

Protecting children's rights in agriculture

Bayer is a founding member of the UN Global Compact and committed to advance the implementation of the ten principles of the initiative in the areas of human rights, labor standards, environment and anti-corruption. In the spirit of the Global Compact Initiative, Bayer CropScience has developed a comprehensive program to protect the rights of children living in rural areas of India, where they are still today often employed by farmers for cotton seed production.

With the purchase of Aventis CropScience in 2002, Bayer CropScience entered into seed business thereby acquiring, among others, the Indian seed company Bayer BioScience Pvt. Ltd, formerly Proagro. When Bayer CropScience had to learn that children were often employed by contract farmers for the manual pollination of cotton plants, the company started a unique initiative to protect the rights of children in its newly acquired supply chain.

In 2005, following two years of awareness campaigns and project planning development work, Bayer CropScience launched a multi level action program under the roof of the Association of Seed Industry (ASI). It was first rolled out in Andhra Pradesh, where young children allegedly comprise over 50% of the region's cottonseed workforce. The comprehensive program included targeted communication and awareness campaigns, a unique incentive and sanctions scheme for farmers, a sophisticated monitoring program originally developed in cooperation with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), a micro credit scheme in cooperation with the State Bank of India and several training modules like the 'Target 400' Productivity Enhancement Training which includes instructions on the safe use of crop protection products.

Bayer CropScience has also entered into cooperation with Naandi Foundation, a renowned Indian NGO, to set up bridge schools or so called Creative Learning Centres for drop-out and out-of-school children. In early 2008, Bayer CropScience, in cooperation with a local NGO, opened a Vocational Training Center for Agriculture near Hyderabad, India, to train underprivileged children in professional agricultural skills. In one year training courses, former child laborers will acquire professional skills which will allow them to enter into higher qualified employment, for instance with an agricultural company like Bayer CropScience, thereby breaking the cycle of continued poverty and recurring child labor.

Even though Bayer CropScience had to go through a steep learning curve to address the enormous challenge of child labor in its newly acquired seed business, the company program proved extremely successful right from the start. Child labor incidents in cotton seed production dropped substantially already in the first year of roll out. Today, only isolated cases of child labor are still detected, they are consequently addressed by trained staff.

The results have been verified by external audits of Ernst & Young. In addition to the reduction of child labor incidents in the supply chain, more than 1,000 children have been trained in the Creative Learning Centres since the beginning of Bayer CropScience' cooperation with Naandi.

In mid 2007, Bayer CropScience integrated all of its child care activities into a novel in-house organization and developed a comprehensive management system to further enhance the effectiveness of its Child Care Program. Using the high standards and requirements of its improved Child Care Program, Bayer CropScience has started to look for potential child labor challenges in other areas of its Asian seed business while rolling out the Child Care Program to its contract vegetable seed supply chain in India.

Bayer CropScience is actively sharing its knowledge and experience with interested parties, including other seed companies. In 2007, the company has actively started to look into opportunities for further improving and/or expanding its child care activities. To that end, the company has established an external Advisory Panel of internationally renowned experts in the area of labor standards, social sciences, and development support which convened for its inaugural meeting in early 2008.

