Transcript of ‘Transforming Uzbekistan's Cotton Industry’

Season 3, Episode 25, Transforming Tomorrow

[Theme music]

Paul: Hello and welcome to Transforming Tomorrow from the Pentland Centre for Sustainability in Business. I'm Paul Turner.

Jan: And I'm Professor Jan Bebbington.

Paul: Often the challenge with sustainability is in the transition from one system to a newer, better one. How do you move a cotton-picking industry that uses state mandated forced labour towards a functioning private sector endeavour?

[Theme music]

Paul: Do you ever have to do things you don't want to do? Jan?

Jan: Oh, so many times I'm not even gonna begin.

Paul: Can you tell me any of them without getting fired [Jan laughs] from your current role of employment?

Jan: No. No. But um, I suppose we all do, from time to time, have to do things we're not so keen on. But that's different from having to do things 'cause you've got no choice. I mean, that's a whole different category, isn't it?

Paul: That was my point exactly. You've taken it away from me…

Jan: …oh, I'm sorry…

Paul: …you want to do this whole intro by yourself this week.

Jan: …no, I don't. I don't…

Paul: …yes, that, that's sometimes, we all probably think, especially when you're young and you're a teenager and your parents ask you to tidy your room or wash the dishes. It is, in fact, you don't even have to be a teenager. You can be a 10-year-old girl. I'm not talking any personal experience obviously here. [Jan laughs]

Um, uh, you, you feel, why do I have to do that? Why are you forcing me to do this? But like you say, you're not really being forced, you're being asked and it's something that you really should be doing anyway. But that's an entirely different kettle of fish to being forced into doing something.

Jan: And we have had some other podcasts where we've talked about forced labour and modern slavery, and I suppose modern slavery is the overarching term and forced labour as a more specific term whereby people, um, are required to work without their ability to say no. And that comes from many different sources.

So, um, and it affects global supply chain. So I think that's, you know…

Paul: …mm-hmm…

Jan: …a big part of what we're gonna talk about today.

Paul: Yes. We've had the episode at the start of the season with Kyla Raby, which was about human trafficking and how that ties in with modern slavery.

We've had conversations about modern slavery in this country within, uh fashion industry. We've had conversations about modern slavery throughout supply chains and how companies operate within them.

We haven't heard from anyone who has been in a firsthand situation of being involved in forced labour.

Jan: No, and I think that's a very particular perspective that it's very important for our listeners to find out about.

Paul: Yes, because today we are joined by someone who, in his homeland, has experienced forced labour. Someone who is now a PhD researcher here at Lancaster University Management School, looking at the challenges of eradicating forced labour and modern slavery from global supply chains, and focusing specifically on the textile and apparel sector in developing countries.

So we're going to say welcome to Farmon Asadov.

Farmon: Hi. Thank you having me. I'm from Uzbekistan. Um, over the past 10 years, I had the experience in the public sector, NGOs and, uh, working on the human rights and the labour standards.

Uh, one reason that I am here, uh, because the national government scholarship, which, uh, introduced after major, uh, reforms in Uzbekistan that the, it is called the presidential scholarship.

That the government create a special initiative to identify potential candidates, future leaders, to support them to study top University in western countries. The programme provide the full support, uh, from tuition fee, living cost. And after the graduation, the many graduate take the top level, uh, in the ministry level or the, as a senior, senior public level, uh, to help bring the international knowledge to back to Uzbekistan. Help to contribute to Uzbekistan development.

I'm part of the, this project and, uh, I choose, uh, to do the PhD at Lancaster University because it has very strong reputation in supply chain and sustainability. My goal is develop the research to help positive change in workers' life in, on the ground.

Jan: And this is what I really like about, um, PhD students from overseas, is that you're, you're gaining a lot from us, but we're gaining even more from you in terms of understanding, um, different settings and understanding different issues.

So if we maybe start with Uzbekistan. Can you tell us something about the history of that country, because I'm sure many of our listeners currently will be on Google Maps to look exactly where the country is, and tell us about its economic makeup, um, what kind of, what the economy's made up of, et cetera.

Farmon: Yeah. Uzbekistan is central Asian country that become independent in 1991 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, it has nearly 40 million, uh, people making the most populous, uh, country in the Central Asia.

Historically, uh, under the Soviet system, we had the central planet economy, and Uzbekistan serve as the main cotton production hub. That's why, uh, cotton become the core part of the economy after the independence, also.

Today, how, however, the, our economy is, uh, more open and much more diverse. Uh, relying on several key industry, uh, kind of agriculture, cotton, steel is very important. The mining, the gold is where Uzbekistan is the main global producer, and the manufacturing.

More recently, tourism is becoming a key pillar of the, uh, economy as the ancient cities like Bukhara, Samarkand are the becoming major destination for international travels.

Jan: I think that's a very good recommendation for some future holidays. [Farmon laughs] Get out into the middle…

Farmon: …yeah, yeah, yeah.

Paul: Are we gonna base all future guests on this? You want people to come in and tell you about their countries and decide whether that's where your next holiday's going to be?

Jan: Well, it's, it's kind of like a, you know, very ancient part of the world, but also it looks very beautiful in terms of, you know, you know, there's plenty of water in some places and it's, it's, you know, green, it's lush.

I mean, it really is. These places are amazing and yet we don't really know very much about them from the UK end.

Paul: No, that's it, I, I think particularly in the UK, but I daresay most of Western Europe, it's not an area of the world that you consider much when it comes to travel. Does the, um, the old Silk Road, does that run through…?

Farmon: …yeah, it's…

Paul: …Uzbekistan...

Farmon: …Uzbekistan is the part of the Silk Road and that's why the Bukhara, Samarkand, Khiva is the major Silk Road cities.

Paul: Mm-hmm.

Farmon: And they have the huge historical and cultural buildings. And that's why nowadays the tourism is, uh, becoming the main sector and is booming. And I think nowadays more than 10 million visitors each year coming to Uzbekistan to see…

Jan: …forty million people and 10 million visitors…

Farmon: …yeah…

Jan: …that's incredible, isn't it?

[Everyone laughs]

Paul: Yeah. If you're in a room with five people, the chances are at least one of them is a tourist.

Jan: That's amazing. So, so dear listeners, we'll put, um, some information about the Silk Road, et cetera, on our show notes.

So just to get you in, in, into context. But it's more recent context that we want to talk about today. And particularly…

Paul: …I'll cross off all those lists about the history of the Silk Road and Samarkand, then. Thank you, Jan.

[Jan and Farmon laugh]

Jan: We have a historian here. You could be in big trouble, but…

Paul: [laughing] …what do you think I'm going to do? I'm not gonna question the man about the history of his own country. [Jan laughs] I, I'm 999% sure that Farman knows a lot more about Uzbekistan and its history than I do.

Jan: I'm sure he does. Let's, let's come to more, more recent past and particularly, uh, you, you highlighted the, the cotton has been a big production sector within the country.

What's the history of the concerns about fair and decent work in the cotton industry there?

Farmon: The concern was related to Soviet, uh, cotton system. A largely continued after independence of Uzbekistan. Cotton, often called in Uzbekistan as a white gold. They remain the key economic pillar.

What we need to know, Uzbek cotton is handpicked, and so harvesting is labour-intensive production. Until 2017, uh, the government mobilised around 2 million the people to harvest cotton during the September and October period.

They include mainly public sector workers, including teachers, doctors, university students, even the schoolchildren. From 2011, the, the global boycott were over 300. The global brands, including Nike, H & M, uh, Zara, announced that they had stopped sourcing from Uzbekistan, and committed to avoid any product is, uh, related to Uzbek cotton in their supply chain.

Uh, fortunately after government transitioned, the government officially, uh, started to reform sector and ended state imposed the forced labour in 2021,

uh, and the global boycott was lifted in 2022, and it create a new chapter in Uzbek cotton textile industry.

Paul: We've talked a lot on this podcast in the past about the potential for businesses and corporations to impact things beyond their own operations. Do you think that the companies that you mentioned, the likes of Nike, likes of Zara, et cetera, pulling out and refusing to deal with Uzbekistan cotton was the main, or a main, factor in the forced labour situation changing?

Farmon: Yes. Uh, because it is the state imposed the forced labour, the, in 2007, uh, 17, the Cotton Campaign started, uh, Cotton Campaign coalition started their advocacy, uh, to pressurise Uzbekistan, uh, to stop using the forced labour in the cotton production. And then they pressurise the brands to stop using Uzbek cotton.

But however, in fact, Uzbekistan produces still, uh, the same amount of cotton during that years. Mainly they, the Uzbek cotton production, uh, went to the raw cotton. They export to the third countries like Bangladesh, Vietnam, the Turkey. Uh, they played as a player in the opaque side of the supply chain.

Jan: That would be a big economic impact though, because raw cotton versus processed cotton…

Farmon: …yeah…

Jan: …you know, there's, the value added is then happening outside of the country. So that must have been incredibly disruptive for the economy as well.

Farmon: Yeah. It was the main problem during that years, the, the raw cotton, the main export and the government treat this one as a main key pillar and they try to, uh, use the forced labour as, as a patriotism, as a, your duty to help the country to develop.

Jan: Yeah. As we said at the opening, and as you described, you know, the public sector's involvement in that forced, state mandated forced labour process, what was your experience of that?

Farmon: Yeah, about my experience, uh, let me share my, the, uh, student times. Uh, throughout my student years, we were sent to remote camps to pick cotton. Sometimes, uh, it is 40, 50 kilometre away from the major cities.

We stayed there for weeks and the routine was very tense. We need to wake up, uh, at 5:00 AM and working in the field until the evening under the 30, 40 degree in hot weather.

Each student has daily, uh, quota. That sometimes it is 50, 60 kilo per day, and if you didn't meet the certain daily target, you could face the serious, uh, the academic pressure after returning to university. Uh, also the living condition was very, very difficult. The many camps were old, most built during the Soviet Union and lack of basic facilities.

Uh, in one room, 10, 15 students need to sleep together. And, uh, looking back, it is hard to believe that we managed it under those conditions. Uh, but at, at the same time, the picking cotton was framed, the patriotic, patriotism rather than the state, uh, imposed the forced labour, as I understand it now. And you could not refuse because the same government demand labour also control your education, your future career. This is a sense of the state-imposed forced labour, that like state itself as a main orchestrator.

Paul: When you're growing up, then, in Uzbekistan, not now, but when you were growing up, did you know that this was going to be part of your life at some point in the future then, no matter what, if you wanted to go into higher education and such?

Farmon: Yes. Definitely. Because, uh, it came from the Soviet Union time. It is more than 30, 40 years for everybody in the Uzbekistan. During that time it was normal. Because it's a part of the life, you need to do it, and it framed it's a patriotism. And, uh, when during that time also, we never thought one day it would end.

Paul: So when did it become clear to people in Uzbekistan that this wasn't just a big great thing for everyone to be doing their patriotic duty? That there was a lot more to it than just that?

Farmon: Yeah. Uh, after the transition, the government in 2017, new president came. Then the, the government started, publicly acknowledged that there is involvement of state, uh, imposed the forced labour. There is the huge problem, uh, in, in related to the corruption. And that's why then the people start to understand it is not only the, because of the national development and it, it is the main problem with government structure, cotton structure.

Jan: And at that time, I mean, they obviously gave you somewhere, some food and somewhere to stay, even though it sounds quite awful…

Farmon: …yeah…

Jan: …and quite basic. Were you paid for that time as well?

Farmon: Yeah. Yeah. They, uh, you know, they paid during that time, like 10 dollar per day, would work all day and they, they would deduct the certain money for your eating and they organise. And you know that after returning to the uni, we, we need to pay our debt for eating or living, uh, living in the remote camps during that time.

Paul: Did you end up with any money, then, after all of those expenses were paid?

Farmon: No. [laughs] To be honest, after coming back to, to normally to the university, I need to pay around a hundred dollar ,or more than a hundred dollar, on my living costs. Because in the beginning of the cotton harvesting you can, uh, pick the 50, 60 kilo, but at the end it is impossible.

It is, you just pick like the 10, uh, 15 kilo. It means that your one day living cost is more than the 20 kilo, they…

Jan: …yeah.

Paul: Is it impossible because there's no cotton to pick or is it impossible because you're physically so worn down?

Farmon: Uh, because there is less cotton.

Paul: Mm-hmm.

Farmon: In one field, we need to go to they pick the one time the cotton, after like the 10, 15 days, the cotton will open and you need to come back to pick that cotton again. That's why at the end it would, it would be difficult to pick more cotton. Even if the, there were not any cotton in the field, but the government still try to hold you to there. To stay there…

Paul: …mm-hmm…

Farmon: …because it is the state, the quota system, they just keep you for the nonsense. You just live there, you just sit there and 'til the, when the central government told, okay, it's end, everybody should return.

Paul: It's just such a ridiculous situation. It might be that there's five days work, but you've got to stay there for 10 days because that's what's mandated, that you will be there for 10 days?

Farmon: Yeah.

Jan: So that's, that's hugely difficult for you as a, a citizen and as an individual. But also that's hugely difficult for a government that's built its economic, you know, sort of plan on this exploitation of people.

So you said that a, a new, um, president was elected. How did the whole country go about changing that model of the, you know, the, the free labour into something more paid?

Farmon: Uh, after the government change, the government, uh, government change, change the uh, cotton sector is organised. How they organised. The cotton production has largely shifted into the private sector through the cotton textile cluster system, uh, around nowadays in Uzbekistan 130, the clusters, it is very unique system, which the vertically integrated firms that, uh, manage the chain from the farming, harvesting, textile and garment, uh, alongside these, uh, restructuring reforms have improved pay, paying and uh, working condition, independent monitoring.

Especially during the harvest, it's become of the part of the system. Uh, also the government support new establishing textile firms that, for example, the paying the half, uh, picking cotton, uh, expenses and help them for exporting to Western countries through the paying the half of logistics costs.

Also, the Uzbekistan has gained, um, GPS plus, uh, which the duty-free access to the Western, uh, Europe, uh, European countries.

Jan: Oh, and so that duty-free access…

Farmon: …yeah…

Jan: …is that, was that part of like the, the international response…?

Farmon: …yeah…

Jan: …because you have to help. You can't just say, stop it, I'm gonna pull out all the financial lifelines. There has to be some, some relationship building.

Farmon: Yeah.

Paul: Do you have siblings, cousins, nieces, nephews, so younger people who are growing up now in Uzbekistan who maybe 10 years ago would've therefore gone into this state mandated forced labour.

And if you do know people like this, what's the situation for them? Does it, has life become easier for them? Have studies at university become easy for them because this is no longer part of it?

Farmon: Yeah. Honestly, uh, for example, if I told about this situation, we went there two months or the awful condition, they didn't believe.

Jan: How quickly people forget…

Farmon: …yeah, forget, yeah.

They didn't believe because, uh, for me, the 2017, the first time, um, government didn't use the, the university students to pick cotton, it was, for everybody, it was the shock. How it is possible.

Because you know, during the September, October, every city is less car, less people and everybody in every public organisation, on the entering you can see 'hamma paxtaga', everybody to cotton, or everybody to our, on the white gold.

And, you know, the hospitals, uh, worked as a skeleton personnel. The main problem, because most of their staff already sent to the picking cotton. But nowadays the, uh, you know, the, nobody believed we had this harsh system in the 21st century.

Paul: It's amazing how widespread the positive effects are going to be, because as you said, people are drawn away from so many other sectors and now you, it, it seems almost ridiculous that you'd have understaffed hospitals because people are, you know, taken away from the hospitals to work there.

And now you've got hospitals that are properly staffed the whole year round. You've got students who are able to study the whole year round and not have to worry about, you know, not going away for a month, however long from their studies, all the other aspects of life as well.

Jan: But the question is who, who's picking the cotton now?

Farmon: Yeah. [laughs] Because you know, the before, uh, the payment is very low. Nobody want to pick that cotton at that price. Nowadays, after transferring the cotton production to private sector, now the private sector is

paying very good and the, the village people want to pick, uh, and want to spend their time on the cotton because they're making the good money now.

Paul: Hmm. It, it's gonna, it's going to mean that the final product maybe costs a little bit more for the consumers over hear, say, who are buying it. But it's what we talk about so often is you pay more because you want it to be coming from somewhere where you know it's been ethically sourced, and you're no longer having a state mandated forced labour, you are having people who are being paid well for it.

That's a really important factor, and it's what we've talked about many times before when it comes to modern slavery and supply chains, and how companies report on that and figure that out. This is what they want to have within their systems. Properly paid workers in properly structured companies.

Jan: But it also seems to me, and I, I know a little bit of your, your PhD studies, 'cause I, I had the, the pleasure of, you know, being involved in one of your, your upgrades.

Um, sounds like it's a systems effect though. So it's not just, you know, the, the ownership of the fields, it's not just the technology, it's not just the labour, it's not just, you know, the export conditions.

So what I'm really interested in hearing about is how from, uh, 2017, when, when, you know, the, the conditions changed, through to 2022, when the global boycott was, was removed, what kind of things happened to make that possible? 'Cause it's a programme, isn't it…?

Farmon: …yeah…

Jan: …it's not a single intervention.

Farmon: Yeah, yeah. Uh, there are several steps and the Uzbek government tried to do the change the system for, from the state mandated forced labour to the, the private.

The first thing, as I mentioned, it was the cluster system. They transferred and the whole system from the state, uh, management to the private sector, which, uh, vertically integrated enterprise, which they, they manage from farming till, uh, garment production.

The second thing, there are a lot of, uh, international support. For example, as I mentioned, is, uh, GPS plus, duty-free access to the European market. The

second, the GIZ, Better Cotton, Better Work Initiative, also the Cotton Campaign, are helping to build new, emerging, uh, textile and garment industry.

And nowadays the, at least the 10 international brands started sourcing from Uzbekistan. And you know, it is kind of, um, very helpful, the international support because the, uh, during the boycott years, we did only the export raw cotton. Nowadays it's building the scale, building quality, building the, the supply chain, uh, is the long run and is very difficult. Without the international support is, it couldn't build.

Paul: Is there a level of national pride that you are now producing such good quality cotton that goes around the world to so many important companies?

Farmon: Yes, sure. Uh, it give, uh, kind of the pride when you saw that Made in Uzbekistan label, because it is the pride, uh, before. And the, we just export the cotton, but the other countries kind of Bangladesh, Vietnam, Turkey, they did and all labels Made in Turkey, Made in Bangladesh. Now the seeing they Made in Uzbekistan is give kind, gives kind of the pride.

Paul: I almost want to check on the label on my, my clothes now. [Jan and Farmon laugh] It'd be a bit weird to start getting undressed in the, in the studio just to read the labels, but maybe one of the things we're wearing says Made in Uzbekistan.

Jan: I, I shall certainly look for that label and I'd encourage our, our dear listeners to look for that label as well, because it, it says something more transformational as, as well.

Farmon: Yeah.

Paul: Yeah, so we talk very positively about the situation now. Are there still problems though? Are there issues with the cotton industry in Uzbekistan that still need to be addressed?

Farmon: Yes. Today the Uzbekistan cotton industry, uh, they face new set of the challenges, uh, unlike the ending the forced labour, but now the overcoming the economic and structural barriers to shape how quickly the country can rebuild its place, uh, in global supply chain as, as the trusted sourcing destination.

First, I can, I can say, uh, there is a huge skill and knowledge gap. For many years the sector was relatively closed and centred on the production raw

cotton. And so, uh, nowadays the government try to, uh, grow up on the value chain, uh, from which, uh, the competing international required continued investment in technology, the training and better coordination of the supply, uh, supply stage of each production stage.

And the second, the competitiveness challenge. During the boycott period, cotton export continued, but often move it through less transparent in the, uh, shadow roads. Uh, now the Uzbekistan is trying to move to, into textile garment, but it is entering the market dominated by established producers such as Bangladesh, Vietnam, the Turkey. Reaching the necessary skill and scale, quality, speed, the providing the long-term reliability to global brands will take time.

And the third, uh, I can say it is the reputational and trust challenge. Even after the boycott was lifted, international buyers still expect a strong, uh, traceability, transparency and the compliance. Uh, this create kind of the chicken egg problem. Uh, without the stronger demand from the high value buyers, it is harder to rise wage, and invest the further in working condition. But without high standard and clear evidence of the compliance, it is hard, harder to attract, um, the buyers, western buyers. So that the current task is building modern competitive, the credible cotton garment sectors that can integrate fully into global market.

Jan: And, I know that we've been talking about Uzbekistan in particular, but is this a sort of situation that's common in other industries and other places around the globe?

So while your story and the story of your country is, is unique and particular to that country, is it the only place where there's been these problems and then there's been a process to develop something quite different?

Farmon: Yes. The, the forced labour is global systemic issue in many, uh, you can see in many labour intensive sectors like agriculture, fishing, the construction. However, Uzbekistan case is the unique because it is scale and it was orchestrated by the state itself.

But today, uh, very similar concern arising regarding our neighbour country, Turkmenistan, that like the Uzbekistan in the past, Turkmenistan still they face serious international allegations, state imposed forced labour where the Cotton Campaign's still working, which arising the government to change.

The key difference, uh, is the path of each country has taken. While Uzbekistan has opened to international monitoring and committed reforms, and the Turkmenistan still remains, uh, much more the closed system, make it far more difficult to address or those issue on the ground.

And, additionally, in some countries, even when the government are not directly organising the forced labour, they may still contribute indirectly by keeping, uh, labour protection weak through weak legislation and limited civil society, especially in the developing country context.

This can create the race on the bottom. Where countries compete to attract investment by lowering, uh, lower cost, often at the expense of the most vulnerable workers.

Paul: So, draw to a close then, Farmon, and look to the future. What would you like to see happen in Uzbekistan with regards to labour practices as we move forward?

Farmon: Yeah. Um, I want to see the Made in Uzbekistan label become a mark of the ethical pride.

Uh, to get there, we need the strong independent trade unions and the worker representation of modern manufacturing. My hope is that Uzbekistan transition serve as the model for how the country can rebuild. It is labour, uh, labour practices, and the integrate into global economy.

Jan: That's a pretty good ambition, but I also think that, 'cause I know you're quite close to graduating, as you go back, I think you'll be part of that process, you know, personally, you'll be part of rebuilding that.

Farmon: Yeah. Yeah. I hope so. I will be, I will be in the part because it's the government project. They're supporting us and our duty is return the country, bring Western knowledge, build this industry, to return to global economy.

Jan: Well, I wish you success with that…

Farmon: …thank you…

Jan: …every success.

Paul: Yes. We look forward to seeing what happens. And thank you very much for joining us today, Farmon, and sharing your story.

Farmon: Thanks. Thank you very much for having me.

[Theme music]

Paul: I don't think you're ever allowed to moan again, Jan, about being asked to fill out the requisition forms.

Jan: [laughs] I think that's the case. And I, I was really super keen for, for our listeners to hear from Farmon. I, I, as I maybe said, I was involved in his upgrade, and it just struck me as, like, a really important insight of somebody who's actually been there and actually been involved in forced labour.

And sometimes we think that people in that situation are sort of wholly victims. But, and you know, I don't, I think he was victimised by his own government, but at the same time that, that, you know, it was taken for granted, it was a longstanding practice, but then actually things can change. And I think that's what I hope our listeners took from it, that with a programme, it doesn't have to stay the way something is.

Paul: Mmm. And yeah, it was just normal. For the people in Uzbekistan until, yeah, less than 10 years ago that, yes, this is what would happen for a few months of the year.

You would be taken out and you'd be working and not necessarily even working some of the time, as he pointed out, because you'd have done the harvest in five days rather than 10, and…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …yeah. It was, yeah, it's, it's crazy to think that this kind of situation still goes on because it's the kind of thing you think, oh no, that, that happened decades, even centuries ago in some countries…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …that was when it was, but no, it was actually going on not that long ago at all…

Jan: …yeah. But I, um, I'll put on the show notes something about the Better Cotton Initiative. Um, because there's one thing to say, well, we don't know what's happening in a particular sector on a particular country, and just sort of abandon, you know, that country and say you hard luck. It's another to actually build a process and it, that will allow things to change. And I think that's one of the things that, um, the Better Cotton Initiative does.

I was also quite interested at that international support for, um, tariff-free, duty-free access to markets to try to, you know…

Paul: …mm-hmm…

Jan: …actually change the, the cost benefit, um, um, situation for the country as well. And um, yeah, I thought that was really quite cool to hear about.

Paul: Yes. GPS plus, which I thought was just a very posh way of knowing where you are on the planet, [Jan laughs] but it turns out, no, it's, uh, all about, yes, getting access to those important markets.

Jan: Yeah.

Paul: And that's something that was needed. It was not just, uh, changing the system, but getting access both to the markets and to the companies coming back in for that boycott to be lifted…

Jan: …yeah…

Paul: …so, so that operations could take place again. And that way money now goes in and it goes to the people and they're working within the cotton industry because they choose to work within the cotton industry, rather than for those so many days, weeks, months of every year, you are said no, that's what you are doing now by the government.

Jan: Yeah. And he used a phrase that is something that you see in the papers a bit from time to time, shadow roads, so, uh, an untransparent sort of supply chain. Because we also hear about the shadow fleets, um, particularly for, for oil, um, moving around the world.

So this idea of, of a lack of transparency, making it very difficult to know exactly what's going on. And the converse, of course, is that transparency starts building trust, reputation, the ability to, to get decent work and to get decent prices for the goods that are being produced.

Paul: Yes. And now it can proudly say Made in Uzbekistan, whereas previously it might have said, using some of the countries that, Made in Bangladesh, but the cotton will actually come from…

Jan: …yes…

Paul: …Uzbekistan and gone through various channels to, to get there.

Jan: Well, well, here's our, our, um, our challenge to our listeners, but our challenge to each other of who can find the first Made in Uzbekistan label? [laughs]

Paul: Hang on. Hang on, I'll just reach behind me…

Jan: …ooh!... [laughs]

Paul: …pull the collar in front of my face and read what it says. Yes, no I, I won't do that here. It'd be a hideous sight for all concerned.

Jan: [laughing] And then our producer, Jo, is busy, busy looking at all her labels as we speak as well. So, so dear listeners, if, if you see it, let us know and you, you might win the, the prize of being first.

That's the only prize. Laughs]

Paul: I'm not offering any money or any other incentive. If you want to give people money, that's your business…

Jan: …yes, indeed…

Paul: …nothing to do with me…

Jan: …yes, indeed…

Paul: …yes. So where are we going next week?

Jan: I think we should keep on thinking about markets and marketplaces.

Paul: I think we should, and I think we should think about accessibility to them and how marketplaces are not necessarily accessible for everyone to the same level.

Jan: That sounds brilliant.

Paul: Yes. So we're gonna welcome Leighanne Higgins and Killain O'Leary from here at Lancaster University, they're gonna be talking to us about the Marketplace and I project, which works with businesses, but also works with people with a disability, in order to spread knowledge and practice when it comes to better accessibility to marketplaces.

Until then, thank you very much for listening. It's goodbye from me, Paul Turner.

Jan: And it's goodbye from me, Jan Bebbington.

[Theme music]