

# Making the Connection Between the United Nations Global Compact Code of Conduct for the Textile and Fashion Sector and the Sustainable Apparel Coalition Higg Index (2.0)

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**Abstract** The Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) is an industry-wide group of more than 100 leading apparel and footwear brands, retailers, suppliers, nonprofits, and nongovernmental organizations working to reduce the environmental and social impacts of apparel and footwear products around the world. The SAC Higg Index 2.0 is primarily an indicator-based tool for apparel that enables companies to evaluate material types, products, facilities, and processes based on a range of environmental and product design choices. The United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) is a strategic policy initiative for businesses that are committed to aligning their operations and strategies with 10 universally accepted principles in the areas of human rights, labor, environment, and anti-corruption. The first “sectorial” initiative of the UNGC is the Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry, which is totally aligned with the Global Compact principles. This chapter introduces SAC Higg Index 2.0 and the UNGC Code of Conduct, in addition to describing their principles or constituent tools. The chapter also analyzes the differences between both initiatives, putting forward some thoughts based on the impacts of the fashion and textile sector. However, because every company is unique, this work is not intended to prescribe the only way to develop sustainable strategies in the textile and fashion sectors.

**Keywords** Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) · United Nations Global Compact (UNGC) · UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Sector · SAC Higg Index 2.0

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## 1 Introduction

In 2000, consumers spent approximately US\$1 trillion worldwide buying clothes. Around one-third of sales were in Western Europe, one third in North America and one quarter in Asia (Make Trade Fair and Oxfam International 2004). Seven percent of total world exports are in clothing and textiles. Significant parts of the sector are dominated by developing countries, particularly in Asia, and above all by China. Industrialized countries are still important exporters of clothing and textiles, especially Germany and Italy for clothing and the United States for textiles. According to Allwood et al. (2006), developing countries now account for half of the world's textile exports and almost three quarters of the world's clothing exports.

Because of the size of the sector and the historical dependence of clothing manufacture on cheap labor, the clothing and textile industry is subject to intense political interest and has been significantly shaped by international trading agreements. Estimating the number of people working in these sectors is extremely difficult, due to the number of small firms and subcontractors active in the area and the difficulty of drawing boundaries between sectors (Allwood et al. 2006). According to statistics from the United Nations Industrial Development Organization Industrial Statistics Database, approximately 26.5 million people work within the clothing and textiles sector worldwide (International Labour Organization (ILO) 2006). Of these 26.5 million employees, 13 million are employed in the clothing sector and 13.5 million in the textiles sector. These figures are only people employed in manufacturing—not retail or other supporting sectors (Allwood et al. 2006).

Against this background, there is no doubt that the textile (and fashion) industry is important in the economy. However, taking into account the concept of sustainability, this industry often operates to the detriment of environmental and social factors (Gardetti and Torres 2011). Therefore, this chapter presents two initiatives: the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC)'s Higg Index 2.0 and the United Nations Global Compact (UNGC)'s Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry. The main purpose of both organizations and their relevant initiatives are to have textile and fashion companies and brands reduce their (negative) social and environmental impact throughout their supply chain. Moreover, this chapter presents and describes the elements of both initiatives, analyzing their differences and providing thoughts in the light of the impacts of this sector. Finally, some recommendations are made.

## 2 Methodology

The methodology used to prepare this chapter is based on the analysis of the SAC's Higg Index 2.0 and the UNGC's Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry, in the areas of human rights, labor rights, environment, anticorruption, and fashion specifics (designers, modeling, animals, transparency, etc.). The analysis includes many of the socioenvironmental impacts caused by the

industry today, ending with a comparative table that summarizes the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats.

To discuss and reflect on the SAC Higg Index 2.0 and the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry, the former was divided into three levels, which are described in Appendices I and II. The analysis conducted in this paper, based on the list of the UNGC Code of Conduct principles (see Table 7), only deals with the first two levels of the Higg Index 2.0.

### **3 The SAC Higg Index 2.0 and the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry**

#### ***3.1 An Introduction***

In February 2011, large companies in the textile and fashion sectors presented a multistakeholder alliance in order to establish a set of sustainability indicators to be used throughout the clothing (or apparel) industry—what Chouinard et al. (2011) called the “value chain index.”<sup>1</sup> The SAC was subsequently created, with the aim of transforming the industry into one that produces no unnecessary environmental harm and has a positive impact on the people and communities associated with its activities. According to Poldner (2013), SAC’s members are convinced that they cannot face the social and environmental challenges in the textile supply chain on their own,<sup>2</sup> and that they should strike a balance between their own goals and the SAC’s goals.

Once the SAC’s founding circle reached 30 members, they were divided into work groups and subgroups based on members’ interest and experience (Poldner 2013). In 2009, 18 months after its creation, SAC’s members had grown to include 40 companies, accounting for over 30 % of the global clothing and footwear market share.

The Higg Index 1.0, which was only focused on environmental aspects, was released on June 26, 2012 and has been used by hundreds of organizations, both SAC members and others. The Higg Index 2.0—an evolution based on version 1.0, which includes social and labor aspects—was released on December 11, 2013.

The UNGC is the result of a world characterized by glaring and unsustainable imbalances and inequities (Kell 2003). This is a joint initiative of the United Nations Development Program, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, and the World Labor Organization, in an effort to enable corporate social responsibility development and foster human rights, labor standards, environmental protection, and anticorruption. The main goal of the UNGC is to help

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<sup>1</sup> This has also been the focus of other initiatives, such as The Sustainability Consortium, a group made up of companies, universities, and government agencies.

<sup>2</sup> Through multistakeholder engagement, SAC seeks to lead the industry toward a shared vision of sustainability built upon a common approach for measuring and evaluating apparel and footwear product sustainability performance, which will spotlight priorities for action and opportunities for technological innovation.

align corporate policies and practices to universally concurred and internationally applicable ethical goals.<sup>3</sup> That is, by means of business voluntary commitment, the Global Compact is an initiative for promoting a new corporate culture on how to manage businesses. Its real essence is to create an ever-growing labor network (McIntosh et al. 2004a, b) supporting companies through learning and knowledge sharing, exercising leadership as a corporate citizen, and hence exerting influence on others through their behavior (Fuertes and Goyburu 2004).

The UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry, the first sector-specific initiative of the UNGC, was developed by the Nordic Institute Clean and Ethical (NICE), which is a project of the Nordic Fashion Association with the support of the city of Copenhagen and Denmark's Ministry of Business and Growth.

Appendix III shows the members of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition that also adhered to the Global Compact, as of April 2014.

### 3.2 *The Higg Index 2.0*

The Higg Index 2.0 is a self-assessment tool designed to (1) measure the sustainable impact on the apparel and footwear sector throughout the value chain and (2) provide for smoother relationships with the stakeholders. This tool includes both quantitative and qualitative environmental and social/labor indicators (Sustainable Apparel Coalition). The former are based on lifecycle thinking and span the apparel lifecycle (material, manufacturing, packaging transportation, use, and end-of-life), based on the Eco Index and Nike's Apparel Environmental Design Tool. The latter are based on the worker lifecycle, using some initiatives in such connection (e.g., the Global Social Compliance Program, SAI Social Fingerprint-a program of ratings, training and tool designed to help companies to help measure and improve social performance, FLA Sustainable Compliance Initiative which goal is to develop sustainable compliance tools and training materials for all code requirements to be use in the internal compliance programs of participating companies.).

This index has three application levels; the objectives and tools are described in Table 1.

The three levels were described by Chouinard et al. (2011), who stated:

To appreciate how these three views mitigate impacts, imagine the CEO of the casual apparel maker in a meeting with the head merchant of the company's largest customer. The merchant declines to place an order, informing the CEO that the brand's overall VCI-Value Chain Index- rating is too low to meet the retailer's standards. Having lost the sale, the CEO tells the VP of Design that all products for next season must have cumulative better

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<sup>3</sup> The principles stem from four key agreements: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The International Labour Organization's Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, The United Nations Convention Against Corruption.

**Table 1** Higg Index 2.0 levels, objectives, and application tools

Level	Objective	Tools
Brand	To assess product-specific environmental/social and labor performance at this level	Environment (apparel)
		Environment (footwear)
		Social/Labor (apparel/footwear)—Beta
Facility	To assess specific environmental and social and labor performance materials, packaging, manufacturing suppliers facilities	Environment (apparel/footwear)
		Social/Labor (apparel/footwear)—Beta
Product	To assess product-specific impact	Rapid Design Module—Beta
		Materials Sustainability Index (MSI) Data Explorer

Source Sustainable Apparel Coalition

VCI ratings. The VP conveys this directive to his team. A designer on the team starts work on a cotton blouse. She begins by specifying traditionally grown cotton, but her design software tells her that the VCI rating for that material falls short of the new sustainability goals. She then selects a vendor offering organically grown cotton, but the score is still low because she has sourced the cotton in western China, where irrigation is drawing down an aquifer faster than rainfall can replenish it. Scanning the VCI tables, she lights upon another option, a vendor in southern India buying from farms that are watered by region’s rainfall. She completes her selection of materials and reaches the sustainability score she and her bosses have targeted.

### 3.2.1 The HIGG Index Tools

Because the UNGC Code of Conduct refers to the textile and fashion sectors, the following analysis describes the Higg Index 2.0 only as it relates to these sectors (see Table 2).

**Table 2** The Higg Index 2.0 tools analyzed in this chapter

Level	Objective	Tools analyzed in this chapter
Brand	To assess product-specific environmental/social and labor performance at this level	Environment (apparel)
		Social/Labor (apparel/footwear)—Beta
Facility	To assess specific environmental and social and labor performance materials, packaging, manufacturing suppliers facilities	Environment (apparel/footwear)
		Social/Labor (apparel/footwear)—Beta
Product	To assess product-specific impact	Rapid Design Module (RMD)—Beta
		Materials Sustainability Index (MSI) Data Explorer

Source Sustainable Apparel Coalition

## A. Brand level

### A.1. Environment (apparel)

This tool, which scores in terms of an ideal, consists of seven areas with the same relative weight, which are divided into different aspects; in turn, each of them has a specific relative weight (see Table 3). The scoring system of the Higg Index was designed to drive behavior change. In the Index (2.0), points were heuristically assigned to each indicator question to potentially drive actions, decisions, and practices that lead to better sustainability outcomes.

**Table 3** Areas and aspects included in the environment tool on the brand level

General	Internal sustainability performance and accountability
	Supplier tracking and risk assessment
	Product life cycle assessment (LCA)
	Chemicals management system
	Public reporting and verification
Materials	Materials program
	Chemical responsibility greater than the restricted substance list (RSL) content and transparency
	Chemical responsibility: restricted substance list (RSL) verification/certification
	Chemical impact reduction management (i.e., “Sustainable Chemistry Program”)
	Materials selection and approval procedures
Packaging	Packaging program
	Packaging restricted substance list (PRSL)
Manufacturing	Manufacturing program
	Environmental guidelines for manufacturing suppliers
	Water use/conservation
	Manufacturing efficiency: seconds/reject rate reporting
	Continuous improvement programs with manufacturing suppliers
	Sampling program
Transportation	Optimizing modal type, distance, and weight/volume
	Maximizing utilization of transportation assets
	Carrier selection
Product care and repair service	Product care and repair service program
	Repairability design standards
	Design for durability and longevity (quality assurance feedback mechanism)
	“Product Care” communication to consumers
	“Repair Service” communication to consumers
End Of Use (EOU)	EOU program
	Design policies for EOU streams
	EOU collection/processing infrastructure
	EOU communication to consumers

Source Sustainable Apparel Coalition website

**Table 4** Areas and aspects included in the social/labor tool on the brand level

Company’s internal social/labor performance management	Company’s internal workplace standards
	Company’s internal employee orientation and development
Company’s social/labor performance management system for partners in the value chain	Social/labor performance management system for value chain partners
	Monitoring and continuous improvement in the value chain
	Company’s integration of social/labor performance requirements to the business
External engagement, community impact, transparency and public disclosure	Engagement and collaboration
	Community impact
	Transparency and public disclosure

Source Sustainable Apparel Coalition website

**A.1. Social/Labor<sup>4</sup> (apparel/footwear)—Beta**

This tool, which scores in terms of an ideal, has three areas with a specific relative weight, which are, in turn, divided in relevant aspects within each area (Table 4).

**B. Facility level**

**B.1. Environment (apparel)**

This tool consists of a detailed description of the facility profile and its production, such as apparel, footwear, home textiles, equipment, or others. Moreover, it includes the environmental aspects and the three levels defined for each of these aspects (see Table 5).

**B.2. Social/Labor (apparel/footwear)—Beta**

This tool, which scores in terms of an ideal, has three areas, each with a specific relative weight, similar to those described for the brand level. These areas consist of relevant aspects. Table 6 shows the areas and their relevant aspects within the social and labor framework.

**C. Product Level<sup>5</sup>**

Nike’s Material Sustainability Index (MSI) is the result of more than 8 years of researching, compiling, and analyzing publicly available information on a wide variety of materials. The full SAC membership voted to include the Nike MSI in SAC product indexes in June 2012.

In 2003, we began developing Nike MSI to provide a practical method to help designers make informed, real-time decisions about the potential and various

<sup>4</sup> Bair et al. (2014) provided insight into the potential for the market to protect and improve labor standards and working conditions in global apparel supply chains. It examines also the possibilities and limitations of market approaches to securing social compliance in global-manufacturing industries.

<sup>5</sup> This paragraph is based on the paper called *Nike Materials Sustainability Index*, prepared by Nike Inc. in 2012.

**Table 5** Areas and aspects included in the environment tool on the facility level

Environmental management system or program	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3
Energy use and greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3
Water use	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3
Wastewater/effluent	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3
Emissions to air	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3
Waste management	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3
Chemicals management	Level 1
	Level 2
	Level 3

*Source* Sustainable Apparel Coalition website

*Note* Levels 1, 2, and 3 signify general thresholds of environmental practices. *Level 1* awareness, understanding, and baseline performance; *Level 2* planning and managing; *Level 3* implementing sustainability measures/demonstrating performance and progress

environmental impacts of material choices in the product creation process. Nike MSI calculates relative material scores for each of the more than 80,000 materials available to Nike product creation teams from 1,400 suppliers. These scores then feed into the Nike Apparel and Footwear Sustainability Indexes, helping designers to select materials with lower environmental impacts, as measured by Nike MSI.<sup>6</sup> However, the Higg Index 2.0 tool only includes 43 analyzed materials.

Nike MSI uses three categories of points—a base material score, material environmental attributes, and supplier practices—to achieve a robust scoring framework that delivers comprehensive materials assessments.

*Base Material Score* This category consists basically of four environmental impact areas:

- *Chemistry* (includes carcinogenicity, acute toxicity, chronic toxicity, reproductive toxicity, and endocrine disruption)

<sup>6</sup> It is important to note that Nike MSI is not intended to be a substitute for full lifecycle assessment studies, nor does it provide footprint endpoint data (Nike 2012).



**Table 6** Areas and aspects included in the Social/labor tool on the facility level

Facility’s labor and workplace performance management	Recruitment and hiring
	Compensation
	Hours of work
	Worker involvement and communication
	Worker treatment and development
	Health and safety
	Termination and retrenchment
Facility’s labor and workplace performance management for the value chain	
External engagement, community impact, transparency and public disclosure	External engagement and collaboration
	Community impact
	Transparency and public disclosure

Source Sustainable Apparel Coalition website

- *Energy and Greenhouse Gases* (includes intensity of energy and greenhouse gas intensity)
- *Water and Land Use Intensity* (includes water intensity and land use intensity)
- *Physical Waste* (includes hazardous, municipal solid waste, industrial, recyclable/compostable, and mineral)

*Material Environmental Attributes*, comprising:

- Nike Green Chemistry Program Validation—Material Greening Effort (must participate in Nike Green Chemistry Program Commitment and achieve a “0” score before points can be gained)
- Water Conservation Option 1—Dye Method (suppliers are awarded water conservation points at the supplier or the material level, but not both)
- Recycled Content
- Organic Content
- Blends and Composites

*Supplier Practices*, basically consisting of:

- Restricted Substance List Program
- Nike Green Chemistry Program Commitment—Self-Evaluation of Chemicals and Facility (must participate in Nike Green Chemistry Program Commitment and achieve a “0” score before points can be gained through Nike Green Chemistry Program Validation)
- Nike Water Program
- Water Conservation Option 2—Supplier Facility Water Recycling (suppliers are awarded water conservation points at the supplier or the material level, but not both)

- Nike Energy and Carbon Program (suppliers are awarded water conservation points at the supplier or the material level, but not both.)
- Sustainability Certifications and Programs

### ***3.3 The UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry***

On May 3, 2012, the UNGC presented its first sector-specific initiative, a Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry jointly developed with the Nordic Fashion Association, and NICE (2012). This presentation took place at the Copenhagen Fashion Summit of that year. George Kell, Executive Director of the UN Global Compact, said: “As an industry facing serious and widely publicized social and environmental challenges, the fashion and textile industry is uniquely positioned to launch a sectorial initiative under the umbrella of the UN Global Compact. We are very excited about this effort and look forward to collaborating with NICE and its partners” (Nordic Fashion Association, 2012).

There was a second launch during the Rio+20 Summit, with the purpose of boosting this new initiative, in the activity titled “Changing the World through Fashion: Contribution to Sustainable Development by the Fashion and Textile Industry.” In this new activity, Mr. Kell emphasized “the importance of changing the fashion and textile sector” and said that “this new impetus was backed by the Global Compact.”

Why a Code of Conduct? Kaway (2009) stated it should be used “not only due to the subcontracting chain system used in this industry but also due to the fact that the Textile and Clothing industry is mainly a labor industry, that is, the use of manual workers is high if compared to other machinery manufacturers sectors, and therefore creating an environment more favorable for abuses to occur in this sense.”

While this UNGC Code includes the ten principles of the United Nations Global Compact,<sup>7</sup> it provides additional specificity from a sector perspective, adding six principles within a varied range of topics that pertain to the fashion and textile industry relative to an area called ethical conduct.<sup>8</sup> Table 7 shows the 16 principles of the code, matching them with the compact, sector specificity, and relevant areas.

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<sup>7</sup> For more information about the Global Compact, please visit [www.globalcompact.org](http://www.globalcompact.org). Additionally, to implement its principles, refer to: Fussler et al. (2004). For more academic papers, please refer to: McIntosh et al. (2004) and McIntosh et al. (2004a, b). The Journal of Corporate Citizenship Issue 11 (2003) special issue on Global Compact and McIntosh M, Waddock S and Kell G (2004) Learning to Talk—Corporate Citizenship and the Development of the UN Global Compact (2012). Greenleaf Publishing, Sheffield.

<sup>8</sup> The textile and fashion industries are subject to a great deal of criticism because they basically foster the consumption of goods that people do not necessarily need. Therefore, we need a proactive approach to create ethical relations regarding animal treatment, design process, body image ideals, mining or precious stone extraction, and supply chain transparency.

**Table 7** UNGC Code of Conduct: principles and subject areas

Code of Conduct principles			
1. Support and observe human rights protection	<i>Global compact</i>	Human rights	
2. Not be an accomplice to abuse of rights			
3. Support the principles of freedom of unionization and the right to collective bargaining		Labour rights	
4. Eradicate forced and obligatory labor			
5. Abolish any form of child labor			
6. Eliminate discrimination based on job and occupation			
7. Support a preventive approach to environmental challenges		Environment	
8. Foster greater environmental responsibility			
9. Promote development and dissemination of green technologies		<i>Sector specificity</i>	Ethical conduct
10. Businesses must act against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery			
11. Animals must be treated with dignity and respect. No animal must be deliberately harmed or exposed to pain			
12. Businesses and their designers must work actively to encourage and support sustainable design			
13. Businesses must, through their choice and treatment of models, promote a healthy lifestyle, and healthy body ideals, and the models' minimum age must be 16 during fashion weeks and other occasions where the workload is excessive.			
14. Businesses must work towards transparency in their supply chain			
15. Businesses must work towards a stronger commitment throughout their supply chain to reinforce the development of a secure mining industry			
16. All businesses involved must at all times be open and accessible for announced, semi-announced, and unannounced audits for monitoring and evaluation of compliance with the Code of Conduct			

For each of these principles, the Code explains:

- What it means to act in accordance with the Code of Conduct (i.e., the goal of each principle)
- Why each principle is important
- An explanation for the above, and
- How to do it (recommendations).

Furthermore, you will find important facts and information on where to learn more about creating a long-term viable and sustainable business. Note that the Code is applicable not only to the brand (or the company owner of the brand), but also to every partner, both in the country and abroad.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> According to the Code, the brand is responsible for developing an ethical and sustainable supply chain in the company.

Likewise, the Code includes some peculiarities, which are described below:

- (a) In the labor right area, it delves deeper into working hours, based on ILO Convention No. 1 on working hours; contracts of employment; sick leave and holidays with pay, based on ILO Convention No. 152 on paid vacations; complaint filing systems; occupational safety and health, based on the ILO Plan of Action 2010–2016: ratification and effective implementation of the occupational safety and health), and home work.
- (b) In the environment area, and in connection with principles 7 and 8, it highlights the waste and water topic, while referring (within the framework of principle 9) to the use of chemicals, energy use, carbon dioxide emissions, and atmospheric emissions in general.
- (c) As to monitoring and evaluation, it provides an analysis of value chain development based on three levels of risk—basic, high, and advanced—suggesting some guidelines for each of them. They are as follows:

*Basic Level*

- Include corporate social responsibility (CSR) clauses or the UNGC Code of Conduct in supplier contracts and begin working towards integration.
- Conduct informal (Code-based) audits when visiting suppliers for other reasons.

*High Level*

Make a detailed mapping of all suppliers in order to be able to assess them in accordance with their specific risk level. Operating in the fashion industry typically means maneuvering in high-risk countries.<sup>10</sup>

*Advanced*

- Send out a self-evaluation questionnaire, partly to get an initial knowledge of the suppliers' performance level within CSR, and partly to point out to the requirements in the Code of Conduct.
- Create a good dialogue with suppliers so that they perceive the self-evaluation process as part of their long-term relationship.
- Conduct formal audits solely concentrating on environmental, social, and ethical issues. Both announced or unannounced audits are possible, each of which has various advantages.

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<sup>10</sup> Here, the UNGC Code of Conduct suggests considering the Danish Institute for Human Rights' Human Rights and Business country risk analysis.

01  BASIC LEVEL	02  HIGH LEVEL	03  ADVANCED
CODE OF CONDUCT OR CSR CLAUSE IN CONTRACT   INFORMAL AUDITS	MAPPING AND RISK ASSESSMENT   SELF EVALUATION   FORMAL AUDITS   ACTION PLANS	PARTNERSHIPS   THIRD PARTY AUDITS

**Chart 1** UNGC Code of Conduct: principles and subject areas. *Source* NICE Code of Conduct and manual for the fashion and textile industry (May 2012)

Chart 1 shows the above description, as well as the suggestions for each risk level.

- (d) The code states that risks may be influenced by various factors, including spending, country, category, and the nature of the transaction, in addition to how critical the supplier is to your business. Broadly speaking, the more critical the supplier is, the higher the generated overall risk will be. Therefore, it is important to divide suppliers into three categories, depending on how critical replacing them is:
  - highly critical (meaning that replacing the supplier would be extremely costly and disruptive);
  - semi-critical (meaning that replacing the supplier is possible but it is time consuming and partly costly);
  - less critical (suppliers can be replaced as necessary).
- (e) The code suggests that an audit should begin with a meeting with the supplier’s management (including the person responsible for implementing the Code, a human resources representative, and even the local union representative) where the outline for the audits is reviewed and discussed, and which should deal with the “how’s” explained in each principle within the framework of the Code.

## 4 Discussion, Reflection and Conclusions

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights describes human rights as 30 separate articles that can be organized into four areas (United Nations Global Compact, 2013):

*Equality* (prohibition of discrimination on the bases of race, color, sex, language, religion, political beliefs or affiliations, national or social origin, property, or birth).

*Life and Security* (rights to life, liberty, and security, and the right to be free from slavery or torture; a just legal system; and equal protection under the law).

*Personal freedom* (rights protecting personal privacy for family, home, thought, religion, opinion, and property ownership).

*Economic, social, and cultural freedoms* (right to social security, to work, equal pay, to form and join unions, to rest and leisure, and to adequate health care and well-being).

According to Rulli and Justo (2012), some of the most important characteristics of human rights can be described as follows:

Human rights are founded on respect for the dignity and worth of each person. Human rights are universal, meaning that they are applied equally and without discrimination to all people.

Human rights are inalienable, in that no one can relinquish his or her human rights or have his or her human rights taken away.

Human rights are indivisible, interrelated, and interdependent, for the reason that it is insufficient to respect some human rights and not others. In practice, the violation of one right will often affect respect for several other rights. All human rights should therefore be seen as having equal importance and of being equally essential to respect for the dignity and worth of every person.

While Dickson et al. (2009) stated that human rights are an essential part of business social and environmental responsibility, the Higg Index 2.0 does not explicitly include this area. On the contrary, these rights, in a broad sense, are fully addressed in the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry. As this Code was prepared in 2011, it fails to include the “Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights—Implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework,” which was also developed in that year by a team led by John Ruggie for the UN Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner.<sup>11</sup>

The cut-make-trim stage<sup>12</sup> (in which cloth is cut and sewn into garments or other textile products) is a largely manual operation with key sustainability impacts being social rather than environmental. Converting pattern pieces to garments requires workers at sewing machines—an inexpensive, mechanically simple technology. This results in a “mobile and itinerant” industry that is relocated to whichever area of the globe has the cheapest labor costs and standards. Therefore, as stated by Fletcher (2014), manufacturers compete with each other for a place in the supply chain of retailers and big brands, which puts downward pressure on labor rights and

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<sup>11</sup> The Guiding Principles, also known as Ruggie’s model, require that companies have a policy commitment to respect human rights and proactively take steps to prevent, mitigate, and, where appropriate, remediate their adverse human rights impacts (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2011).

<sup>12</sup> Not only in its preparation do we find serious social impacts, but also in cotton picking we find migratory workers, undocumented immigration, and child labor. In the last case, see “The Children Behind our Cotton,” developed by the Environmental Justice Foundation (2007) or, for more general issues, such as health and the inefficient use of water, see “The White Gold: the True Cost of Cotton,” also developed by the Environmental Justice Foundation (2005).

working conditions. These impacts were studied by both academics and organizations, including Allwood et al. (2006), Draper et al. (2007) for Forum for the Future; Dickson et al. (2009), Smestad (2009), Ross (2009), Lieutier (2009), Gwilt and Rissanen (2011), Siegle (2011), War on Want (2011, 2012, 2013), Labour Behaving the Label (2011), Balatti (2013), Bair et al. (2014). That is why labor rights are addressed in both initiatives. However, it should be noted that there is well-documented evidence that, over the past 25 years, the labor rights of few workers in the apparel industry are respected, as stated in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 2013) and the ILO Declaration of the Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (International Labour Organization, 2013). We are referring to low wages,<sup>13</sup> long working hours, irregular employment and immigration, child labor,<sup>14</sup> forced labor, union-busting, sexual harassment, nonpayment of severance pay, abusive conditions, and gender inequality.<sup>15</sup>

One of the more detailed studies addressing the environmental impacts of these industries was, without a doubt, *Fashioning Sustainability: A review of the Sustainability Impacts of the Clothing Industry*, prepared by Stephanie Draper, Vicky Murray, and Ilka Weissbrod in 2007 for the World Wildlife Fund. This study analyses the impacts in different processes of the chain, including the following.

*Obtaining fiber as raw material* The use of pesticides during this process leads to health problems for workers and causes soil degradation and the loss of biodiversity. Water is such a necessary element in the processing of cotton, in particular, that this crop has been called the “thirsty crop.” While the use of agrochemicals tends to be reduced, the use of genetically modified organisms for such purpose could lead to another type of impact. In turn, many of the synthetic fibers are derived from a nonrenewable resource, such as oil. In general, environmental abuse combines with ethical issues when there is an excessive use of water and when land for food production is usurped.

Considering the whole *textile chain, from spinning to consumer use*, it cannot be ignored that the use of chemicals may have carcinogenic and neurological effects, may cause allergies, and may affect fertility. During both of these processes and consumer care, large amounts of water and energy are used and, in general, nonbiodegradable wastes are produced. These stages also involve the generation of carbon dioxide emissions (CO<sub>2</sub>).

Both the SAC Higg Index 2.0 and the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Industry cover the mitigation of environmental impacts. In this regard, it should be noted that the Nike MSI is a tool that helps one to quickly assess the impact of 43 materials.

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<sup>13</sup> The report titled “Tailored Wages. Are the big brands paying the people who make our clothes enough to live on?,” prepared by Anna McMullen et al. for Clean Clothes Campaign, funded by the European Union and presented in March 2014, states that Inditex, Marks and Spencer, Switcher, and Tchibo are companies that have been working “a little” in this sense, but not enough yet.

<sup>14</sup> A very interesting case to read about this topic is “When Clothes for Children are made by Children” (Delalieux 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Almost 70 % of workers in the apparel industry are women (Hernandez 2006). In the clothing industry, women generally sew, finish, and pack clothes. Supervisors, machinery operators, and technicians are usually men, who earn more.

Principle 10 of the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Sector, referring to “anti-corruption” and derived from the United Nations Conventions Against Corruptions, is not addressed in the Higg Index 2.0. Corruption has a negative impact on social and economic development, as well on the environment, and it undermines the positive effects of good business practices (UN Global Compact 2012), in addition to increasing the legal and reputation risks.

Besides Principle 10, the Higg Index 2.0 fails to include the principles below:

*Principle 11* Animals must be treated with dignity and respect. No animal must be deliberately harmed or exposed to pain.

*Principle 12* Businesses and their designers must work actively to encourage and support sustainable design.

*Principle 13* Businesses must, through their choice and treatment of models, promote a healthy lifestyle and healthy body ideals, and the models’ minimum age must be 16 during fashion weeks and other occasions where the workload is excessive.

*Principle 14* Businesses must work towards transparency in their supply chain.

*Principle 15* Businesses must work towards a stronger commitment throughout their supply chain to reinforce the development of a secure mining industry.

Issues such as the increasing number of species in danger of extinction and the current focus on animal rights have fueled the debate among consumers, in some cases even resulting in high-profile personalities taking a public stand in terms of these ethical issues (Krüger et al. 2012).

Fletcher (2008) stated that the textile and fashion sector should help “cultivate new aspirations.” In this, designers play a vital role as key components, capable of fostering change towards a model that provides for a balanced combination of processes, people, and the environment. According to Clark (2009), 80 % of the social, environmental, and cultural impact of fashion is determined during the design stage, which places a huge amount of responsibility into the hands of the designer (Earley 2007).

Despite the glamour of fashion shows, the fashion world can be cruel and full of sacrifices and secrets. Christine Hart, a former model who worked for 10 years on the runways of Milan, Paris, and New York, described it in her book “The Stories Models Never Tell” (2011). This book revealed her experiences in a profession that even considered her to be “too old” because she started out at 25 years old, after graduating with a degree in law: “Having an education gave me an invaluable background to navigate these waters, infested with sharks and piranhas,” she explained. The dictatorship of beauty, as defined by Hart (2011), implies setting canons of so-called perfection defined by a minority. Setting these canons through fashion, advertising, and all their supports is a million-dollar business.

For its part, transparency implies going beyond statutory requirements towards a full and honest disclosure of business activities, strategies, and current impacts, including both costs and supply chain. However, the long, complex, and fragmented



fashion supply chain lowers transparency and control and creates a disconnect between the few who reap the benefits from fashion and the many who pay the social and environmental costs (Martin 2013; Gjerdrum Pedersen and Andersen 2014.)

Mining and the production of precious metals and stones entail a high cost for both nature and native communities. The misuse of mercury in gold mining has highly harmful consequences, not only for the environment and biodiversity, but for the health of craft miners and their families as well. As for diamonds, those coming from conflict areas threaten responsible business, because diamonds are extracted from war areas and often sold to fund the activities of a military leader or violent group.

Both initiatives—the UNGC Code of Conduct and the Higg Index 2.0—promote monitoring, evaluation, and auditing. Table 8 shows a summary of their relationships. While neither of these initiatives includes consumers, the UNGC Code of Conduct has an indirect allusion to them: it states that Communication on Progress<sup>16</sup> is the tool used by businesses and brands to communicate with their stakeholders—and consumers are among them. This is no minor detail: it is not only Erhenfeld (1999, 2002), and Suzuki and Dressler (2002) who place sustainability at the individual level. Presas (2001) claimed that a real transition to sustainable development requires a new way of thinking.

However, a sustainable society is not possible without sustainable individuals (Cavagnaro and Curiel 2012). That is, individual capacities seem to be at the heart of the issue. These definitions should lead to a more responsible attitude from the consumer. They refer not only to water and energy consumption and chemicals and detergent use, but also, according to Fletcher (2008), to how consumers should handle the pressure to compare themselves to others through the accumulation and display of possessions, the continuous replacing of things (which, in the fashion world, means that every new item requires another “matching” item), and the cultural obligation to experience everything and take consumption as part of a continuous process of identity formation. That would require the use of a collective learning mechanism for all types of environments and stakeholders and the creation of the necessary space for a structure of dialog on what our vision of sustainable society is. Table 9 briefly illustrates the strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats of both initiatives. To conclude, the organizations and brands that make up these sectors—textile and fashion—can lead the change and create the space mentioned by Fletcher (2008).

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<sup>16</sup> According to the paper prepared by Fuertes and Goyburu (2004), Communication on Progress “is a report endorsing the commitment of the entities subscribing the Global Compact, and, more importantly, it is a tool to maintain the initiative credibility.” However, according to Gardetti (2006), today more than ever, it is a communication tool whereby the company can gradually build trust. This “communication” describes a company’s progress in terms of each principle during a given period of time.

**Table 8** Relationship between the UNGC Code of Conduct and the Higg Index 2.0

Code of Conduct principles			Higg Index 2.0		
			Brand level	Facility level	Product level
1. Support and observe human right protection	<i>Global compact</i>	Human rights	–	–	–
2. Not to be an accomplice to abuse of rights			–	–	–
3. Support the principles of freedom of unionisation and the right to collective bargaining		Labor rights	X (see Tables 3 and 4)	X (see Table 6)	X (some comments about health—Paragraph C)
4. Eradicate forced and obligatory labour					
5. Abolish any form of child labour					
6. Eliminate discrimination based on job and occupation					
7. Support a preventive approach to environmental challenges		Environment	X (see Table 3)	X (see Table 5)	X (see Paragraph C)
8. Foster greater environmental responsibility					
9. Promote development and dissemination of green technologies					
10. Businesses must act against corruption in all its forms, including extortion and bribery		Anti-corruption	–	–	–

(continued)

**Table 8** (continued)

Code of Conduct principles			Higg Index 2.0		
			Brand level	Facility level	Product level
11. Animals must be treated with dignity and respect. No animal must be deliberately harmed or exposed to pain	<i>Sector specificity</i>	Ethical conduct			
12. Businesses and their designers must work actively to encourage and support sustainable design					
13. Businesses must, through their choice and treatment of models, promote a healthy lifestyle, and healthy body ideals, and the models' minimum age must be 16 during fashion weeks and other occasions where the workload is excessive.					
14. Businesses must work towards transparency in their supply chain					
15. Businesses must work towards a stronger commitment throughout their supply chain to reinforce the development of a secure mining industry					
16. All businesses involved must at all times be open and accessible for announced, semi-announced and unannounced audits for monitoring and evaluation of compliance with the Code of Conduct			X	X	X

**Table 9** Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats between the UNGC Code of Conduct and the Higg Index 2.0

Strengths		Opportunities	
UNGC Code of Conduct	SAC Higg Index 2.0	UNGC Code of Conduct	SAC Higg Index 2.0
Initiatives of the UN Global Compact	Initiative of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition	To change the industry's status quo at a global level	To improve organizations' performance facing society
Sound support of the United Nations	Initiative proved in many companies members of the Coalition	Change leaders may be trained based on these initiatives <sup>a</sup>	
Multi-stakeholder initiative	Includes labor rights and environmentally-related aspects	Although a few experiences have been conducted, this is an opportunity to lead the change	
Includes human rights with a very broad vision		To improve organizations' performance facing society	
Includes labor rights and environmentally-related aspects			
Includes the corruption issue			
<i>Weaknesses</i>		<i>Threats</i>	
<i>UNGC Code of Conduct</i>	<i>SAC Higg Index 2.0</i>	<i>UNGC Code of Conduct</i>	<i>SAC Higg Index 2.0</i>
Few experiences worldwide	Although it has been proven in companies members of the Coalition, the experience is limited with respect to the entire industry (no experiences in small companies)	It may be the case of unfavorable macroeconomic and political contexts, poor labor and environmental legislation, hindering their integration	No experiences in small organizations

(continued)

**Table 9** (continued)

Strengths		Opportunities	
UNGC Code of Conduct	SAC Higg Index 2.0	UNGC Code of Conduct	SAC Higg Index 2.0
Implementation cost Does not include consumer's issues	Implementation cost	Industry's status quo	It may be the case of unfavorable macroeconomic and political contexts, poor labor and environmental legislation, hindering their integration  Industry's status quo
	Temporarily, the initiative is restricted to members of the Coalition and their vendors		
	It is a multi-stakeholder initiative, but limited to members		
	The SAC consists of members whose reputation can be questioned		
	It does not include human rights to the extent they should be included		
	It does not include the corruption issue		
	It does not include fashion specific areas such as: the designer's role in promoting sustainability; modeling; transparency and treatment towards animals		
	It does not include consumer's issues		

<sup>a</sup> For example, in 2013 the Argentinean Chapter of the United Nations Global Compact began to develop the Training Program for Change Leaders in the Textile and Fashion Sector [Programa de Formación de Líderes para el Cambio en el Sector Textil y de la Moda] based on UNGC Code of Conduct, with plans to spread it to other Latin American chapters

## 5 Going Forward

The process of transforming the industry into something more sustainable—and more sensitive to our needs—takes time. It is a long-term commitment towards a new way of producing and consuming that requires widespread personal, social, and institutional change.

The two initiatives analyzed in this paper, the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual for the Fashion and Textile Sector and the SAC Higg Index 2.0, supplement each other (the former is qualitative and the latter is a quantitative initiative) and may help broaden the debate on the textile and fashion industry, which is currently focused on technical and commercial details regarding dyeing technologies, the value chain, and the search for alternative fibers. According to Flechter (2008, 2009), to broaden the discussion means to integrate issues such as consumption, fashion, globalization, and physical and mental health; each of these items reflects the cultural visions and social standards behind the textile industry. Therefore, it is necessary to connect with other disciplines, industries, communities, and international groups, beyond their own boundaries (Gjerdrum Pedersen and Andersen 2014).

The paradox for the textile and fashion sector is that, for its survival, the workforce depends on a system that seems to be destroying the world's capacity to withstand such a force.

According to Poldner (2013), one of the problems with the Higg Index is that it is based on the structure of the Eco Index of the Outdoor Industry Association and the Apparel Environmental Design tool developed by Nike, which focus on a specific type of industry. Therefore, it might be difficult to adjust to other sectors, such as high fashion. Another problem is that those indexes were developed using widely criticized criteria, as they accept chemicals banned by other organizations. However, according to Dickson et al. (2009), implementing codes of conduct and monitoring procedures can be seen as a first generation of solutions to eradicate the poor labor standards in apparel manufacturing companies.

Supply chain sustainability is a key component of corporate responsibility; therefore, the management of environmental, social, and economic impacts contributes to an improved business decision-making process (Sisco et al. 2010). When a factory building collapsed in Bangladesh, killing hundred of workers, it was not the first time the long and complex textile and fashion supply chain shocked the world and drew the (negative) attention of politicians, the media, human rights groups, etc. In fact, this incident displayed the textile and fashion industry's tragic social and environmental performance climax over decades. Hence, and beyond any comparison, it becomes important to work on a single initiative to be accepted and implemented in the short term.

Academia can make a new contribution by “opening” the UNGC Code of Conduct and Manual with a deeper approach in mind, delving into each principle to analyze the recommended guidelines and compare them to level 3 of the SAC Higg Index 2.0.

## 6 Appendix I Environmental Levels (Material)

MATERIALS		LEVEL 1
MAT-B-1 Materials Program		LEVEL 2
LEVEL 3	MAT-B-1.1.1	Brand has a program to track, measure, and document the environmental impacts from the production and finishing of Materials (beyond RSL). This must include a portfolio of all major materials used to build products and an evaluation of their environmental impacts.
	MAT-B-1.1.2	Program includes the setting of targets and goals to reduce those environmental impacts associated with product materials.
	MAT-B-1.1.3	The program has demonstrated evidence of reducing environmental impacts associated with product materials.

## 7 Appendix II Social Levels (Material)

SL-B-2 Company's Social/Labor Performance Management System for Partners in the Value Chain		LEVEL 1
Section SL-B-2 assesses how a Company manages the social/labor performance of its value chain partners (tier 1, tier 2, tier 3 vendors/manufacturers etc)		
Social/Labor Performance Management System for Value Chain Partners		LEVEL 2
SL-B-2.1	SL-B-2.1.1 Documenting Social/Labor Performance Requirements (Max 10 Points)	LEVEL 3
	What best describes how the Company documents the social/labor performance requirements it has for partners in the value chain?	
	The Company does not document social/labor performance requirements it has for partners in the value chain.	
	The Company documents the social/labor performance requirements it has for partners in the value chain.	
	The Company obtained no external input / oversight when developing the social/labor performance requirements for value chain partners.	

## 8 Appendix III Members of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) as of April 2014 and Their Relation with the UN Global Compact (UNGC)

Tables [A.1](#) and [A.2](#).

**Table A.1** Sustainable Apparel Coalition website and UN GlobalCompact website

SAC	Adheres to the UNGC	SAC	Adheres to the UNGC	SAC	Adheres to the UNGC
Adidas	x	Ann Inc		Huntsman	x
Asics		C&A		Invista	x (as DuPont)
Burberry	x	Gap	x	Lenzing	
Coca Cola	x	H&M	x	Li and Fung	
Columbia		Inditex	x	Mas holding	x
Brooks		JC Penney		Novazymes	x
Desigual		Kohl's		Pinneco research	
Ecco		LL Bean		Pratibha	
Eilen Fisher		Mountain Equipment		Ramatex	
Esprit		Nordstrom		Rubia natural colors	
Fénix outdoor		Otto group	x	Saitex	
Hanes brands		Rei		TAL apparel	
IC companys	x	Target		Teijin	
Kering	x	Wal-Mart	x (Chilean Affiliate)	Toray Industrie	
Levis	x	Artistic Milleners		Bureau Veritas	x (Lithuanian Affiliate)
loomstate		Arvind Mills		Cotton Inc	
Madura fashion		Avery Denisson		Malwee	
Marmot		Bayer material science	x	Williams-Sonoma	
New Balance		Charming trim		1888 Mills	
Nike	x	Clariant	x	Archroma	
Patagonia		Cristal group		Birla Cellulose	
Pentland Brand	x	Dupont	x	Clailar	
Puma	x	DyStar	x	CWS-boco	x
Pvh		Esquel	x	Hirdaramani Group	
Reckitt		Gildan		Hong Kong Non Woven Fabric Ind.	

(continued)



**Table A.1** (continued)

SAC	Adheres to the UNGC	SAC	Adheres to the UNGC	SAC	Adheres to the UNGC
VF		WL Gore		KG Denim	
Keen		Lululemon Athletica		Lubrizol	
Makalot		TLC Tiong Liong Corp		Freudenberg Vildona	<b>x</b>
Wah Fung Group		Bluesign Technologies		Control Union	
Green Earth Cleaning		Hellmann Worldwide Logistic	<b>x</b>	Indicate	
Reseat Carbon		SGS		Vérité	
Xeros Cleaning					

**Table A.2** Sustainable Apparel Coalition website and UN Global Compact website

SAC	Adheres to the UNGC	SAC	Adheres to the UNGC
European Outdoor Group		American Apparel and Footwear Association	
FLO cert		Cradle to Cradle Products Innovation Institute	
Outdoor Industry Association		International Wool Textile Organisation	
Oeko Tex		Aid by Trade Foundation	
Better Cotton Initiative		Duke Center for Sustainability and Commerce	
Caux Round Table	<b>x</b>	Environmental Defense Fund	
Fairtrade Intl		Natural Resources Defense Council	
Danish Fashion Institute	<b>x</b>	The Sustainable Fashion Academy	
Made by		Sustainable Fashion Business Consortium	
Environmental Protection Agency		The Swedish School of Textiles	
Solidaridad Network	<b>x</b>	University of Delaware	
Textile Exchange		Utrecht University	
World Resources Institute			

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