

A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO SUPPLY CHAIN MAPPING

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Content developed by the Fair Labor Association (FLA) as part of the project “Remedies Towards a Better Workplace” with input from project partners: Hivos, Arisa, Unicef, AGT/SER, SAVE, READ, CCR CSR, WE Fashion, O’Neill, Prénatal, Hunkemöller, FNG, Cool Investments.

For whom: for AGT signatories, FLA affiliates¹, brands and companies.

Objective: The principles, steps and recommendations provided in the document support companies in understanding **how to best work with and support supply chain partners when mapping supply chains**. In addition, advice is provided on how to get insight into good practices and challenges deeper in the supply chain.

Background: Companies that signed the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile (AGT) commit to addressing social, environmental and animal welfare risks by means of a due diligence management system (see figure 1).

In order to identify and address such risks in the value chain, supply chain insight beyond direct suppliers is essential. Therefore, AGT companies are expected to gradually create insight in their supply chains beyond production locations (the stage where CMT takes place). In two years, collected information needs to be shared with the AGT secretariat.

As part of the project “*Combatting Child Labour in the Garment Supply Chains*”, AGT signatories took a collaborative approach to supply chain mapping. The Fair Labor Association (FLA) provided expert support in this process. Visits were made to suppliers (ready-made garment factories) and subcontractors / suppliers (dyeing, knitting and embroidery units) in Tamil Nadu, India and by CCR CSR in Bangladesh.

This document provides guidance and learnings to support AGT signatories in their supply chain mapping. In addition to this document you can make use of the following documents and tools:

Supply chain mapping – Steps and recommendations for garment production units

Tool 1: Recommendations for dialogue with suppliers

Tool 2: Sample Policy for SCM and Disclosure

Tool 3: Form for Supplier Data Collection

Tool 4: Tool for collecting info suppliers and sub-suppliers

Tool 5: FLA Planning Template Supply Chain Mapping

Tool 6: Information to collect for child labour risk mapping



Figure 1: Annual AGT due diligence management system cycle

¹ FLA has designed an in-person 1-day training on supply chain mapping for buyers, suppliers, licensees, universities, and civil society organisations, based on the supply chain mapping concepts presented in this document.

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Key Principles for Supply Chain Mapping Beyond Compliance

The Fair Labor Association uses the following key principles for supply chain mapping. In this document we use these principles as a framework for providing more concrete recommendations, examples and lessons learned from the project “*Combating Child Labour in the Garment Supply Chains*”. It is advised to combine this document with FLA’s Guide for Supply Chain Mapping, Transparency and Traceability 1.0.

KEY PRINCIPLES

Supply chain mapping operates under the following principles:



TRUST: For a company to be able to map out its business operations at different levels, it must base relationships and communications on trust. This implies a change in mindset from a “compliance” approach to one of trust-building. In other words, the approach should evolve from demanding information from a supplier to seeking cooperation based on willingness. All departments within a company should take part in the process and receive training. Responsible sourcing results from trust-building.



COLLABORATION: To map a supply chain, collaboration is essential. Who are the different actors? Buyers, suppliers, subcontractors, intermediaries—the chain stretches all the way back to farms. In addition, other stakeholders can provide useful information, including employer associations, workers unions, civil society organizations, and public authorities. Every actor plays a role and has strengths that can be leveraged.



CO-CREATION: It is important that all partners and shareholders are engaged throughout the exercise, even its initial design. This ensures a better understanding of the scope and objectives of the initiative and promotes participation. Feedback from partners is essential.



TRANSPARENCY: Open and transparent communication is key to engaging actors and obtaining valuable information beneficial to all parties.



TIMELINESS: Setting clear timeframes and ensuring timely communications are essential.



COOPERATION: Brands/ companies may share suppliers. Cooperating with brands will enable greater leverage at the supplier level and encourage commitment and participation. A multi-stakeholder initiative that maintains confidentiality might be the best approach.

Source: FLA’s Guide for Supply Chain Mapping, Transparency and Traceability – 1.0

1. TRUST



Trust is essential for successful supply chain mapping. Suppliers may hesitate to give insight into their supply chain. Be mindful of potential concerns, think about solutions and explain why you want to map your supply chain.

1.1 Recommendation: Set the right tone about the importance of supply chain mapping

Initial communication, a good explanation, trust and regular engagement are very important foundations of ensuring successful supply chain mapping. This can be established by taking into account the following:

- It is of paramount importance to set the right tone from the start. To raise awareness among a large group of suppliers, it is useful to organise visits and information sessions, e.g. through webinars, in local languages to explain the rationale and mechanism of supply chain mapping. Buyers could consider inviting suppliers (tier 1 and tier 2) that have gone through the process to share their experiences, as suppliers tend to have more trust towards their peers. Make sure it is NOT a top-down process but a conversation on equal footing.
- Be prepared to explain why supply chain mapping is important to your company, how the company will use the provided information and how supply chain mapping can be used for progress toward better working conditions beyond your direct suppliers.
- Provide assurance to your supplier, whether verbal or written or both, about maintaining business ethics, confidentiality of the information gathered and respecting the business relationship between suppliers. Ensure that any agreements made are also known to your colleagues in other divisions, particularly buying and sourcing.
- Consider working with other departments in your company, such as materials, buying and sourcing, to see what information already exists about the supply chain, and how they are able to collect it. If necessary, involve colleagues from other departments in the dialogue with suppliers.
- Methods used in awareness-raising matter since supply chain mapping is a sensitive topic. The content should be approached delicately, in a way that won't be too threatening. It is also good to avoid being too dry such that the information fails to sink in. A participatory approach with lots of drawings and a mixed-factory discussion (so that an individual factory will not be singled out) encourages participants' involvement and sharing during the process. Topics to discuss include:
 - Understanding the risks in recruitment and worker management (incl. definition of child and child labour, national laws and regulations, and basic concepts of human rights and child rights)
 - Internal system for preventing recruitment and compliance risks (incl. age verification)
 - Business partner management (incl. supply chain mapping and supply chain risk assessment). Supply chain mapping usually is a top-down measure imposed by brands. To get buy-in from tier 1 suppliers, it is instrumental to emphasise the *business benefits* to them, e.g. from the perspective of building a competitive and resilient business (considering the set back of discovering child labour in their supply chain).
 - For tier 1 factories, include a discussion on engagement with sub-suppliers/subcontractors to conduct supply chain mapping

Learning:

In most situations, one-directional, top-down methods are used when conducting supply chain mapping. It usually does not involve in-depth discussions with factories in all tiers, especially those in the lower tiers. When tier 1 factories are tasked to conduct supply chain mapping, they tend to distribute the data collection tool and do not spend time to explain to their sub-suppliers or validate the data received. Suppliers perceive it as another administrative or audit requirement from the buyer, without understanding that this is also in their business interest.

1.2 Recommendation: Take time to explain what supply chain mapping entails

- Ask your suppliers about their understanding of the supply chain and the different steps or tiers in their supply chain. Inform the suppliers of what supply chain mapping entails from your point of view. It is not just about the sub-supplier and subcontractor information, but it entails more layers of understanding. AGT signatories are encouraged to make use of the guidance documents and tools developed.
- Visual aids are particularly useful as suppliers are sometimes confused with their positioning in the supply chain, as they could be tier 1 to some brands, and tier 2 and 3 to other suppliers. A more extensive visualisation of both *downstream* and *upstream* entities would help suppliers to conceptualise their relationships with business partners and the corresponding responsibilities.
- Having a kick-off and supplier onboarding meeting, where the various supply chain partners, including subcontractors and material suppliers are invited and discuss the importance of supply chain mapping, is particularly helpful.

Learning:

It was found that suppliers had a very different understanding of the supply chain and tiers. The majority of the ready-made garment suppliers see themselves as tier 1, but in one case the supplier considers the cotton farm as tier 1, and themselves as tier 4. The tools and explanations provided were therefore understood differently.

The AGT recommends refraining from using the ‘tier terminology’ for this reason and suggests being specific about which steps in the supply chain you would like to focus on. Take a risk-based approach to define where the focus should be and think about which companies deeper down the value chain need to be involved in order to address risks and implement improvements.

1.3 Recommendation: Get to know your supplier, and let your supplier get to know you.

As a first step, it is important to get a more in-depth understanding of who your supplier is. Having an open and informal conversation about the origin and characteristics of the company is helpful for building a good relationship.

- Gather information that goes beyond the main contact person, products and the location of the supplier.
- Get to know the company. Who is leading the company? Is it a family business? How did the company develop over the years? What are the plans for the future? Talk about the work force as well as about their supply chain structure. How is your supplier’s relationship with its suppliers?
- Share your commitment to enhancing sustainability through the process of engagement and continuous improvement. Share how you (aim to) include sustainability issues in your selection of suppliers, next to elements like price and quality. Talk about what parameters your supplier uses to select suppliers of yarn, fabric or processing (dyeing, finishing, embroidery). When you buy ready-made garments, you need the support of your supplier to achieve improvements with existing sub-suppliers or subcontractors or to select the ones with specific sustainability characteristics.
- If you feel there is sufficient openness, you can ask about the vision of the people around the table with regard to sustainability, especially in the areas of human and labour rights.

- It is equally important for a company to be well prepared before you embark on a dialogue with a supplier or a group of suppliers. Be ready to answer questions such as, “If I don’t do supply chain mapping, will it impact my business with you?”; “What if we find child labour in our supply chain? Will you cut off your business with us?”; “Supply chain mapping will cost resources (human, time, and financial), will the company support me in any way?”

Learning:

Suppliers are prepared and used to sharing technical information about products and to explaining that everything they do is in compliance with standards and requirements. They know how to provide the desired information and answers. They are used to a system of audits and their normal mindset is compliance-oriented. Being open and transparent about challenges is still very new and sometimes uncomfortable to suppliers. They may feel reluctant to share information that might not be perceived well by the buyer. Suppliers feel the fear of losing business.

It is key to underline your willingness to jointly work towards improvements and that openness about challenges is part of that. It is recommended that you prioritise openness over compliance. Actively seek feedback on your business practices to ensure that the dialogue is a two-way process.

1.4 Recommendation: Be clear about information needs and intended use

Before asking your suppliers for information about the supply chain, get internal agreement within your own company on what is needed and what you want to work towards. You can think about the following:

- Where will you start your supply chain mapping? Think about your focus as part of your due diligence process. You can start with key suppliers in certain high-risk countries/regions, or you can start with high-risk product categories. Explain your focus in your (AGT) action plan.
- Ensure you know what information you plan to request from your supplier. Would you like insight into all suppliers involved (with certain product categories) or are you specifically interested in certain processes?
- Is the request for the last orders or for all orders of the past full year? Or is it only for new and upcoming orders? What process approach do you aim for? Tip: Supply chain mapping is easier for orders not yet in production.
- Do you want to receive the name and address of the location or do you need more information? If so, what kind of information? Think about how you can set up a systematic approach that is efficient for you to collect and process data. Consider tools the supplier can use to provide you with data. Tip: Use tool 3 for collecting supplier info.
- Depending on the possible risks, you may want to collect additional information. For example, to get more insight into risks of bonded labour, it is important to learn about the origin and nationality of the workers. For assessing child labour risks, it is wise to get to know more about simple processes and sub-contracting. Tip: Use tool 6 on information to collect for child labour risk mapping.
- Determine if you want to work towards insight into all possible stages of production, e.g. from ‘cradle to store’.
- Keep in mind that the lower the tiers, the weaker the management systems usually are, including lower levels of awareness and skills of staff (e.g. they may not even have an HR department), and documentation, availability and quality of data. Different approaches (full mapping day, baseline data collection) for data collection should be used depending on the readiness of suppliers. A rapid assessment on the management capacity of suppliers in lower tiers could be useful as you consider the level of sophistication of data to be collected.

Learning:

Suppliers often feel reluctant to share information about their supply chain. They may feel that they risk giving away sensitive business information or could jeopardize their business relationship with their suppliers. They may also not understand the need for companies to get a full overview. Suppliers need time to get used to sharing information on the supply chain. In one case it was found that there was subcontracting from the washing unit (part of the direct supplier) to a bleaching unit which was unknown to the buyer. As this was just a small part of the production, the supplier was not aware of the importance of sharing this information.

1.5 Recommendation: Provide reassurance and emphasize non-retaliation

- In case there is information missing or if information is incorrect, provide support, ask for an explanation and work towards improvement. Do not consider the missing information as a sign of non-compliance or lack of trust, but as a learning point for both parties. In case the supplier is not providing full transparency yet, do not immediately respond by misusing your leverage as a buying company or threatening to end the business relationship. Try to understand the reasons behind the reluctance and think about what you can do to address these. Measures like ending relationships or cancelling orders are only to be used after a certain period wherein the supplier is clearly not willing to collaborate.
- Make clear that this is not purely about compliance, but about achieving continuous improvements. Provide support where needed and engage in continuous dialogue about sustainability risks in the supply chain without causing fear of cancelling orders in case of a non-compliance. A non-retaliation policy can be helpful for this. The policy can explain that understanding challenges and sustainability risks is important to you so you can jointly think about steps for improvement.

Learning:

The project in which these tools were piloted focused on child labour. In general, the risks of child labour at the level of exporting garment manufacturers are low, but at the level of subcontractors and sub-suppliers it certainly remains present. The zero-tolerance policy regarding child labour has made it difficult to have open conversations about this topic. Therefore, it is key for companies to gain the trust of their suppliers and provide reassurance that if issues are found, companies will work together with suppliers towards a solution.

2. COLLABORATION



Collaboration is key for successfully mapping a supply chain, which stretches as far as raw materials suppliers (e.g. farms and fibre production). Who are the different actors, e.g. buyers, suppliers, subcontractors and intermediaries? Stakeholders outside the supply chain may be able to help (e.g. NGOs, standard organisations, etc.).

2.1 Recommendation: Invest in communication and engagement

- Establish regular dialogue, either through in-person meetings, e-mail or phone conversation about the need for mapping and understanding the challenges of the industry and finding solutions together. Use different ways and approaches for explaining the needs and expectations to get more information about the supply chain.

Provide guidance and tools where possible and work towards a systematic approach that is efficient for your suppliers and your own company.

- Be respectful of the business relations of your suppliers. Demonstrate trust in the information shared, but be aware that this information might not be complete or fully accurate. It is a step-by-step process in which collaboration and continuous progress is key.
- Provide support to your suppliers. Suppliers might ask for support in case of issues or risks encountered or if they have limited influence (leverage) over sub-suppliers. They may request a signed commitment that you will not engage with their suppliers directly (or provide the details of key suppliers to other garment manufacturers you work with).

Learning:

Suppliers visited did not make use of pre-determined criteria to select their suppliers. The selection of where to source from or to outsource to is often based on established connections, family relations or word of mouth recommendation. The garment factory owners often inherit the business or have multiple generations in the same business. There are often long-term relationships between companies, and they know which supplier has good output and good quality.

2.2 Recommendation: Consider involving local partners

- Consider engaging a local consultant or civil society organisation who can provide additional support to your supplier. An explanation coming from a person with a different role can be more effective. It helps when they speak the local language(s), have a broad network, in-depth knowledge of a topic and local practices.
- Suppliers might be interested and motivated to connect with local, national or international support or stakeholders. It can be helpful for suppliers to be part of networks or to have regular interactions with civil society organisation(s) to increase their level of knowledge, understanding and awareness on sustainability. This will be helpful in creating more ownership and commitment for taking steps in supply chain mapping.

Learning:

The most common questions shared by the suppliers about supply chain mapping were:

- How will you use the information I share with you?
- How will you ensure that you will not use the information for commercial purposes, and for example bypass us?
- What would be the consequences if business confidentiality is breached?
- How do we collect and deal with information on tiers deep in the supply chain, e.g. when traders or middlemen are involved? What about information that is less reliable, since it is received indirectly (e.g. through sub-suppliers)?

2.3 Recommendation: Understand supplier questions and challenges

- Be prepared to receive questions from suppliers and ensure open conversations to increase understanding of your supplier's challenges when it comes to supply chain mapping. Listen, learn, show understanding, provide reassurance and discuss possible solutions.
- Keep in mind that lower tier suppliers would expect clear and open communications from all stakeholders, not only about the mechanics of supply chain mapping, but also the rationale and the use of the results. Buyers and tier 1 suppliers would need to align their messages and coordinate in communications.
- If the goal of your company is to identify salient risks such as child labour, violation of children's rights, and forced labour, it is important that you organize a learning session/training for the suppliers on these topics. Brands may have a different understanding of the subject matter than a supplier. It is important to come to the

same understanding of the issue at hand. It is commonly assumed that suppliers know about these issues, but in reality they are often unaware or only partly aware of these topics.

- Tip: Make use of tool 1: Recommendations for dialogue with suppliers.

Learning:

One of the suppliers visited agreed to an MoU/contract with their buyer to ensure that the brand would not use the information for commercial purposes. This includes not sourcing directly or connecting suppliers of one garment manufacturer with other garment manufacturers.

3. CO-CREATION



Co-creation: The likelihood of success increases when you actively engage all actors needed to successfully map your supply chain. Ensure there is a common understanding of the scope and objectives of the mapping, and promote participation and feedback.

3.1 Recommendation: work together to select suppliers beyond direct suppliers

- Identify the key personnel (company owner/manager) at the supplier and engage with them directly. Explore how supply chain mapping can also help them strengthen their business and hear what they think would be an effective way to work. Ensure that from your side buyers as well as corporate responsibility staff are involved. Have regular contact through calls rather than email, and if possible, have in-person meetings at least once per year to build a trusting and positive relationship.
- For each company and business partner it is essential to engage all relevant stakeholders (such as the buyers, HR and compliance department) who interact with sub-suppliers/sub-contractors. This process also serves to get their buy-in so that any progress on improving purchasing practices can be closely monitored at a later stage.
- Ask your suppliers about how they make decisions about which suppliers and subcontractors to work with. Try to get more insight in the selection criteria (if they exist) and to understand if selection is based on word of mouth, long term business association, business leverage, geographical location, family relations, certifications on social standards or other reasons.
- It will be helpful to motivate suppliers to develop criteria for the selection of material suppliers and subcontractors taking into account social standards and requirements. Support your suppliers in this.
- Collect additional information from peers and local organisations to increase understanding of the process involved in order placement and supplier selection.

Learning:

Most of the time, the marketing departments of the tier 1 factories are involved in the selection of sub-suppliers/subcontractors, while HR and compliance departments are not consulted or involved. Such decisions are mainly based on the speed, price, and quality of the sub-suppliers/subcontractors, and labour conditions are thus usually excluded.

4. TRANSPARENCY



Transparency: Open and transparent communication is key to engaging actors and obtaining valuable information beneficial to all parties.

Learning:

Suppliers had very limited understanding of the need for the companies to map their supply chains and the tools provided. Most suppliers feel that it is only about providing the names and locations of their suppliers and subcontractors. The linkage between supply chain mapping and due diligence is not understood.

4.1 Recommendation: Develop and share tools that help to create more transparency

- As part of the project there are several tools developed and provided. Nevertheless, it will always be necessary to adjust the tools to fit your own business characteristics and needs.
- Share the tools with your suppliers and make sure they have the opportunity to ask questions and get a good understanding of how to use them. Consider introducing the tools to suppliers in a participatory workshop.
- Tools allow the suppliers to collect and share information as needed and requested by the company/brand. Ensure tools are simple and easy to use and updated at regular intervals. Ideally, the tools have an added value for the supplier as well (e.g. to keep an overview of suppliers used, track status of certain certifications and expiration dates, etc.)
- Create beneficial conditions for compensating the time investment that is required, for example through order guarantees, long-term contracts or by making them a preferred supplier.
- Put conditions in the contracts with new suppliers about collecting and submitting information about the supply chain.

Learning:

Ideally your suppliers do their due diligence, and have policies and procedures to ensure sustainable practices in their supply chains. Suppliers who are certified under SA8000 and BSCI are obligated to visit their sub-suppliers every six months/one year to conduct monitoring visits. In the project, it was learned that suppliers that are not certified do not regularly visit their suppliers. Even if visits take place, monitoring is often superficial and there is no in-depth assessment conducted.

4.2 Recommendation: Start engagement beyond your direct suppliers

- As part of cascading requirements beyond direct suppliers, several certification and monitoring systems require suppliers to visit their suppliers and subcontractors. Ask about these visits, find out if and what documentation about (sub-)suppliers and subcontractors is collected.
- It is recommended that brands provide support to their direct suppliers to collect additional information about their supply chains, build relationships and to develop a joint system for improved selection and monitoring.
- Discuss which requirements are key to cascade in the supply chain. Support suppliers to develop procedures in line with your expectations.

- Supporting direct suppliers to set up a rapid assessment on the management capacity of sub-suppliers can be another way to get insight into the level of sophistication of data to be collected and approaches (e.g. on-site assessment for factories that are less equipped vs. collection of electronic data from more established ones).
- Involve several actors in the supply chain and let them know they are all part of this new way of working towards progress. Ideally, the different supply chain actors should feel comfortable to provide support and advice to each other.
- Working towards lasting improvement in a more sustainable manner, rather than relying (solely) on a pass/fail compliance program, is the way forward. It is good to have more stringent and strict business terms and conditions maintained but it is important to know that this is not achieved through audits and assessments.
- Another way to build trust is for buyers and direct suppliers to support sub-suppliers in raising awareness on social issues among their management and workforce. This is considered to be a positive form of engagement and not problem-finding. More concrete actions in supporting/signing up to workers' well-being initiatives would also allow sub-suppliers to see that buyers have good intentions and are investing in their future.

Learning:

The lower (or more upstream) the tiers, the weaker the management systems, including lower levels of awareness and skills of staff (they may not even have an HR department), documentation, availability and quality of data. Different approaches (full mapping day, baseline data collection) for data collection should be used depending on the readiness of suppliers.

5. TIMELINESS



Timeliness: Setting clear timeframes and ensuring timely communications are essential.

5.1 Recommendation: Provide support to maintain the updated information

- Develop concrete action points together and agree on a realistic timeline. Have regular contact to monitor the progress and to be able to arrange support when needed.
- Supply chains in the garment and textile sector often change. Most suppliers have relationships with their suppliers ranging between two years to 15 years. It is thus important that the information is updated at regular intervals. The regularity of the information may vary from supplier to supplier, and depend on your business needs, but it may be important to have the information checked every six months to one year. Ideally a systematic approach is taken, linking, for example, supplier information in the order system.
- In case there is considerable time between placing orders and production (one month or more), it is recommended that you obtain the 'tier two' supplier data from the 'tier one' supplier twice: (1) at the time of the order and (2) once the production commences. Getting this information again at the start of production is important to make sure that no unallowed changes are taking place.

Learning:

There are multiple layers of suppliers that one tier may not know about. During the peak production time when a particular supplier overbooks, it is not uncommon to outsource. This information is often not shared with the buyer.

6. COOPERATION



Cooperation: Finding ways to collaborate with other brands and companies will enable greater leverage as well as increase learnings and insights. Joint collaboration can focus on a specific area or region.

6.1 Recommendation: work together and share learnings and insights

- Engage with other brands and companies, as well as with NGOs, in supply chain mapping projects. Especially for smaller companies it can be helpful to join forces with others as this will help in developing better approaches and tools. It can be helpful to focus on a specific area or on a specific product/material.
- Invest time and effort in building trust and be open and transparent about challenges and difficulties. This will create a positive and stimulating environment wherein all participants feel motivated and inspired to continue.
- The business relationships between direct suppliers and their sub-suppliers and subcontractors are primarily determined by business factors such as price. As trust is built between them, more social/labour factors could be integrated into business decision-making. That will incentivise suppliers in lower tiers to strengthen their management systems.

Learning:

As part of the project, four Dutch companies focused on supply chain mapping in Tamil Nadu, India and two companies focused on Bangladesh. The companies shared their approaches, expectations and learnings. This was key in creating a better understanding of practices and challenges. A joint meeting with suppliers has been useful in creating more leverage and awareness. Working together with more actors, including NGOs, is challenging and takes time, but leads to better and more lasting results.