



**Results of a collaborative project
to combat child labour in the
garment supply chains**



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Between April 2017 and March 2020, a coalition of parties and companies have worked together to prevent and eliminate child labour in garment supply chains in India and Bangladesh in the project: *Remedies towards a better workplace*. The goal of this project was to work towards child labour prevention and elimination in garment supply chains including the lower tiers since major risks are deeper down the supply chain. The project focused on elements that AGT companies can influence directly such as supporting direct and indirect suppliers to improve working conditions for workers.

This first collective AGT project was coordinated by Hivos and implemented by six companies: Hunkemöller, Prénatal, WE Fashion, Cool Investments, O'Neill, and FNG group. Other organizations that participated in the project were UNICEF, Arisa, SAVE, READ, CCR CSR, Fair Labor Association, INretail, and AGT.

Companies have concluded that much more can be achieved through a collaborative approach instead of focusing primarily on compliance. Through engaging with (local) NGOs and building relationships with suppliers these companies have worked on measurable and sustainable impact for workers.

During the project tools were developed, trainings were given in factories and companies received support to improve their dialogue with suppliers. This led to new insights and more transparency in the supply chains of suppliers beyond the first tier. The tools are now publicly available for all AGT signatories and other interested parties and companies.

In summary, the project has achieved the following results:

- More than 12,000 employees work in safer working conditions and have more knowledge about their labour rights and rights of children as a result of a training programme that focused on establishing and strengthening worker-management committees with suppliers.
- At 30 factories and spinning mills, methods were introduced on how to work with child-friendly age verification.
- Worker committees improved in 13 factories, showing a rise of filed employee complaints in 2019. All 83 complaints were resolved through a collaboration between brands and management of the factories. Another result is that more than 400 employees are registered under the *Employee State Insurance Act*, a social security scheme which gives workers access to healthcare, maternity benefits, and sickness and employment-related disablement benefits.
- More than 3,500 workers and almost 2,000 children were reached with workshops and training sessions on children's rights, maternity rights, WASH, maternal health & nutrition, adolescent workers, wages & benefits, child labour prevention & remediation.

The lessons learned in this project can be applied by other industries with an international supply chain, especially the garments, shoes and leather sector.



The most important lessons learned:

1. Building trust and a relationship with and between all stakeholders requires investment but is an essential step towards creating openness and willingness to collaborate. Besides possible reluctance that needs to be overcome, this way of collaboration asks for a new way of being accountable that goes beyond the classic social auditing methods. To shape this new way of working, intensive collaboration and frequent contact is needed. Do it together and collaborate!
2. Getting insight in the reality in factories and working towards real solutions in the supply chain require a substantial amount of time investment of all stakeholders in the supply chain, but deliver results that are much more valuable than audits.
3. Involve the local partners from the start (NGOs and suppliers). They have the local knowledge and are essential in contextualizing the programme (e.g. establishing relationship, being cultural sensitive or engaging local leaders and communities).
4. Leverage in downstream supply chains can be mobilized through meaningful collaboration between brands and first tier suppliers.
5. The project shows that there is a need to prevent child labour by focussing on improving conditions for working parents as well. Concrete examples are access to social security, maternity leave, day-care services, and functioning worker-management committees.
6. The *tools on policies* have proven to be very useful and are used to update existing procedures (e.g. on age verification). These tools are very detailed as they explain what child friendly means and what companies should do.
7. Brands participating in the project experienced benefits from using *tools* and expertise from project partners to develop their own child labour policies from scratch.
8. Using dialogue with suppliers and asking questions on broader issues like education and community development, gives more insight and openness to discuss sensitive topics like child labour and forced labour.
9. It takes time to settle a project and work at a local level with a community based approach. Due to the fact that child labour was more common in lower tiers, remediation of child labour cases was done from a community based approach and not necessarily linked to the supply chains of participating brands.
10. Migration gives an extra challenge in the remediation process and community based interventions as migrants come from other areas, speak other (local) languages, use different cultural practices and are in some cases from minority groups. These specific issues can complicate interventions. Before a project starts, it would be necessary to gain insight in the migration situation within the specific region. Therefore, you need some extra care, activities and time.



Some observations, quotes from the project partners:

"One thing we really value about the training done by SAVE is the inside information you get from a worker perspective. You can tell that the training was created with worker/management relationships in mind. The results from the training and feedback we got, supports our due diligence approach!" Janine Martens – O'Neill

"With complex issues in supply chains it is valuable to collaborate with a local partner who can work with workers and employers towards improvements. Arisa knows the right local partners, the expertise of SAVE helps us to work towards the desired changes in factories and mills." Marijke Willemsen – WE Fashion

"We experienced a pleasant collaboration with Arisa, FLA, Hivos and local partners. With the FBK project we improved our insight in the potential risks in our supply chain and we implemented tangible improvements at our suppliers. Moreover, we used the knowledge gained from this project as input for writing our own child labour policy, a milestone for Prénatal!" Laurien Dwars – Prénatal

"We have experienced the cooperation with both (inter)national and local partners as very valuable and informative. Approaching situations from different perspectives works very effectively. We can use the experience and knowledge gained for other regions. Finding the right local partners is crucial." Ellen de Jong – Miss Etam

"The relationship with our suppliers transformed from a compliance focused relationship into a real collaboration in which both parties can be open about challenges and concerns and we can support each other to improve. The official project period has ended, but the work has not. We will continue!" Daphne van Esveld – Coolinvestments

"Trainings beyond direct manufacturing gave more insight and an increased understanding of root causes. It resulted in a new Child Labour policy & remediation plan and a new way of mapping the supply chain." Rebecka Sancho – Hunkemöller

Social security benefits for all our factory workers, a story from a Human Resource manager in a RMG factory, India

Our company has worked with SAVE to educate the workers about social requirements. Through the training programme, awareness on the existing labour laws increased. Now the different worker committees are functioning and a system has been put in place. Since then we have a clear inquiry process in case a complaint is raised. Throughout the training programme, we found that some workers were not registered under the Employee State Insurance and Provident Fund (which is required by law). We are now addressing these issues. Also, we have made some infrastructural improvements, to improve the production process and atmosphere at the factory premises. This training programme is very different than the certification schemes; it helps to make the system work.

Human interest story from the perspective of one of the factories, Bangladesh

Our company has worked with UNICEF and CCR CSR on the Better Business for Children programme, to increase the positive impact on the condition of the workers and their families. This programme has helped the factory to find gaps that stand in the way of the worker's welfare and updated the factory policy to mitigate these gaps. The senior management believes the programme will have a positive impact on both the workers as well as the business results: *"We believe this project will help to improve the social impact of the factory, and will also lead to a return in investment on the long run".*

This project has helped factory management to observe and understand how the psychological and physical wellbeing of the workers can lead to better results. As the majority of the workers are female, the complication of caring for their children and working at the same time puts a significant distress on the family. Through the Better Business for Children (BB4C) programme, the factory works on mitigating this through daycare and nursing rooms. Families with children left behind in their place of origin will be reunited, children will get the care of their mothers while at the same time the mothers work to generate income. The priority of a for-profit organization is to make profits, however CSR is also an important part of our business. We will cooperate dedicatedly for the betterment of the workers in their premises.





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