Perspectives on Sustainable Development in the Jewellery Industry

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ABSTRACT

This exploratory paper presents the perspectives of industry professionals on sustainable development in the jewellery industry from 2015 to 2024 (inclusive). This is achieved through thematically collating and analysing discussions which took place at the Fair Luxury conference, The State of Sustainability in the Jewellery Industry, held in June 2025 at The Goldsmiths' Centre, London. The material presented during the conference was further developed through the integration of industry sources, providing a stronger academic grounding.

First, the impact of sustainable development is established, to map out the scale and scope of supply chains related to gold, diamond and coloured gemstones in a global context over the last decade. Second, current attitudes and industry practices are thematically analysed to present current approaches engaging in sustainable development. Lastly, emergent aspirations for further sustainable development in the jewellery industry are outlined to identify where future efforts may be invested for sustainable development.

I posit that while global progress remains limited in scale, industry infrastructure for sustainable development is now more greatly established for stakeholders across the supply chain: offering tested pathways to scale impact through increased participation. Findings include seven attitudes to frame industry practice, demonstrating adaptation for local and global contexts. Practice-informed insights demonstrate UK businesses adopting strategies such as carbon reduction, traceable sourcing and more transparent consumer communication. The paper forms a reference point: to help track the complexity of sustainable development discourse within the jewellery industry over time and offer insights in how to respond to geopolitical inequality in supply chains.

Keywords: *Sustainable Development; Ethical Practice; Radical Craft; Supply Chain; Neocolonialism; Extractive Industries*

INTRODUCTION

Historically, there has been disconnect between miners, refiners, trade specialists, manufacturers, designers, craftspeople, educators, retailers and consumers in the global jewellery industry. The issues associated with this division subverted public knowledge until the term 'blood diamonds' reached the consumer lexicon in the 1990s. Since then, the industry has been openly criticised for 'dirty' practices including social injustices, economic exploitation of mining communities, environmental degradation and unregulated toxic chemical practices, compounded by a lack of transparency on, and accountability for, these issues (Archuleta, 2016; Oakley, 2019).

In response, international interventions emerged. In the wake of the Global Witness (1998) report, *A Rough Trade*, the Kimberley Process (2025) was established in 2003, to certify the conflict-free origin of diamonds, intended to ensure that diamond sales in war zones do not fund armed conflicts. The 'No Dirty Gold' campaign in 2004, led by NGO Earthworks and Oxfam America, sought to raise awareness of the issues to the consumer and retailer as a catalyst for change in gold mining practices (Earthworks, 2004). In 2011, the Fairtrade and Fairmined accreditation systems launched in 2011, to certify the traceability of gold and silver from licensed mining operations in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (ARM, 2013). Extractive industries related to jewellery manufacturing are typically not considered sustainable, given resources are non-renewable and irreversibly impact the environment. External to the sector, the United Nations (2025) adopted the now commonly recognised Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, to support social, economic and environmental stability across borders and industries, acknowledging extractive industries' vital role in creating long-term value for mining communities.

Further development has occurred over the last decade (2015–2024 inclusive) to address divides that persist between stakeholders in the global jewellery industry. To further academic discourse, this paper aims to capture changes in industry perspectives over the last decade.

RESEARCH RATIONALE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper responds directly to the discussions which took place at the Fair Luxury conference, The State of Sustainability in the Jewellery Industry (2025), held on the 9th June 2025, 1–8pm, at The Goldsmiths' Centre, London. Invited industry professionals delivered four presentations, followed by four panel discussions, with audience Q&A, to represent sustainable developments within micro- to large-scale organisations. This exploratory paper mirrors the conference's 10-year framework to assess change in the industry and will represent the industry's internal debate and offer perspectives of both pioneering and ongoing sustainable developments that have occurred since the groundbreaking establishment of certification systems. Industry reports and community networks typically address sustainable developments individually and on an annual timeframe, whereas the intention of this

paper is to build a broader understanding of the thematic issues connecting industry practices. The methodological approach adopted in this paper involves the collection of data directly from conference presentations and their critical examination through engagement with relevant industry publications. Conference data was collected through notetaking and then thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to present non-identifiable views. The material derived from the presentations and panel discussions at the conference (Fair Luxury, 2025) will feature abbreviated referencing "(c.)" throughout this paper. The collected data is supported by sources to provide broader contextual information and examples. Additionally, a critical review of the attitudes toward sustainable development within the industry, the existing supply chain systems and how businesses align with sustainable development is offered, to evaluate the nature and rate of sustainable development. These aspects are analysed in relation to industry reports and the Sustainable Development Goal framework (United Nations, 2025).

SCOPE

There are forms of sustainable development or practices which can operate in jewellery supply chains: mining can offer economic, cultural and other social benefits. In this paper, the term sustainability aligns with the United Nation's definition—"meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (United Nations, 2026)—and is intended to reflect the journey toward more sustainable development, rather than defining any aspect of extractive mining as inherently sustainable.

This paper intends to capture perspectives on sustainable development within the industry over the last decade. To achieve this, the investigation reviews the socio-cultural perspectives based on their grounding in the past, present and future. First, sustainable developments from 2015 to 2024 (inclusive) will be mapped out to review the scale of innovation in a global context. Secondly, current industry perspectives presented at the conference will be thematically analysed. This will encompass changes in attitudes which have led to sustainable development. Industry practices will also be discussed to present current approaches responding to the attitudes. Lastly, emergent industry aspirations will be outlined to explore where future efforts may be invested.

The paper will not provide comprehensive research on each specific topic raised; its value lies in capturing an overview of sustainable developments from the perspective of industry professionals. The perspectives shared are from professionals in the Global North, and whilst some of the contributors have direct engagement with mining communities in the Global South, the findings are inherently limited by their representation. This exploratory study offers a useful resource for researchers, educators and industry to engage with these sociocultural perspectives which are scarcely captured in academic research.

INDUSTRY REVIEW: 2015–2024

This section reviews the past decade of activity discussed at the conference. Broadly, the conference emphasised the need for responsible mining strategy sector-wide, to promote traceable supply chains: considering the local environment and social dimensions (c.). Following this, a change in business models was noted: frameworks that embed economic, social and ecological equity are replacing solely economic frameworks (c.). A call for greater governance through industry regulation was made, given that global jewellery markets are not significantly affected by sustainability credentials (c.). The information shared below provides a sense of the scale of sustainable development made over the last decade. This focuses on Artisanal and Small-scale Mining (ASM) communities and emphasises the liminal nature of sustainable development issues faced by the jewellery industry.

ASM (ARTISANAL AND SMALL-SCALE MINING)

The jewellery industry circulates precious metal, diamonds and coloured gemstones from newly-mined, pre-mined and synthetic (often labelled 'lab-grown') materials. Mining practices vary from artisanal to small-scale, medium and large scales. ASM is characterised by workers utilising basic tooling to extract their desired metal or mineral from the earth. This typically informal manual labour activity is coupled with a lack of economic infrastructure, which leads to risk of exploitation and illicit activity (Pact, 2025; Yansura, 2025). For example, an industry insider suggested that the mines of the Ituri province in the Democratic Republic of Congo extract 5–6 tonnes of gold per year, yet only 18kg was legitimately exported out of the country in 2023 (c.). Most of the gold extracted was thought to reach the international market in Dubai and China through the African Gold Refinery in Entebbe, Uganda (c.); the African Gold Refinery has faced US sanctions since 2022 for the illicit movement of gold (Open Sanctions, 2025).

Most recent statistics from 2017 indicate that ASM (in gold, gemstones and other metals unrelated to jewellery) provides a vital livelihood for nearly 40 million people around the world, with a further 150 million depending on ASM across 80 countries in the Global South. It is estimated that the ASM sector contributes 20% of the gold, 80% of the sapphire and 20% of the diamond supply globally (c.; IGF, 2017). ASM is paradoxical for sustainable development: it is a vital source of income for remote and impoverished communities, yet can contribute to illegal activity and unregulated practices, risking lives and the environment (c.; Human Rights Watch, 2018). For example, mercury is used to extract gold from mined ore, forming an amalgam. This amalgam needs to be heated to vaporise the mercury, leaving the pure gold behind. The open burning of mercury is commonplace: despite the risk, it's estimated that 10–19 million gold miners release approximately 410–1400 tonnes of mercury into the air, water and soil annually (Esdaile and Chalker, 2018).

ASMs are considered key to contributing toward sustainable development within the extractive industries for precious metals, diamonds and gemstones

(c.; Pact, 2025). Yet the challenge lies in the scale: engaging with individuals and communities at a local level in a meaningful and sustained way, across global mining sites (c.). The economic viability of mining is tied to the ASM community livelihoods: as the price of gold has increased over the last decade, it suggests ASM extraction is on the increase (c.). However, there is major risk of displacement, in times when the global gold price crashes, or as seen in the diamond industry over the last decade. Synthetic diamond alternatives have become popularised and are up to 90% cheaper than their mined counterpart, which has negatively impacted the demand for mined diamonds (Forbes, 2025). Beyond their desirability within the jewellery context, these precious materials are entangled with other industries and currency, which further influence value, extraction rate and operational methods, making it a volatile landscape for mining communities (c.).

GOLD AND COLOURED GEMSTONE INITIATIVES

By 2015, gold mining reform had already been proven possible (c.). Since then, smaller-scale initiatives for traceable precious metal supply chains have emerged. These include: Single Mine Origin gold, which was launched in 2017 as a joint venture between the Betts Group and Hummingbird Resources, and the AgAIN silver product (recovered from X-ray film) launched in 2022 by Betts Group (Betts Metal Sales, 2025a; Betts Metal Sales, 2025b). The CRAFT (Code of Risk-mitigation for ASM engaging in Formal Trade) code was developed, in 2018 to "convert the due diligence process into a tool for development" for ASM communities looking to formalise (LBMA, 2020). Furthermore, PeaceGold fosters long-term partnerships to source gold from mining communities as a mechanism for peace in areas of conflict (c.; PeaceGold, 2025). Radical change has occurred for coloured gemstones. A contributor considered the coloured gemstone sector 'still asleep' in 2015: responsibility focused on scientific disclosures, such as the 4 Cs (i.e., the cut, colour, clarity and carat of a gemstone), rather than the origin and related social, economic and environmental impacts in mining the material (c.). Miners' lack of knowledge was weaponised against them in some instances due to their being in rural geographies, and often women (c.). From early 2017 the Gemological Institute of America (GIA) acted, offering free gemmological education to artisanal miners, who were shown how to sort and value their own gemstones, enabling a transition from sale by weight to sale by material value (c.; GIA, 2017; Shor 2019). Furthermore, 2018 saw the establishment of Moyo Gems, a miner-to market collaboration for coloured gemstones. The pilot project in 2019 had 91 miners involved, and as of 2024 the program had approximately 900 miners enrolled (Anzagems, 2022; Moyo Gems, 2021), which is a testament to the success of the project. Miners were said to earn ~95% of the export value where the industry average is a meagre 35% (c.). The small-scale collaboration encourages legal mining where it was previously impossible; miners become creditworthy as they have a bank account and receipts for the sales they make (c.). Now there are gemstone suppliers who are driven to represent miners and cutters through their product range and to share their stories through social media and client conversations (c.; Ethical Gem Suppliers, 2024).

SCALE OF IMPACT

However, the scale of initiative impacts has been incredibly small in a global context. In 2023, 133kg of Fairmined gold was mined, equating to 0.0036% of the total gold mined globally that same year (c.; Fairmined, 2025; World Gold Council, 2023). Virtu Gem, established in 2021, has up to 100 miners involved in sustainable development activities, yet again is a minute fraction of the global ASM community (Virtu Gem, 2025: c.). Whilst most mining communities remain unsupported, a major change in the last decade is that the industry now has greater infrastructure to support more responsible mining operations (c.). There are now numerous examples of traceable supply chains at differing scales and risk levels, and traceable ASM supply chains in coloured gemstones have now been proven possible on a small scale (c.). Increased miner representation through official media and informal social media platforms means that consumers and stakeholders further down the supply chain are increasingly aware of the need for sustainable development (c.). Accounts were shared at the conference, expressing how proud miners are of their skills and what they create, yet how external stakeholders often take advantage of their skills and resources (c.). Contributors who had visited mines recounted poor health and safety conditions, gender-based violence, and an acceptance of the deplorable environmental conditions caused as a direct result of mining activity (c.).

The impact that initiatives have had in the last decade is significant, yet it is essential that the industry avoids disillusionment with the scale of change in a global context. Most miners are yet to experience the positive narratives the jewellery industry often celebrates: “Our friends on the ground [mining communities] have more wealth [natural resources] than we will ever have, but have no means to realise it.” (conference contributor 1, 2025).

This statement suggests that existing neocolonial systems prevent many mining communities from gaining geopolitical power, despite their rich resources. Sustainable development remains a contentious issue within the industry, with resistance to acknowledging involvement in extractive mining issues and to taking a proactive approach (c.).

TRACEABILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

One contributor noted that the world “woke up” in 2020, with a 50% increase in Positive Luxury licensees (2025; c.). Interest is gaining for accreditation for responsible practices within the industry, such as B-Corp and memberships through the UK National Association of Jewellers and the Responsible Jewellery Council (RJC), where members adhere to codes of conduct, assisting businesses in benchmarking their sustainable practices (c.; B-Lab, 2015; NAJ, 2025; RJC, 2025). Again, the uptake in these memberships for jewellery brands remains minimal in the UK and international context.

The RJC was established in 2005 and has been heavily criticised for its governance, standards, and certification systems. Critics posit that the RJC contributes toward greenwashing as, “RJC certification does not provide assurance that companies meet international standards for responsible sourcing.”

(Human Rights Watch, 2018). Many other accreditation-oriented initiatives face scrutiny over their effectiveness: for example, the standards set for miners to obtain accreditation can marginalise artisanal miners, who cannot access support to progress with or finance the requirements for formalisation, or the standards themselves are self-regulated, or lax in their auditing of license holders (c.). The Kimberley Process Civil Society Coalition, for example, was established as an observer of the Kimberley Process and a human rights activist to encourage good governance within the diamond sector, beyond conflict (Kimberley Process Civil Society Coalition, 2025). This indicates that the Kimberley Process falls short in both ensuring that all certified diamonds are conflict-free and in considering broader social issues affecting diamond mining communities within their criteria.

This section indicates that new sustainable development initiatives in the jewellery industry seek to empower mining communities and address systemic geopolitical and socioeconomic issues. The increased uptake in certification schemes for jewellery manufacturers and retailers evidences further action being taken toward supply chain traceability. However, the scale of impact remains minimal, and some certification systems are falling short in holding their members accountable.

INDUSTRY PERSPECTIVES

The previous section provided a sense of scale for the extractive industry challenges and the impact initiatives have had over the last decade. The complex geopolitical factors affecting ASM and limited research mean that there is no comprehensive understanding of the issues from a variety of stakeholder perspectives. As a result, sustainable development knowledge is developed through practice by stakeholders within the industry.

ATTITUDES

This section contributes to the sociocultural research gap by presenting attitudes shared by industry professionals during the conference (Fair Luxury, 2025), organised into seven groups.

Identify Opportunities for Sustainable Development

Connecting jewellers to miners for socioeconomic benefit can occur through access to an international market: there is a need to transition away from illicit trade—where the value of ASM materials moves out of their originating country—toward more formalised economies, ensuring miners have a genuine stake in the supply chain (c.). Given that millions of people rely on the extractive industries related to the jewellery industry, one contributor stated that stakeholders need to find a way to enable responsible mining and support sustainable development through celebrating geology and gemmology (c.). The industry needs to build the economic value of precious metals, diamonds and coloured gemstones to account for the cost of fair trade (c.). Jewellery is uniquely positioned to advocate for sustainable development through communicating the

sustainability "story" as a value factor of interest to the consumer (c.).

Reimagine Supply-Chain Dynamics

Risk mitigation, including preventing conflict minerals from entering the supply chain, has historically been implemented to protect and benefit large companies. This has marginalised mining communities who do not have the means to align to frameworks (c.). The aforementioned point emphasises the need to change the power dynamic within supply chains to ensure symmetry between the interests of miners and all other stakeholders (c.). It was proposed that a generational transformation was needed. For example, to pursue gold mining that is not only free from the hazardous use of mercury and conflict, but also where the practices build formalised economies where the environment and community is respected, healthy and empowered (c.). This may include incentivising nationally owned mining operations, to make it more likely for wealth creation to stay within the country, promoting sustainable development and entrepreneurial projects, which lower long-term economic reliance on mining (c.). Currently, the jewellery industry is setting the standards. There is no NGO specifically dedicated to the jewellery industry (Human Rights Watch is considered the closest) to conduct impartial research and hold the industry to account (c.).

Imperfect Actions are Encouraged

Sustainable development in mining and wider industry is an extensive undertaking; an iterative approach is necessary as mistakes will be made (c.). Another challenge is balancing all the different aspects of business—often with limited capacity—while acting toward sustainable development simultaneously (c.). A conference contributor stated that, "It's a journey: you are never going to get there." (conference contributor 2, 2025) emphasising the cyclical nature of sustainable practice.

Collaboration is Essential

Stakeholders were encouraged to build empathy and find common ground to move beyond polarised narratives (e.g. mined vs. recycled vs. synthetic) and recognise that all precious materials in the supply chain have the potential to support sustainable development (c.). For example, exploring methods to account for the carbon cost of mining fairly, across mineral products, both newly mined and pre-mined. Building sustained and trusting relationships—particularly with mining communities that have historically been exploited by foreign traders—across the supply chain are needed. This was considered achievable through understanding the complex issues in greater detail and humanising the narratives of miners (who are often portrayed in the binary: as 'criminal' or 'hero') (c.). Lastly, industry collaboration with academia was advocated for, to offer legitimacy to sustainable development issues, with a greater possibility of innovation for the jewellery industry (c.).

Corporate Shift

Larger companies are shifting from Corporate Social Responsibility to Environmental Social Governance (ESG) (c.). Carbon strategy has also emerged in the last decade, due to businesses needing to comply with net-zero carbon emission targets (c.). The shift to ESG indicates a transition from meeting regulations and improving efficiency to incorporating sustainable development frameworks for holistic decision-making in all aspects of the business, thereby making a more meaningful impact. Governance serves a dual purpose: ensuring regulatory compliance—e.g., to climate-related law—and in enabling a company to articulate its own distinct values across social, economic and environmental dimensions (c.). Some business models have also undergone progressive change, to avoid undermining their impact: the Hockley Mint, for example, established an Employee Ownership Trust in 2023, to ensure the power was no longer a 'top-down' model (c.; Hockley Mint, 2025).

Industry Change is not (Currently) Consumer Driven

It was identified by contributors in the room that sustainable development was self-initiated, whether as an independent jeweller, a medium or large manufacturer or retailer (c.). Price was the first concern for clients (based on confidential surveys and direct conversations conducted by retailers) when making a jewellery purchase, with questions on ethics second, or not considered at all (c.). A general industry attitude that consumer demand for sustainable development is necessary to validate the pursuit of this activity was posited (c.). The contributors noted that taking sustainable development actions pays dividends through focusing on genuine sales, enabled through informing clients about their values or ESG (c.).

Good Intentions are not Enough

Having good intentions or developing frameworks and policies is not enough without evidenced implementation (c.). From a carbon perspective, the best thing to do is to sell less, which is a conundrum businesses need to resolve to justify their level of production (c.). It was warned that carbon accounting can further risk clarity of the overall business impact: investing in good projects rather than removing slivers from a footprint may lead to greater impact (c.). Lastly, the loose use of terms such as 'recycled' and 'lab-grown' (Davidson, 2022) implies greater sustainability credentials for 'non-mined' products—avoiding the nuanced reality of material acquisition and overall impact. Greenwashing tactics like this have become a greater issue over the last decade, and it is preventing industry change (c.).

All seven attitude-oriented groupings presented above hinge on taking responsibility: in evaluating current thinking and practice to identify areas for actionable sustainable development. I suggest these themes are significant as they align with post-imperialist theory: current practices are being questioned from more diverse geopolitical and socioeconomic perspectives. Conference contributors stated that the jewellery industry from the Global North needs to engage and take meaningful action across the supply chain, particularly with mining communities in the Global South, which reflect trends over the last decade, outlined in the 'impact' section above. These attitudes indicate that stakeholders in the jewellery industry are

acknowledging sustainable disparities between the Global North and South. By extension, I suggest that stakeholders frame issues to avoid divisive rhetoric. These perspectives represent activist attitudes within the supply chain; these principles guide those willing to make a proactive contribution. I also note that an issue not raised here is how to "activate" dormant or resistant stakeholders in the jewellery industry to participate in sustainable development.

PRACTICE

This section outlines the trend toward more sustainable practices that have emerged in UK-based businesses, mainly within manufacturing, but also design and retail spaces, based on the perspectives shared during the conference (Fair Luxury, 2025). The internal and external changes and challenges experienced by designers, manufacturers and retailers are presented below.

Strategic

As presented in the 'Corporate Shift' grouping in the previous section, businesses are establishing new or formalising existing values through sustainability policy and/or environmental and social governance (ESG). It was made clear that there is no blueprint; instead, businesses shared their approaches, whether holistic or with a specific agenda to champion (c.). Material sourcing was being evaluated in both quantifiable aspects (such as carbon emissions) and qualitative (social and environmental) impacts, while acknowledging that no matter the sourcing choice, there will likely be shortcomings (c.). For example, recycled gold has a lower carbon footprint than newly mined gold, yet it does not directly engage with mining (E.C.One, 2025) to lift communities out of poverty. Transitioning to renewable energy sources was a common strategy across the business changes shared (c.).

Organisational

Product materials were noted to account for most of a small business's carbon footprint. Designing for longevity was encouraged, as the longer the design lasts, the less carbon is emitted: typically, 2–3 times (c.). To raise awareness for the differing source options, small jewellery brand Alex Monroe showcases a bracelet to share the varied diamond origin stories and impacts with clients at their London boutiques (c.; Alex Monroe, 2025). Boodles (a medium-sized British luxury jewellery brand) developed their *Peace of Mined* collection, which captures their story of traceable diamonds (c.; Boodles, 2022). These examples indicate a shift to empower the public in the material sourcing process.

To follow through on the renewable energy transition, businesses had invested in heat pumps and solar panels, alongside rainwater harvesting systems for use in bathrooms (c.). The Weston Beamor Creative Group (comprised of Domino Jewellery, Gecko Jewellery and Weston Beamor) has a business model to enable better pooling of resources across the independent operations, which was considered supportive of minimising the overall carbon footprint (Domino Jewellery, 2023).

Regulations

The OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018) was considered a valuable resource informing how businesses developed both

their strategy and organisational practices. Regulatory barriers included the difficulty for non-specialists to understand the jargon and keep up to date with regulations that inadvertently affect the jewellery supply chain (c.). An example of this is the European Union Deforestation Regulation—in effect since 30 December 2025—which requires companies to perform due diligence on their natural rubber sourcing. This material is commonly used for mould-making in the jewellery industry (Li et al., 2025), but it is likely many jewellery businesses will be unaware of the new regulation. Scope 3 carbon emissions (indirect greenhouse gas emissions: e.g., from overseas manufacturers) were also considered the main challenge to achieving carbon net-zero targets, given there is no direct control over making these carbon reductions (c.).

Industry Standards

Discussions during the conference comprised of methods to promote internal and external change for businesses. Internal change included working toward third-party accreditation for sustainable credentials from an industry-recognised provider, e.g., B-Corp or Positive Luxury (c.). Whilst businesses usually fail to meet standards initially, accreditation systems offer a clear framework to develop organisational and operational change. More informally, an 'accountability buddy'—on a one-to-one basis, or through the Fair Luxury Pledge (2025) for example—was noted to continually prompt action (c.). Conducting independent audits to verify sustainability claims and digital passports for products to evidence traceability and transparency in the supply chain were becoming more common (c.).

Externally, demanding carbon receipts from suppliers or conducting a supplier survey are a means to gather accurate information and to prompt sustainable development through purchase power (c.). Suppliers are starting to act in this area, such as Cooksongold collaborating with the Institute of Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering at Coventry University to accurately calculate and report on their scope 1-3 carbon emissions (Cooksongold, 2022).

Market Forces

Communicating both philosophy and sustainable practices were considered central to defining brand values and offering transparency of the business's supply chain(s) and wider impacts to the public (c.). Defining sustainability using language clients will understand helps clearly express the business rationale. Furthermore, making evidence accessible, transparent and relevant to the consumer contemplating a purchase not only adheres to regulations such as the Green Claims Code (CMA, 2025), but builds confidence and can define a distinct brand identity. Humanising the terminology, particularly when referring to people in the supply chain, can help acknowledge distant realities and build empathy with them. Fear of 'cancel culture' was encouraged not to outweigh the value in sharing genuine positive impacts: a contributor encouraged staying calm and confident in plans once established. The press were considered to be much more aware of industry issues now and ask about traceability details. The practices shared demonstrate the quantity and value of clear sustainable development frameworks to follow. Whilst there are some examples of original practices, many of these examples relate to existing energy and carbon reduction strategies or are aspiring

to align with standardised certifications. This indicates that many businesses in the UK seek a prescribed, industry-recognised route toward sustainable development. Given the complex nature of global supply chains, equity will be difficult to achieve if more diverse supply chain and business models are not sought after in the Global North.

EMERGENT ASPIRATIONS

This section extends from the attitudes and practice-based findings to outline emergent aspirations for the future of the jewellery industry recorded during the conference discussion. These include global trends and areas identified as pertinent for sustainable development that have not been prevalent over the last decade.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

By 2030, 42% of the world's young people will be African (PRB, 2019); it was considered time to acknowledge the new power centres (c.). There are miners and gemstone cutters keen to be entrepreneurial and it's an opportunity to make direct links with those in resource-rich countries such as Africa (c.). A contributor asked the audience to consider where the power 'sits' and to make sure the methods don't undermine the intended impact: for example, working to eradicate racist and nationalist ideologies embedded through the supply chain. An attendee expressed that it was great to have big brands represented in the room, which was not the case at the 2016 Fair Luxury conference (c.). They advocated for diversity in the journey toward sustainable development by including people who work in the industry as well as activists and outsiders who ask difficult questions.

PARTICIPATORY PRACTICE

Sustainable development was posed as a collective responsibility (c.). Opting into steering groups and contributing toward public consultations such as "The Blue List – The Responsible Jewellery Supply Chain Lexicon," launched by CIBJO, the World Jewellery Confederation (2025), was encouraged (c.). Widening engagement through training and/or creating a sustainability factsheet was thought to help brand storytelling relating to traceability, transparency, and responsibility across the workforce (c.). These points relate back to Section 1, where there is recognition that the impact needs to be scaled up through increased participation now that traceable supply chains and sustainable development within the jewellery industry have been proven possible.

KNOWLEDGE SHARING

The consistency of terminology (as"The Blue List" sets out to achieve) relies on most stakeholders within the industry adopting these agreed definitions, which has not been the case to date. In the last decade, amid an increasing trend in sustainability claims, the term 'recycled' has become commonplace but faces strong criticism due to no internationally recognised definition (c.; Karib, 2023). Compounding this issue is the fact that the industry sets its own standards. This calls for impartial input and scientific data to help resolve the insular and often biased thinking to identify ways to establish coherence across the industry. Access to information to enable learning about sustainable

development and representation of stakeholder journeys toward sustainable development would help educate and clarify the options for change available (c.). The Ethical Making Resource had been an online platform with this aim, but has not been updated since early 2024 (Incorporation of Goldsmiths, 2025). Conversations and questioning each other at events like the conference or Open House sessions (Fair Luxury Open House Recordings, 2025) were also noted as key to supporting change through connection and respectful debate (c.).

ACCOUNTABILITY

Lastly, accountability for misconduct within the industry was outlined as key to progress (c.). A contributor advocated for methods to be like 'an iron fist with velvet glove' (conference contributor 3, 2025): taking a step-by-step approach to educate and bring attention to issues, then have recourse if the issue remains unresolved, e.g. disciplinary procedures through associations, memberships and accrediting bodies, to ensure adherence to the code of practice. It was recognised that more work is to be done to whistle-blow and identify who needs to raise their sustainability standards within the jewellery industry (c.). The severity of non-compliance was emphasised: people can go to jail for breaching regulations, and reputational damage can occur if claims are falsified (c.).

The themes here and in previous sections relate to the recent Copenhagen Commitment (a collective, now disbanded) S*olutions Workshop*, also hosted by The Goldsmiths' Centre (Copenhagen Commitment, 2023). This workshop identified four key areas for action:
Communication**:** to develop a universally understood language for responsible sourcing.
Lobby power: uniting with key stakeholders to address issues and engage in industry decision-making as a collective.
Reliable data: to nurture supply chain transparency through academic research.
Empowering communities: Advocacy work for marginalised communities in the supply chain.

There is a range of disciplinary expertise required to enable the sustainable development changes outlined across both the insights from the conference and the workshop. This further emphasises the need for collaboration to diversify and bolster the current approaches for sustainable development for the jewellery industry in the future.

CONCLUSION

This exploratory paper identified sustainable developments that have occurred over the last decade (2015–2024, inclusive), based on the contributions made during the 2025 Fair Luxury conferenceand broader industry sources. At the forefront of sustainable development in the jewellery industry, attitudes are gradually shifting from focusing on risk mitigation to seeking opportunities in sustainable development activity. Making connection across stakeholders in the supply chain is enabling a human-centred approach: through greater awareness of, and connection to, stakeholders experiencing social and economic inequity. This has raised questions on how to

decolonise systemic supply chain hierarchies to ensure historically marginalised groups are empowered and included in industry change. Findings indicate the relational challenges faced both vertically and horizontally within supply chains (miners, refiners, trade specialists, manufacturers, designers, craftspeople and retailers) prompted frameworks that rely on internal and external collaboration to action sustainable developments. This demonstrates the need for impartial viewpoints and wider participation to challenge geopolitical power dynamics within the global supply chain. I hypothesise that the combination of complex supply chains and global systems create a layering of 'wicked problems' (Buchanan, 1992). For example, as gold is tied to currency and other industries, the jewellery industry has little control over the material value: this systemic issue makes it difficult to address many supply chain issues (e.g. fair pay and illegal mining) as a result. The properties of 'wicked problems' can prove difficult to manage risk and make an improvement at scale without unintended consequences (Buchanan, 1992).

Given there is little consumer demand for industry reform, contributors were tentative in sharing industry-driven changes made, as it was not perceived as being externally valuable. This signifies the disparity between the belief that businesses meet customer demand, and the reality in the conference room, where businesses were autonomously grounding their strategy on their own social, economic and environmental values. Effective communication of evidence-based sustainable development credentials also appeared stunted through a disconnect with marketing teams and concerns about making 'green claims' in a culture of greenwashing.

Over the last decade, traceable supply chains have continued to expand and diversify, reflecting the specific needs of miners and communities. It has now been proven possible to have legitimate ASM businesses trading in coloured gemstones by providing marginalised miners with education and access to global marketplaces. Engaging with carbon emissions remains an emergent theme, demonstrating that businesses are responding to carbon regulation in the UK. I suggest greater policy and industry-specific regulations may further 'activate' stakeholders toward legitimate operations. However, regulations need to reflect the complex procurement landscape: respecting 'our friends on the ground' through collaboration with key stakeholders and national governments.

The sustainable development progress made over the last decade has advanced the jewellery landscape, yet the scale of these impacts is minute in a global context. Since 2015, a small but growing number of people have continued to pioneer different theories and practices toward more equitable supply chains and proactive business models. This paper's findings suggest that the next steps are to raise the bar of industry standards and accountability, and to expand adoption of the tried and tested 'imperfect' models. Collective disinvestment in activity that doesn't support sustainable development—through transitioning to work with stakeholders in the supply chain who have evidenced credentials—is, for example, an option available to every UK stakeholder. Ensuring there is capacity for diverse sustainable development activities and linking business (financial) sustainability to sustainable development may incentivise industry change. An outstanding component of sustainable development is both identifying funding

for sustainable development and developing economically viable routes for businesses to adopt more sustainable practices. As previously noted, jewellery is uniquely positioned to promote supply chain narratives, driving fair (currently considered 'premium') product pricing that reflects fair trade and sustainable development compared to other industries engaged in gold, diamonds and gemstones.

The research shared in this paper distils the liminality of complex issues the industry faces and the conflicting nature of addressing one aspect of sustainability to the detriment of others. Despite this, the compiled resources in this paper evidence leadership and stakeholder capacity for embracing these complex problems. Finally, the findings suggest that further collaboration and academic input are needed to develop diverse methodologies to contribute toward data transparency and policy for sustainable development.

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