Addressing the effect of social life cycle assessments

Purpose: In the recently published 'Guidelines for social life cycle assessment of products', it is stated that the ultimate objective of developing the social life cycle assessment (SLCA) is to promote improvements of social conditions for the stakeholders in the life cycle. This article addresses how the SLCA should be developed so that its use promotes these improvements.

Methods: Hypotheses of how the use of SLCA can promote improvement of social conditions in the life cycle are formulated, after which theories and empirical findings from relevant fields of research are used to address the validity of these hypotheses.

Results: Three in some cases potentially overlapping SLCA approaches are presented, assumed to create a beneficial effect in the life cycle in different ways. However, empirical and theoretical findings show that the beneficial effects proposed to arise from the use of each of these three approaches may all be problematic. Some of these problems may be mitigated through methodological modifications.

Conclusions: Given the significant problems in relation to creating an effect through the use of the SLCAs, and given the significant practical problems in applying the SLCAs, it is questioned whether the development of SLCA is a fruitful approach for improving social conditions in the product life cycle.