

Round Table Meeting on Child Labour

12 December 2016

Humanity House, The Hague



Hosted by Stop Child Labour

Facilitated by Janice Reul

Report by Kristen Gehrman

## 1. Introduction

---

A single organisation's effort is no match for the international child labour machine. If there is one thing special guest Venkat Reddy of MVF-India has learned from his work with "the poorest of the poor", it is the importance of building networks and forming alliances. Clearly there are many different approaches to fighting child labour, but the goal of the half-day session on December 12<sup>th</sup> was to discover how different organisations can better work together. Hosted by Stop Child Labour, the Round Table on Child Labour welcomed 26 participants from 16 organisations, among them Stop Child Labour coalition members, NGOs, unions, CSR initiatives, and special guest Venkat Reddy of MVF-India.

The purpose of the Round Table was to get to know each other, gain a better understanding of each other's work, share knowledge and discover common goals.

Led by independent facilitator Janice Reul, the discussion focused on three main points: 1.) Child labour and local communities, 2.) Child labour and companies/CSR initiatives, and 3.) Child labour and politics. The discussion was followed by pertinent reflections from Venkat Reddy and a brief Q&A session. It concluded with a plan to continue the conversation in the future. The list of participants and programme can be found in Annexes I and II respectively.

This report aims to provide an overview of the Round Table discussion, including noteworthy remarks from various participants. Given that this was an open, candid discussion among colleagues, it should not be assumed that all comments reflect the speaker's overarching point of view or that of their organisation. The facilitator encouraged all participants to speak freely with the goal of finding common ground.

## 2. Brief overview of the Stop Child Labour Coalition

---

While the purpose of the session was not to advocate any single approach, as Round Table host, Sofie Ovaa of Stop Child Labour set the tone with a short presentation of Stop Child Labour before turning the discussion over to the group.

Stop Child Labour (SCL) believes that no child should work. Every child has a right to education, play and enjoy childhood. It is a clear vision with complex implications, which call for a united, multi-faceted plan of action. The coalition, coordinated by Hivos, consists of the Algemene Onderwijsbond (AOB), Mondiaal FNV, Hivos, the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN), Kerk in Actie & ICCO Cooperation and Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland. Together, these parties agree that seemingly insurmountable challenges such as poverty and inadequate or inaccessible education can be overcome.

SCL promotes an area-based approach to create **child labour free zones**. Within these zones, everyone believes that child labour should be eliminated and works together to get all children out of work and into school. Currently there are child labour free zones in India, Uganda, Ghana, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Morocco, Ethiopia, Mali, Burkina Faso and Nicaragua.

A successful child labour free zone requires more than concerned parents and community members. It also takes stakeholders who are committed to eradicating child labour within the supply chain. For this reason, SCL also seeks to collaborate with businesses, CSR initiatives, unions and governments on a national and international level. With this goal in mind, Sofie Ovaa opened the Round Table with following questions: Where can we find common ground? What ideas and best practices can we share?

### 3. Commonalities among the organisations in attendance

---

Prior to the Round Table, each organisation was asked to provide some information on their vision and initiatives, which was then forwarded to all participants. In order to devote as much time as possible to discussion, facilitator Janice Reul presented a concise summary of the commonalities she observed among the input provided.

The organisations in attendance tend to...

**A. Strive for eradication of child labour worldwide**

It is evident that all organisations present are active in combatting child labour worldwide; however, they have different ways of going about it.

**B. Identify a link between child labour and poverty (over generations)**

Child labour does not exist in a vacuum; it is a result of a cycle of poverty that is passed on from one generation to the next. Fighting child labour means addressing this cycle.

**C. Search for alternative ways to protect children from abuse and exploitation**

Most organisations agree that simply forbidding child labour does not work. Therefore, alternative methods need to be developed to discourage the practice.

**D. Promote Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) plans in production chains**

CSR initiatives are crucial to involving companies in the cause. When corporate interests are at stake, companies are more likely to take responsibility.

**E. Consider the family and community role in strengthening child protection programmes**

Even in poor areas, most parents and community leaders would rather their children not have to work. They are essential to getting children out of work and into school.

**F. Recognise the right to public and quality education**

The Round Table organisations agree that all children have a right to education and that this education should be publicly funded and accessible to all.

**G. Strive for sustainability**

Several organisations referred to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which emphasises meeting the needs of the present without compromising the future.

**H. Emphasise multi-stakeholder initiatives**

Combatting child labour means involving stakeholders at the local, regional, national and international level.

**I. Seek partnerships with governments from the local to international level**

Governments at all levels can play an important role in institutionalising child-friendly policies. Thus, relationships with governments need to be established and formalised.

### 4. Child labour and local communities

---

*How to involve different community actors in combatting child labour and make sure they all take responsibility?*

The Round Table collectively acknowledged that one thing that sets MVF-India apart is **its success in involving local partners**, something that, despite all efforts, simply cannot be done from a desk in Europe.

The three following themes emerged in the conversation: The need to 1.) build relationships, 2.) understand the context, and 3.) train teachers.

#### 4.1 Build relationships

Save the Children opened the dialogue by pointing out that involving community actors is first and foremost about building trust: “We have to work clearly together and make parties co-owners of a solution. Then we need to make it sustainable so that we are no longer needed.” Based on Save the Children’s experience, ongoing dialogue and gradual change are not to be undervalued.

Participants from Kerk in Actie/ICCO agreed and emphasised that long-standing relationships need to be developed to create mutual understanding and trust. They explained that their approach involves working intensively with local partners, whether a local church or child rights agency, and encouraging them to engage local leaders. “We address the parents who then address those higher up in the value chain”. When questioned whether it isn’t a contradiction to approach families in poverty about education, they elaborated: “Usually the parents want their children to go to school. Once it is a common objective, it’s not a contradiction to take children out of work.”

#### 4.2 Understand the context

Child labour is intrinsically linked to the rest of the community. Hivos/SCL highlighted the fact that one needs a holistic view of the context in order to develop an effective strategy. What relationships exist within the community? What is the situation with schools and teachers? How much do parents earn? They believe that questions such as these need to be considered before attempting to intervene.

“Without understanding the underlying causes of the child labour, you can’t effectively tackle the issue,” ICN added and pointed out that their experience in natural stone has revealed that fathers often die young due to harsh labour conditions, consequently their children are sent to the mines in their place and the cycle continues. This cycle is also apparent in the garment sector, as UNICEF mentioned. “It’s not only about children working in the industry, but also about parents and their lack of childcare options,” they said. In these cases, older children are obliged to stay home and look after the younger ones while the parents work. They do not attend school and ultimately follow in their parents’ footsteps to the factories.

When it comes to keeping children out of work and in school, it is also important to understand what the local community defines as ‘child labour’. UTZ raised the point that each community has its own norms and ideas of what kind of work is appropriate for children based on their age and gender. These norms may or may not align with the organisation’s point of view, but regardless, they are realities that need to be acknowledged and understood.

#### 4.3 Train teachers

One way to build relationships and understand the local context is to interact with teachers. “Just because we send children to school doesn’t mean there is education,” said AOb. In some cases, there are no teachers or the teachers are poorly trained and paid; this is something that needs to be addressed as well.

Education International sees teacher training as highly relevant to combatting child labour on the community level and a way to involve a wide variety of local stakeholders. They explained that hosting a teacher training requires permission from the local authorities and their involvement trickles down to the rest of the community. “We invite them [the local authorities] to participate in the training so that they also know what we are doing. Parents and local leaders come too. People are so excited that there is a

training in their village that they come to see what it is all about. This is the first spark in creating a local consciousness," they said.

## 5. Child labour and companies/CSR initiatives

---

*How to involve companies (international and local) in specific sectors (coffee, tea, cocoa, gold etc.) in lower tier production areas? How do we see their role?*

The Round Table acknowledged that companies generally need to be pushed to take an active role in fighting child labour and many participants see this as an essential part of their organisation's work. But how to go about it? The discussion centred around three main strategies: 1.) make it their problem, 2.) avoid scare tactics and 3.) build a positive business case.

### 5.1 Make it their problem

Child labour is, by nature, a sensitive topic and one that no company wants to be associated with. HR@W pointed out that companies generally need to see a clear link with their own supply chain before they will take responsibility. It is well known that companies will go to great lengths to avoid bad publicity and this can inspire them to take action. "Companies tend to be reactive, rather than proactive, so we can push them to look into their own supply chain," Hivos/SCL contributed.

That said, there also needs to be mutual trust between NGOs and companies, "and it's a long process building that trust," Solidaridad said. Several organisations take a due diligence approach, pushing companies to analyse issues in their own supply chains. Furthermore, NGOs can build relationships with companies so that they know who to turn to for advice. For example, UTZ mentioned that they engage in round tables and other platforms, and as a result, many companies have started coming to them with questions and concerns about regulations. Terre des Hommes mentioned that they try to "focus on the frontrunners and people on the ground, and then everyone in between feels involved."

### 5.2 Avoid scare tactics

Experience within the group suggests that 100% child-free labour guarantees can be very intimidating for corporate partners. Even Stop Child Labour has struggled with the term "child labour free zone", because one can never be completely sure that children aren't being exploited. According to Hivos/SCL, the goal is to try to get companies to be proactive and committed to taking action without scaring them away. This goes back to recognising their efforts and giving positive feedback. Netherlands Enterprise Agency agreed: "Companies are scared of the language used by NGOs." So how can NGOs better connect with corporate stakeholders and communicate with them in a way that is less confrontational but still effective?

### 5.3 Build a positive business case

Participants agreed that child labour issues are rarely black or white and companies resent taking all the blame. Therefore, rather than simply pointing fingers, organisations can try to build a positive business case. "Companies are more likely to get involved when their efforts are recognised," HR at W stated. When it is simply a matter of compliance, they are more likely to avoid the issue. Therefore, challenging companies in a positive way that allows their brand to shine can be an effective approach. "There are a lot of children working in cocoa, for example, and companies know this. We've changed our approach to try to get companies to commit to changing, rather than just saying they're bad," explains UTZ. "We are trying to recognise the efforts of companies that are looking for issues, finding them and doing something about it." Nevertheless, Netherlands Enterprise Agency warned against the risk of "window dressing"; in

other words, a company can run an attractive campaign against child labour while still selling products made by children. This can be very confusing to consumers.

Although corporate efforts and CSR initiatives can be effective, some Round Table participants raised the issue of urgency. Corporations tend to set their priorities based on their own agenda; therefore, they may not see child labour issues as urgent enough for their immediate attention. In the meantime, childhoods are being lost. At the very least, child labour evokes a strong public reaction, which means that it is often seen as more urgent than other humanitarian issues.

## 6. Child labour and politics

---

*From these experiences, how can we inspire governments? And how can governments implement their policies and address gaps in education, child labour, CSR etc.?*

The conversation about child labour and politics turned toward education and the government's role in it. The Round Table mostly agreed that the local government should take responsibility for the education of its own people, but sometimes it does not. The conversation turned toward 1.) the Dutch government's role in education overseas and 2.) how to encourage local governments to take responsibility.

### 6.1 Dutch government's role in education overseas

AOb raised the issue that the Dutch government has removed education from their priority lists, claiming that it is not their place to invest in social sectors abroad. In their opinion, organisations such as those at the Round Table need to address the Dutch government on this issue. "The government thinks that others will take care of education, but we are all part of this process." Other participants wondered whether it was more strategic to focus on the role of Dutch corporations in child labour when addressing the Dutch government, as this could align better with its interests and inspire more action.

Hivos/SCL pointed out that for the Dutch government, the connection to education overseas has not been strongly established. "We can still plead hard for more support for education, but if you look at the timeline and what is possible within three years, it's less likely that education will get attention from the Dutch government. It's easier for them to say that local governments should take care of their own education, whereas we are responsible for our companies."

### 6.2 Encouraging local governments to take responsibility for education

UNICEF brought up the fact that the organisation often works in rural locations where the government is very absent. This can lead to the establishment of private schools that offer low-quality education using a for-profit model that does more harm than good. However, this raised the question of whether some education is better than no education. "Of course we want the governments to take full responsibility, but sometimes they are not immediately prepared to do so," said Hivos/SCL. "It's not so black and white."

Education International pointed out that what often ends up happening in child labour free zones is that the schools become overcrowded. The positive result is that locals start lobbying their own governments to build more schools. While some may question the efficiency of the method, "in the end it works," they said. It allows international companies and NGOs to indirectly influence the local government in a productive way. UTZ concluded the discussion by stressing that everyone – local communities, corporations, and governments – must recognise their own responsibility.

## 7. Venkat Reddy: Reflections on the Round Table discussion

---

Following the lively discussion, Venkat Reddy closed with some reflections and suggestions for moving forward. Underlining the commonalities that the facilitator mentioned at the beginning of the round table, he commended the organisations present for their efforts and recognition of the “veritable demand for education around the world.” He agreed that all players are important and that a strategy of inclusion is needed to motivate all stakeholders to take action against child labour. For him, the discussion underscored the need to build institutions from the local to global level and for those institutions to come together and discuss issues. **“We need to match skills and continue to build trust. Dialogue is so important.”**

In terms of government, he raised the issue of expenditure, which had not yet been discussed. In his experience, the fund flow mechanism remains a major challenge in developing countries. “We allot the money, but we don’t know how to flow the funds,” he said. “Our governments need your expertise. They need to know how to use the money.” In short, investment in schools, through both funds and training, is non-negotiable when it comes to releasing a child from labour.

### 7.1 Recommendations: What can we do?

Venkat Reddy closed with several things that Round Table organisations can do to fight child labour in developing countries:

- A. Come together** on basic principles. Networks do not have to agree on everything, but they should find consensus on one or two key points. Individual efforts are weak; we need to build networks.
- B. Teach us how to flow the funds.** Funds come in for education, for air-conditioning, for computers, but in all of this the child is missing. How much money is it? Where is it going? Most importantly, how is it getting there?
- C. Establish a system for feedback and sharing experiences.** Talk to your communities, find out what is working and what isn’t. Sharing experiences of community mobilisation is very important. The communities also benefit from giving feedback; it helps them clarify issues of accountability. Local people can participate directly in data collection and analysis through small studies and surveys.
- D. Focus on scalable models.** Governments are concerned with numbers. A government may ask for a “pilot project” that saves 100,000 children, but for an NGO that’s a ten-year project! Make models that are workable and can be scaled up.
- E. Engage with policy makers.** They show up at our inaugurations and we never see them again. But it is crucial to engage with them at the national, state, and sub-state level so that they can internalise issues of child labour and act accordingly. Influence, impact!

### 7.2 Q&A with Venkhat Reddy

Q: What are the trends? How have mindsets changed over the past two decades?

VR: “There are layers and layers of challenges. There was a time when we saw a lot of students in school and no teachers, which meant that the next level was engaging with the people who make decisions. The biggest challenge has been the state, going beyond the communities and trade unions. Understanding how the system functions can be very tough. We’ve also had to learn how to take a neutral stance, which isn’t so easy. We needed a lot of training to be neutral in public life.

Q: Have you seen any effect of the new child labour law?

VR: No not yet, it needs internalisation and enforcement. Enforcement is still a big issue.

Q: What have you learnt from how other countries have used the MV model?

VR: We realized that we were not so comfortable with scaling up, but once we visited other countries – stateless societies – even in those conditions, we saw our work in a different light. We learned a lot actually.

Q: I met a woman in Pakistan who said she didn't believe in changing mindsets, she believed in changing behaviour. Do you agree with that?

VR: Role models are key to influencing people. But identifying role models is a challenge. Who are the role models for the poorest of the poor? We work very hard with first generation educated young people. They are the role models. Behaviour changing in the entire communities is very important.

## 8. Conclusion: Where do we go from here?

---

The half-day Round Table on Child Labour ended on an inspiring note, with the participants expressing enthusiasm to continue the dialogue on a regular basis. “Wouldn't it be great if we could meet like this every month?” one participant said. While the day's programme offered an overview of a wide range of issues surrounding child labour, it was recommended that future gatherings focus on specific themes. Ideas included: communicating with companies, CSR initiatives, child labour in specific industries, improving quality of education, and engaging policy makers. One participant said that it would be helpful to go more into detail about what each organisation is doing. Another suggested that future Round Tables could present more expert analysis of certain topics.

The question was also raised as to whether anyone had any information about the upcoming **IV Global Conference on Child Labour – 2017** in Argentina. EI offered the information that it will be held in November 2017 and there is debate whether the theme will be expanded from child labour only to: “Child labour, forced labour, modern slavery and human trafficking with a view of accelerating the eradication of these fundamental rights violations, among other actions, through enhanced partnerships”. The Round Table agreed that it would be helpful to find out the details and share them with the group. It was suggested that Round Table participants could jointly prepare for this event.

In conclusion, the Round Table on Child Labour successfully brought together 17 organisations at the Humanity House in The Hague to get to know each other and find common ground. By the end of the day, it was clear that this gathering has the potential to become the first of many – a small step towards combining efforts to better fight child labour.



## Appendix I

Attendance List: Round Table on Child Labour  
Monday, 12 December, 13:30-17:00, Humanity House, The Hague

### **Stop Child Labour Coalition:**

#### Hivos

1. Sofie Ovaa: sovaa@hivos.org
2. Leonie Blokhuis: lblokhuis@hivos.org
3. Jolijn Engelbertink: jengelbertink@hivos.org
4. Akky de Kort: akort@hivos.org
5. Thijs van Brussel: tvanbrussel@hivos.org

#### LIW

6. Gerard Oonk: g.oonk@indianet.nl
7. Dieuwertje Heyl: d.heyl@indianet.nl

#### Stichting Kinderpostzegels Nederland

8. Odilla van Manen: o.van.manen@kinderpostzegels.nl

#### Mondiaal FNV

9. Hans Hupkes: hans.hupkes@fnv.nl

#### AOb

10. Trudy Kerperien: tkerperien@aob.nl

#### ICCO/KiA

11. Henja Visser: henja.visser@icco-cooperation.org
12. Gert Kuiper: gert.kuiper@icco-cooperation.org
13. Gonda de Haan: gonda.de.haan@icco-cooperation.org

### **Other invited guests:**

#### Global Campaign for Education

14. Anneloes van Kuijk: Anneloes.van.Kuijk@educans.nl

#### UNICEF

15. Mark Wijnen: mwijne@unicef.nl
16. Florine Bos: fbos@unicef.nl

17. Jeroen van der Heijden: [jvanderheijden@unicef.nl](mailto:jvanderheijden@unicef.nl)

HR@W

18. Liesbeth Unger: [l.unger@humanrightsatwork.nl](mailto:l.unger@humanrightsatwork.nl)

Terre des Hommes

19. Tirza Voss: [t.voss@tdh.nl](mailto:t.voss@tdh.nl)

Save the Children Fund

19. Katarina Muzsikova: [Katarina.Muzsikova@savethechildren.nl](mailto:Katarina.Muzsikova@savethechildren.nl)

UTZ

20. Conny Peters: [conny.peters@utz.org](mailto:conny.peters@utz.org)

21. Emma Harbour: [emma.harbour@utz.org](mailto:emma.harbour@utz.org)

Solidaridad

22. Boukje Theeuwes: [boukje.theeuwes@solidaridadnetwork.org](mailto:boukje.theeuwes@solidaridadnetwork.org)

SOMO

23. Esther de Haan: [e.de.haan@somo.nl](mailto:e.de.haan@somo.nl)

MVF-India

24. Venkat Reddy: [venkatmvf@gmail.com](mailto:venkatmvf@gmail.com)

Education International (EI)

25. Samuel Grumiau: [samuel.grumiau@ei-ie.org](mailto:samuel.grumiau@ei-ie.org)

Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland

26. Corina Kerkmans: [corina.kerkmans@rvo.nl](mailto:corina.kerkmans@rvo.nl)

Facilitator (independent)

27. Janice Reul: [janice.reul@gmail.com](mailto:janice.reul@gmail.com)

Rapporteur (independent)

28. Kristen Gehrman: [kristengehrman@gmail.com](mailto:kristengehrman@gmail.com)

## Appendix II

### Programme: Round Table on Child Labour

Monday, 12 December, 13:30-17:00, Humanity House, The Hague

13.00-13.30	Arrival of participants for round table meeting and viewing the # ONCE photo exhibition of Jimmy Nelson.	
13.30-13.45	Welcome, introduction of participants and explanation of programme.	Facilitator, Janice Reul
13.45-14.00	Welcome and introduction of Stop Child Labour Programme (convener of the meeting). Where do we come from as SCL and how have we reached where we are now. The common ground/vision on child labour: ILO Conventions, UNCRC, SDGs.	SCL Programme Manager, Sofie Ovaa
14.00-14.15	Summary of inputs from the different organisations: what are common points and what are discussion points.	Facilitator
14.15-15.15	Discussion on 3 points according to the papers: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Child labour and local communities</li> <li>2. Child labour and companies/CSR initiatives</li> <li>3. Child labour and politics</li> </ol>	Facilitator
15.15-15.30	Tea/coffee break	
15.30-16.00	Summary of discussions and vision on scaling up different child labour interventions; the cohesion between the supply chain and an area based approach; possibilities for collaboration on child labour issues. Advice on the way forward and what we can do here from The Netherlands (at a political and business level for example)?	MVF India, Venkat Reddy
16.00-16.45	Discussion on the points raised by Venkat: do we agree and what do we see different? How do we take it forward?	Facilitator
16.45-17.00	Wrap-up, closing of the programme and invitation for the drinks.	SCL
17.00-18.00	Drinks and bites	