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BRIEFING

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# GANGES LEATHER BUYERS PLATFORM

## Mitigating leather-related water risk through collective action

### BACKGROUND

There are approximately 400 tanneries in the city of Kanpur and more along the rest of the Ganges River. Many of these tanneries don't use suitable water and pollution management practices to prevent harmful waste from reaching the river. Pollution is having a substantial impact on local communities and a vast number of freshwater species. To help address this problem HSBC, via the [WWF-HSBC Water Programme](#) are funding WWF-India to work with tanneries to encourage and facilitate improved practices.

Ganges leather finds its way through various suppliers into the UK market. This creates a reputational risk to companies selling leather produced in the area. Leather supply chains are complex, with small tanneries sometimes providing leather to larger tanneries for processing and sale to retailers. In addition brands and retailers often source from different suppliers throughout the year as products change. The complexity and transience of the leather supply chain means a collective approach is needed to catalyse change and improve practices.

### THE PLATFORM

The Ganges Leather Buyers Platform brings together UK companies buying leather from Kanpur to support a reduction of pollution from tanneries along the Ganges River and support more sustainable leather production. This provides economic, social and environmental benefits for the tanneries themselves, local communities and international markets by creating a more sustainable leather supply chain.

WWF has established the platform, and is supporting member companies to take action by:

1. Raising awareness of the impact of the tanneries;
2. Enabling businesses to collectively influence tannery practices in Kanpur;
3. Supporting joint advocacy with the aim of driving policy change to support more sustainable leather production across India.

## HOW MEMBER COMPANIES ARE SUPPORTING ACTION

Companies don't pay a fee to join the platform but are expected to take meaningful action and commit time commensurate with the size of their supply chains and associated water risks. They commit to:

- Attend Platform meetings and workshops;
- Encourage tanneries in their supply chain to join WWF-India's local action to improve tannery practices;
- Using their combined influence to advocate for policy change;
- Advise WWF on opportunities to expand and promote the work and align with other initiatives.

The Platform meets twice a year, shares interim updates and operates task-based working groups.

## ACTIONS TAKEN AND IMPACT

Actions undertaken so far include:

- Companies mapping their supply chains back to source tanneries and reviewing tannery auditing practices;
- Undertaking clean technology and water management practices assessments in 40 tanneries that produce almost half the leather from Kanpur. The assessments showed that on an average only about 57% of basic water management practices were being followed by the tanneries
- Working with a group of these tanneries to enable them to work towards accreditation under the Leather Working Group protocol. Already, many of them are showing significant progress.
- Holding meetings with the Indian Government to advocate for improvements to policy and regulation in India so that leather products produced locally meet international buyers' sustainability standards and don't impact on local communities and nature.

## WHY SHOULD YOU JOIN THE PLATFORM?

Joining provides a number of benefits for companies sourcing from the region including:

- Taking action on tannery pollution as a single company is difficult due to complex changeable supply chains – the Platform approach allows businesses to reach a far greater number of tanneries;
- Collective action brings the benefit of combined leverage and additional resources;
- Reputational, regulatory and physical risks to companies sourcing leather from the Ganges are high, but Platform membership can help mitigate the risks.

## CURRENT PLATFORM MEMBERS:



### IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE INFORMATION OR TO JOIN THE PLATFORM

Please feel free to contact  
[WaterStewardship@wwf.org.uk](mailto:WaterStewardship@wwf.org.uk)



#### Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature.  
[wwf.org.uk](http://wwf.org.uk)