



# Social aspects in work towards sustainable supply chains

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## About the TOSCA project

The TOSCA project – “Towards sustainable supply chains through a common approach for company strategic work and daily operations” – is jointly funded by the EU LIFE+ programme and AkzoNobel, SCA Hygiene Products AB and Chalmers University of Technology. The project runs between 2009 and 2011. The findings from the work with this report contribute to the development of the TOSCA Sustainability Framework website [www.tosca-life.info](http://www.tosca-life.info).

## Social aspects in sustainable supply chains

Depending on how sustainable development is defined, the social dimension is either one of three equally important dimensions: the environmental, the economic and the social, or the very aim of sustainable development, as in the Daly triangle (Daly 1973 in Meadows 1998). In spite of this, there is often a heavier emphasis on environmental issues than on social ones, both in the academic literature and in corporate reports. This may partly be a result of the strong environmental movement starting in the 1970s, but the fact that many social impacts are even more invisible to the general public than the environmental ones may also contribute to this situation: social impacts often affect people far away and probably appear as less of a threat than the increasingly global environmental impacts. Moreover, many environmental effects are easy to quantify and thus easier to assess and report, whereas social issues tend to be qualitative and hence more difficult to handle. So which are the social aspects and how are they best assessed? The answers to these questions will vary from one supply chain to the other, but some guidance and inspiration can be found in the literature.

## Aim and outline of report

The aim of this report is to give an overview of the most important ways of dealing with social aspects in sustainable supply chains in terms of choice of indicators and assessment methods and processes. A number of methods are described in the following chapter, and the main recommendations summarized after that. The report leans primarily on scientific articles, books, standards, guidelines and web pages from key organizations. These references are all listed at the end of the report and are recommended for further reading for those wanting to learn more on any of the topics.

## Methods for working with social aspects in the supply chain

The methods available for working with social aspects in the supply chain include stand-alone tools as well as guidelines and standards. The difference between tools and standards are not clear-cut, and either or could be used as point of departure for improved social performance. The most established method is social impact assessment, but as the focus on social impacts within business (and within society at large) has increased over the last few years, so has the number of methods for assessing, reporting and improving performance with regard to these impacts. Below, the most important methods are presented in order of appearance.

## Social Impact Assessment

Social Impact Assessment (SIA) was developed in the late 1970s along with environmental impact assessment (EIA). The two processes have a lot in common and the distinction between the two is not clear cut. Both are processes for identifying potential impacts of proposed actions, policies, programmes or projects. Not just identifying, but also monitoring and managing the impacts is often included in the process. For EIA the focus is on environmental impacts and for SIA on social impacts. This sounds simple enough. The matter is, however, complicated by the fact that the definition of “environmental impacts” varies. If “environmental impacts” are restricted to bio-geophysical impacts, EIA is clearly distinct from SIA, but if on the other hand “environmental impacts” are given a broad definition, as is also common, including bio-geophysical, socio-economic and cultural aspects, the two impact assessment varieties more or less collapse into one (Vanclay 2004). In this text, SIA and EIA will be regarded as opposite ends of the same spectrum, with EIA and the bio-geophysical – “hard” and “objective” – aspects at one end, and SIA and the socioeconomic and cultural – “soft” and “subjective” – aspects at the other end, as in Barrow (1997).

EIA and SIA were developed in the early 1970s as a consequence of the introduction of the United States National Environmental Policy Act, and then spread over the world. In 1992, the Interorganizational Committee on Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment was formed in order to develop a set of guidelines and principles for support of SIA in public- and private-sector agencies and organizations. This resulted in the “Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment in the USA” (Interorganizational Committee on Principles and Guidelines for Social Impact Assessment 2003). The same year, the “International Guidelines and Principles for Social Impact Assessment” were published (Vanclay 2003). Both documents were developed under the auspices of the International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA 2011), and the latter has now been endorsed by IAIA as “being its official understanding of what SIA should be about”(IAIA 2009). For a comparison of the two documents, see Vanclay 2006.

The use of impact assessments varies, but among the more common are

- **Project development** in e.g. a company
- **Development control** (licenses, permits etc); a tool for authorities to prevent adverse environmental impact from a project
- **Planning of development**; a tool for authorities in planning of e.g. resource or land use, or infrastructure like roads and railways

In impact assessments, generally, there is heavy emphasis on the *process* and public involvement. The process is formally sanctioned by a legislative or bureaucratic framework set within a national and local policy context. These policies influence the character and direction of the impact assessment process in a given country and a given setting. This is particularly important for environmental impact assessment, as environmental impacts and their assessment are, to date, more strictly regulated than social impacts.

Lately, the role of impact assessment in corporate sustainability work has been increasingly recognized. EIA and SIA are fundamental for companies to foresee, monitor and manage various environmental and social impacts and risks; to position the company as a responsible actor with regard to sustainable development; and to enhance corporate image and build trust within the community. Often these activities are referred to as e.g. environmental management, corporate

social responsibility, and environmental, social or sustainability reporting or accounting, but at the bottom of all these are some kind of environmental and social impact assessments, whether spelt out or not.

### *Social impacts*

Looking more closely at SIA, the potential variables to include under “social impacts” are numerous. As Vanclay states:

*SIA [...] is an umbrella or overarching framework that encompasses all human impacts including aesthetic (landscape analysis), archaeological and heritage, community, cultural, demographic, development, economic and fiscal, gender, health, indigenous rights, infrastructure, institutional, political (human rights, governance, democratisation etc.), poverty-related, psychological, resource issues (access and ownership of resources), the impacts of tourism and other impacts on societies. SIA is not limited to a narrow or restrictive understanding of the concept 'social.'* (Vanclay, 2002, p 190-191).

Vanclay (2002) is a review of existing social impacts lists, which can be recommended for inspiration. The author, however, in a different paper, warns of checklists as he considers it not in line with the SIA philosophy to adapt a “checklist mentality”. Below, however, to give a clearer picture of SIA, follows some examples of impacts to include, based on Barrow (1997, p 233-234):

- consequences of development actions (or projects) on community structure, institutions and infrastructure
- assessment of who benefits and who suffers: locals, the region, the developer, urban elites, a company’s shareholders etc
- changes in behaviour of the various groups in a society or societies affected
- alterations in behaviour, attitudes, local norms and values, equity, psychological environment, social processes and activities
- demographic impacts
- effects on employment opportunities
- alterations in mutual support patterns
- mental and physical health impacts (although these are sometimes treated separately in a Health Impact Assessment, HIA) (Vanclay 2004)
- gender impacts

### *Methods and techniques*

Possibly because of the “soft” nature of social impacts, they may appear more difficult to assess than environmental impacts that can most often be measured (although certain environmental impacts such as toxicity and biodiversity, are also complex and difficult to measure). To assess social impacts, qualitative methods are needed. These include analyses of documentation, observations, focus groups, surveys and interviews. Ideally, methods applied should be systematic and contribute to consistent comparisons as well as reasoned judgement (Barrow 1997). As qualitative methods are quite different from quantitative, broadening the scope from environmental to social impact assessment is not just a matter of adding more variables to a list of impacts to be assessed, but more importantly to have personnel with the skills and qualifications needed for qualitative assessments.

### **Social Accountability 8000 Standard**

In 1997, the Social Accountability International (SAI) was formed as a non-governmental, multi-stakeholder organization with a mission to advance the human rights of workers around the world. The organization set up an international, expert, multi-stakeholder advisory board with which it cooperates continuously on standard development and revision, and other tasks within its field of operation. The International Standard Social Accountability 8000 (SA8000) was first published in 1997 and revised in 2001 and 2008 (Social Accountability International 2008). The Social Accountability Accreditation Service (SAAS), an affiliation of SAI, accredits qualified audit organizations to certify compliance with the standard. To date, more than 1.3 million workers are employed in over 2,300 SA8000 certified facilities in 62 countries, across 66 industrial sectors (Social Accountability International 2011).

The purpose of the SA8000 standard is:

*to provide a standard based on international human rights norms and national labour laws that will protect and empower all personnel within a company's scope of control and influence, who produce products or provide services for that company, including personnel employed by the company itself, as well as by its suppliers/subcontractors, sub-suppliers, and home workers.*

### **Social impacts**

The requirements set up in the standard refer to:

- Child labour
- Forced and compulsory labour
- Health and safety
- Freedom of association & right to collective bargaining
- Discrimination
- Disciplinary practices
- Working hours
- Remuneration
- Management systems

Each of the above requirements is further defined by between 3 and 16 criteria.

The work procedure of SA8000 follows the so called Deming cycle (plan, do, check, act), also applied in standardised environmental management systems (ISO 14063 2006). This means, basically, to set up targets and objectives, and work on continuous improvement towards these.

The usefulness of SA8000 in various organizations, from NGOs to businesses, is well documented (Teuscher et al. 2006; Ciliberti et al. 2009; Leipziger 2009).

### **The Global Reporting Initiative**

The possibly most widespread, or at least most visible, approach to corporate sustainability is sustainability reporting. In 1998, Ranganathan listed 47 sustainability reporting initiatives in the May issue of *Perspectives*, published by the World Resources Institute (WRI). The year after, the first set of guidelines from the Coalition for Responsible Economies' (CERES) Global Reporting Initiative (GRI)

was published. The guidelines were updated in 2002 (G2), 2006 (G3) and 2011 (G3.1). The GRI guidelines include recommendations for the process of sustainability reporting using indicators of economic, social, and environmental sustainability (GRI 2006), the three dimensions of sustainable development also known as the triple bottom line (TBL). The latest revision, from March 2011, included expanded guidance for reporting on Human Rights, Local Community Impacts, and Gender.

Just as with social impact assessment, sustainability reporting is meant to be performed as a multi-stakeholder process and should furthermore promote, through standardization, external accountability as well as internal decision making (Bavaria 1999). The guidelines define a set of principles for sustainability reporting, including materiality (significance of content) and stakeholder inclusiveness (stakeholder engagement). Examples of stakeholders given are employees, shareholders, suppliers and communities. A critical study published by Manetti (2011), however, it is shown that in a vast majority of sustainability reporting processes studied, stakeholders are managed rather than truly engaged in the process.

Vanclay (2004) points out that the triple bottom line and similar approaches, like GRI, are basically varieties of impact assessment. Obviously, any monitoring and reporting of impacts require assessment of these impacts, i.e. assessment is always a basic step.

### *Social impacts*

Reporting requires a selection of indicators, i.e. a choice of impacts to include in the accounting and reporting system. The GRI framework includes four categories of indicators of social performance, each including a number of sub-categories with 1-4 indicators (the latter not shown below) in each (GRI 2006):

- **Labour Practices & Decent Work**
  - Employment
  - Labour/Management Relations
  - Occupational Health and Safety
  - Training and Education
  - Diversity and Equal Opportunity
- **Human Rights**
  - Investment and procurement practices
  - Non-Discrimination
  - Freedom of association and collective bargaining
  - Child Labour
  - Forced and compulsory labour
  - Security practices
  - Indigenous rights
- **Society**
  - Community
  - Corruption
  - Public policy
  - Anti-corruptive behaviour
  - compliance
- **Product Responsibility**

- Customer health and safety
- Products and service labelling
- Marketing communications
- Customer privacy
- Compliance

### *Process*

The GRI Guidelines are very explicit on the recommendations of indicators and on how a sustainability report is constructed. Concerning exactly how information on the various indicators is to be retrieved, the guidelines are not very detailed, but give, for each category of indicators, ideas of potential information sources. For the social indicators these recommendations include documentation collected through quality management systems and from various departments of the reporting organization (e.g. customer relations, R&D departments, and legal, sales and marketing departments), local or central collective agreements, employee contracts, minutes of occupational health and safety committees, employee and attendance records, and results from external stakeholder forums and community programmes.

### **UN Global Compact**

The UN Global Compact was launched in 2000 and was in 2009 the world's largest global corporate responsibility initiative, with more than 5.000 participants, including over 3.600 businesses in 100 countries (Visser 2009).

The UN Global Compact is a call to businesses around the world to align their strategies and operations with ten principles in the areas of human rights, labour, environment and anti-corruption, and to support the broader UN goals, like the Millennium Development Goals. It's an open and multi-stakeholder voluntary initiative. Signatories are monitored in order to avoid superficial commitment to the principles (Visser 2009).

### *Social impacts*

The ten principles of the UN Global Compact include both social and environmental impacts (UNGC 2011):

- **Human Rights**
  - Principle 1: Businesses should support and respect the protection of internationally proclaimed human rights; and
  - Principle 2: make sure that they are not complicit in human rights abuses.
- **Labour**
  - Principle 3: Businesses should uphold the freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;
  - Principle 4: the elimination of all forms of forced and compulsory labour;
  - Principle 5: the effective abolition of child labour; and
  - Principle 6: the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
- **Environment**
  - Principle 7: Businesses should support a precautionary approach to environmental challenges;



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- Principle 8: undertake initiatives to promote greater environmental responsibility; and
- Principle 9: encourage the development and diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies.
- **Anti-Corruption**
  - Principle 10: Businesses should work against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery.

### *Method*

The UN Global Compact model is a 6-step process (UNGC/Deloitte 2010):

1. Commit: public leadership commitment
2. Assess: assessment of risks, opportunities and impacts across issue areas
3. Define: development of strategies, goals, metrics and policies
4. Implement: adjustment to core processes, education, capacity building, supply chain work
5. Measure: monitoring and analysis of performance metrics developed in earlier steps
6. Communicate: engagement with stakeholders

Like in environmental management systems, the process is cyclic, aiming at continuous improvement. The UN Global Compact is an open framework, with explicit references made to the Global Report Initiative (see above) and other initiatives. For assessment of environmental impacts, environmental life cycle assessment (see next chapter) is recommended.

### **Social Life Cycle Assessment of Products**

In 2009, the UNEP/SETAC Life Cycle Initiative published their guidelines for social life cycle assessment (S-LCA) of products (Benoît and Mazjin 2009; Benoit et al. 2010). Environmental lifecycle assessment (E-LCA) is since long a standardized (ISO 14048 2002; ISO 14040 2006; ISO 14044 2006) and well established method for assessing the potential environmental impact of products and processes. Likewise, life cycle costing has been used for many years to assess the costs over the entire life cycle of a product (or process). The new guidelines on S-LCA are meant to widen the scope of LCA so that the method becomes one of sustainability assessment, i.e. all three dimensions of sustainable development are captured, as in the triple bottom line concept. The following section is based on the guidelines as published in 2009 (Benoît and Mazjin 2009). Future versions can be expected to contain substantial changes as the present guidelines point to several methodological aspects that may need improvement.

In the guidelines, S-LCA is described as distinct from social impact assessment (SIA) in two major ways. First, S-LCA, unlike both SIA and E-LCA, works with data at the enterprise management level per se. Labour practices are given as an example of such data. Secondly, the guidelines state that S-LCA is specifically adapted to life cycles of products, and therefore, unlike other tools and methods, takes the supply chain into consideration, rather than just the enterprise or facility. However, as shown in this report, also other tools and methods can be applied for supply chain work.

### *Social impacts*

Like E-LCA, S-LCA works with impact categories. In the case of S-LCA these comprise social and socio-economic impacts, and are linked to specific stakeholder groups (to the left below):

- Workers – Human rights

- Local community – Working conditions
- Society – Health and safety
- Consumers – Cultural heritage
- Value chain actors – Governance

In addition to these, “Socio-economic repercussions” form a sixth impact category.

The five impact categories related to stakeholders contain a number of sub-categories each, shown below:

- **Stakeholder “worker”**
  - Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining
  - Child Labour
  - Fair Salary
  - Working Hours
  - Forced Labour
  - Equal opportunities/Discrimination
  - Health and Safety
  - Social Benefits/Social Security
- **Stakeholder “consumer”**
  - Health & Safety
  - Feedback Mechanism
  - Consumer Privacy
  - Transparency
  - End of life responsibility
- **Stakeholder “local community”**
  - Access to material resources
  - Access to immaterial resources
  - Delocalization and Migration
  - Cultural Heritage
  - Safe & healthy living conditions
  - Respect of indigenous rights
  - Community engagement
  - Local employment
  - Secure living conditions
- **Stakeholder “society”**
  - Public commitments to sustainability issues
  - Contribution to economic development
  - Prevention & mitigation of armed conflicts
  - Technology development
  - Corruption
- **Value chain actors (not including consumers)**
  - Fair competition
  - Promoting social responsibility
  - Supplier relationships
  - Respect of intellectual property rights

### *Method*

The S-LCA method follows the same outline as that of E-LCA (which it frequently refers to), i.e. it contains the following four basic steps: goal and scope definition, life cycle inventory (LCI), life cycle impact assessment (LCIA) and interpretation (see e.g. Baumann and Tillman 2004). It should be underlined, however, that LCA is always an iterative process, in spite of the linear description of it. Like E-LCA, S-LCA is systemic and systematic in its approach to assessing impacts, which makes it (theoretically) well apt for application on supply chains. The major differences between S-LCA and E-LCA are mainly a consequence of the different kind of data handled in the two methods; i.e. qualitative versus quantitative data. For example, it is not considered possible to include all flows in the inventory of an S-LCA, as it would be far too time consuming to collect the data. Instead, it is recommended to work with so called social hotspots, which are defined as “unit processes located in a region where a situation occurs that may be considered a problem, a risk or an opportunity, in relation to a social theme of interest”, where a social theme of interest is defined as an issue “considered to be threatening social well-being or that may contribute to its further development” (Benoît and Mazjin 2009, p 60). Once the selection of what data from what sites, enterprises, regions, communities etc should be included in the inventory, it is time for data collection. When possible, desktop screening is recommended, which implies that data is collected through literature review and web search. Site specific data, however, must normally be collected through social audits, for which the guidelines recommend e.g.:

- Auditing of enterprise documentation
- Auditing of documentation of authorities and NGOs
- Participative methodologies
- Directed and semi-directed interviews
- Focus groups
- Questionnaires and surveys

Notably, this list of recommended methods is basically the same as in social impact assessment.

The next step in any LCA is Life Cycle Impact Assessment. In S-LCA this consists of the same basic steps as in E-LCA, and the same vocabulary is used. Basically, inventory data are related to impact categories (classification) and aggregated to characterization, i.e. conversion to a unit common for each impact category. In E-LCA the characterization factors used have been defined through scientific calculations. E.g., all green house gases can be converted to greenhouse gas equivalents. In S-LCA the conversion cannot be based on environmental science. Instead scoring systems are used.

Finally, the LCA need to be interpreted. This phase includes the following steps:

- Identification of significant results
- Evaluation of the study in terms of e.g. completeness and consistency
- Level of engagement with stakeholders
- Conclusions, recommendations and reporting

The main difference to E-LCA in this part is the evaluation of engagement with stakeholders.

### **ISO 26000: Guidance for social responsibility**

In 2010 the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), published the voluntary international standard ISO 26000, Guidance on social responsibility. The aim of ISO 26000 is to assist public and private organizations in contributing to sustainable development and to encourage them to act proactively, i.e. to go beyond legal compliance. The standard leans on 7 principles of social responsibility:

- Accountability
- Transparency
- Ethical behaviour
- Respect for stakeholder interests
- Respect for the rule of law
- Respect for international norms of behaviour
- Respect for human rights

The standard is not meant to replace other assessment methods and initiatives, but to complement them. (ISO 26000 2010; International Organization for Standardization 2011).

### ***Social impacts***

ISO 26000 defines social responsibility as constituted by 7 interdependent core subjects, whereof 6 comprises a number of issues:

- **Organizational governance**
- **Human rights**
  - Due diligence
  - Human rights risk situations
  - Avoidance of complicity
  - Resolving grievances
  - Discrimination and vulnerable groups
  - Civil and political rights
  - Economic, social and cultural rights
  - Fundamental principles and rights at work
- **Labour practices**
  - Employment and employment relationships
  - Conditions of work and social protection
  - Social dialogue
  - Health and safety at work
  - Human development and training in the workplace
- **The environment**
  - Prevention of pollution
  - Sustainable resource use
  - Climate change mitigation and adaptation
  - Protection of the environment. Biodiversity and restoration of natural habitats
- **Fair operating practices**
  - Anti-corruption
  - Responsible political involvement

- Fair competition
- Promoting social responsibility in the value chain
- Respect for property rights
- **Consumer issues**
  - Fair marketing, factual and unbiased information and fair contractual practices
  - Protecting consumers' health and safety
  - Sustainable consumption
  - Consumer service, support, and complaint and dispute resolution
  - Consumer data protection and privacy
  - Access to essential services
  - Education and awareness
- **Community involvement and development**
  - Community involvement
  - Education and culture
  - Employment creation and skills development
  - Technology development and access
  - Wealth and income creation
  - Health
  - Social investment

### **Method**

The standard guides the organization through a number of steps towards (increased) social responsibility. The first step is to consider the characteristics of social responsibility and its relationship with sustainable development. The principles, core subjects and issues (listed above) must be embraced and respected. The organization should, furthermore, consider two fundamental practices of social responsibility: recognizing its social responsibility within its sphere of influence, and identifying and engaging with its stakeholders. Thereafter, relevant and significant core subjects and issues of social responsibility, as well as related actions, should be identified. The next step is for the organization to integrate social responsibility throughout its decisions and activities. This involves practices such as integrating social responsibility into its policies, organizational culture, strategies and operations; training and competence building; and internal and external communication practices.

### **Recommendations**

Most initiatives on social responsibility, as well as on sustainable development (and any major organizational change) underline the importance of leadership commitment, the creation of a shared (and understood) vision in the organization, and integration of this vision and the strategy of how to attain it into all practices, even when this requires big changes of e.g. communication flows and feedback practices (Mamic 2004; Doppelt 2010). These are circumstances that need to be discussed and considered at an early stage in any work towards increased business performance with regard to sustainable development.

Vanclay (2004) warns of the checklist mentality in approaching social responsibility issues, and of the danger of focusing on the things that can be counted rather than the things that count. To avoid these traps, it may be a good idea to start by looking at the purpose and aspirations of the own

organization with fresh eyes – before looking more closely at the lists of social impacts or methods of how to assess these. Thereafter, an organization can choose one or several of the initiatives described above. Organizations vary and so will their preferences and needs with regard to social responsibility in terms of issues focused and methods applied.

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