



Action Research on Garment Industry Supply Chains

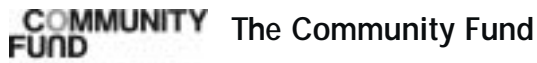
Some Guidelines for Activists

Women Working Worldwide

Compiled by Jennifer Hurley, with Angela Hale and Joanne Smith 2003

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Women Working Worldwide is a small UK women's organisation which works with an international network of women workers organisation. The aim is to highlight the impact of the world economy on women workers and to support the development of appropriate organising strategies. The focus is on workers in globalised industries such as garments. WWW facilitates the exchange of information and the development of links between workers's own organisations and those campaigning on their behalf in Europe.

Manchester Metropolitan University, Manton Building, Rosamond Street West, Manchester, M15 6LL, UK

Telephone (0)161 247 1760
Email info@women-ww.org

Facsimile (0) 161 247 6321
<http://www.women-ww.org>

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Frequently used abbreviations



Many of these abbreviations are not used in this manual, but they are terms that you are likely to hear during the research.

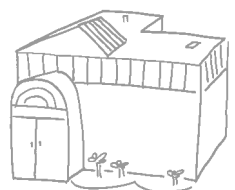
AMRC	Asia Monitor Resource Centre
AQL	Acceptable Quality Level
ATC	Agreement on Textiles and Clothing
CCC	Clean Clothes Campaign
CMT	Cut, Make and Trim. The term CMT is used when setting the price - it refers to the price for just this process.
COO	Country of origin
FOB	Free on Board. This is another pricing term. It includes the cost for transporting the product and putting it on a ship or an airplane.
GSP	Generalised System of Preferences
HQ	Headquarters
ILO	International Labour Organisation: the international organisation charged with protecting workers' rights in the global economy
JV	Joint venture
LC	Letter of credit
MFA	Multi-fibre Agreement
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NGO	Non-government organisation
OT	Overtime
QC	Quality control
TNC	Trans-national corporation
WIEGO	Women in Informal Economy Globalising and Organising
WTO	World Trade Organisation: the inter-governmental organisation responsible for deciding on international trade regulations
WWW	Women Working Worldwide (always in capital letters)
www	world wide web (always in small letters)

1: Introduction

This guide combines the experiences of organisations who participated in a Women Working Worldwide Action Research project on garment industry supply chains in Asia and Europe. We wanted to share what we had learnt through this project with other organisations supporting workers' rights in the garment industry.

The aim of the kind of Action Research we undertook is to support workers. Workers are at the core of what is researched, how this research is done and the actions that follow on from the research.

Workers inclusion in the research process makes this unlike most other kinds of research. Because it is a more unusual research method there is less information available about how to carry out this kind of a research project. We hope that these guidelines will help to fill the gap.





Summary

This is not a manual that needs to be read from cover to cover. It's a collection of suggestions that can be used at different points in the research process. Use the following summary to choose which sections are of particular interest.

The manual has four sections covering the basic steps used in the Women Working Worldwide project. These sections reflect the general stages of the research process.

- **Understanding supply chains**

It is useful to understand the basics of how these chains operate before we begin to research them. This can make it easier to identify them and trace them.

- **Tracing supply chains**

There are four different methods of tracing supply chains used in this chapter. We don't have to use all of them, just pick the methods that seem most useful. If we need more information, or a particular method doesn't suit us, we can try another method.

- **Analysing information from workers**

This chapter looks briefly at identifying the issues that workers highlight.

- **Presenting information on the chain**

The last section has some ideas on writing a report to present the information on the supply chain to a wider audience.

- **Appendix 1** has lists of useful internet sites, divided into different categories:-

- sites on doing research on supply chains
- garment industry websites
- NGO campaign websites
- media websites



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- **Appendix 2** provides some suggestions for questions on supply chains.
 - possible questions for workers
 - possible questions for management and employers.
- **Appendix 3** looks at one way we can do a gender analysis of information from workers. This is just a suggestion, it may not be suitable for everyone's research.

What is action research?

There are two basic differences between Action Research and other kinds of research.

- Action Research is directly linked with taking action and making a change. So the research is done to find out what kind of action we need to take in order to change a specific situation.
- Action Research takes the concerns, needs and knowledge of participants as its starting point. If the concern is with workers' rights it means putting workers at the centre. This is very different from other research which begins by trying understand how a company's supply chain works by starting from the top down.

Action Research can be much more dynamic and exciting because it begins with workers' knowledge and concerns, which are normally hidden at the bottom of the chain.

Box 1 *Defining Action Research*



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Where this manual comes from

The Women Working Worldwide experience

This manual is one of the outcomes of a year long Action Research project involving ten organisations in nine countries in Asia and Europe. The project's aim was to increase workers' and activists' understanding of subcontracting in the garment industry. The information was needed to help participant organisations develop appropriate organising and advocacy strategies and to develop educational programmes around workers' rights in the industry. The research also helped organisations to develop more links with workers outside large factories and begin to involve them in education programmes and other activities.

This project was not typical of research projects, because it was not designed by researchers but by participant organisations. Many of these organisations had taken part in an earlier WWW project, which aimed to raise awareness among women workers about the introduction of codes of conduct. It focused on discussions between the women on the potential usefulness of these codes to the worker's movement. It became clear that in order for workers to understand the codes they needed to know how their workplace linked to companies that were introducing the codes. The organisations themselves realised they did not know enough about these links. They were also aware that more and more work is being outsourced from the main factories to smaller workplaces and in most cases they had no contact with these workers. They agreed that they wanted to build stronger links with workers in subcontracted units and to understand the issues these workers are facing.

With these aims in mind, a two-year project was developed that was divided into two sections:

The first stage focused on doing Action Research. The research traced the supply chains of local companies, beginning with what the organisations already knew. Most of the organisations support factory workers, so they started with a factory they knew and



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researched up the chain to the buyers and down the chain to smaller factories and outworkers. They looked at differences in the terms and conditions between workers at different points in the chain. But they also went much further: they asked workers about their opinions on how to improve these conditions. Although the organisations shared a common research goal, they chose to focus their research in different ways, depending on what they needed to know. The information was shared at a project workshop and WWW also produced an overview of the key findings and issues raised. Box 2 shows the research focus of each organisation.

The second stage focused on using the information gained through the research for organising and education work. This included the production of education material based on the combined information gathered from the research. This material is used in workshops to help workers understand subcontracting in their workplace.

These sessions help workers to explore:

- their role in a global industry
- the effects that this has on their lives and work
- different actions they can take to improve their situation





The different research aims of the organisations in the WWW project

ORGANISATION	RESEARCH AIMS
Bulgarian-European Partnership Association, Bulgaria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assess pay and conditions in industry ● Map subcontracting chains of several international companies, including homeworkers where possible
Hong Kong Christian Industrial Council, Hong Kong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map subcontracting chain of Hong Kong owned companies in mainland China ● Document the working conditions of workers, especially home/informal sector workers and their opinions on improvements
Friends of Women, Thailand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Learn how the target factories implement subcontracting ● Information collection on where power is located in the chain ● Uncover how producers and agents work
Karmojibi Nari, Bangladesh	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Compare quota and non-quota companies ● Map the overall trend of the industry ● Document workers issues
Philippine Resource Centre, Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map subcontracting chains of top twenty foreign TNCs ● Build links between workers in factories, sweatshops and homeworkers
Transnational Information Exchange Asia, Sri Lanka	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map the subcontracting chain of Sri Lankan suppliers to homebased workers ● Explore the relationship between brand label producers and the informal sector
Union Research Group, India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map the structure of the Indian garment industry and export production links in the subcontracting chain ● Document employment conditions of workers in informal sector
Working Women's Organisation, Pakistan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Trace the role of contractors, middlemen and companies ● Research conditions for women workers (factory and home-based) in the chain
Innabuyog Metro-Baguio, Philippines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Document conditions of knitters and weavers who work from home ● Explore ways for contract and permanent workers to organise together
Women Working Worldwide, UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understand the relationship between the decline of the industry and the nature of subcontracting ● Compare conditions in different locations and chains ● Provide overall co-ordination and research support for the other organisations

Box 2 The different research aims of each organisation in the WWW project

How and why this manual has been written

Origins & Acknowledgements

Doing research for the first time can be intimidating. It can seem as though there is too much to discover but we don't really know where to look for the information we need. That's what it felt like to us. Many of us had never done research before and none of us had done collaborative Action Research before. As we knew how complex the international garment industry is, we were not sure how much we would be able to find out.

There was very little practical information on how to do Action Research, especially relating to supply chains. So we started from scratch. Organisations identified their research problems, from tracing workers or companies to analysing interviews and writing reports, and shared these with WWW. Meanwhile WWW approached different people who had experience in similar kinds of research and looked at how they could help us overcome these problems.

Some activists in the **Clean Clothes Campaign** have years of experience of trying to trace supply chains, so we asked Ineke Zeldenrust to provide us with some hints.

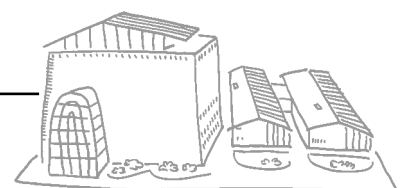
Douglas Miller, from the **International Textile Garment & Leather Workers' Federation**, is an expert on internet-based research and he explained how to research using the internet.

Kelly Dent, from **Transnational Information Exchange Asia** (TIE Asia), explained how to trace the codes on clothing labels using an on-line database.

Each person wrote or co-wrote some guidelines that were sent to the organisations to help their work and these have been incorporated in different ways into this manual.

We also found the **WIEGO** guide to doing research on homeworkers in garment industry supply chains very useful.¹

¹ Manual For Value Chain Research on Homeworkers in the Garment Industry, McCormic, D. and Schmitz, H (2001) (Sussex: Institute for Development Studies)



Introduction



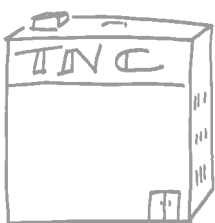
And we have included case studies from participating organisations in this manual.

Kelly Dent has shared her experiences of conducting Action Research with several organisations.

Aima Mahmood, from **Working Women's Organisation, Pakistan**, has contributed her experiences on easing workers' apprehensions.

And we have also used Monina Wong's comparison of wages in the supply chain in Guangdong province, China.

This manual comes from our combined experience and is the kind of manual we wished we had when we began. Our aim is not to set out comprehensive guidelines or to cover every aspect of research in detail, but to provide a few ideas and a basic introduction. We hope that it will help trades unions, workers' rights organisations and other activists to realise that they can undertake this kind of work even if they have never done any research before.

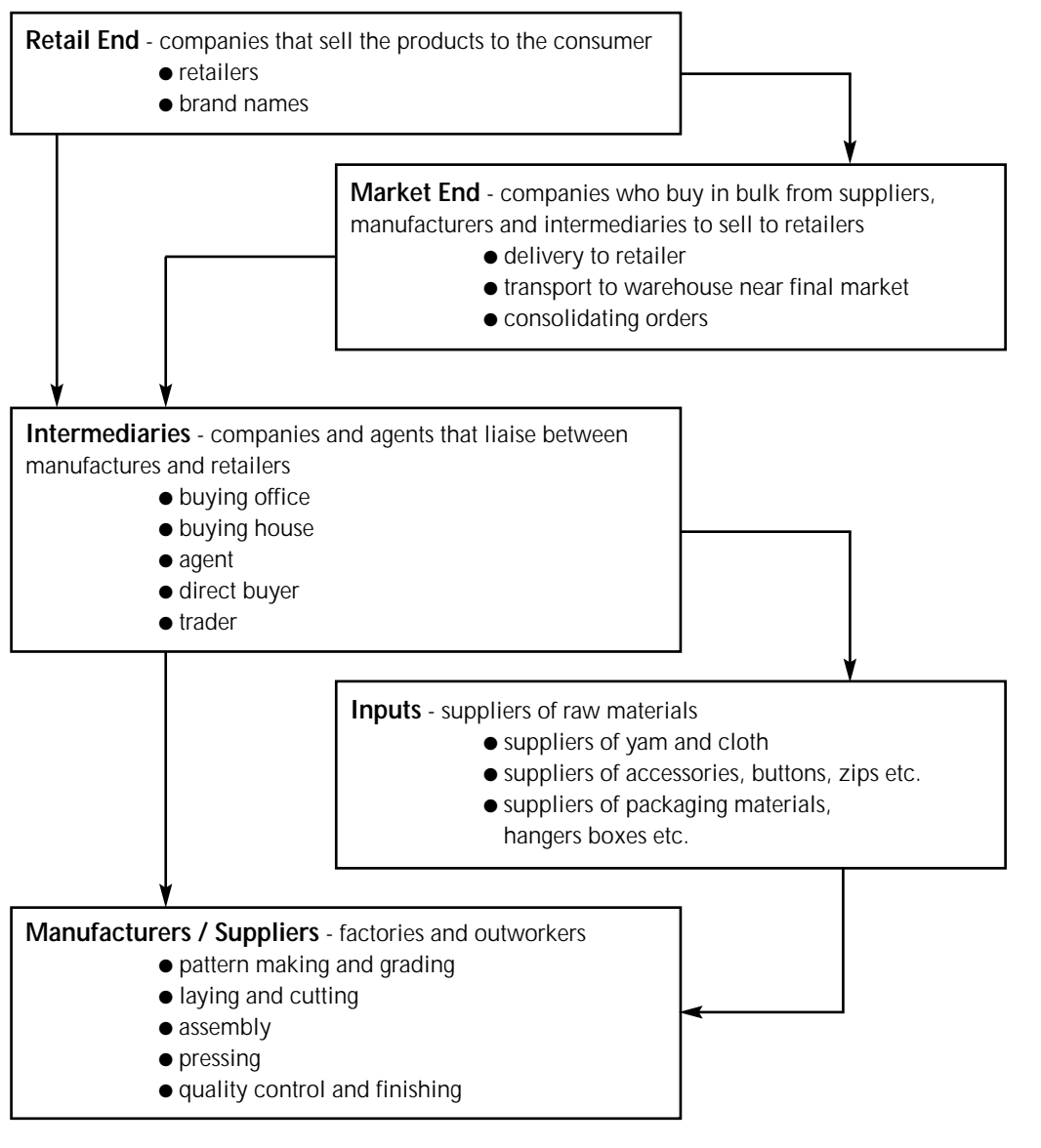


Chapter 1

2: Understanding supply chains

What is a supply chain?

A supply chain is made up of all the stages involved in the production and sale of a specific product. The chain follows the product from its source as raw material to its final destination in a shop. We can break this process down into 5 stages or links in the chain:



Box 3 Five stages of participation in a Garment Industry Supply Chain



How does the chain work?

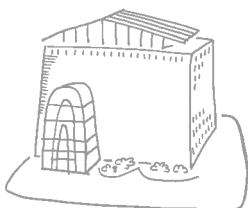
Here is a simplified version of how the chain works. A retailer / brand name, often the firm at the top of a particular supply chain, sends a sample garment to either an intermediary or a manufacturer. The manufacturer supplies a copy of the sample and a price quote. If the retailer / brand name's design and sourcing team approve - of the cost, time, quality, quantity and delivery - an order is placed.

Frequently, it is the manufacturer who sources the right material to make a good sample. The manufacturer may decide to finish all the work in the factory, or to subcontract parts of the order to smaller manufacturers further down the chain. These smaller manufacturers may also decide to subcontract part of the order to other manufacturers or homeworkers.

The next process that links the different parts of the chain is Quality Control (QC). The retailer / brand name wants to guarantee the quality level and checks this during the production process. This is because the retailer / brand name does not want to be stuck with bad merchandise, even if they have the right to send it back. There are many different ways in which QC can be done. It can be:

- outsourced to specialised companies - e.g. SGS, BVQI, ITS/Intertek
- the retailer / brand name may employ QC staff to visit the factories three times per order (Ineke Zeldenrust).

When the garments are finished, they are shipped to distribution centres - e.g. in the US and Europe - from where they are sent to individual shops.



Some key players in the chain: manufacturers, intermediaries & workers

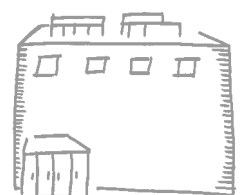
Before we begin any research, it's very important that we are clear about what we want to know and why. It is not always necessary to understand the entire chain in order to take action. For example, the WWW research project did not look at raw materials or transport. This was because the research focus was on finding the links between large factories/brand names and subcontracted units and workers. For that reason, the partner organisations focused on manufacturers and intermediaries.

Manufacturers

Manufacturers, sometimes called suppliers, are frequently responsible for buying raw materials, although sometimes this is done by the retailer or its intermediary. During the project WWW partners found it useful to divide manufacturers into groups of large, medium and small manufacturers.

Large manufacturers are found at the top of the chain. Frequently, the largest manufacturers are part of multi-nationals that have textile production units and manufacturing units. Some even have their own freight and distribution subsidiaries. They are mostly backed by foreign direct investment. They produce large bulk orders for export for global brands. Their size gives them some power with the companies for whom they manufacture.

Medium manufacturers can also be very large, but they do not have the international scale of operations of large manufacturers. In some cases they are subsidiaries of large manufacturers. Medium manufacturers can vary quite widely in size: in China they can employ 400-1000 workers, while in Sri Lanka they may only employ 40-80 workers. They subcontract from the larger manufacturers and also receive orders directly from intermediaries. They produce for the national market as well as for export. They have very little power in negotiations with large manufacturers above them in the supply chain. They have more power over manufacturers below them in the chain.



Understanding supply chains



Small manufacturers is a category covering small factories, sweatshops and informal factories, as well as tiny units operating out of someone's house. Again, the size of these units varies depending on the location: in Sri Lanka they can have twenty employees, while in China the scale is much larger with several hundred workers in these small units. Factories at this level tend to be funded by local capital. They generally do 'make and trim' work which is subcontracted in from bigger manufacturers. They also do CMT for domestic production. These units have no power as they are located close to the bottom of the chain.

Intermediaries

Intermediaries are all the businesses that operate between the retailer/brand owner and the manufacturer. There may be one or several intermediaries. They are called buying offices, buying houses, importers, agents or traders. Based on research in Hong Kong (SOMO, 1997) the tasks of intermediaries usually are:

- communicating between the buyer and supplier, problem solving.
- sourcing: finding (new) manufacturers that can produce what the retailer wants.
- quality control: sampling, in-line inspection, final inspection (pre-shipment inspection).
- (sometimes) sourcing raw materials (often this is the task of the manufacturer).

We can divide intermediaries into two groups: those that are **owned or controlled** by the retailer/brand owner and those that are **independent** of the retailer/brand owners.

Intermediaries owned or controlled by retailer/brand owner

If the intermediary is owned by the retailer/brand owner we call it a **buying office**.

It often has the same name as the parent company. A buying office has only one client: its parent company.



Many of the largest retailers and brand names set up their own buying offices, which they control, as it is safer and cheaper than relying on an external company. However, after they have set up their buying offices, they may continue to use agents and traders. Sometimes the buying office gets the best orders and the riskier ones go to independent agents and traders. The buying office may also choose to subcontract to an independent agent or trader, for example to get rid of the responsibility for quality control, if they do not want to do this themselves. "Buying offices of the retailers themselves, like Mondial [for C&A], are for the safe items, the ones they can always sell. The risky items are placed via others. They prefer to pay the percentage and have the agent, the trader or the importer take the risk" (SOMO, 1997:12-13).

Independent intermediaries

If the intermediary is not owned by the retailer/producer we call it a **buying house**, **buying agents**, **agents or traders**. They have many clients. Confusingly, they are also called manufacturers locally. This is because some of them were originally manufacturers, and some still have their manufacturing companies as well. They have expanded into the role of intermediary as this gives them greater control and profits. Agents/traders can also take on the role of a supplier, taking care of all aspects of production, from the delivery of all raw materials to packaging, transport and distribution. Li & Fung Ltd, the largest trader in Hong Kong, received a big order for Limited Stores: 150,000 pants in one style, delivery time 30 days. So they placed the order at four or five factories to have it ready on time, but made sure they all used the same fabric, the same zippers etc. (SOMO 1997:14).



Understanding supply chains



Workers

There are significant differences between workers. One important difference relates to employment status:

Permanent workers have permanent contracts of employment. They work for the bigger manufacturers, who may also employ casual and contract workers as well.

Casual workers may work for twenty years in the same company or they may only work there for a few months. They never get an employment contract so they lack any employment rights and may be fired at a moment's notice.

Contract workers work on short-term contracts, normally for a few months. Their rights and conditions, as explained in their contracts, are often different from the contracts of permanent workers. For example, they frequently are paid less than permanent workers.

Homeworkers come into three categories according to the International Labour Organisation. These are not the only definitions, and the divisions between the different kinds of homeworkers are very blurred so they may not always be adequate.

1. **Craft homeworker** - a person who makes craft-pieces, for example batik. They are self employed, find their own work and may be responsible for selling their products themselves to shops, tourists etc.
2. **Manufacturer homeworker** - a person who subcontracts work from a firm to make the whole garment. They are considered to be highly skilled. The firm pay them, normally on a piece-rate, but because they are considered to be more skilled this rate may be higher than the rate an industrial homeworker is paid.
3. **Industrial homeworker** - a person who makes either the whole garment or just a part of the garment from pre-cut fabric. They are considered to have limited skills and are also paid a piece-rate.



Power within the chain

Power is a feature of all chains. It's important to know who has power and where they are located in the chain. This information makes it easier to decide who to approach for different kinds of action. Most chains have several different power relationships at different points in the chain. Here are four different kinds of power (McCormic & Schmitz, 2001).

Market relationships - or 'arm's length' relationships. There is very little co-operation between the parties. The flow of information and assistance between them is almost zero. This is a relatively fragile relationship as there is no trust built up between the parties. Indicators of arms-length relationship are:

- The intermediary may use many manufacturers or the manufacturer may produce for lots of intermediaries, brand names and retailers. This means that one, or perhaps both parties, is not dependent on the other party for their business to succeed
- The intermediary and manufacturer may do business together more than once but they do not discuss any delays, problems etc.
- No technical assistance is supplied by the intermediary to the manufacturer

Controlled relationship - this relationship is controlled by one company - the 'lead company' - which dictates what is produced, who produces it and they also monitor the quality of the product. Indicators of controlled relationships are:

- The main customer, normally an intermediary, takes at least 50% of the manufacturer's output
- The intermediary defines the product's design and technical specifications
- The intermediary monitors the suppliers performance
- Manufacturer's freedom to leave the relationship is more limited than the intermediary's because they are more dependent than the intermediary is on the relationship



Understanding supply chains



- The intermediary provides technical assistance
- The intermediary knows more about the manufacturer's costs and capabilities than the manufacturer knows about the intermediary's costs

Balanced relationship - no one firm or group in this relationship has more power than any other firm. They co-operate and prefer to work together whenever this is possible.

Indicators of a balanced relationship are:

- Both the intermediary and the manufacturer have various customers
- If the intermediary has few customers, the manufacturer also has few customers
- Both parties communicate a lot about what they are doing, orders, delays etc.
- It would be very hard for any of the parties involved in the network to find another company that could do the same things as their 'partner' firms
- There is a commitment to solving problems through negotiation rather than threats or exit

Hierarchy relationship - the firms in this relationship are vertically integrated. This means that all or most of the firms in this group are owned by one company that controls either all of the chain or most of it. Indicators of a hierarchy relationship are:

- Several points in the chain are part of the same firm
- Raw materials factory is owned by the manufacturer or vice versa
- There is very limited independence to take decisions at the local level; they need to get permission from headquarters



3: Mapping supply chains

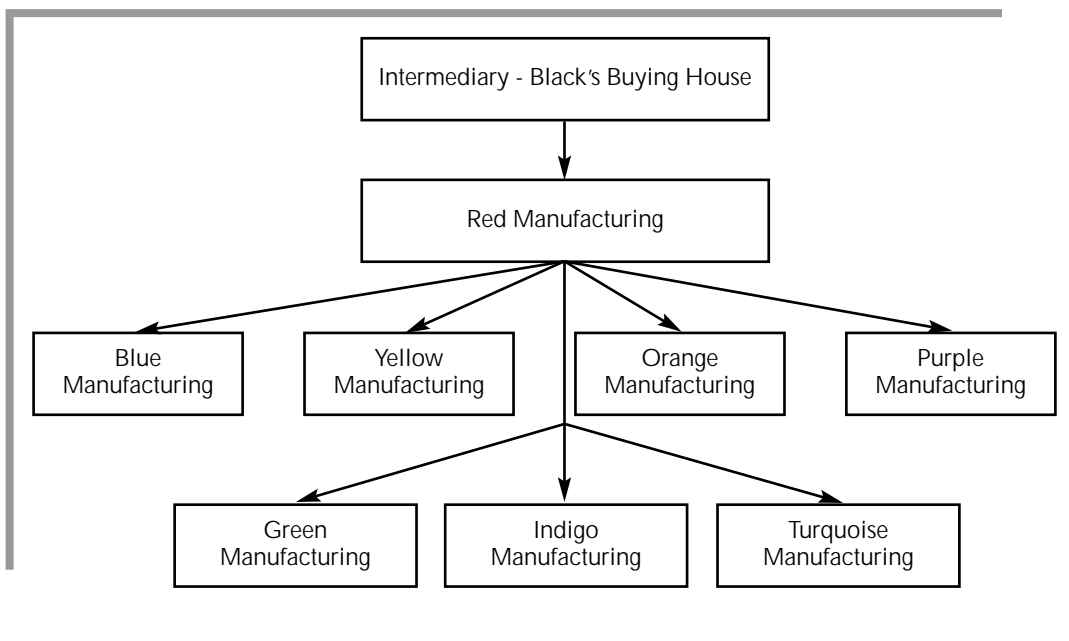
We now have a basic understanding of the various parts of the supply chain, how it operates and how power is exercised in the chain. In this section, we are looking at how to draw maps of the supply chain and the different kinds of information that can be shown in a map. (This section is drawn from McCormick and Schmitz, 2001)

The simple flow chart on page 11 in the previous chapter maps the journey from the raw material to the finished product. The information is shown simply and can be understood at a glance. It is possible to construct more complex maps to show clearly different kinds of information.

We can draw a general map that provides an overview of the national garment industry or a particular brand name. Or we can draw a map that shows the different kinds of power relationships that exist within the chain.

Maps allow us to compare information at different points within the chain: for example, we can have one map that shows trade union participation at different points in the chain; or how many women are employed at different points in the chain.

Box 4 shows the manufacturing section of a supply chain. The large manufacturer is subcontracting work to four medium manufacturers and three small manufacturers.







Box 4 A simplified map of the manufacturing section of a supply chain

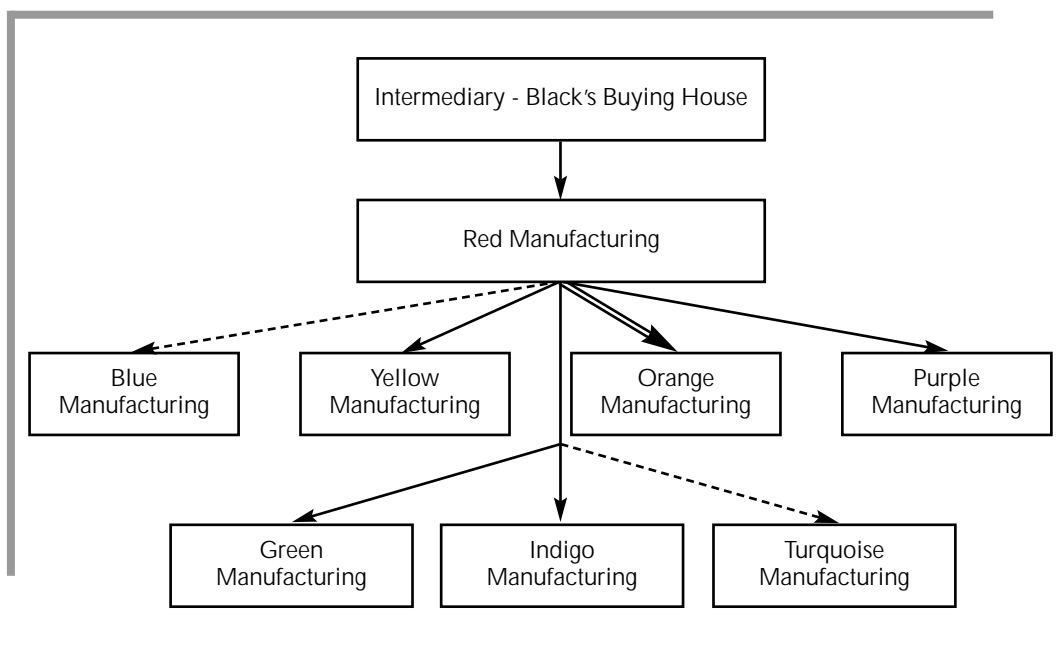
Mapping supply chains

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We can use this map, shown in Box 4, to show other information. For example, we can show the different kinds of power relationships in this section of the chain. We can do this by using different arrows to show different power relationships.

1. Market-based relationships – firms deal with each other in “arms-length” transactions – are illustrated with this arrow 
2. Controlled network – firms form networks directed by a lead firm, for example a buyer-driven chain directed by the retailer - are illustrated with this arrow 
3. Balanced network – firms form networks in which no one firm exercises undue control over others - are illustrated with this arrow 
4. Hierarchy network – firms are vertically integrated, the parent company controls its subsidiaries - are illustrated with this arrow 



Box 5 Power relationships in Red Manufacturing's supply chain

Box 5 shows a more complex picture of the relationships in Red Manufacturing's supply chain. From this diagram we learn that:

- many of the arrows indicate arm's length relationships. This means that the relationships are quite distant. This frequently happens when there is a surplus of production. The biggest manufacturer can transfer production easily so they do not need to develop more long term relationships. The result is that the relationships are more short-term or unstable.
- Red Manufacturing has significant control over Blue Manufacturing and Turquoise Manufacturing. This is because Red Manufacturing takes at least 50% of their output. As a result, they are both very dependent on Red Manufacturing, although they are independent companies.
- Orange Manufacturing is a subsidiary of Red Manufacturing. It controls the work that Orange Manufacturing does.

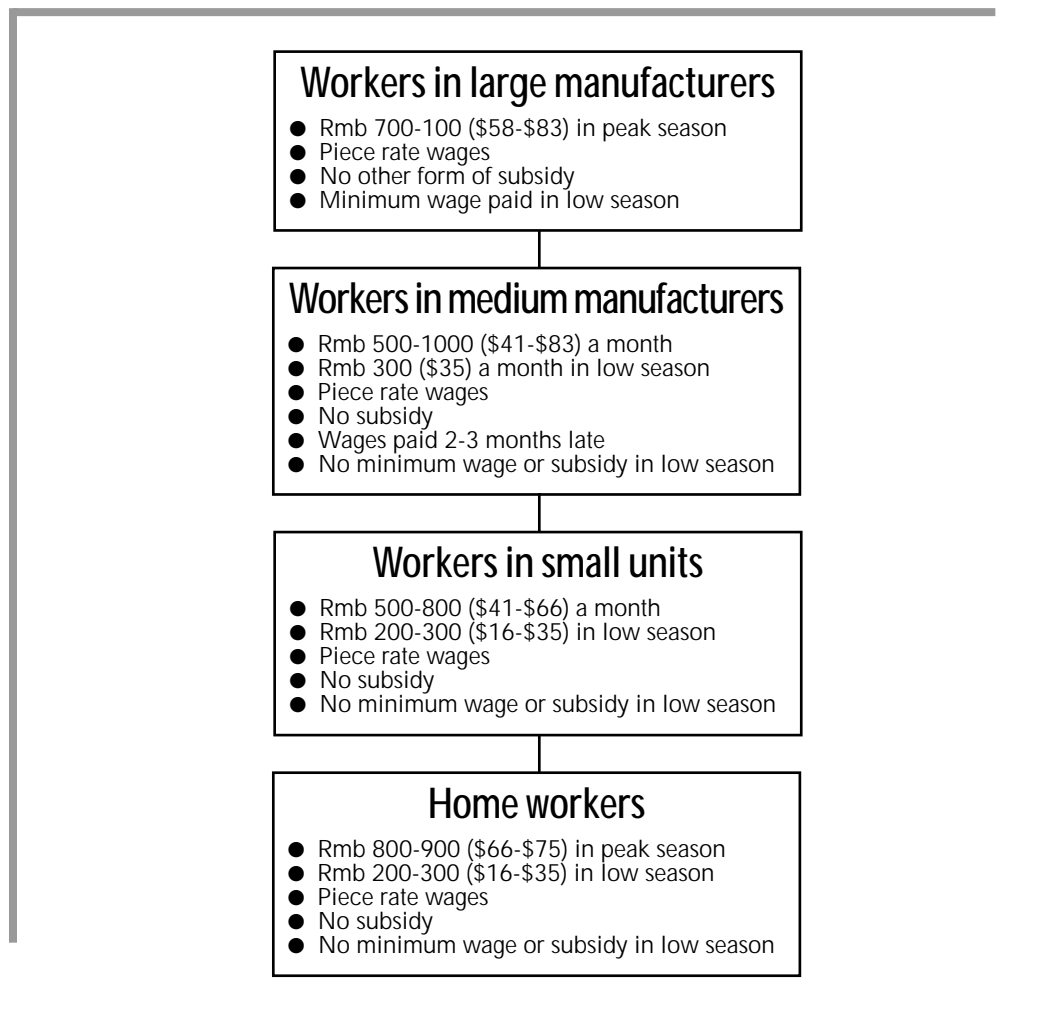


Mapping supply chains

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Just as it is possible to show the power relationship between different players in this section of the supply chain, we can use the map to show other information as well. The information in Box 6 compares wages in different companies in a supply chain in China (adapted from Wong, 2003).



Box 6 Comparison of wages across the manufacturing section of the supply chain

By laying out the information on wages in a map, the information on wage differences is very clear. We can see that in this chain:

- all workers are on piece-rates during the peak season
- only workers in large manufacturers are paid a minimum wage during the low season
- homeworkers can earn more than workers in small units during the peak season
- homeworkers and workers in small units earn approximately the same amount in the low season.

4: Tracing supply chains

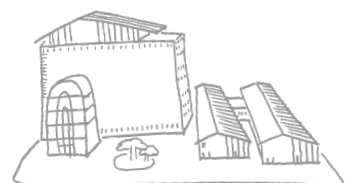
An introduction to researching supply chains

This section is a very basic introduction to doing the research. Many organisations working with garment workers have never done research before, so the aim for this chapter is to learn a little about doing research. Once we have an idea of the basics, we can experiment with our own methods.

A really good place to start getting information is to contact other groups to find out what they know about the supply chains we are researching. We can approach trade unions, NGOs and academics. We can also contact others through networks like AMRC, CCC and WWW. These different groups may be able to give us information about supply chains, the company or brand name we are researching at a local, national or international level. To avoid wasting time and money, it's important to make sure that we do not research something that other people already know.

The chapter is divided into three sections:

- Deciding what to Research
- Organising Action Research
- Ways of Sourcing Information





Deciding what to research

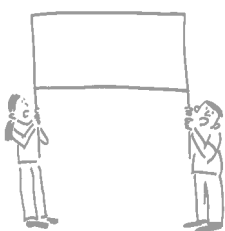
Trades Unions and other organisations that work with and for workers often find that there are areas where they need more information in order to support workers better. This section looks at how we decide on the changes we would like to make and what we need to know in order to make these changes.

Worker involvement is a key focus in the research process. This is important when we are designing the research and when we are interviewing and analysing the research. Worker involvement is vital to ensure that the actions and research are appropriate for their real needs.

Ideally, research should evolve from the previous work that an organisation has done. It should be a bridge, linking the organisation's past work with its future work. It's a good idea to begin designing the research project with joint meetings with the organisation's members and employees.

These meetings are an opportunity to look at past work in order to see where the organisation should go in the future. Several questions that could be used to focus the discussion are:

- What are the workers' and organisation's objectives?
- What would the workers and organisation like to change?
- What action would the workers and organisation like to take?
- What information is necessary in order to achieve this?



Linking research to a desired outcome, to action, is the crucial difference between Action Research and other forms of research. It grows from previous work and builds on the participation of the workers who will benefit from these actions.

The outcome of these initial meetings should be several clear ideas for action. The research questions should directly relate to these actions. In the beginning, we may only have a few themes that we want to explore, for example, wages or homeworkers' rights. This is a good foundation.

The next step might be to organise focused group discussions on these themes to explore them in detail. The aim is to answer three key questions:

- What do we already know?
- What are the problems relating to this issue?
- What exactly do we need to know in order to take action on this issue?

The ideal outcome of these discussions is a set of clear questions to help us focus our research. It's worth revisiting our key questions at different points during the research. This helps us to avoid being side-tracked. It also helps us to check on our progress.





Organising action research

This section ‘Organising multi-group Action Research’ was written by Kelly Dent of TIE Asia. The section focuses on coordinating a research project with several participating groups, but the basic ideas are also relevant for coordinating a project done by one group. The section also includes a Box on issues to consider when organising a multi-group research project. And it includes a case study from Working Womens’ Organisation in Pakistan, another partner organisation in the WWW project, on increasing worker trust.

Many Action Research projects involve different groups or individuals in a collective research project. Sometimes these groups have worked together before, but sometime this is their first time that they have collaborated. This section is based on the experience of one organisation which participated in the WWW project: TIE-Asia.

They did research in collaboration with two other organisations that they work with on a regular basis and which have participated in previous WWW projects, Da Bindu and the Women’s Centre.

Organising multi-group action research TIE Asia, Sri Lanka Kelly Dent

Defining the research topic

First we discussed how the research would be used. What was our purpose for doing the research? We decided to focus on women in informal employment who are producing garments for export. We chose this because it had not had much attention, so research would be useful in many ways. It would help to:

- Determine the extent of informal employment in this sector
- Discover the issues/problems faced by workers and their suggested solutions for these issues/problems
- Make contact with more informal workers and give them information about their rights

- Inform organising strategies (including campaigns) for workers in both the formal and informal sector
- Create links between workers in formal and informal employment
- Provide useful information to unions
- Help develop the programmes and activities of TIE-Asia, Da Bindu and the Women's Centre

Once we had decided on the focus for the research, it was easier to determine how the research would be done and who would do it.

Finding researchers

We searched in many places to find researchers: research organisations, activists with experience in research and labour/women's organisations. It was difficult to find researchers because there are not many and those we found were not available. Eventually we decided to assemble a research team whose skills would compliment each other and where everyone would learn new skills. This would also help the development of the three organisations the women came from.

The research team consisted of:

- Kelly Dent (TIE-Asia Co-ordinator), who has some experience in research and research co-ordination and some aspects of law relating to informal employment
- Melanie Brehaut (Researcher) who is a journalist with a good understanding of Sri Lanka
- Pushpa (Assistant Researcher) who has studied research techniques and is also working on a database project as a researcher
- Field Researchers came from Da Bindu and the Women's Centre. They are long term labour activists and have some experience in field research

The research team had nine members from three organisations, but other people also acted as resource people for us on various issues. TIE Asia co-ordinated the research, but we were all collectively responsible for the research.



The skills we were looking for when we were creating the research team were:

1. An understanding of the issues facing (mostly) women workers
2. Ability to relate to women workers
3. Experience organising women workers
4. Some experience in or exposure to research
5. Skills that would compliment each other.

Not everyone had all of these skills, but No 1&2 were essential for everyone. Different members of the group had different skills, for example: the ability to write well, obtain data from various sources, analyse data, conduct interviews etc. It was important that some women had these skills and were willing to share them and teach others.

The team met once a month. These meetings were to review progress, update each other and plan the work for the next month.

Training

The researchers were given an introduction to Action Research, as well as training about the supply chain. We didn't need any training on the garment industry as we already had this information. We also did some training on laws and rights relevant to workers in informal employment. Again, there was slightly different training for different team members, depending on their role in the research. For Mel and Pushpa, there was in-depth training in Action Research and analysing data.

We took a very flexible approach to training. It was based on the needs of the groups at different times, so it was flexible, informal and practical. Training was done on issues related to the research, for example on workers' rights and globalisation. Training was also given on the process of conducting research, for example asking questions, following up issues and answering workers' questions.

In Action Research, information goes both ways: Action Research is part of a dialogue where workers are encouraged to ask questions rather than just answer questions.

The training was done through informal presentations with resource materials. We tried to use real examples wherever possible. As everyone involved had some experience of these issues, part of the training was sharing experiences and developing skills.

Key issues in co-ordinating multi-group research

Working within a group can bring up unexpected issues. It's helpful to be as clear as possible before the research begins about issues such as leadership; individual and group responsibilities; communication; deadlines and research outputs. This makes it easier to resolve issues quickly and avoid creating tensions within the group. Below is a list of questions to consider.

Does the group need and have a leader?

Who is responsible for:

- organising meetings
- keeping records
- chasing progress
- analysing the findings
- writing up the findings
- finances

How are the different roles and tasks required for the successful completion of the project shared among the group?

Does every member of the group have a clear idea of their tasks and responsibilities?

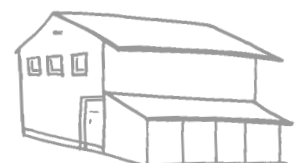
Does every member of the group feel able to respect differences between group members?

Are there individuals or subgroups within the group who are not happy with the task or the organisation of the group?

How will differences of opinion be handled?

Will the results of the research be reported on and written up individually, collectively or both?

Box 7 *Key issues for multi-group research (Blaxton, Hughes & Tight, 1998)*





Overcoming research problems

The biggest problem we had doing the research was actually finding the women workers producing garments for export in the informal sector. Our field researchers were able to find women who were producing for the local market, but those producing for export were harder to locate. It appears they are more “hidden” because supervisors from large factories will sometimes take excess work home with them and distribute this to home-based workers. We tried to overcome this by including small factories of up to 50 workers in the research. The focus remained on home-based workers and workers in very small factories, with less than 10 workers.

Another big problem was lack of data (official data and unofficial data from primary and secondary sources). We tried to overcome this by being persistent and creative, searching for supplementary material, brain storming and group problem solving.

One of the significant advantages of doing Action Research is that the organisations have a history of working on workers’ issues, so workers’ trust is already there. However, workers who were not aware of the organisations were still apprehensive when approached by a stranger. We tried to overcome this by:

- explaining the research and the organisations involved to workers.
- interviewing workers in an environment that they found comfortable (where possible).
- making more than one visit to build up trust and a relationship.

We also found that interviewing workers known by other workers, who already knew us, made it easier for the workers to trust us. (See also the Case study from Working Women’s Organisation on Increasing workers’ trust)

All this is a time consuming process and there is no easy short-cut. We tried to deal with it and hoped that the research would be used to improve conditions for women workers through organising, training, campaigns and awareness raising.



Increasing workers' trust in the research project

Although WWO has a long history working with women workers, we still found that some workers who were not members or did not know of us were very cautious the first time that we approached them.

We found workers through WWO's members, districts' and towns' committees, trade unions, labour department, partner NGOs and community organisations. We approached workers:

- At workers' home
- Their communities
- Sometimes in factories
- Through trade unions, labour and women's organisations' offices.

Workers showed their fear in many different ways, including:

- Hesitation in responding to our questions
- Sometimes they gave false answers or no answer
- Expressing doubts about our work and our involvement in their working matters
- Expressing fears of termination of their jobs
- Saying that family members, especially fathers or brothers, would be angry if they responded to our questions or contacted us
- Requesting non-disclosure of their names and their factories or employer's names.

To make workers feel more comfortable and to help them trust us, we made contact with workers through people or organisations whom they already trust. We met them in their communities and their homes, where they felt safe. We also met their family members and sometimes we even met their employers. We gave them as much information as possible, describing every aspect of WWO's work and activities, as well as explaining the benefits of these activities to women workers. We also invited them to WWO's office or programs to try to get their trust

Working Women's Organisation, Pakistan



Different ways of sourcing information

There are many different sources of information on supply chains. This section provides an introduction to four sources. These different sources can be used together or individually. The sources available depend on our research aims and on the resources we have. The sources explored in this section are:

- the internet
- tracking brand labels on an online database
- books, magazines and other printed information
- surveys, interviews and focus groups

Tracing supply chains using the internet

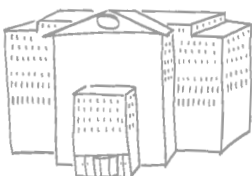
The internet has revolutionised the research we can do on any company. We're going to start by looking at tracing supply chains using the internet because this can help us find a lot of information very quickly. This information will help us understand the chain better and develop our questions. In this section we'll look at a few case studies to see the different ways we can find information on the internet.

Before we look at any websites it is crucial that we create a new Word document for the company we are researching. This document is where we will paste all the information that we find on the internet.

In Case studies 1-3, we look at getting information when we know the name of the retailer or the brand name. Case studies 4 & 5 show ways to research starting from the manufacturer, when we don't know which brand names or retailers they are supplying.

Case Study 1 Getting information from the Retailer or Brand's own website

In this case study we are going to look at a UK-based retailer: Mothercare (www.mothercare.co.uk). This company, like many others, uses its website as an online store so corporate information may be difficult to find. Watch out for the **corporate information** 'button' (a 'button' is the icon we click on to move to that page). It is on the left hand navigation bar (the 'navigator bar' is a list or menu showing the different pages we can access) and can easily be overlooked .



Once we have clicked **corporate information** look for the **investor relations** button and click.

These pages may contain press releases. Press releases will contain financial statements which are less interesting for us: more important are articles or announcements of joint ventures and new investments where a spokesperson for the company may reveal the name of other companies they intend to work with. These names can be added to our supply chain so that we can fill in another link.

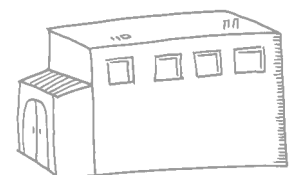
The investor relations pages also contain links to the company's Annual Reports. These are usually available in a PDF format. We can either save the PDF format to our own pc, though they may take some time to download, or we can read the annual report on line and copy & paste the relevant sections to our word document on Mothercare.

It is unusual for retailers or brand owners to disclose who they source from. So, what we are looking for are clues that will lead us to that information, such as the locations - countries - where they source. Mothercare is an example of a company which reveals very little on its website about its actual sourcing operations. The only clue is contained in the annual report, which mentions a new national distribution centre in Daventry, Northants, owned and run by a company called Tibbett & Britten. This turns out to be a global logistics company which Mothercare has contracted for its freight and distribution operations.

So this company is the first main link we have down Mothercare's supply chain. Unfortunately this does not help us trace Mothercare's supply chain and subcontractors.

Now what do we do? Here are some possible ways of finding out more information. There is no 'right' next step. These are just suggestions: some of them may not get us any extra information and some may be too time-consuming.

1. Contact TGWU/GMB (general trade unions) in Northants (UK) district to see whether they have any membership or organisation at the Daventry depot of Tibbett & Britten. If they do, these members may be able to assist in providing the information on the companies/countries the garments come from.



Tracing supply chains



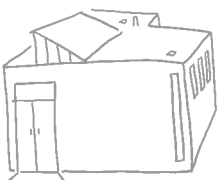
2. Go back to the Annual Report of Mothercare (look at other years too) and check out the subsidiaries past & present of this parent company. A former subsidiary of Mothercare was for example British Home Stores. What do we know about this company?
3. Conduct an online search using www.kompass.com on suppliers of baby clothing
4. Contact partners in our network regarding suppliers of Mothercare products

Case Study 2 Getting information from a supply chain manager's website

In this case study we are looking at Mast Industries. Here is an example of a multinational which is, for commercial reasons, quite forthcoming in what it is prepared to put on its corporate website. It likes to advertise its commercial links on its corporate website as a way of showing how networked it is in the global supply chain.

The website contains a world map which shows the countries where it sources. The site has a list of worldwide offices which provides us with another entry point for further research. There is also a time line of joint ventures which gives us further clues to specific companies in countries which are part of the MAST network. This however is of little value until we know MAST clients. Here the website assists us with a list of client companies: British Home Stores, Marks & Spencer, Liz Claiborne, Gap Group, Ralph Lauren (Polo), Jones New York, Tommy Hilfiger and C&A.

This is an example of how research on one company can provide additional information on another company. So, for example, it may be possible that the supply chain of British Home Stores (which also sells baby clothing) may share some similarities with Mothercare. This gives us a new 'vein of information' to trace in order to find suppliers to Mothercare.



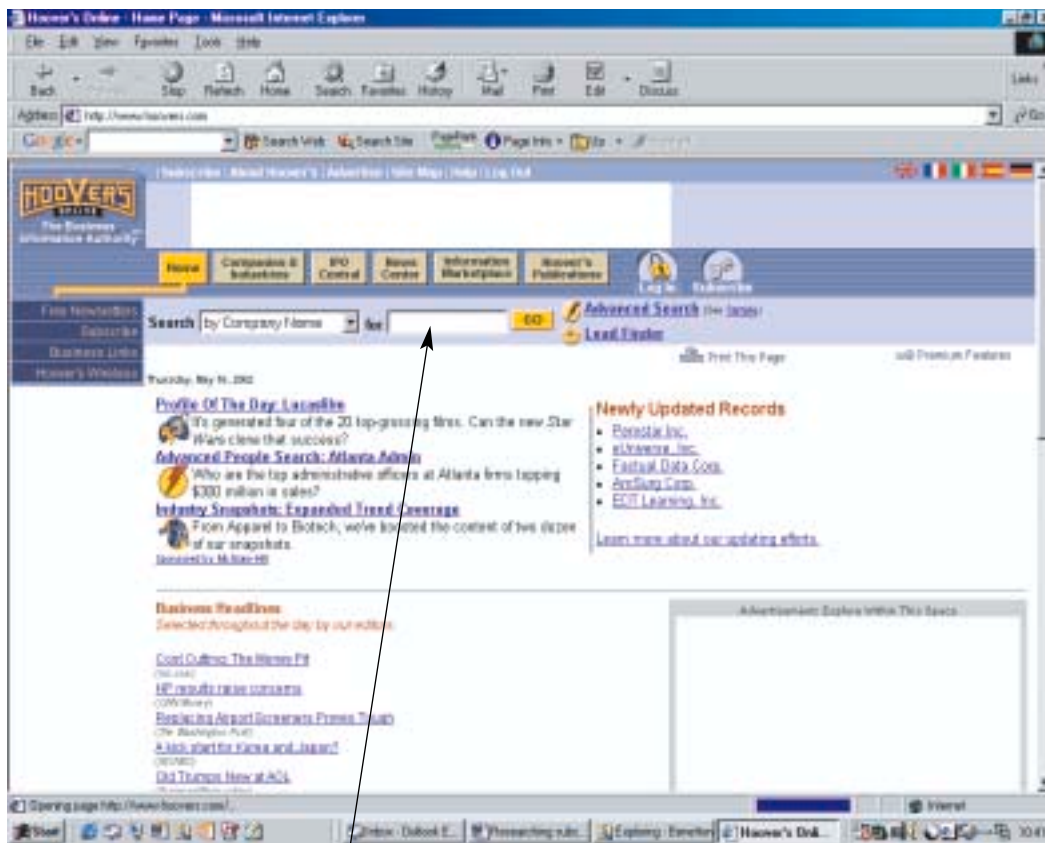
Tracing supply chains

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Case Study 3 Getting information from an online database

In this case study, we're going to look at Victoria's Secret. This is a brand name underwear retailer. This website is similar to Mothercare because it is predominantly a commercial site. However, there is no corporate information on this site so we need to undertake corporate research elsewhere on the web - this is where on line company databases, such as www.hoovers.com, are really useful.

After searching for www.hoovers.com we come to its 'home page'. This is our starting point. The first thing to do is to type in Victoria's Secret in the box indicated with the arrow and then press the 'Search' button next to the box.



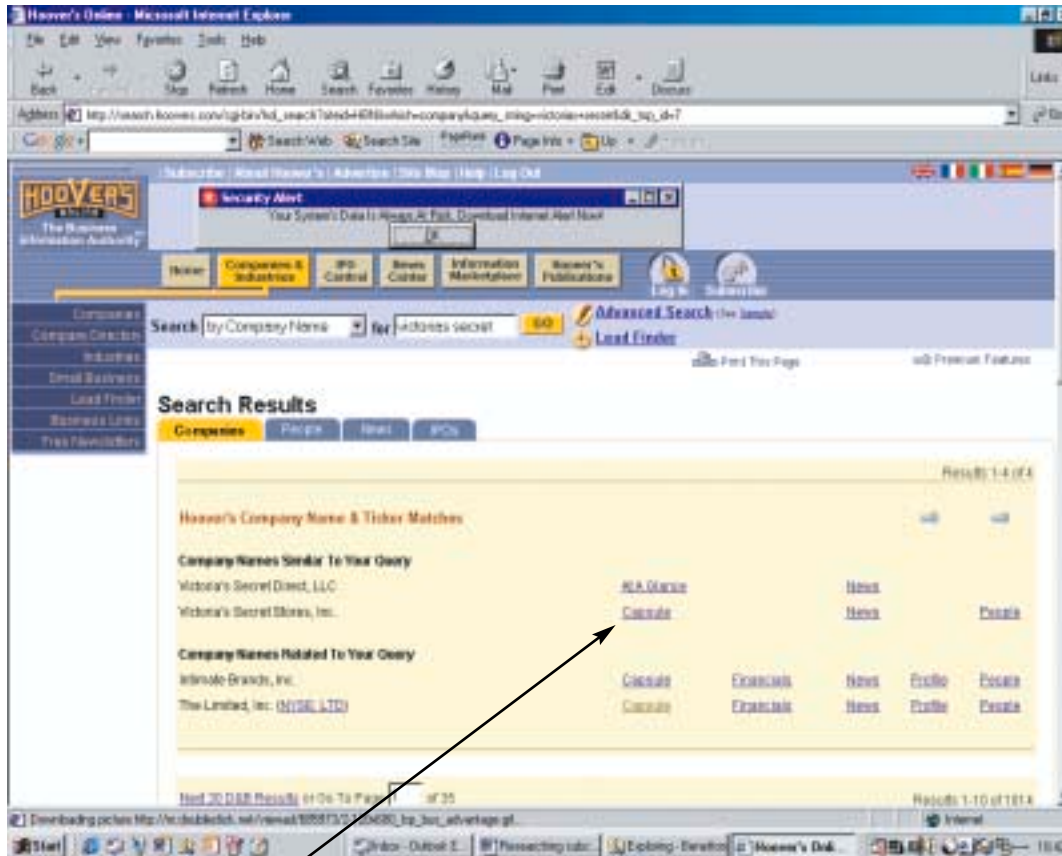
This will bring up the following page:



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If we click on the **Capsule** of Victoria's Secret Stores we find that Victoria's Secret is a subsidiary of **Intimate Brands**. If we click on **Intimate Brands** it takes us to another Hoovers Capsule which tells us that Intimate Brands is owned by The Limited Inc.

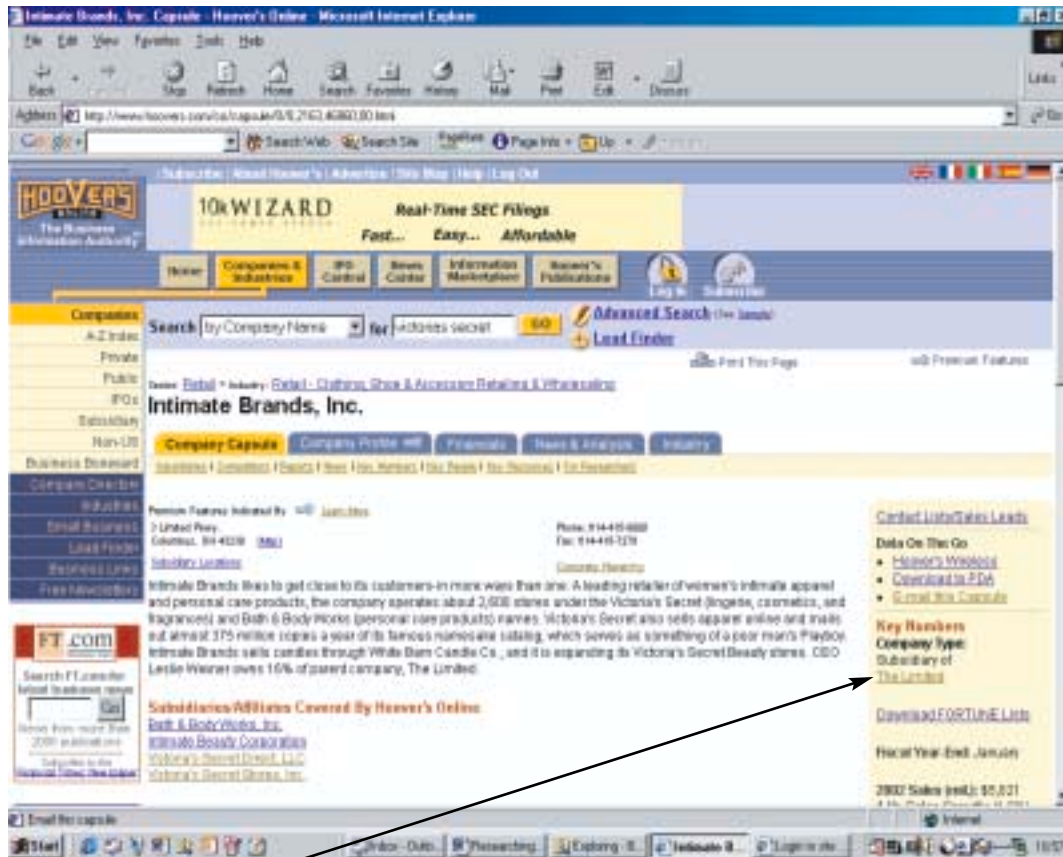
(Note: The search also provides us with company names that are related to the query, Victoria's Secret. It is useful to follow up these leads, as they can include affiliates and subsidiaries. It can also be useful to look at other buttons including **News**, **Profile**, and **People** to get other leads.)



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By clicking on **The Limited** we end up with the parent company in this structure and the capsule has the following things to say about it:

The Limited is as much of a shopping-mall mainstay as food courts and teenagers. The retailer operates about 4,600 stores in the US, focusing mainly on women's clothing. Its stores include The Limited, Express, Lerner New York, Henri Bendel, and Structure, which it is rebranding as Express Men's. The Limited also owns Intimate Brands, which is best known for Victoria's Secret (lingerie stores and catalogs), Bath & Body Works (personal care product stores), and White Barn Candle Co. (candles and fragrances). The company also owns and operates apparel-maker Mast Industries. The Limited is tightly controlled by founder and CEO, Leslie Wexner, whose family owns about 16% of the company.

Subsidiaries/Affiliates Covered By Hoover's Online

Express, LLC
Intimate Brands, Inc.
Lerner New York, Inc.
MAST Industries, Inc.

Box 9 Extract from Hoover.com's capsule on The Limited

Tracing supply chains

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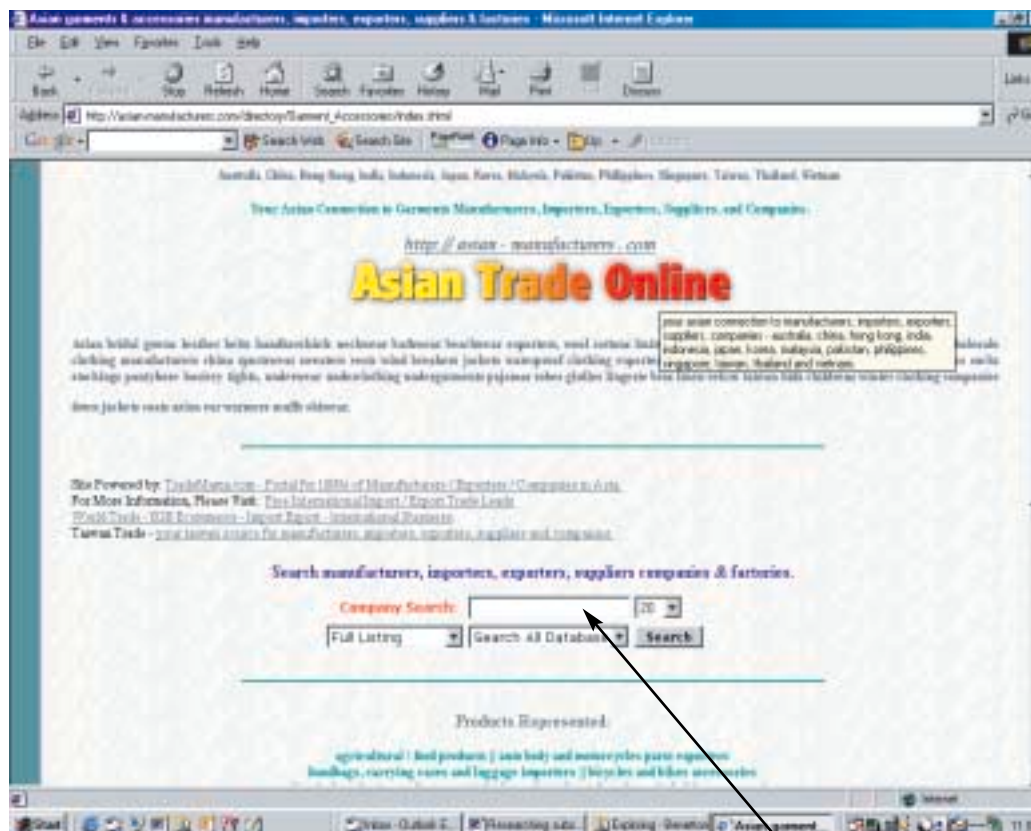
Significantly we find that Victoria's Secret is part of a company which also owns MAST Industries so it is reasonable to assume that Mast Industries is involved in the supply chain of Victoria's Secret.

Case Study 4 Getting information from a national exporters' association website

When we don't know which retailers or brand names a manufacturer is supplying it can be useful to look at online databases provided by national exporter's associations. These databases are used by businesses to find new suppliers and manufacturers, so manufacturers may provide some useful information for us.

For Asia, we may want to try Asian Trade Online. This website is free to access. You can find it on the web either by entering the address below or by using a search engine and typing in *Asian Trade Online*.

http://asian-manufacturers.com/directory/Garment_Accessories/index.shtml



This window will then open up and, just like using Hoovers.com, we enter the company name in the box shown beside **Company Search**.

Another way to find information on manufacturers is to look at websites in the country the company is based in. Good places to check are:

- the relevant exporter's association for that country because they keep directories of companies
- that country's Departments of Trade and Industry

A good search engine is a valuable tool when doing research on the internet.

www.google.com is one of the best. Searching Google for the 'Department of Trade, Philippines' brings up a selection of sites to choose from, one of them is the Garments and Textile Export Board (www.gteb.gov.ph).

Box 10 has an extract from the Philippines Garments and Textile Export Board. These sites also have on-line directories which can be used to trace the names of companies and possibly the name of the brands or retailers that they work with or own.

You may not be aware but the Philippines has always been a supplier of garments to the UK. Total garment imports of UK from the Philippines amounted to US\$45.6M as of May 2001 with increases of 37.58% and 40.45% for the period 1999 to 2001 and 2000 to 2001, respectively. Among the Philippines' top buyers in Europe are GAP, Adidas, Otto Versand, GMBH, Polocco S. A., Nike, Playtex, Triumph, Vegotex International, Cavendish International, Mackays Stores, Baird, Karstadt, Reebok, Poundstretcher Ltd. and Woolworth.

The government, through the Garments and Textile Export Board, an agency attached to the Department of Trade and Industry of the Philippines, is helping the country make more waves in the international market by promoting the Filipino capabilities from merchandise design, manufacturing, packaging and delivery.

Box 10 Extract from Philippines Garments and Textile Export Board website

Using the internet to do research can be very time consuming, and even addictive. It's important to remember two things when researching on the internet: there are many other ways of finding information and don't get side-tracked.

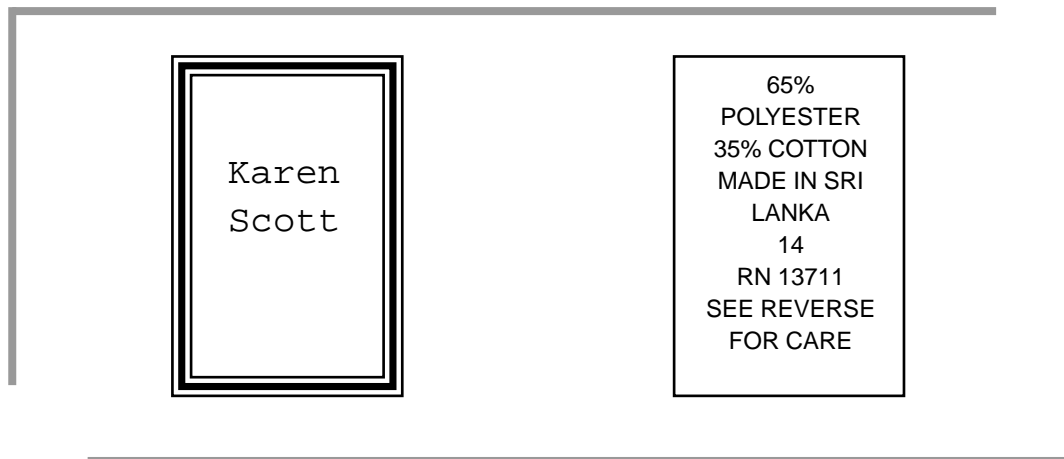




Tracking brand labels

Kelly Dent TIE - Asia

The labels sewn into garments for the US and Canada can also provide us with valuable information. All clothing produced for export to the USA and Canada carries an RN (USA Textile Products), CA (Canadian) or WPL (USA Wool Products) number, which can be used to track the manufacturer and the owner of that company. These numbers usually appear on the washing instructions label of the garment, but they also appear on the actual label that identifies the brand name as the clothing, such as Gap, Calvin Klein or Colombia (Sportswear). Unfortunately there is no equivalent site for European garments.



Box 11 *Examples of garment labels*

1. Record the brand label e.g. Gap, Calvin Klein or Colombia (Sportswear), the RN/WPL/CA number and the details of the factory that produces the garment.
2. Go to the website: <http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/rn/rn.htm>. To look up the RN, WPL or CA number on the database select the appropriate category. There are three categories:
 - RN/WPL number
 - Company name
 - CA number
3. For this example, we will use the RN/WPL category. Select the RN category. When the RN category comes up click on RN Number, enter the RN number in the box provided and click 'Find'.

4. The following information will be displayed:

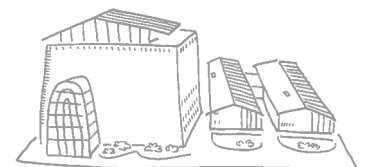
- RN number
- Company name
- Address
- City State
- Zip code
- Phone
- Fax
- Internet address (URL)
- Date last updated
- Date RN number issued

This information is the owner of the brand name. The owner may be a transnational company or it may be a part of a transnational group. Using contacts with groups in international networks, particularly those in the north, we can try to find out whether the company we have found is a transnational or is owned by a transnational. This information can be used to target a particular transnational company in a campaign. Or to determine if there is a code of conduct which could apply to the factory we are researching, if the code recognises contractors/subcontractors.

Once we know who owns or subcontract to the factory we can also use this information in a regional or international campaign. We can ask groups in the country where its head office is located to put pressure on the company to meet our demands. We may also be able to find valuable information on the company's financial situation.

It's worth remembering that the owner of a brand label is not always the manufacturer of the brand label. Another company may own the factory that is manufacturing the brand label or it might be a joint venture with an overseas investor. This will need to be traced separately and can not be done through this data base - we can try www.kompass.com or www.hoovers.com for this information.

This information can be added to the other information we have collected. Or it can also be used to build up a database - for example on Microsoft Access - of who owns the factories in a given area or country and the goods that they produce for export.





Using books, magazines, trade press and advertisements

If we have access to libraries of different kinds they are a good place to get a background understanding of how the garment industry works. Some cities have public libraries, universities, colleges, industry promotion boards, and government departments also have libraries which may be open to the public. Industry magazines are often available in libraries run by national level fashion or garment-related institutes.

It's also worth looking out for advertisements, especially in industry magazines and journals. They often include the names of existing clients and photos of garments where the labels of existing clients are visible. Sometimes it's worth ringing these companies up and asking for a company profile. This should include production capacity, type of product, type of machines, countries of export and clients. It may be an idea to pretend we are writing an article or are doing research as a local consultant as companies can be very cautious when sending out information.

On location: visits and interviews

Industry associations, export promotion councils, fashion institutes and schools

Industry associations or institutes organise fashion fairs. They also publish listings of companies in different sections of the industry - for example, lists of exporters or buying offices. We may need to use another identity rather than our own, as some of this information is only accessible upon request for economics or garment industry students (free of charge).

Most producer countries also have an **Export Promotion Bureau or council**, which keeps track of what is going on locally in the industry (since they try to promote them). They also have knowledge of the other end of the chain, since potential buyers will use their services.

It is sometimes easier to get access to these institutes via the **Trade Assistance Desks**. These are run by governments and chambers of commerce in the USA and EU. Once identified, initial contact can also be made from the EU, requesting permission for a 'local consultant' to visit and get the required information.



Fashion Fairs are worth the effort of gaining entrance. This is often possible as consultant, who pays a fee, or as a member of the press, who gets in for free. Most local manufacturers, buying houses etc. will have stands there, so it's a good chance to ask questions. The racks on the stands will also have samples hanging which often have the buyers label inside.

Shipping records are also useful tools. It may be useful to link with a trade union which has members in the port and airport. They see the records, so they could find out who a particular factory produces for and where it produces these garments.

Visiting the Retailer

If possible, it's also worthwhile visiting the shops where these garments are sold. This may not always be very productive, but we can sometimes uncover valuable information. Other ways of getting information include:

- talking to the staff, they may know from which countries products are arriving
- making contact with staff in the buying department or administration office, for example through a trade union, who can help us get some information
- looking at box cartons as these may have the manufacturer's address on the side of the carton

Visiting the Factory

The focus of Action Research is on workers and their perspective. However we can learn a lot from talking with management and employers. They have access to information that workers may not know. One way to do this is to visit a factory, which can reveal a lot of information. However, this can be complicated as it may be necessary to alter our identity, to a university researcher or a consultant for example.

It may be difficult to leave the managers office. One way around this is to ask for a quick "walk through". This way we can see the different sections of the factory and get an impression of the conditions and the number of workers. We can also find out more about the buyers - the retailers and brand names.





Interviewing Management

At the back of this manual are some questions that may be useful during an interview with management or employers. Some of these questions focus on the structure of the firm and how it operates in the market. There are other questions that focus on how the factory is run internally. Management may give one set of answers but the workers' answers to the same questions may show that there is a gap between management's answers and the reality of workers' experiences. These gaps are important tools when we decide how to follow up our research. They create spaces for dialogue, negotiation and action.

Questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus groups

The key focus of Action Research is involving workers in defining the issues that are most important to them. While some workers may be involved with the design of the Action Research project, it is probable that we will want to speak to more workers. These workers may not have had any contact with the organisation before we approach them. Approaching workers for Action Research projects is about opening up a two-way conversation with workers. Workers are not resources for our research; for Action Research to have a genuine impact it must be organised around workers in a way that supports them and helps them become part of the process of change.

Questionnaires, in-depth interviews and focus groups are some research methods that work well for Action Research projects. All these methods are face-to-face, which helps develop a two-way conversation and builds workers' trust. Ultimately, the method we choose depends on the kind of information we want to get: if we need statistics, we can use questionnaires; if we need to understand the issues in greater detail, we can use in-depth interviews or surveys. These are just suggestions. Action Research is about creating research around what is needed, so there are no rules or 'right ways'.



Questionnaires

Standard questionnaires are a useful way of gaining a lot of information quite quickly. They are also quicker and cheaper to do than in-depth interviews. The data from questionnaires can easily be used to create statistics, graphs and tables to show key findings. Here are some ideas that might be useful when considering using questionnaires:

- questionnaires are best used in a one-to-one interview
- two or three simple questions are better than one complex question
- length is important: long questionnaires may take too much time and workers may not have the time to finish the questionnaire with the researcher
- have a 'test run' to time how long it takes to complete a questionnaire and to ensure that the questions are clear

Interviews

Interviews are useful for discovering new issues or exploring an issue in greater detail. The information we get in interviews can also provide quotes. Interviews can be organised in different ways and we can use one method or a combination of methods. Here are two possibilities:

- a list of general issues that we discuss with everyone. This is less structured than standard questionnaires and provides more general information. The advantage is we can learn a lot of different information from each interviewee; the disadvantage is that it can be harder to compare information between interviewees.
- discussing the supply chain map (even if it's not complete). This can be used to explain the aim of the research. It can also help workers understand where they are in the chain. The workers may also be able to add in other sections that we were not aware of before.

Focus groups

At the beginning of the research a focus group can help us to identify key issues where action needs to be taken and the research that is needed to support those actions. At the end of the research, we can use focus groups to discuss/verify the research findings and to discuss ideas about the kinds of action that we should undertake.

Focus groups generally have 7-10 participants, but it can be as few as four and as many as twelve. If the group is too large, the participants may break into smaller conversations and valuable information can be lost. It can also be difficult to ensure that everyone gets to contribute.

5: Analysing information from workers



Now that we have collected all the information, we need to make sense of it. This chapter looks at analysing the information we get from workers. In addition to information about the supply chain itself, we may want to:

- identify the issues for workers
- search for the causes of these issues

Identifying the issues

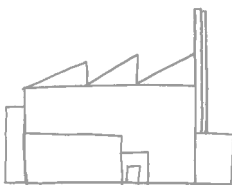
Interviews and focus groups can provide a lot of very useful information. However, it can be daunting to analyse all of these 'conversations'. The key is to reread the interviews/focus group notes and identify the common issues.

These may be quite broad issues, for example, wages, job insecurity, etc. It can help to make a list of these issues. Once we have identified the big issues, we can look for sub-issues. These are smaller issues that are part of a bigger problem. For example, wages may be a big issue, but there are many sub-issues that relate to wages. These include underpayment of wages, sub-minimum wages, late payment, non-payment of overtime etc.

When we have identified the issues and sub-issues, it can be useful to look for trends or patterns:

- Where do we find certain issues?
- Do they affect all workers?
- Do they only affect some workers?

We may find that a specific issue is only a problem for workers at one point in the chain, but not for all workers.



Searching for the causes of problems

Once we have identified the issues, we may want to ask:

- Why do these problems exist?
- What is causing the problems the workers describe?

In some cases our research will provide us with a reason, or at least part of an explanation, for the problems and issues of workers. At other times, we have to do further research.

Gender analysis

There is a large concentration of women in the garment industry and we may want to consider doing a **gender analysis** of our findings. This helps us understand how women workers are affected by problems at work in a different way to men workers in the same industry. Some ideas on how to carry out a gender analysis can be seen in Appendix 3.



6: How we present information on the chain



This section gives some ideas to consider when writing a report. Key issues we may want to include are:

- what we have learnt about the supply chain
- how this affects workers
- what actions we should take, given the knowledge we now have

What we have learnt about the supply chain

Some ideas to consider when we are writing this section could include:

- Diagrams of the basic structures of the chains researched
- Similarities and differences between chains
- What parts of the chain were excluded/included and why. For example, the chain may not include sources of raw materials because that section of the chain was not important for our research or because we may have been unable to trace these sections
- The reasons for choosing the chains we researched
- The parts of the chain that were easy to research, the parts that were difficult, the gaps that still exist and why it was hard to fill these gaps
- Who connects the different parts of the chain? For example, is it an intermediary? If so, which kind? Is it an agent? A worker in the company?
- What are the power relationships between different points in the chains? Where does the power lie and why?
- How do companies relate to subcontractors, agents, buyers?
- What are the main reasons companies give for subcontracting in the way they do?
- What are the implications of this for our action aims?
- What are the working conditions at different points in the chain?



How the supply chain affects workers

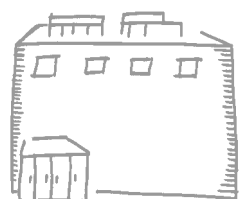
Here are some issues that we may want to include:

- What are the problems highlighted by workers?
- Do the same problems exist at all points in the chain?
- Do workers in formal and informal employment have the same problems?
- Do women and men workers have the same problems?
- If there are different problems, what are these problems?
- Where do these problems occur in the chain?
- Why do these problems exist?
- What kind of relationship exists between workers inside and outside factories e.g. are they from the same communities?
- What is the situation of women in the chain?
- How does it compare with the situation of men workers in the supply chain?
- How much do workers know about the supply chain?
- What do workers want to change?

How the research findings affect our actions

Finally, some ideas we may want to consider when linking the research with our future activities:

- What alternatives do the workers suggest?
- How can the organisation support these alternatives?
- Are alternative actions possible?
- What are the implications for the organisation's action aims?
- What other organisations exist to support workers at different points in the chain?
- What are the implications of this research for future action? For future research?
For the future of our organisation?



How we present information on the chain



Using workers' words and other ideas

Including workers' voices through quotes, case studies and life histories can help make the report come to life.

Some other ideas to consider include:

- Graphs and charts
- Maps of supply chains
- Photographs, drawings and cartoons

Deciding who to send the report to and how to follow up the report with these people also needs to be considered. In that way, we can use our research to gain real benefits for workers.

Reports are just one tool that we can use to help us achieve our goals. The contacts that we make through the research and the relationships that we build are also very valuable outcomes from the research process.

Further reading

How to Research, Blaxton, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M. (1998)
(Buckingham, Open University Press)

Tracking Garment Manufacturers, Dent, K. (2002) (Colombo: TIE Asia)

Manual For Value Chain Research on Homeworkers in the Garment Industry,
McCormic, D. and Schmitz, H. (2001) (Sussex: Institute for Development Studies)

*Report of Women Working Worldwide research on Garment Industry Subcontracting
Chains in Nine Countries in Asia & Europe*, (Women Working Worldwide)



Useful website addresses

Academic Websites NAME	ADDRESS	COMMENT
"Learning From Global Buyers"	www.ids.ac.uk/ids/global/valchn.html	A paper written on interviewing global buyers - includes a questionnaire
International Development Studies	www.ids.ac.uk/ids/global/valchn.html	Have done research on value chain analysis
International Development Studies	www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/research/index.html	University dept in UK, has international reputation. Have done work on participatory research methods in various fields
North South Institute	www.nsi-/ins.ca/ensiresearch/index.html	Have done value chain analysis
University of Natal	www.nu.ac.za	Have done research on value chain analysis

Industry Websites NAME	ADDRESS	COMMENT
(Trade Association) American Apparel Manufacturing Association	www.americanapparel.org	
Apparel Industry Magazine	www.aimagazine.com	
Apparel information	www.apparel.net	1,500 links to apparel companies, links, services
Sporting Goods Manufacturers Assoc - SGMA	www.sportlink.com	

Useful website addresses



Campaign Websites NAME	ADDRESS	COMMENT
Anti-Nike website	www.saigon.com/~nike	
Clean Clothes Campaign - Including international affiliates	http://www.cleanclothes.org/nl/index.htm	A campaigning and research organisation. Many of the groups have done case studies into different firms. The first website is the best place to check first, we can search under company to see if they have done research on the company that we are researching.
	info@cleanclothes.org (Central Office, Netherlands)	
	http://www.indiaccc.org/ - India	
	ccc@mbox.cit.bg - Bulgaria	
	www.schoneklerden.be - Flanders, Belgium	
	http://www.vetements-propres.be.tf/ - Belgium	
	http://www.ethique-sur-etiquette.org/ - France	
	http://www.labourbehindthelabel.org - UK	
	http://www.saubere-kleidung.de - Germany	
	coord@cnms.it - Italy	
	http://www.ropalimpia.org - Spain	
	http://www.renaklader.org - Sweden	
	http://homepage.esoterica.pt/~cidac/ - Portugal	
	www.cleanclothes.at - Austria	
	http://www.cleanclothes.ch - Switzerland	
Corporate Europe Observatory	www.xs4all.nl/~ceo	
Corporate information	www.corporateinformation.com	For information on companies
Corporate power	www.gn.apc.org/pesticidestrust/	On pesticides and corporate power generally
Corporate Watch	www.corporatewatch.org	Under 'research' section has information by company, industry, issue. Plus guides and links for further research

Useful website addresses

Campaign Websites NAME	ADDRESS	COMMENT
Corporate Watch USA	www.corpwatch.org	Unrelated to Corporate Watch UK
Free Range Activism	www.gn.apc.org/pmhp	Guides to campaigning resources including UK government legislation
Maquila Solidarity Network	www.maquilasolidarity.org	Information on South American factories, issues and campaigns
Multinational Monitor	www.essential.org www.essential.org/monitor	Has about 30 US anti-corporate NGOs
Multinational Monitor On-Line Resources	www.essential.org/monitor/monitor_resources.html	
One World	www.oneworld.net	Over 500 organisations, North and South focused on development, environment, human rights. Also has profiles and campaign guides
Researching Corporations How to Investigate a TNC	www.corpwatch.org/resrch.invest.html	Excellent article
The Sustainable Markets Group	www.iied.org/smg/index.html	Have done projects on sustainable trade and supply chains
WalMart	www.sprawl-busters.com www.walmartsucks.com	
WIEGO	www.wiego.org/publi4.ssi	Have done value chain analysis
WIEGO	www.wiego.org/areas5.ssi	NGO coalition doing research on subcontracting chains and homeworkers, also in garment industry. Statistics concerning the size and contribution of informal economy

Useful website addresses



Research Websites NAME	ADDRESS	COMMENT
City Business Library	www.earl.org.uk/magnet	Ex. Range of trade journals, business directories & other sources
Company Profiles	www.hemscott.co.uk/EQUITIES/EQBODY.HTM www.hoovers.co.uk	Provide stats on profits, operations, employee numbers, names of directors etc.
Company Sleuth	www.company.sleuth.com/index.cfm	Another site where we can research companies
Finreports	www.finreports.com	25,000 companies' annual reports including European textile apparel companies & locations
Hoovers	www.hoovers.com	A business network - a great source of information
Kompass	www.kompass.com	The Business To Business Search Engine. Some information is free
PIERS	www.piers.com	PIERS - provides global trade information on importers, exporters, imports, exports and directories.
Search Engine	www.google.com	One of most 'intelligent' search engines in how it ranks pages for usefulness. Very popular among professionals working on internet research.
Securities & Exchange Commission's (SEC) Edgar site	www.sec.gov/cgi-bin/srch-edgar	Access to corporate documents
World Trade Statistics	www.unctad.org www.undp.org www.worldbank.org	

Useful website addresses

Media Websites NAME	ADDRESS	COMMENT
BBC News	www.bbc.co.uk	
British Library	http://opac97.bl.uk/	By law entitled to copy of every book published in UK
Economist magazine	www.economist.com	Very popular weekly business journal
Financial Times	www.ft.com	The business world's business paper
FT page - Annual Report	www.icbinc.com/cgi-bin/ft.pl	FT page: click on companies who send out Annual Report for free. Has many, but not all UK companies.
Link to Media Sites	www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/users/gac/newspap.htm	A good link to newspaper and other media websites
The Guardian newspaper	www.newsunlimited.co.uk	Contains some critical information on companies
The NDP Group	www.ndp.com	

Some of the sites have a subscription charge. But they may provide some information for free or give us a free trial for a period of time if we say that we are interested in subscribing, but we don't have to subscribe at the end. If that's the case, get busy during the free trial.

If we find that search engines sometimes can't find the really long addresses e.g. www.essential.org/monitor/monitor_resources.html. The best way around this seems to be to use just the 'core' address e.g. www.essential.org. and then search the site map for the relevant page.

Some Ideas for Questionnaires



Here are some questions that were used by organisations involved in the WWW project, to find out how much factory workers knew about subcontracting from their workplace. These questions are only suggestions. Questions can be added or removed.

These are interview questions.

Questions about sub-contracting chains for workers

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| (1) Do you know where the garments manufactured by you go? | Yes | No |
| (2) If yes, where do the garments go? | | |

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| (3) Do you know the labels you sew? | Yes | No |
| (4) If yes, what labels did you produce during the last six months? | | |
| (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ | | |
| (4) _____ | | |

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| (5) Are all stages of production (cutting, sewing and finishing) carried out in the same factory? | Yes | No |
| (6) If no, do you know where other work is done? | | |

- | | | |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| (7) What work do they do? | | |
|---------------------------|--|--|

- | | | |
|---|--|--|
| (8) Who organises to send the work there? | | |
|---|--|--|

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| (9) Do you know how much these workers are paid? | Yes | No |
| (10) If yes, how much? | | |

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| (11) Do the work hazards and pressure of work vary according to label? | Yes | No |
| (12) Which label or labels do you like best to produce? | | |

- | | | |
|-----------|--|--|
| (13) Why? | | |
|-----------|--|--|

Some Ideas for Questionnaires

(14) How often do buyers come to your factory?

(15) Does buyer ask the workers any question? Yes No

(16) Do you know before, when buyer will come to your factory? Yes No Sometimes

(17) Do they ask you any question? Yes No Sometimes

(18) Are you told how to answer these questions by management? Yes No Sometimes

(19) Are managers/supervisors in the room during the interview? Yes No Sometimes

(20) What questions are you asked?

(21)

(22) Do you know about home-based garment workers? Yes No A little

(23) What do you know?

Questions about subcontracting chains for Employers and Management⁵

1. How much is produced per month/year (in units)?

2. What is the maximum capacity?

3. How many workers are working in this factory (divided over the sections)?

4. How many workers are women?

5. What is the average age of the workers (men and women)?

6. Does the company have a sister/mother- company?

7. Who owns the factory?

⁵ Based on suggestions from Clean Clothes Campaign

Some Ideas for Questionnaires

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8. Do you buy the fabric/raw materials yourself? Yes No
9. Is it delivered by the retailer/customer? Yes No
10. Who organises the transport?
-
11. Are there any specific problems?
-
12. Who buys from your company (retailers, agencies, other factories)?
-
13. What is your yearly turnover?
-
14. What happens when you have too many orders?
-
15. Do you subcontract out work to other firms? Yes No Sometimes
16. If yes, who do you subcontract to?
-
17. Who chooses which factories to use?
-
18. Do you always use the same factories? Yes No Sometimes
19. What factors do you consider when subcontracting out to other companies?
-
20. For which retailers abroad do you produce?
-
21. What are their labels?
-
22. Do we have long term relationships with your customers? Yes No
23. For how many years?
-
24. Do your customers know that you subcontract out their orders? Yes No Sometimes

Some Ideas for Questionnaires



25. If yes or sometimes, what is their reaction?

26. What percentage of production is exported abroad and to which countries?

27. Have you ever had conflicts with your customers or their agents? Yes No

28. What issues cause conflict?

29. Is your factory regularly visited by agents, buyers and quality control officers? Yes No

30. How many times a year?

31. Do they advise changes in the production process?

32. What are the sanctions?

33. Which of your customers conduct regular quality control?

34. Have retailers ever asked you to sign a code of conduct on environmental or labour issues? Yes No

35. If yes: which companies?

36. Who does the monitoring?

37. How does your company cope with this?

Analysing Garment Chains from a Gender Perspective⁶

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This is based on a model featured in the WIEGO manual (McCormic & Schmitz, 2001). It is divided into four steps. The first three steps give background information about men and women, and the last step applies that information to the garment industry chain.

Step 1 Background information

This includes information on gender, age, marital status, education and training. Sometimes this is available from company records - if we have access to them - otherwise, we can include these questions in our surveys/interviews.

Step 2 Labour force information

This gives the background information about the number of years in the job, rates of pay, working conditions etc. Sometimes this information is available from government labour force statistics. To compare the situation of subcontractors to the garment industry workforce as a whole, we could include questions on this in our surveys/interviews.

Step 3 Company organisation

The third part looks at how the company is organised. There are a lot of differences between companies, but there are five features that every company shares. These are:

- how things are done
- what is done
- what resources are used/what is produced
- who does what
- who makes the rules and decides what's important

⁶ Adapted from McCormic, D. and Schmitz, H. (2001) Manual For Value Chain Research on Homeworkers in the Garment Industry (Sussex: Institute for Development Studies)

Analysing Garment Chains from a Gender Perspective

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The last feature - who makes the rules and decides what's important - is about power. Power is the most important aspect of a gender analysis. Who has power? What priorities do they decide on? What rules do they make? Some groups have more power, for example they decide how the company is run. Others have less power, they decide smaller issues, for example how to organise shifts, production targets and discipline. And others, mostly workers, have almost no power - they have to accept the decisions and rules others make. Part of a gender analysis is finding out the differences between the power women and men have at different points of the chain.

Step 4 Applying a gender analysis

The fourth step applies the gender analysis to the results from the first three steps. This means comparing the differences between women and men at each level of the company and/or supply chain. In this example, in Box 12 - this table is not based on real research - it is clear that men have more management positions, earn more money, go to school longer, get more training and are promoted faster than women.

Analysing Garment Chains from a Gender Perspective

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STEP	TASK
1 Personal Background Information - Looking at the workers who are taking part in the research	Gather basic information about the workers we are studying. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Age, sex, marital status, education level, training ● Years in present job, previous experience, rate of pay, benefits, working conditions ● Are they the main bread winner?
2 Labour Force Information - Looking at the national level	Gather information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The number of people employed in the country, what industries, what industries to women work in, what is the age of women in that industry? ● The same information as above, but just look at the garment industry
3 Company Organisation - Looking at how the company is organised and managed	Gather information on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What the company does ● What resources are used/what is produced ● Who does what: what jobs do men get, what jobs do women get ● Who has power? Who makes the rules and decides what's important?
4 Gender Analysis - Using all the information in steps 1-3 above we compare the information to discover how women workers in the garment industry compare with other groups of workers, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Workers in other industries ● Male workers in the garment industry ● Other women workers in the supply chain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are the differences for women workers in job/pay/hours/average age of worker/training with other groups of workers? ● How do the positions of women/men in this industry compare with their positions in industry in general? ● How does it compare with the position of women/men in the garment industry? ● Do men have more power in this industry - or in this chain - than women? ● Where is this most obvious? ● How does this affect women? ● Are there invisible costs for women workers? What are these? Why do they exist? ● What needs to be changed? ● Why? ● How can this be done? ● What actions are needed in order to change the situation? ● Who can help?

Box 12 Steps in carrying out a gender analysis of garment industry supply chains (Adapted from Mikkelsen, 1995; Kabeer and Subrahmanian, 1996)

Analysing Garment Chains from a Gender Perspective

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STEP	TASK
Gender composition of workforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Top management: 90% male ● Middle management: 80% male ● Support staff (secretaries, drivers etc.): 50% male ● Supervisory staff: 70% male ● Factory production staff: 80% female ● Outworkers: 100% female
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The average age for male workers is 35.4 years, the average age for women workers is 38.9 years
Remuneration	Overall men earned three times more than women, based on wages and benefits, excluding outworkers. When outworkers were included men earned four times as much as outworkers, while women factory workers earned twice as much as outworkers, based on outworkers' estimates of their monthly earnings
Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Male workers average 12.2 years of schooling, compared with female workers how average 8.3 years ● Outworkers, who are 100% female, average 5.2 years of schooling ● The intermediaries who deal with these outworkers are, on average, educated to high school level ● Within the broad categories of management, supervisory workers, and factory production workers, there is no significant difference between male and female education levels
Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Men are twice as likely as women to have had specific managerial or technical training ● Men had a wide variety of training, including management, accountancy, textile design, machine maintenance, computer aided design and sewing/tailoring. Women were mainly trained in either secretarial work or sewing. Only a few women had managerial training, and none had been trained in machine maintenance computer aided design

Analysing Garment Chains from a Gender Perspective

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STEP	TASK
Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Total work experience: Men: 14.1 years Women: 18.3 years ● Garment industry experience: Male: 12.5 years Women: 17.2 years
Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Promotions generally occur within the broad employment categories, e.g. factory workers progress through specific job groups and some eventually become supervisors. ● Men who reached supervisor level did so after an average of 7.2 years; women took on average 8.5 years ● They found only ten cases where factory workers or members of the support staff became managers. Nine of these were men.
Hours worked	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Women and men in most jobs work the same hours. They only found a significant difference in factory work Men: 52 hours per week Women: 45 hours per week

Box 13 Applying a gender analysis: Using the information from Step 1 (Personal background information) and applying it to one company in the chain

⁷ Quoted in McCormic, D. and Schmitz, H. (2001) Manual For Value Chain Research on Homeworkers in the Garment Industry (Sussex: Institute for Development Studies)

