

The years 2010-2020

In this retrospective, we focus on the last decade of ICN/Arisa's 40-year struggle against child labour, human rights violations, discrimination and other injustices in India and South Asia. From this last period a selection of the numerous studies and reports that were often cited in the media, both nationally and internationally, and which repeatedly led to parliamentary questions that forced the Dutch government to take a position.

It was also a decade of major changes for the organisation. The number of staff members grew, Gerard Oonk retired as director after almost 40 years and Sandra Claassen took over, and the foundation moved to new premises on the Korte Elisabethstraat in the center of Utrecht. The latter in combination with the change of name into Arisa – '*Advocating Rights in South Asia*' –, and with that the expansion of the focus from India to South Asia.....



(Stop) Child Labour

Since 2004 ICN/Arisa has been part of the Stop Child Labour (SCL) coalition, which also consists of AOb, FNV, Hivos, ICCO/Kerk in Actie and Stichting Kinderpostzegels. SCL is committed to the elimination of all forms of child labour and to high quality, regular daytime education for children up to at least 15 years of age. The coalition advocates an area-based approach, in which child labour free zones (CLFZs) are developed, expanded and strengthened. Especially in the last 10 years, SCL has played a crucial role in the fight against child labour and the promotion of education. Working closely with local communities and organisations, SCL has so far been involved in creating more than 100 child labour free zones. A brief look back at the activities of SCL and thus ICN:



At the end of 2011, SCL and ICN organised a workshop in Uganda on the use of CLFZs to combat child labour.

The experience of MV Foundation was central to this. This organisation celebrated its 20th anniversary in February 2012 with a large meeting in Hyderabad, India.

In response to a letter from SCL to the Dutch Parliament, the Minister of Development Cooperation promised at the end of 2012 to give priority to the issue of child labour and to support CLFZs.

In 2013, again 120 delegates from 24 countries gathered in Uganda for the SCL-organised conference '*From Work to School - Working on Child Labour Free Areas*', resulting in the [Kampala Declaration](#). Child labour free zones were also the theme later that year during a world conference in Brazil where SCL was also represented.



In July 2014, political party ChristianUnion submitted two motions in response to publications by ICN, on chain transparency in the garment industry and on social criteria for sustainable procurement, recommending the *Toolkit 'Child Labour Free Procurement by Government Agencies'* as a good tool.

In May, SCL's new program '*Out of work and into school – Working together on child labour free zones*' was launched. Kick-off was in Mali, with delegates from India, Africa and Europe. MV Foundation was the model for the approach in a dozen African countries.



In June 2015, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation received the handbook [*Stepping Stones for Creating Child Labour Free Zones*](#) from SCL and promised to promote it. The handbook was also co-presented to the director of the ILO child labour program by ICN. In May 2016, SCL hosted a conference under the same name in Delhi, with the aim of sharing successful experiences and exploring new partnerships.



In 2016, ILO and IOE published a new guide to inform companies about how to prevent child labour. SCL and ICN have contributed their advice.

In 2017, the 'Wet Zorgplicht Kinderarbeid' (Dutch Child Labour Due Diligence Act) was passed by the Parliament and in 2019 by the Senate. This law obliges companies to investigate whether child labour occurs in their production chain, and to draw up an action plan if this is indeed the case. SCL has made the necessary recommendations to make the law more powerful, with ICN as its political advocate.

Natural Stone

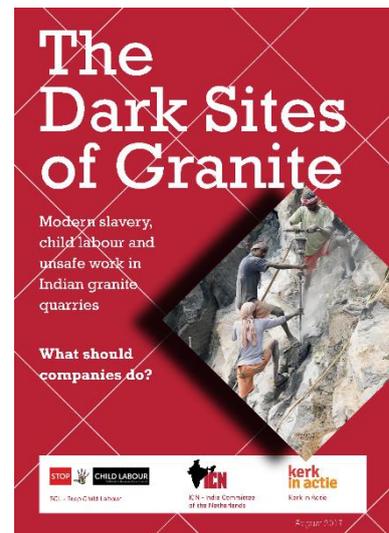
After 2010, ICN remained closely involved in the *Werkgroep Duurzame Natuursteen* (WGDN, Sustainable Natural Stone Working Group), which grew into an international organisation joined by dozens of Dutch, Belgian, English and Scandinavian natural stone companies, with a focus on responsibly produced natural stone from quarries and factories in India and China. In 2012, forces were joined with a British working group to continue at the European level as the *TFT Responsible Stone Program*. In 2013, a child labour free zone was launched in Budhpura, Rajasthan, one of the most important natural stone areas in India, in cooperation with NGO Manjari and ICN partner MV Foundation, with the aim of getting all (working) children (back) to school. Stop Child Labour (SCL) and the companies Beltrami and London Stone also contributed to the project. The website <https://www.nochildleftbehind.be> was set up for news about this project. Through TFT it was possible to make improvements at the suppliers of natural stone to European companies, although the influence on the conditions in quarries was less.

In 2015, ICN and SCL released the report [*Rock Bottom – Modern Slavery and Child Labour in South Indian Granite Quarries*](#) on working conditions in granite mining in South India. The report showed that modern slavery and child labour were still widespread in Indian quarries. Most Dutch importers of Indian granite did not indicate from which quarries their granite came or said they did not know. Parliamentary questions were asked in response to the report, after which the government promised to tighten up its policy for socially responsible procurement.



Since the end of 2017, ICN has been working with natural stone company Arte to improve working conditions in granite quarries in Ballikurava, Andhra Pradesh, including through child labour free zones.

In 2017 ICN and SCL published a new report on the abuses in South Indian granite quarries: [The Dark Sites of Granite - Modern slavery, child labour and unsafe work in Indian granite quarries. What should companies do?](#) The study showed that modern slavery, low wages and dangerous and unhealthy working conditions were prevalent in the quarries in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Karnataka, as well as child labour in some of those quarries. This report again led to a lot of publicity, also in the Indian, German and English press. Questions were asked in the European and Dutch Parliament. The Dutch government promised to speed up a natural stone covenant. Negotiations to this end between ICN, SCL, sector associations, government and trade unions started in that year and resulted in the signing of the natural stone covenant TruStone in May 2019.



Arisa's report [Between a Rock and a Hard Place - Social and labour conditions in sandstone production in Rajasthan, India](#), was published in June 2020. This report shows that progress has been made compared to the 2005 ICN report on the subject: [Budhpura 'Ground Zero' - Sandstone quarrying in India](#). Child labour has been greatly reduced in the quarries but it still occurs. As for paying minimum wages, the situation is less positive, especially for women. The report also shows that silicosis, an incurable dust lung disease, is a major problem that is still receiving too little attention.

Garments and Textile

In May 2011, ICN and SOMO released the report [Captured by Cotton – Exploited Dalit girls produce garments in India for European and US markets](#). This report revealed that 120,000 young girls in Tamil Nadu were making garments for European and American fashion chains under appalling conditions. There was abuse and false promises. Most of them were Dalit girls, younger than 18, who were put to work through the 'Sumangali Scheme' (girls are recruited with promises of good wages and a large sum of money as dowry). All companies involved were contacted. Many companies acknowledged the problem, and some pledged to work together to end child labour and the poor conditions, in collaboration with local organisations and the government. The report generated a lot of attention in the media and the Dutch Parliament..



This report was followed in April 2012 by ICN/SOMO's [Maid in India – Young Dalit Women Continue to Suffer Exploitative Conditions in India's Garment Industry](#). Garment companies had still not succeeded in structurally improving the working conditions at their suppliers in Tamil Nadu, despite good promises and a number of well-intentioned initiatives. Thousands of women and girls were still working under conditions that could only be described as bonded labour. However, according to the report, improvements had been made by some large Indian companies, such as slightly higher wages and more freedom of movement. A few Dutch companies announced that they would no longer purchase garment from suppliers using the Sumangali Scheme. As result of the report, a motion was passed in the Dutch Parliament in which the government was asked to make agreements with the garment industry on 'full chain transparency' and the elimination of child labour. Questions were also asked in the European Parliament, and the US government spoke of forced labour in the case of Sumangali Scheme.

In March 2013, ICN and SOMO again advocated for transparency in the garment industry, through the publication of [Time for Transparency: The case of the Tamil Nadu textile and garment industry](#). In this note SOMO and ICN explained why the garment industry needed to become more transparent and published relationships between suppliers and buyers, which usually remained hidden from consumers and stakeholders.

In June, at the insistence of the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation, the Dutch garment industry published an 'Action Plan – Making the Dutch Textile and Garments Sector more sustainable' to combat abuses in the garment industry. ICN and other social organisations contributed to the content of this plan.



In October 2014 another SOMO/ICN report was released: [Flawed Fabrics - The abuse of girls and women workers in the South Indian textile industry](#), which showed that exploitation and forced labour were still the daily reality in the textile industry in South India. Forced long hours for low wages for girls and women. Staying in dormitories, they were almost never allowed to leave the company premises. The factories investigated supplied western brands such as C&A, Primark and Replay. Dutch companies were hardly active in tackling these abuses. This report did increase motivation among the companies. After parliamentary questions, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development

Cooperation called modern slavery and child labour in the textile industry a 'serious human rights violation' and wanted to support good examples of companies and civil society organisations.

The January 2016 ICN article [Unfree And Unfair](#) led five major garment brands to pledge to improve the working and living conditions of young migrant workers. The article described the poor conditions, low wages and very limited freedom of movement of young – often female – migrants in Bangalore. All the garment companies involved were asked to comment. This article also received a lot of attention in the international media.

In July 2016 ICN and SCL, together with sector associations and the government, signed the Dutch Agreement on Sustainable Garments and Textile (AGT). ICN was involved in the implementation of the covenant, in order to ensure, together with her Indian partners, that the measures taken by companies actually led to improvements for the workers.

In December 2016, the ICN report [Fabric of Slavery - Large-scale forced \(child\) labour in South India's spinning mills](#) was published. This research showed that modern slavery occurs in 90% of South Indian spinning mills. While the Sumangali system was declining, long working days, sexual harassment and below-the-minimum wages were commonplace. Lots of international media attention and questions in the Dutch and European Parliament. ICN set out to finding solutions with the Indian organisations SAVE and READ.

In February 2017, Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and ICN presented a petition to the Minister of Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. With their signature, more than 10,000 Dutch people called on the minister to work for a living wage for garment workers. The petition followed the CCC/ICN report [Doing Dutch](#) on Dutch companies that had garments made in India for low wages. This report also led to parliamentary questions. In May, CCC, ICN and some of the companies discussed with the minister about working towards a living wage.



In January 2018, ICN, together with CCC and the Indian Garment Labour Union (GLU), published the report [Labour without Liberty - Female Migrant Workers in Bangalore's Garment Industry](#) on young female migrant workers in Bangalore's garment factories who were victims of modern forms of slavery. The report was an appeal to various garment brands to tackle abuses at their suppliers.

In early 2018, a project started together with social entrepreneur Sympany to map the chain of residual textiles in the Panipat region, Haryana. Working conditions there are poor, especially for migrant women and children. Findings appeared in June 2020 in the report [Textile Recycling Unravelling - Exploring post- and pre-consumer textile recycling value chains in Panipat, India](#).

With SOMO and HomeWorkers Worldwide, ICN released the report [Case closed, problems persist - Grievance mechanisms of ETI and SAI fail to benefit young women and girls in the South Indian textile industry](#) in June 2018. This report examined the functioning of two organisations – ETI and SAI – that failed to deliver on their promise to effectively address concrete complaints of very poor working conditions of girls and young women in the textile and garment industry in South India. The report made the international press, and resulted in, among other things, the establishment of a dialogue between ETI and local organisations.

Finally, in May of this year, the report [Spinning around workers' rights – International garment companies linked to forced labour in Tamil Nadu textile mills](#) was published, in collaboration with SOMO. A large-scale survey of 29 spinning mills in Tamil Nadu found that forced labour is a major risk in Indian spinning mills producing yarns and fabrics for the international garment and textile industry. The already very vulnerable workers were additionally hit hard by the corona crisis in India.

So the fight for better working conditions in the garment industry is not over yet.

Dalits

In June 2010, the brochure *Onaanraakbaar?*, about the discrimination against Dalits and the violation of their human rights, was published on behalf of the Dalit Network Netherlands. This brochure gave suggestions for action, such as signatures on an attached action card for an active Dutch and EU policy. That year, ICN held fruitful consultations with politicians and officials on the position of Dalits. Thus, the European Commission was asked what they were going to do to raise the issue with the Indian government. In addition, ICN wrote to more than a hundred companies that were active in India to take action. ICN also drew attention to the approximately 1 million Dalit manual scavengers and their struggle for the abolition of their forced work and rehabilitation for it.

In 2011, the Dutch Parliament adopted a motion by MP Voordewind advocating that the Netherlands should continue to work towards improvement of the situation of Dalits. The Minister of Foreign Affairs should raise the issue with the UN and the EU, and should urge companies to combat caste discrimination. The Minister initially reacted positively, even considered continuing to fund the International Dalit Solidarity Network (IDSN), but later withdrew his decision. In 2012, ICN participated as a speaker in a hearing in the Parliament on human rights. MPs were also asked to urge the minister to implement the Dalit motion.

In 2012, questions were asked in the European Parliament about tackling caste discrimination, after IDSN and LIW spoke with a number of MEPs.

In 2013, the motion was still not implemented after a cabinet change. However, a Dalits resolution advocated by IDSN and ICN was adopted by the European Parliament: a strong statement of support for the hundreds of millions of people who were exposed to caste discrimination. The Indian taboo on meddling with Dalits seemed to be faltering. In 2014, the minister finally raised the issue with the Indian government and the UN, following a call from MPs to take action against unpunished violence against Dalit women that year.

Together with FNV Mondiaal, ICN released the brochure *Dalit-vrouwen Recheloos* ('Dalit Women Have No Rights', in Dutch) in May 2014. The brochure is about what it means to be a Dalit woman: frequently victim of sexual and other violence, humiliation, discrimination, exploitation and even murder.

ICN/Arisa still tries to draw attention to the problem of caste discrimination, in recent years with an emphasis on caste discrimination in the workplace.



Seeds

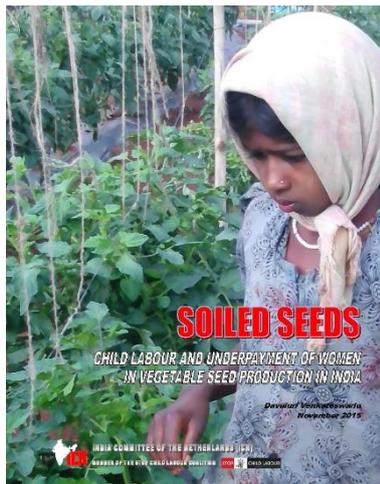
After the publication, together with SCL, of two reports (*Growing up in the Danger Fields* and *Signs of Hope*) on the very extensive child labour and poor working conditions in the cottonseed and vegetable seed cultivation in India in June 2010, ICN held talks with seed companies involved in child labour. These companies had already started tackling the problems in their supply chains.

In December 2012, ICN, together with the Fair Labor Association (FLA), published the report *Wages of Inequality – Wage Discrimination and Underpayment in Hybrid Seed Production in India*, a field study on the wages of workers in cotton and vegetable seed cultivation in four Indian states, seeds destined for both Indian and multinational companies, including Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer (and its Dutch subsidiary Nunhems). The report found that women often earn significantly less than the official minimum wage; paid less than men for the same work. It also turned out that many workers were Dalit women, and that most of the companies employed children. And that was depressing the wages of the adult workers. In response to the report, ICN spoke with various companies. They acknowledged the underpayment, and promised to make plans for decent wages.

After Parliamentary questions following ICN's report *A Tale of Two Companies: The difference between action and inaction in combating child labour* of June 2013, the Dutch government announced that she wanted to eliminate child labour and low wages in seed production 'preferably as soon as possible'. The report examined the supply of seeds to the companies Bejo Zaden and Nunhems.

The Price of Less Child Labour and Higher Wages was published in June 2014 and showed that better prices paid by a multinational to seed farmers will lead to less child labour and higher wages.

Nearly half a million Indian children – 200,000 under the age of 14 – work in cottonseed cultivation. That was one of the shocking results of the July 2015 ICN report *Cotton's Forgotten Children*. Compared to the 2010 study, the number had increased by 100,000, although the number of young children had been reduced. The report immediately led to action. In Rajasthan, the state government was asked for a response by the Court of Appeal, in the Netherlands Parliamentary questions again were asked, and international and Dutch media covered it.



Soiled Seeds – Child Labour and Underpayment of Women in Vegetable Seed Production in India by ICN and SCL, published in November 2015, really forced major seed companies and the Dutch government to take action against child labour and low wages. The report showed that more than 150,000 children - many of them Dalit or Adivasi - were working in vegetable seed production in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

In November 2018 ICN and SCL presented a new progress report on working conditions in the Indian seed sector: *Remedies for Indian seed workers in sight? Monitoring report on tackling child labour and non-payment of minimum wages in hybrid cotton and vegetable seeds production in India*. This report showed that, despite progress in tackling child labour, seed companies have not sufficiently addressed the problem since the previous two reports from 2015. In addition, the companies had taken insufficient measures to guarantee minimum wages, particularly

women's wages were lagging behind. Once again, Parliamentary questions were asked in response to an ICN report.

Arisa's report *Sowing Hope - Child labour and non-payment of minimum wages in hybrid cottonseed and vegetable seed production in India* was published in June 2020, with a message of hope. The report showed that significant steps have been taken in India's cotton and vegetable seed production since 2015 to combat child labour. In particular, child labour declined in the areas where significant interventions took place. Unfortunately, with regard to the payment of minimum wages, the situation was a lot less positive.

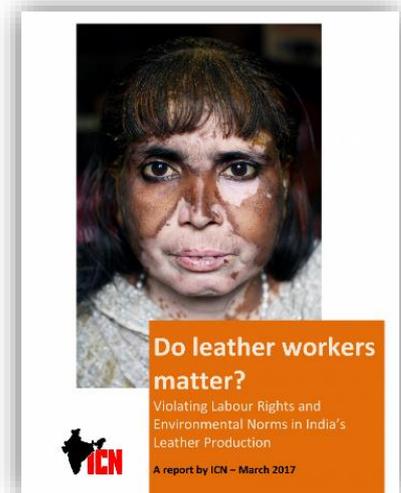
Finally, *Seeds of Oppression - Wage sharecropping in Bt cottonseed production in Gujarat, India* was released in July this year, in cooperation with CLRA. The report highlights a slavery-like reality for many workers in Gujarat – mostly migrants from other areas – working in the cottonseed sector.

Leather and shoes

The SCL campaign *We want childfriendly shoes!* was launched in June 2012, after child labour was identified at a number of suppliers to shoe companies. Consumers were asked to write to those companies. A number of companies entered into dialogue with SCL and ICN. As a result of this action, questions were raised in the European Parliament. In 2013, the SCL report *Working on the Right Shoes* showed that 18 of the 28 companies contacted had already improved their policies and transparency, through research in their supply chain or participation in CSR initiatives. Child labour among subcontractors and homeworkers remained a problem.

In March 2017, ICN published the report *Do leather workers matter? Violating Labour Rights and Environmental Norms in India's Leather Production* which detailed the position of leather workers in India. About 2.5 million workers worked under often unacceptable working conditions. Their human rights were violated and their health was seriously affected by the toxic chemicals in tanneries.

Since November 2020, Arisa has been participating within a Eurasian consortium in the *Together for Decent Leather* program, a three-year program that focuses on improving the working conditions of leather workers in India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. This year, Arisa published the country overview for India, with information on the production of leather (products) in India and the trade therein: *Leather products from India – Trends in production and trade*.



Tea

According to a 2011 ICN/SOMO report, *Certified Unilever Tea – Small Cup, Big Difference?*, workers picking tea for Unilever in India and Kenya faced problematic working conditions and labour rights violations (including poor housing and harassment), even when this tea carried the Rainforest Alliance sustainability certificate. Unilever responded and entered into talks with ICN and SOMO about improving the situation.

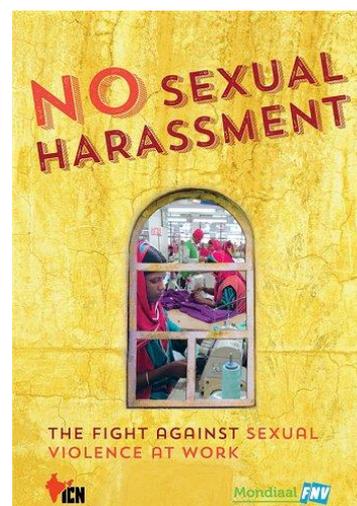
Certified Unilever Tea – A Cup Half Empty from August 2016 showed that working conditions had improved, but remained still 'substandard'.

Human rights

In 2011, the Indian government published the *Information and Technology Rules, 2011* which laid down rules for the content of websites. Indian media and various civil society organisations expressed their great concern, because this would endanger freedom of expression and (therefore) human rights in India. The rules also had consequences for Dutch and European organisations and companies. ICN sent a letter about this to the government and the Parliament.

In response to a visit by Prime Minister Rutte to India in 2015, ICN wrote an open letter to him, together with, among others, FNV and Amnesty, calling for attention to the vulnerable position of civil society organisations in India. Increasingly, cooperation with or financial support to those organisations was hindered, and even bank accounts were blocked. After reports from ICN, Parliamentary questions were asked about the Indian *Foreign Contribution Regulation and Act* that affected thousands of organisations committed to human rights. In the years that followed, ICN continued to draw attention to the increasing pressure on human rights in India.

With FNV, ICN published the brochure [No Sexual Harassment – The fight against sexual violence at work](#), as a follow-up to a meeting organised by ICN and FNV with women from India and other countries.



For an overview of the publications of ICN and Arisa in the period 2010 to the present, see [here](#).

Retrospective Wilma Roos, senior policy advisor Mondiaal FNV and former member of Advisory Board ICN

Impressive black and white photos

It has been almost 40 years ago, in 1982, that I cycled through the beautiful center of Utrecht to see a photo exhibition about India. A fellow student in Social Geography had persuaded me: as one of the first volunteers of the India Committee of the Netherlands, he established this exhibition. And because I was curious about his activities at the ICN, I gladly went along. Impressive black and white photos showed a shocking world of poverty, inequality and caste discrimination that I was not aware of. I had already arranged a research internship to Mexico joined the Mexico Committee Netherlands (in the 70s and 80s there was for almost every third world country a separate solidarity committee), otherwise my study and work might have looked very different.

Back to India

For years we - the fellow student had become my partner in the meantime – spent our time in Latin America and Africa for our study and work. It was not until 2003 that I became involved in India again, this time through my work at Mondiaal FNV. As in 1982, I was impressed by the diversity of this country, by the harrowing inequality, but also by the fighting spirit of the trade union movement. I didn't have to think twice when Gerard Oonk asked me to join the ICN advisory board. I thought it would be a good addition to my work with the trade union movement in India.

Violence against women

From my time in the advisory board, I especially cherish warm memories of the various strategy weekends in which I was privileged to participate in. Especially of the fact that time was taken to discuss the added value of ICN in terms of reducing human and labour rights violations in India. A joint action point was the theme “violence and intimidation against women”. An immense problem in India that can never be given enough attention. In preparation for ILO convention 190, against violence and harassment in the workplace, Mondiaal FNV and ICN conducted a joint study in 2016 in which the experiences of our various partners were shared in an [illustrative publication](#). I will never forget the public discussion meeting on the Oudegracht in Utrecht where this publication was presented. Viyakula Mary, director of our joint partner SAVE, gave a presentation of the horrors in the spinning mills of Tirupur. The many photos of young girls who did not survive this were a bit too much for the audience, but made it clear that an organisation like ICN - now Arisa - still has a very important function to fulfill.