

ACHIEVING WORKERS' RIGHTS IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

**Edited by Richard P. Appelbaum
and Nelson Lichtenstein**

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*This book is dedicated to the 1,138 people who lost their lives at
Rana Plaza*

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acted collectively through labor unions; the state created and enforced regulations designed to protect workers' rights. Unionization and worker's rights were the result of decades of labor struggles. This arrangement, frequently referred to as the American social contract, has given way in the twenty-first century to a new arrangement in which two of the three key players, workers and the state, are replaced by other actors: independently owned contract factories and monitoring firms.

The result is a new tripartite model: brands and retailers produce their goods through contract factories, then hire firms to monitor their factories and privately report back their findings. This new arrangement, sometimes termed a "social accountability contract,"²⁹ effectively makes corporations responsible for governing themselves. This outcome had long been preferred by business, but was reluctantly conceded during the course of the twentieth century in response to growing labor power. But as the power of labor weakened, businesses—long opposed to state regulation—returned to a nineteenth-century approach to economic governance, this time on a global scale. The current prevailing belief in unfettered markets, the power of firms over states, the WTO prohibition of including social clauses in trade agreements, the intentional weakness of the ILO and its nonbinding conventions—all of these have created a space in which companies could effectively argue that a "trust me" approach was the only workable solution to the problem of sweatshops.

CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Moving from Checklist Monitoring to Contractual Obligation?

Jill Esbenshade

Codes of conduct and monitoring are the most prevalent form of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in global supply chains. According to the *New York Times*, more than fifty thousand factories employing millions of workers go through "social audits" each year (Clifford and Greenhouse 2013). There is evidence that to some degree codes and monitoring systems have changed the landscape in which brands and factories operate: there is now acceptance of public disclosure of factory names and locations, which was once held to be an unbreachable trade secret; recently there have been incidents of brands taking responsibility for unpaid back wages and severance, a still rare but previously unknown occurrence in the global supply chains constructed in part to avoid such liability; and there are indications that brands may be consolidating their far-flung production networks that have become unmanageable in the age of disclosure and monitoring (Gereffi 2013).

However, academic researchers, and more recently the popular press, have found that codes and monitoring are not equal to the task of significantly raising standards in the industry. Researchers point to some measure of improvements but emphasize that violations continue, in some areas unabated. Mark Anner's comprehensive study of the Fair Labor Association (2012a) and Patricia Barrientos and Sally Smith's (2007) study of the Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) find that even in Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs), which involve governance by a combination of companies and NGOs, and where there are mutually agreed-on standards for codes and monitoring, effectiveness of monitoring is restricted to certain code provisions. Whereas Anner analyzes detection by violation type in

over eight hundred audit reports, Barrientos and Smith evaluate improvements in twelve in-depth garment factory cases through actually reauditing monitored factories. These disparate studies find significant attention in some “outcome standards” (health and safety, payment of required wages, and hours), little to no detection or improvement in others (living wage, permanent employment, harsh treatment, discrimination), and no progress in “process rights” (freedom of association, collective bargaining). Richard Locke’s book, based on a decade of research, including hundreds of interviews, factory visits, and audit reviews of company monitoring, finds that in the areas where there have been improvements, most notably health and safety, compliance levels have plateaued and that on issues such as freedom of association and excessive working hours there have been no improvements (Locke 2013).

Overall codes have failed to measurably alter the egregious conditions for workers on the shop floor: with few exceptions workers are not paid living wages and are not able to organize, and they are *regularly* cheated out of mandatory pay, benefits, and severance. In fact, workers are owed tens of millions of dollars, and worse yet they are dying by the score in fires and building collapses. And this is happening in factories that are monitored and that often pass inspections (Claeson 2012). After almost two decades of codes of conduct and monitoring, violations are still the norm, not the exception.

This does not mean that codes and monitoring are completely misguided, rather, that they are limited; they are a salve, not a cure. I will argue below that the challenge is for codes and monitoring to change the structure of the industry, which is the only real way to address violations, and in order to create such change codes and monitoring must involve binding—not simply voluntary—agreements to which workers are a party.

Literature Evaluating Codes and Monitoring

What follows is a review of the literature on the successes, failures, and challenges of codes and monitoring covering fifty studies from the last decade on the topic. In its totality the literature emphasizes the following factors as having a positive effect on reducing (although in no way eliminating) violations. First, specific monitoring practices have been found to have a greater effect on reducing violations, and worker participation in monitoring is central to building a sustainable program from identifying problems to ensuring remediation. Second, the independence of monitors and the transparency of their reporting are crucial to ensuring that results have validity and can be effectively used to correct violations. Although the specifics of monitoring are crucial to its effectiveness, monitoring

exists within a constellation of power relationships that determine not only the thoroughness of monitoring practices but also how results are implemented and acted on. The following sections deal with the role of consumers, local governments, and brands, all of whom set the context for and ultimately determine the likelihood of compliance. The final area explored in much of the literature is the inability of current monitoring to affect the structure of sourcing, which is the ultimate cause of violations. After the literature review I will add a largely overlooked factor to eliminating violations: to what extent monitoring is contractual and if it includes workers as party to the contract. I end this chapter with a variety of examples of the emergence of contractual obligations in monitoring; many of these examples also have a direct impact on the structure of sourcing.

Monitoring Practices and Worker Participation

Although monitoring is often referred to as social auditing, in fact there are no standardized practices as there are in accounting audits. Monitoring is conducted by a mishmash of internal, commercial, and independent auditors. It lacks uniformly accepted standards in terms of both what is monitored and how inspections are conducted. Broadly speaking, monitoring includes: self-assessment, brand compliance visits, “third-party” auditing by an entity hired by the brand (or sometimes contractor), “fourth-party” monitoring paid for by an oversight organization to which the brand belongs (like the FLA), and independent monitoring conducted by a group (like the Worker Rights Consortium, WRC) in which companies have no role. There is no uniform code and codes vary on such points as minimum age (Kolk and van Tulder 2002), inclusion of freedom of association and collective bargaining, and aspirations of a living wage (Jenkins 2002). Some important areas, such as building safety, have not historically been included at all. There is also variance as to whether monitoring is a checklist operation that simply captures the day of the inspection or includes a review of policies and implementation procedures on such issues as age documentation, fire drills, or antidiscrimination.

Richard Locke, a political scientist and business professor who works with leading global corporations to implement sustainable business practices, has analyzed the largest set of private audits. He finds that not only is the checklist method the base model for private and third-party monitoring but also that the checklist is not usually completed, as many auditors face such time constraints that once they find their quota of violations they move on to the next factory, not even finishing the checklist much less delving deeper into the violations they find. In *The Promise and Limits of Private Power*, Locke laments that whereas he believed in the “promise” of the enterprise of private monitoring before his

research, he had to conclude that “in reality, the information collected through the audits is biased, incomplete and often inaccurate” (Locke 2013, 38).

To the extent that monitoring can be effective, researchers have identified two specific practices as being important in more accurate verification protocols: unannounced visits and confidential off-site worker interviews. The labor sociologist Jill Esbenschade (2004a), the environmental policy professor and cofounder of GoodGuide, Dara O'Rourke (2000), and Locke (2013) all reveal weaknesses in the private monitoring system through ethnographic research, which includes observing monitors at work. Off-site interviews are necessary, as O'Rourke (2006) documents that in interviews conducted in factories, management knows who is being interviewed, the questions being asked, and the length of time each interview lasts. Esbenschade (2004a) concurs, describing cases in Los Angeles where interviews are conducted on the shop floor and supervisors are even asked to translate. Locke (2013) reports that often employee interviews are not conducted at all. As a counterexample, the labor relations professor and director of the Center for Global Workers' Rights, Mark Anner (2012a), argues that in the Better Work Vietnam program, monitors from the UN's International Labour Organization (ILO), whose standards require them to take worker testimony seriously, actually find much higher rates of process violations.

Researchers have found that unannounced visits are crucial not only for the integrity of the physical inspection of the factory but also for the validity of the record checks, which constitute the basis of most audits. The professor of economics and management David Weil, who is the author of *The Fissured Workplace* (2014) and was Obama's head of the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor (DOL), analyzed ninety-eight DOL surveys of Los Angeles apparel contractors from inspections conducted in 2000. He found that the two most effective of the seven evaluated monitoring components (which did not include off-site interviews), were the combination of payroll review and unannounced visits. Weil concludes that record checks must be coupled with unannounced visits in order to ensure that written documentation reflects reality. Record checks on announced visits are much less effective because keeping two sets of books is a common practice, one set in which workers' actual hours and pay are recorded, and a second set that is doctored to reflect compliance with labor standards (Weil 2005; 2010). Looking at the program in Los Angeles, Esbenschade finds that surveillance outside the factory was often counted as an unannounced visit, even when the actual appointment to check books and interview employees was made in advance. Because books were not on kept on site, one monitoring company that did conduct truly unannounced visits allowed the books to be sent over within three days, undermining the value of the unannounced inspection (Esbenschade 2004, 71–75). British researchers Barrientos and Smith (2007) consistently find

violations in reauditing suppliers who had been giving passing audits through the United Kingdom's multistakeholder ETI program. They find that auditors catch primarily visible problems. They conclude that the inaccuracy of auditing results is due largely to the widespread use of double books and of coaching workers before interviews. Locke's review of hundreds of audits also found that false results are a consequence of the common use of double books, and he notes that factory owners learn over time to doctor records. He asserts that inaccurate results are partially due to the fact that auditors use a financial audit model, which privileges written documentation over worker testimony (Locke 2013, 35–37).

Although unannounced visits and off-site interviews may seem like obvious steps, they are not accepted practice. For private monitors and company sponsored CSR programs, these practices are *not* the norm. In 2006, the three largest retailers in the world, Walmart, Tesco, and Carrefour, joined a number of other firms in founding the Global Social Compliance Program (GSCP) to improve working and environmental conditions by harmonizing efforts and identifying best practices in codes and monitoring. In its “Audit Process and Methodology Reference Tools,” GSCP warns that semi-announced and unannounced audits should be used only in high-risk circumstances and even then only after considering business relationships. GSCP cautions: “Note: Whilst unannounced audits are extremely effective at identifying an accurate picture of working conditions at the employment site, and may help uncover high risk issues, their use can undermine the relationships along the supply chain, reducing the ability of the buying company to remediate. The experience of many companies indicates that unannounced audits should be reserved for due diligence checks or to investigate specific issues (critical issues suspected, lack of commitment/involvement of the suppliers, suspicion of fraud)” (GSCP 2009, 6). In other words, monitors should operate on an assumption of compliance unless there are specific indications to the contrary. In terms of worker interviews, the GSCP protocol “Interviews” section begins: “Interviews with managers, trade union representatives (and/or other workers' representatives) and workers will take place on-site. However, it may be appropriate to carry out additional worker interviews off-site” (GSCP 2009, 14). But no guidance is given about when off-site interviews should be used.

Even for the ILO, which has set international standards for the importance of giving weight to confidential worker interviews, the practices of off-site interviews and unannounced visits seem nonstandard. There has been a lot of criticism in the anti-sweatshop movement about the Better Factories Cambodia (BFC) program (Ballinger 2009), which gave US trade privileges to Cambodian garment manufacturers. Shea, Nakayama, and Heymann (2010), although finding that the model developed under the ILO's monitoring in the BFC program was largely

successful in improving working conditions, admonish that future monitoring ventures should include off-site worker interviews and unannounced visits, the lack of which they say brings the ILO program's integrity into question. A study by Stanford University Law School (2013) indicates that the ILO has only partially rectified these weaknesses. The report finds that the usual procedure is still to interview workers in groups in the factory and to supplement this informally with worker interviews at food stalls and such places just outside the factory gates. The Stanford study also says that although the ILO conducts unannounced visits, they sometimes wait for up to 45 minutes outside the factory, allowing management time to prepare. Furthermore, "Since 2005, factory workers have lost almost all of the access they once had into the black box of BFC's reporting . . . BFC no longer convenes meetings at monitored factories to report on its findings to workers and their representatives." Not only are workers no longer apprised of monitoring results, but those results are also no longer publicly available. The program halted its original practice of releasing public summary reports with some individual factory information, although actual factory reports were never made public (see chapter 5 of this volume). Workers have no ability, therefore, to act as any kind of check on remediation since they do not, and cannot, know what violations have been found.

The lack of worker participation in the monitoring and remediation processes profoundly undermines monitoring as a viable regulatory system. Most workers in the Barrientos and Smith study (2007) were only partially or not at all aware of the codes. Many NGOs have reported a similar lack of dissemination of information. Esbenshade (2004a) found that many workers she interviewed had no idea who the auditors were. Moreover, those who were aware had been told by management that if they revealed problems to the auditor, work would be pulled and they would lose their jobs. Seidman (2007) finds that workers in Lesotho were also silenced by a fear of ruining the reputation, and therefore market share, of their employer and their country.

Auditors not only need to elicit truthful information from workers in order to produce accurate results, but workers' participation in ongoing vigilance at the factory is also key to moving beyond the "checklist" model. We know that factory owners coach workers for interviews, falsify records, and unlock doors for the day of inspection. Only workers who are protected from retaliation and empowered by their own organizations can know and report whether the doors are unlocked and they are paid properly day in and day out. This point was painfully emphasized in a report on death by factory fires written by Bjorn Claeson (senior policy analyst at the International Labor Rights Forum). Claeson documents that many of the factories in which hundreds of workers have died in Bangladesh and Pakistan were actually monitored by brand-name companies. However, because

workers are not empowered to report on the daily conditions within their factories or apprised of the results of audits, which remain secret, monitoring fails to uncover dangerous and illegal conditions and fails to facilitate addressing those conditions when they are discovered, resulting in at best inaccurate reports and at worst a wave of factory fatalities like none seen in the garment sector previously (Claeson 2012). Moreover, O'Rourke (2006) also asserts that worker participation is necessary not only to identify problems but also to verify compliance with remediation efforts. He gives examples of workers' committees in China that have helped improve health and safety compliance.

However, the vast majority of monitoring efforts does not protect workers, much less involve them on any equal footing in the process. Monitoring usually happens through an agreement between brands and contractors, and sometimes an agreement is signed between the brand and an oversight organization; with few exceptions workers have not been party to these agreements (Esbenshade 2004a). César Rodríguez-Garavito (2005) argues that what workers need is "empowered participatory regulation," that would focus on guaranteeing enabling rights, education, training and direct worker complaint mechanisms in the monitoring process. Rainer Braun and Judy Gearhart (2004) and Esbenshade (2001, 2004b) claim that Northern NGOs have assisted in developing a regulatory model not accountable to workers. Such regulation stands in contrast to a union-based participatory model, which is accountable to workers themselves (Compa 2001, 2004).

Independence and Transparency

Researchers also point to the level of independence of the monitors as crucial to monitoring's effectiveness, generally having more praise for independent monitors who are neither selected nor paid by the contractors or the brands. Both Anner (Anner et al. 2008) and Esbenshade (2004a, 2004b) contrast commercial monitors who are paid by the brands with independent monitors who are not. They find that the latter not only have fewer conflicts of interest but also more access to workers and a much better chance of uncovering violations of the key issue: workers' rights to organize and thereby gain the security to monitor their own factory.

The vast majority of factory inspections are conducted by auditors hired either directly or indirectly by brands and contractors themselves. Many large brands, like Nike and Gap, employ their own compliance staff. For these internal auditors, the central aspect of their employers' business, to acquire or produce clothes at a low price in a timely manner, often conflicts with the goal of assuring compliance with workers' rights. Locke quotes an auditor who expresses a typical dynamic: if an order has already been placed "before I set foot in the factory, I know we will give them the business no matter what" (2013, 38). There are also

dozens of commercial firms who offer social compliance auditing services, some of the largest being the Swiss firm SGS SA (Société Générale de Surveillance), the British Intertek, the French Bureau Veritas, and the American UL (Underwriters Laboratories). These external auditors, whose services are purchased either by the brand or the contractor, have an incentive to please the client by keeping prices low with quick (and consequently less thorough) investigations. Moreover, such firms are rewarded with more business when they issue passing reports to contractors who hire them directly and when they refrain from causing problems with business relations between the brand and contractor. For instance, a *New York Times* article entitled "Fast and Flawed Inspections of Factories Abroad" reported that an SGS spokesperson, in defending a stellar inspection report of Rosita Knitwear in Bangladesh, which later erupted in protests over a plethora of code violations, "said the protocol for Rosita did not require interviewing workers outside the factory, a practice that she cautioned could undermine a relationship between a Western company and its suppliers" (Clifford and Greenhouse 2013). Moreover, as social auditing firms expand business in response to growing demand in new locations, they sometimes contract out work, resulting in the same problems of control of standards that they are monitoring for.

Independent monitoring is seen as more effective, although it is not a cure-all. "Independent monitoring" is a term used to refer to both the structure of the relationships, where companies do not directly hire auditors, and a purer form of independence where the monitoring organizations themselves are actually free from corporate influence in their governance and funding (such as the WRC). Kolk and van Tulder (2002) found in their survey of six major garment manufacturers that internal monitoring was *not* considered credible. External monitoring was deemed necessary by social auditors or NGOs, although the preferred method was to hire an external monitor through a foundation, to which the companies paid dues (such as the FLA). Frundt (2004) and Wetterberg (2010) concur that the degree of independence of monitoring is a central criteria by which the stringency of monitoring can be judged. However, Gay Seidman (2007) and Wells (2007) warn that independent monitoring also has its flaws: it depends on the brands for access to factories, it requires the trust of workers, and, perhaps most significant, it has limited capacity to cover even a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands of factories.

Noted individual cases of real progress brought about by monitoring have been in the context of truly independent monitors and processes that were both transparent and put workers concerns and voice front and center. For example, the WRC played a crucial role in the establishment of the first independent apparel union in Mexico at Kukdong/Mexmode (Ross 2006) and in the Mombasa Free Trade Zone of Kenya at Sinolink. The WRC was also instrumental in guaranteeing

workers' rights in the struggle at the BJ&B factory, which resulted in the first collective bargaining agreement to require higher than the minimum wage in any export-processing zone of the Dominican Republic (Ross 2006; Esbenschade 2008). Workers at Jerzees Nuevo Dia, a Russell factory in Honduras, won a number of concessions through the monitoring of the WRC, in conjunction with actions by universities and a well-coordinated campaign between unionists in Honduras and student protesters in the United States. The Honduran workers were rehired, signed a collective bargaining agreement, received 35 percent above the local standard in benefits and wages, and won a guarantee of broader rights to freedom of association than previously experienced in the industry, not only for themselves but also for all workers at other Honduran Russell factories (Esbenschade 2012). These gains, though extremely important, are generally in individual factories and sometimes are ephemeral. Unfortunately, they are not indicative of a progressive trend in either independence of monitoring or transparency. In fact, one sign that transparency may have plateaued is the deterioration of the ILO's BFC program into a "black box" system as described above.

There is consensus in the literature that transparency of monitoring procedures and results is a necessary facet of an effective system, although this finding is largely based in theoretical argument rather than evaluation, since no major system beyond the WRC makes reports with factory names public. O'Rourke (2006) argues that "increased transparency is the first, and perhaps most critical, element in advancing more accountable non-governmental governance" (909). Hemphill (2004) supports the monitoring model but warns that strong accountability and transparency mechanisms are needed to insure effectiveness. Grinis (2010) reports that for Malaysia, her case study, WRAP and SAI reports contain only numbers for factories, not names, which was also noted by O'Rourke (2006) and Hemphill (2004) in regard to FLA reports. As discussed above, the lack of transparency of the audits coming out of Bangladesh, Pakistan, and elsewhere has contributed to workers dying en masse (Claesson 2012; and Ross in chapter 4 of this volume). This secrecy not only endangers workers but also makes evaluation of the system and accountability almost impossible. Lack of transparency thereby also hinders consumer action. Bartley (2007) and Robinson (Anner et al. 2008) explain that the lack of a consistent consumer demand for ethically produced goods is at least partly a result of the lack of reliable certification system.

Consumer Leverage over Brands

In terms of the role of the consumer, researchers argue that the more leverage over brands those requiring monitoring have, the more effective the consumer can be in affecting brand behavior. Wetterberg (2010) differentiates between the

buyer-regulated markets where the individual consumers hold sway and socially regulated markets such as college logoed goods or uniforms for city or state workers. Socially regulated markets are more conducive to improving workers' conditions because: (1) they are in an area where market access is limited (licenses for college logoed goods or procurement for public employee uniforms), (2) there are "interested intermediaries" who can provide market access in exchange for higher levels of compliance (universities or government agencies), (3) these intermediaries have engaged some independent monitoring entity (the WRC or FLA), and (4) there is on-going activism (by students, workers, or citizens) to ensure that the intermediary continues to require compliance.

Others have also pointed to the fact that institutional consumers have more leverage and reliability in their influence over brands than do a large number of individuals with similar preferences. Seidman (2007), Armbruster-Sandoval (2005), and Wells (2007) assert that the nature of individual consumer and activist action is somewhat mercurial. Institutional consumers, on the other hand, have a specific role that creates more influence (granting licenses or making large purchases). Such institutional buyers often have long-standing relationships with specific brands and can thus exert more influence on their practices. Moreover, the purchases by or licenses with universities, bookstores, cities, and states can be a stable demand that is controlled by longer-term policy decisions rather than immediate shopping choices. In a few instances, such as the Sweat-Free Communities consortium, governments act as responsible consumers in procurement, but more often governments are involved with monitoring through the intersection of their enforcement capacity with private monitoring.

Relationship to Government Enforcement

Where monitoring is actually part of government enforcement, it is more effective. Weil (2005) shows that where private monitoring is part of a government oversight program, as in Los Angeles, it can raise compliance. He finds that putting government pressure on actors further up in the industry (at the level of retailers, for example) can force monitoring further down the chain of production. Esbenschade (2004a), while focusing on the deficiencies of the DOL-supervised monitoring program in Los Angeles (most notably the myriad conflicts of interest), also acknowledges that monitoring in the context of government enforcement and the threat of embargoing goods or complaints reaching retailers provides some improvements. As Brayden King and Nicholas Pearce (2010) point out, the threat of state regulation strengthens the potential of private regulation, since companies prefer self-regulation to submitting to the state.

However, as Gereffi, Garcia-Johnson, and Sasser (2001) warn, monitoring should not be seen as a substitute for state enforcement. Although monitoring and certification are an opportunity to highlight disparities in state enforcement, since they look at laws across governments in the process of evaluating compliance, state enforcement has a breadth and potential system of consequences that cannot be replicated by private alternatives. In terms of which has a greater effect on compliance, research has shown that government enforcement clearly outweighs monitoring. Locke, Qin, and Brause (2007) find that whether factories operate in a country with a stronger rule of law and more active labor inspectorate makes more of a difference in compliance than does monitoring. Locke suggests that if companies are concerned with compliance they locate production in countries with stronger labor-law enforcement mechanisms. However, companies often choose production locations precisely to *avoid* countries with strong labor-rights enforcement because the costs of compliance drive up wages, benefits, and infrastructure costs, as argued by Nova and Wegemer in chapter 1 of this volume. Not considering the context of labor-rights compliance in sourcing location belies the notion that monitoring is a sincere effort to ensure workers' rights are respected.

Moreover, even at its most effective, monitoring does not challenge practices that fall *within* the law but are clearly undermining workers' rights. For example, in Crinis's case study in Malaysia, contractors legally hire short-term foreign workers with few labor rights in terms of overtime pay, unionization, suitability of housing, and withholding of travel documents. These foreign workers are often hired by an outsourcing company that deducts a fee from workers' wages so that workers are paid far less than nationals and far less than they were promised when recruited. Although some of these practices would violate company codes, Crinis concludes that "auditors who monitor factory compliance are not in a position to question national labour standards" (2010, 590). Looking at case studies in China and Vietnam, where half of FLA company production occurs, Anner (2012a) demonstrates the complicated and unproductive exercise of monitoring for code provisions such as freedom of association and collective bargaining rights in a context where these provisions are illegal.

If indeed government enforcement is much more significant than monitoring in achieving compliance, is there any way in which monitoring can spur more government enforcement? Kolk and van Tulder (2002) argue that as part of code implementation companies can assert pressure on local governments to enforce national laws, and the literature shows that there are instances where independent monitoring has done this. O'Rourke (2006), Anner et al. (2008), Seidman (2007), and Knight and Wells (2007) document examples from Mexico, Indonesia, El Salvador, and Guatemala where independent monitors advocated for the

state to enforce laws. However, reviewing the reports from the WRC (which was responsible for the Mexican Kukdong/Mexmode and Indonesian cases), it is clear that these are fairly isolated incidents and not indicative of any general trend in independent monitoring, much less private monitoring. It seems that pressuring for government reform is a more likely outcome of a *local* independent monitor (e.g., in Coverco in Guatemala and GMIES in El Salvador) that is continuously engaged in the civil society movements within the country and for which government engagement is part of its long-term work. The recent tragedy in Bangladesh saw a push for legal reform supported by brands; however, that was in the context of the worst possible publicity for both the country and the brands that produce there.

There is, however, a debate over to what extent private regulation is a distraction from the task of shoring up national labor-law enforcement rather than complementary to or supportive of government enforcement. According to Robert Ross (2004), codes and monitoring are the weakest point in a continuum of possible labor-rights protections; unions and government enforcement are at the strong end and international law and trade sanctions are in between. Jill Murray (2003) argues that primary responsibility for regulation lies with the state. The enforcement of labor law actually fulfills two major tasks of the government: providing companies with a “level playing field” and balancing the power of companies and workers. Ronnie Lipschutz and James Rowe (2005) agree that it is in the government’s interest to make sure that everyone abides by the same rules, both within their countries and between countries. Voluntary private regulation cannot play this role since it is not uniform, nor enforced, nor enforceable given the global and mobile nature of supply chains. Although some companies may sincerely want to regulate their contractors, they cannot count on others to do the same. Thus monitoring, rather than giving a company or even a country a market advantage, may actually put them at a competitive disadvantage. The same could, of course, be said for enforcing labor laws: although certainly a supposed obligation of the state, enforcement puts the country at a competitive disadvantage in attracting manufacturers and brands to locate production there.

Relationship of Brand and Supplier

The relationship between the brand and the contractor is actually a more important factor in compliance than the monitoring itself; in fact, some researchers argue that the contours of this relationship are the most important factors. Crucial aspects in this relationship include how often the brand visits the facility, the length of the relationship, and most important the ability of the contractor to renegotiate price when circumstances (like delivery schedule) are altered. Locke,

Qin, and Brause (2007), analyze eight hundred Nike audits from fifty-one countries and find that monitoring alone has little effect on compliance. Rather, factory-level compliance is most tied to the relationships with brands that allow for negotiation over scheduling and support for higher productivity. These researchers find that it is visits not by brand CSR staff but by brand quality control and production staff that correlates with code compliance, indicating that it is the intimacy of the business relationship—not the worker rights efforts—that creates space for improved labor conditions. Locke reiterates this point in his 2013 book on the subject, hailing “strategic partnerships,” which are long term and marked by frequent interaction, as more important than monitoring.¹

All four studies that address the question find that a strong and/or more equitable relationship between brands and contractors outweighs monitoring in terms of the effect on compliance. Barrientos and Smith concur with Locke that brands “had greater influence” (2007, 78) when they have longer-term relationships with the contractors, account for a higher percentage of output, and order more regularly from the supplier. Where there is a critical mass of brands insisting on similar codes, the effect is greater. Weil (2005) and Esbenshade (2004a) analyzed data from DOL surveys of almost one hundred garment shops in Los Angeles in 2000 and both find that the ability of contractors to renegotiate price when there is a change in schedule has a stronger effect on compliance than does the comprehensiveness of monitoring.

With a growing realization that monitoring is not an antidote to widespread labor rights violations, many brands are now turning to capability- or capacity-building approaches. As the Global Social Compliance Program claims, “The GSCP is ultimately working towards remediation of root causes to non-compliances, aiming at supplier ownership of solutions and their implementation. That is why we support the development of collaborative models to build to capacity at supplier site” (<http://www.theconsumergoodsforum.com/gscp-our-work/capacity-building>). Here root causes are understood to be not the practices of buyers but the organizational and technical capacity of suppliers. Locke offers a description of this model: “By providing suppliers with the technical know-how and management systems required to run more efficient businesses, this approach aims to improve these firms’ financial situation, thus allowing them to invest in higher wages and better working conditions” (2013, 8). However, he says the model is built on a number of faulty assumptions. First, the model assumes that technical upgrades lead to better wages and conditions and not more deskilled jobs. Second, the model operates on the premise that different parties in the supply chain have common rather than divergent interests. Third, the program is presented as one that can be reproduced across countries regardless of social, legal, and cultural environments. Locke finds very mixed results and

concludes that gains come from longer-term committed and close relationships between brand and factory rather than the program itself. He observes that, as with monitoring, brand practices in terms of pricing, schedules, and ordering small batches all continue to undermine any improvements brought about by the supplier improvement programs that brands sponsor (Locke 2013, 101–4).

Impacting the Structure of the Industry

There is agreement among many researchers that monitoring's greatest flaw is that it does not alter the structure of the industry, which is the real root cause of violations. In his analysis of NGO monitoring, Wells (2007) points to larger problems that cannot be tackled by even the best monitoring. Monitoring is necessarily limited by the mobility and volatility of global production, which is sourced from an ever-changing list of factories in a multitude of countries, so that monitors cannot even cover the factories currently used by a given brand. Moreover, global production chains were created in large measure to avoid the kind of responsibility monitoring purports to establish (Bonacich and Appelbaum 2000). Barrientos and Smith state that "purchasing practices are being seen by many as the Achilles heel of corporate codes." They "conclude that corporate codes have a role to play in improving labour standards, but are currently doing little to challenge commercial practices . . . that underpin poor labour standards." Barrientos and Smith find that where commercial demands conflict with code compliance, commercial demands win out (2007, 713). For instance, companies place repeated small orders, with short lead times for each, in order to keep inventory at a minimum. This lean approach puts strain on factory-level production in terms of planning, with suppliers having to work in bursts. This fluctuation in workload requires factory owners to either increase overtime above code limitations and/or not pay overtime properly or hire temporary workers. Locke (2013) concurs, also emphasizing the negative effects of lean production.

Not only has monitoring failed to address pricing and sourcing, so that its effect is limited in scope and depth, but also some aspects of the industry, like wages, have deteriorated despite monitoring (Worker Rights Consortium 2013). The shift to temporary, short-term, and contract work is another example of a negative practice that actually became more widespread at the same time as the monitoring regime proliferated. Barrientos and Smith (2007), in their study of factories that received satisfactory audits through ETI, point to the fact that migrant and temporary labor are extremely common, and undermine even basic protections. Even as Cambodian manufacturers participated in the ILO's Better Factories monitoring program, they shifted most of their workforce to temporary contracts, greatly undermining workers' rights (Allard K. Lowenstein

International Human Rights Clinic 2011). The Stanford Law School study (2013) confirms that monitoring in Cambodia did not positively impact the structural issues of wages and job security.

There are attempts, especially by the Worker Rights Consortium and anti-sweatshop organizations, to strategize how to leverage monitoring to require structural change. Esbenshade (2008) documents ways in which activists have progressively, although often futilely, attempted to weave changing the structure of sourcing into monitoring schemes. One such example is the never implemented Designated Supplier Program (DSP), proposed by United Students against Sweatshops (USAS) and developed by the WRC. This program would have required university licensees to incorporate the following into their sourcing: longer-term relationships with contractors, larger orders to cover a higher proportion of production in their supplier factories, and prices paid to suppliers that would cover compliance. The Accord for Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh discussed below is a more successful example of finally tying monitoring to changing fundamental brand practices that cause violations. I argue that this success is possible only because the Accord involves a binding agreement with workers, the last factor I will explore in regard to monitoring's effectiveness.

Voluntary versus Binding Agreements

In 2004, Esbenshade argued in *Monitoring Sweatshops* that workers were left out of the "social accountability contract" created by the monitoring regime. A decade later, we are seeing glimmers of workers being brought back into legal agreements over monitoring. Workers as party to the contracts as well as the binding nature of the monitoring agreement in requiring not only monitoring but also remediation are key to changing industry practices. The proliferation of monitoring has mostly occurred as a "good will" effort in which companies show their concern for workers' conditions so that consumers will choose their products and activists will leave them alone. A minority of codes and monitoring takes place within a contractual obligation to universities or cities or an agreement with a multistakeholder initiative. Moreover, even within the context of legal obligations, there have rarely been contractual consequences to violations, and these have taken the form of losing either business with a university or membership in an organization. These codes and monitoring arrangements have not proven to be binding agreements under which workers are guaranteed to be made whole in cases of illegal firings or of owed severance and back wages. Neither do these licensing or multistakeholder membership agreements oblige brands to pay compensation for death or injury that results from safety

violations, although some brands do so as a measure of their generosity. However, this general pattern is being challenged through new arrangements and by pushing for more contractual obligations.

Creation of New Contractual Obligations

The area of government procurement is a possible avenue for both changing the structure of sourcing and for the use of enforceable contracts to implement a more rigorous process. The work of Sweat-Free Communities is key in this regard. Having developed the necessary protocols and processes to begin work, the Sweat-Free Purchasing Consortium is in the midst, through the leadership of the city of Madison, Wisconsin, of establishing a pilot project of cooperative buying in which various cities would issue a joint RFP for fire-fighter apparel (uniforms and sweatshirts, etc.) This RFP includes the sweat-free code and independent monitoring requirements, but also makes structural changes in sourcing. The project would mean cities use a smaller number of suppliers for longer contract periods and larger volume, which comes from cooperative buying. Such consolidation would raise the incentive and ability to use complying producers.

As a direct purchaser of over \$1 billion of apparel and shoes per year (Verité 2015), the US government under the office of federal procurement launched an initiative to end the use of trafficked labor in all procurement. Obama's Executive Order 13627, "Strengthening Protections against Trafficking in Persons in Federal Contracts," and the Congressional legislation "End Trafficking in Government Contracting Act" both contractually require companies that sell goods to the US government to monitor the activities of their contractors and subcontractors for such common, and now illegal, practices as: labor recruitment fees paid by workers, providing false recruiting information to potential workers, and holding or destroying identity documents. According to an officer from the procurement office who presented to Sweat-Free Communities in 2013, the program will require some third-party auditing, although it is still unclear how rigorous implementation and enforcement will be. The officer stated that they wanted to follow the lead of the proactive companies rather than forcing this on them. This "collaborative" approach seemed evident in the January 2015 White House forum on combating human trafficking in supply chains, held the same day as the final rule clarifying these regulations was published in the Federal Register. Despite this less than stringent approach, the language against these widespread practices in federal procurement contracts will provide a new platform for workers and activists to demand higher levels of enforcement.

Rise in Enforcement of Contractual Obligation

It is in the university, through contracts between the university and licensees or sponsors, where there has been significant and escalating establishment of contractual obligation, and most important an obligation that involves workers' active participation. I will present the increasing use of binding contracts by discussing three recent cases. I want to emphasize that the use of contractual obligation to effect changes has only succeeded in the context of worker struggles to assert their rights and call for enforcement *and* student activism to encourage universities to cut contracts in response to breaches of the codes.

Russell Athletic was the first major instance in which universities cut their licenses en masse to enforce the licensing contracts. It should be noted that Russell is an unusual licensing brand in that its parent company, Fruit of the Loom, owns some of its own factories, making it more obviously responsible for violations in factories wholly dedicated to its production and more able to exercise control over the factory in remediation. In October 2008 after a successful unionization campaign, Fruit of the Loom decided to close its Jerzees de Honduras factory in violation of the university codes of conduct. Over the next year over one hundred universities cut contracts with Russell for breaching the licensing agreement. As a result, Fruit of the Loom agreed to open a new unionized factory (Jerzees Nuevo Día), to rehire the fired employees, and to remain neutral over unionization at its other Honduran facilities (see chapter 14 of this volume for more details). The agreement was signed with workers' representatives and proved that universities could use the weight of contract to enforce the most violated code of conduct—the right to unionize.

Soon after, universities used the power of the contract to force a licensee to set a precedent for brands assuming the monetary obligation to its contractor's workers. In January 2009, 1,800 workers found themselves out of work and owed over \$2 million when two Nike contractors in Honduras, Hugger and Vision Tex, closed without paying the legally required severance and back wages.² Nike went through the usual denials of (1) not having work, or significant work, in the factory, and (2) not being responsible for money owed workers by a contractor.³ Nike then proceeded to offer to pay for training and not owed compensation—emphasizing its "goodwill" rather than its obligation. As stated by the workers in a February 2010 letter to Nike rejecting the offer: "We want to be very clear that while our stomachs are empty and we have a lot of debts, we don't need training. We are trained workers with many years of experience making high-quality products. What we need is to receive payment for the work that we have done, which is an obligation established by Nike's own code of conduct."⁴ Dozens of universities threatened to cut contracts and the University of Wisconsin did so.

Given what had just happened months before with Russell, the mass termination of contracts was a very real threat. In July 2010, Nike agreed to sign an agreement with the main workers' federation that committed to pay workers' severance and to find jobs for the laid-off workers at its other contracting facilities in Honduras.

In a case of violations at the Indonesian factory PT Kizone, the University of Wisconsin sued adidas for breach of contract and the workers joined in the contractual dispute directly. PT Kizone closed in April 2011, owing workers \$3.4 million in severance (see chapter 14). Other buyers in the factory, most notably Nike, made partial payment. Adidas, however, gave a half million dollars in what its own communications called "humanitarian aid"⁷⁵ rather than pay the remaining \$1.8 million in owed severance. This aid largely consisted of food vouchers that workers had to spend at expensive convenience stores. These vouchers were in large denominations and no change would be issued, forcing workers to either sell them at a lower price outside the store or try to collect food that would add up to the exact amount of the voucher. As one worker testified, "I reject [the food vouchers] because for us, it is an insult, because it is nothing compared to our sweat from all the time we spent working with adidas."⁷⁶ At the same time that adidas was distributing its vouchers, the University of Wisconsin filed suit against it for breach of contract. Since adidas and UW had a sponsorship agreement, UW was required to go through a legal process to end the relationship, first arbitration and then court. When the Indonesian union representing the workers filed a motion in January 2013 to intervene in the lawsuit, Judge John Albert granted the motion, finding that the workers had a valid and legally binding interest in the contract between adidas and the UW. The judge's decision led to a remediation agreement that, unlike the sponsorship or licensing contracts, workers are a signatory to.

Both the Nike and adidas cases show how companies are struggling to maintain their position that CSR is an act of charity not a legal obligation to make workers whole. Adidas actually titled the announcement on its website that came after the remediation agreement "Adidas Group extends *help* to Indonesian workers."⁷⁷ However, it should be noted that other severance cases have been settled in the wake of the adidas case, indicating that companies are being forced to take the contractual obligation established in licensing and sponsorship agreements more seriously.

A Binding Contract Signed Directly with Workers: The Accord versus the Alliance

Finally, the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh, following the Rana Plaza collapse, is a legally binding agreement between brands and workers representatives. Significantly, the Accord sets a precedent in being the first CSR

monitoring agreement to address the structural causes of violations through two provisions concerning pricing and stability.⁸ The first states: "An agreement by signatory companies not to offer prices to, or accept prices from, factories such that the factories would be without the financial wherewithal to maintain safe workplaces and comply with upgrade and remediation requirements instituted by the Safety Inspector."⁹ Another provision of the Accord requires companies to maintain production for at least two years in the factories where they have significant production (which must apply to at least 65 percent of their production in Bangladesh). Combined with the requirement to help finance building upgrades and repairs, which creates an investment of the brands in the factories, this provision aims to stabilize production in such a way that factories have an incentive to raise compliance.

Of course, this trajectory toward obligation is not without strong opposition. Many companies have rejected the Accord based on what they see as increased liability and because they object to the role in negotiations played by unions, or what the head of the National Retail Federation called a "narrow agenda driven by special interests."¹⁰ It is precisely the elements of contractual obligation and workers being party to the agreement that makes the Accord a major departure from voluntary monitoring—and therefore anathema to many companies. The competing Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, initiated by Walmart and The Gap, replicates the major flaws of CSR monitoring (for a full discussion of the Accord and the Alliance see chapter 1 of this volume). We can only hope that the Accord and not the Alliance is indicative of the future.

Neither private nor independent monitoring can replace government enforcement, and neither can effectively function without a guarantee of workers' rights to organize on their own behalf. But private regulation, through monitoring agreements, can play a significant role within this context. The strongest contribution of codes and monitoring will be the extent to which it requires changes in the sourcing structure of the industry and is tied to contractually binding agreements in which workers are a recognized party.

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