

Letters to the Editor

ISO 14044 also Applies to Social LCA

Bo Weidema

2.-0 LCA consultants, Amagerstorv 3, 2., 1160 Copenhagen K, Denmark
(bow@lca-net.com; <http://www.lca-net.com>)

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A Framework for Social Life Cycle Impact Assessment (10 pp)
Dreyer, Louise; Hauschild, Michael; Schierbeck, Jens
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In their contribution to a framework for social LCA, Dreyer et al. (2005) dismiss the possibility of using generic data for social LCA: "the value of conducting Social LCA on the basis of generic product chains is normally limited." which leads the authors to suggest that the system boundaries for social LCA should depend on the data-availability: "The need for company specific information and data has consequences for the scoping of the product system in Social LCA, i.e. which parts of the product system need to be included. In order to obtain specific information from a company, it is crucial that the data collector has some influence to exert on it."

Making the system boundary dependent on data availability leads to arbitrariness in system boundary setting, compromising the result for use in comparisons. This is why ISO 14044 requires that "decisions regarding the data to be included shall be based on a sensitivity analysis to determine their significance". Furthermore, the need for ex-

cluding processes has recently become superfluous due to the availability of complete databases based on input-output data.

If we accept the argument that we can exclude processes from the studied systems, just because we do not have the necessary influence to obtain the data, this would have serious implications also for biophysical LCAs. Dreyer et al.'s argument would apply to most of the toxic, chemical emissions in LCA, which – like social issues – depend more on management practices than on the physical characteristics of the processes.

The solution applied in biophysical LCA – and which is equally applicable in social LCA – is to estimate the missing data based on averages. Only if a company can prove that its processes have smaller amounts of an emission, it may apply such company-specific data instead of the default averages.

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Goal, Scope and Background. To enhance the use of life cycle assessment (LCA) as a tool in business decision-making, a methodology for Social life cycle impact assessment (LCIA) is being developed. Social LCA aims at facilitating companies to conduct business in a socially responsible manner by providing information about the potential social impacts on people caused by the activities in the life cycle of their product. The development of the methodology has been guided by a business perspective accepting that companies, on the one hand, have responsibility for the people affected by their business activities, but, on the other hand, must also be able to compete and make profit in order to survive in the marketplace.

Methods. A combined, bottom-up and top-down approach has been taken in the development of the Social LCIA. Universal consensus documents regarding social issues as well as consideration for the specific business context of companies has guided the determination of damage categories, impact categories and category indicators.

Results, Discussion, and Conclusion. The main results are the following: (1) Impacts on people are naturally related to the conduct of the companies engaged in the life cycle rather than to the individual industrial processes, as is the case in Environmental LCA. Inventory analysis is therefore focused on the conduct of the companies engaged in the life cycle. A consequence of this view is that a

key must be determined for relating the social profiles of the companies along the life cycle to the product. This need is not present in Environmental LCA, where we base the connection on the physical link which exists between process and product. (2) Boundaries of the product system are determined with respect to the influence that the product manufacturer exerts over the activities in the product chain. (3) A two-layer Social LCA method with an optional and an obligatory set of impact categories is suggested to ensure both societal and company relevance of the method. The obligatory set of impact categories encompasses the minimum expectations to a company conducting responsible business. (4) A new area of protection, Human dignity and Well-being, is defined and used to guide the modelling of impact chains. (5) The Universal Declaration of Human Rights serves as normative basis for Social LCA, together with local or country norms based on socio-economic development goals of individual countries. The International Labour Organisation's Conventions and Recommendations, and the Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy, support development of the impact pathway top-down, starting from the normative basis. (6) The obligatory part of Social LCA addresses the main stakeholder groups, employees, local community and society.

Recommendations and Outlook. Social LCA is still in its infancy and a number of further research tasks within this new area are identified.