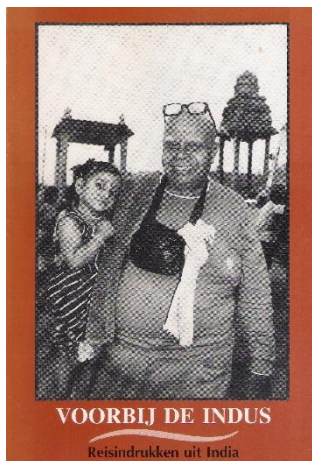


The years 1990-1995

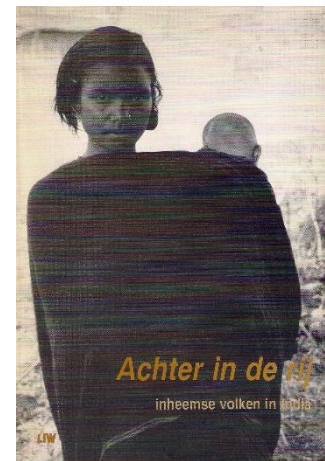
In the 1990s, a large part of the Dutch population came into contact with the activities of the India Committee of the Netherlands. ICN disseminated information about India through articles and announcements in newspapers and magazines, at events, on national or regional radio, and through libraries and bookstores. ICN gave lectures and was present with an (information) stand at various festivals such as the annual well-attended *Festival Mundial* in Tilburg. The library in the office was well visited by students and India travelers and materials were lent out. Magazine *India Nu* had over 800 subscribers at that time. In January 1995 there was a one-time trial edition of *Masala*, a magazine about South Asia, created through a collaboration with other country working groups. This did not receive a follow-up.



Dozens of volunteers were committed through the local India working groups, and the secretariat now had five paid employees.



Many publications were released at that time. Some well-selling own publications in those years were *Voorbij de Indus - Reisindruckken uit India* (1991), with travel impressions and black-and-white photos that gave a penetrating picture of life in India and the way in which travelers from the West experienced it, and *Achter in de rij: Inheemse volken in India* (1993), an accessible written book that provided a better insight into the situation of Adivasi (the indigenous peoples of India) and their fight against mining, dams and forest harvesting that destroyed their way of life.



Campaign Work Against Poverty

Through the *Work Against Poverty* campaign, ICN has advocated since 1990 to make agricultural workers the main target group of Dutch and European aid to India. At least a quarter of the aid should be spent on work guarantee programs for agricultural workers. A large number of civil society organisations, including Dutch trade union FNV, Novib, Hivos and Milieudefensie (Friends of the Earth Netherlands), supported these campaign recommendations. As a result of these campaign, Minister Pronk of Development Cooperation was prepared to support new work guarantee programs for agricultural workers in India, such as those that have existed for some time in the state of Maharashtra. In two states, an



experimental program was examined together with India. As a result, agricultural workers became an important target group of Dutch aid to India. Pronk also wanted to involve other countries in a work guarantee as a way of combating poverty on a large scale, but the European Commission was not in favour of this, despite questions from Dutch MEPs. Interestingly, a few years later a work guarantee law was passed in India that guaranteed agricultural workers hundred days of work a year at the minimum wage or a small benefit.

Child labour in the carpet industry

From 1994, ICN campaigned in support of the South Asian Coalition Against Child Slavery (SACCS). ICN argued in favour of only importing hand-knotted carpets that had a "not made by children" label. More than 400,000 children in South Asia tied carpets in poorly ventilated workshops for a few rupees a day, recruited from the poorest areas, and working far from home. In addition, ICN demanded Dutch and European support for education and other rehabilitation programs for (still) working children. ICN addressed consumers, politicians and the carpet trade with this campaign.

As part of the campaign, an information meeting was held in May 1994 with the chairman of SACCS, later Nobel Prize winner Kailash Satyarthi as the lead guest.

Further activities

In 1991 ICN, together with the VU University in Amsterdam, published the booklet *Uitgekleed, Geplukt en Ingepakt - Werken in de confectie, de thee en de havens in India* ("Undressed, Plucked and Packed - Working in garments, tea and ports in India"), with summaries of a number of studies, including the involvement of C&A in the garment production in India and the outsourcing of labour in the Indian tea sector by Unilever.

ICN's participation in the Clean Clothes Campaign, which started in 1989 in the Netherlands and is now a successful worldwide network, dates from 1990. Based on the belief that things must and can be done differently, Clean Clothes Campaign has committed itself from that time to a transparent and fair textile industry, in which garment workers can work under good conditions and receive a fair wage. In the 1990s, fair trade and human rights issues clearly became more important within ICN. The involvement in development aid became relatively less important, and determining which issues would be tackled often led to discussions. Ultimately ICN mainly focused on the political and socio-economic issues that Indian organisations themselves addressed.

In November 1995 ICN organised a number of information and discussion meetings on the garment industry, child labour in that sector, the poor working conditions that also left much to be desired for adults, the underpayment of women and the anything but environmentally friendly production of garments. Among the guests were some politicians and - again - Kailash Satyarthi.



Ipe van der Deen
(former chairman of the India Committee of the Netherlands, 1994-1998)
looks back...

It must have been somewhere in the mid-1990s when during a General Assembly of the India Committee of the Netherlands (ICN) the discussion about chain responsibility for garment traders was introduced. Contractors were already aware of that concept at the time. Chain responsibility would be an opportunity to hold textile retailers here responsible about their misconduct when sourcing elsewhere on the planet. Among the members at the time were some hard-core supporters of the Communist Party who didn't believe that that would ever happen. They were partly right with their doubts, now a quarter of a century later something similar is only beginning to emerge.

At that time, however, discussions with Dutch garment companies began. An ICN project officer was working on that subject at the time and had organised a meeting in Brussels in cooperation with others. There, H&M appeared to be one of the most progressive companies. In the Netherlands, C&A did not want to discuss about this through their representative at a meeting in Amsterdam. What happened in the supply chain could not be checked, and moreover they would have to name their producers and, because of price protection against competitors, this could of course not be the case. In the then board of ICN there was also sometimes a fierce discussion. One of the board members thought talking with the garment industry, especially if you wore a jacket, was collaborating with the enemy. That was something that could not, and should not, be done.

It took an awful lot of pushing and pulling to get some movement in the textile front. The ICN staff members have done their utmost for this. That meant collaborating with other organisations working on these issues. And still do. In fact, it is deeply sad that the garment industry, like most other sectors, still refuses to regulate and guarantee a living income. The excuse was and still is that the half or whole Euro that we pay more here evaporates in the chain and still does not end up with the people who make our clothes. Each link in the chain demands a percentage on top of her/his purchase price. Perhaps we should do something about this insane starting point after all?

The farmers here would also be happy with changing that starting point. For example, they now receive a 10 cents per kilo of onions, while in the store you may pay a Euro per kilo. But then again, that is something else.

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