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SA retailers want to buy more locally made clothing, targeting localisation of up to 80-million additional garments a year by 2030 — worth about R8bn in manufacturing sales.

If achieved, the shift could create as many as 34,000 formal factory jobs countrywide. But local manufacturers still struggle to match the prices of imported clothing.

This is according to a feasibility report by consulting firm BMA and commissioned by the Localisation Support Fund (LSF).

According to the report, the price gap is at the centre of a growing fight over the future of SA's clothing industry, as Asian online discounters Shein and Temu rapidly expand.

The report finds that retailers are willing to source more products locally, especially basics like T-shirts, denim and athleisure.

Demand and capacity exist, but cost competitiveness is lacking. Imported clothes are often 25%-40% cheaper than locally made versions. For simple products such as T-shirts, factories can meet quality and speed, but not price.

"Customers and retailers are ready to source more locally where price, quality and responsiveness meet market needs.

"The pathway outlined in this report provides a practical foundation to grow regional manufacturing and deliver sustainable jobs across the value chain," said Cape Clothing & Textile Cluster chair Graham Choice.

This tension could determine whether the thousands of jobs at stake can be created or more are to be lost.

Together, Shein and Temu generated more than R7bn in sales in 2024 in SA, said the BMA and LSF.

About 8,000 local jobs have already been lost, with 34,000 more at risk by 2030.

For shoppers facing high living costs, cheaper clothing is hard to ignore.

But industry bodies and unions warn long-term costs could be far greater.

The labour-intensive industry creates many jobs not just in factories but also in transport, warehousing and retail too.

It also contributes to economic growth and export earnings.

It is a cornerstone of the government-backed R-CTFL masterplan, which aims to increase local sourcing to 65% by 2030.

The report says R6.2bn in local manufacturing sales could be lost if the country fails to respond effectively. - **Business Times**