

TRANSFORMING LABOR AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES: EXAMINING SUPPLY CHAINS IN THE FOOTWEAR AND APPAREL INDUSTRIES IN ASIA

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ABSTRACT

Multinational companies (MNCs), whether they are based in North America, the EU, or in East Asia, are under pressure to "globalize" their business operations. As the result, many MNCs are benchmarking their environmental management practices to a single global standard and have realized important green improvements in eco-efficiency, stakeholder ties, and supply chain management practices.

Unfortunately, the globalization of business operations has also allowed many MNCs to pay lipservice to social and labor safeguards - national workplace standards, environmental and health safety codes, and collective bargaining - that are tightly interwoven in the culture and values of North American and EU countries.

Nowhere has the challenge of mainstreaming the principles of the triple bottom line (integrating economic, environmental, and social issues) in the business sector generated more controversy in recent years than in the footwear and apparel industries. A number of companies in this sector, including Nike (Vietnam), Reebok (Indonesia), and the Gap (Macao), have had to respond to charges that they encourage or allow their suppliers to conduct intolerable workplace conditions in their factories, many of which are located in Northeast and/or SE Asia. This panel/session will address such issues and questions as:

- How can footwear and apparel industries "green" their global supply chains?
- Can industry codes of conduct and monitoring systems (e.g. the Apparel Industry Partnership, SA8000, etc.) resolve concerns raised by labor and human rights groups?
- How can monitoring and verification by third parties support improvements?
- What is the proper role in this debate for NGOs, national governments, and international organizations such as the International Labor Organization?

Organized by two individuals with extensive backgrounds in Asian sustainable business issues, this proposed panel will seek the participation of major stakeholders in this debate, including representatives from corporations; NGOs that specialize in labor and corporate accountability concerns, and/or relevant national government agencies.