

**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.