

Presentation Outline for ETI Conference 2005

PLENARY SESSION: PUTTING WORKERS CENTRE STAGE

Background: The aim of this one-hour session, which will take place on the morning of 12 May 2005, is to convince brands, retailers and their suppliers that codes need to be implemented in such a way that workers are given an active role in shaping better working conditions for themselves, and that this involves actively promoting freedom of association and other measures such as educating workers about their rights. While providing the rationale for putting workers centre stage, ETI hopes the session will also provide practical pointers to brands and retailers about how they might go about doing so. Ideally, they would like to focus to be on what companies can do to promote freedom of association and collective bargaining, but it could also focus on other aspects of putting workers centre stage, e.g. worker education, involving workers/unions in monitoring and reporting on working conditions.

Session structure: Speaking time 10 minutes each for Gap Inc., Precious Garments & LECAWU.
Q&A- 30 minutes.

- **Introduction to Gap Inc.'s CSR program** – key components, key learnings:
 - **Background & History**
 - Setting up of GC in mid 90's, profile of VCO's, brief on the monitoring program
 - **Relevance of ETI membership- MSI learnings**
 - Lessons from monitoring help us realize the complexities in the field
 - The challenges also provide opportunities to reach out to stakeholders and create significant change
 - **Monitoring to Sustainability- Role of workers & their representatives**
 - Workers need to be at the centre stage of any intervention in the field and truly sustainable change can come only through their empowerment
 - Role of local stakeholders (ngo's, trade unions) very important in making this happen – trust building, raising awareness of local issues
- **The Garment Worker** – a profile (based on the information validated through the GA experience) no reference to the GA program will be made here but focus will be on insights revealed through the NA.
 - **Key issues** – (referring mainly to workers in a developing economy viz. where the bulk of the garment producing population is situated) health & gender issues, wages, FOA, sense of alienation, insecurity about the future, lack of control or direction in their lives etc
 - **Key Drivers** – insecurity, need for survival, poverty, impact of globalization etc.
- **Case Studies (Putting Workers Centre Stage):** The Lesotho Experience – interface with TU's - process, learnings & challenges

**(taken from Sean's earlier presentation)*

- *Lesotho, 2002, alerted by UNITE and MSN regarding FOA issues in a supplier factory*
- *The issue escalated in the factory and we investigated*
- *Our team visited the factory and met with the local trade union LECAWU*
- *Union explained how management was interfering in the workers right to freedom of association*
- *After many calls, e-mails, discussions, factory visits and “headaches” management agreed to hire new supervisors, meet and discuss issues with LECAWU and allow for information to be distributed by the union to workers on site. These new supervisors took a different “more open” approach to the issue.*
- *Our role was primarily that of an “influencer” and “facilitator” to management regarding this issue but it took a long time over several months.*
- *This incident demonstrated the need for us to engage globally and locally to share perspectives*
- *We continued our relationship of information sharing with the AFL-CIO Solidarity center and the ITGLWF regional office to engage around factory issues in additional African countries.*
- *We will continue to help facilitate dialog between these parties and create workable solutions in our supply chain*
- *Today workers in Lesotho feel they have a better voice & a choice in many matters related to them*
- *Challenges will remain but brands can play a key role as catalysts in this process*

Case Study (Chennai):

- *Management encourages workers in becoming key communication agents in the factories*
- *They play the role of the friend, the counselor, the link with the management and are promoted from within the ranks. This then becomes their full time role.*
- *Workers experience a sense of pride and ownership which is a key component of empowerment*
- *This greatly decreases the sense of alienation in the factory and increases the sense of belonging.*

Key Takeaways:

- *Role of the Brands - catalysts, initiators of change, facilitators in the process of empowerment*
- *Role of the Trade Unions - strengthen local networks, capacity building of local groups, helping them understand the big picture*
- *Role of other Civil Society groups – strengthening community networks, identifying core issues of the community, helping develop community leadership*
- *Role of the Governments - formulating policy, ensuring its enforcement, upholding human rights*

- *Role of the Factory Management-* recognizing rights of workers, providing free-fair empowerment for workers to associate if they choose to, voice to collectively bargain, treating them as key stakeholders in the business process, provide opportunities for training & growth
- *Role of the Workers-* awareness building, understanding roles, rights & responsibilities, cooperation & cohesion

Opportunities for the future:

- *Improved identification of global and local networks to raise issues*
- *Sharing best practices from a number of initiatives*
- *Government engagement around FOA expectations*
- *Worker and Management training and capacity building*

Conclusion – The future of sustainability lies in workers empowerment.