Melissa Vernon and Zoological Society of London Net-Works[™] team's Nick Hill and Heather Koldewey for their input and help in editing as well as the expansion of the case.