



Final Evaluation of 'Omzet met Impact' Programme

Case study report

INDUS Platform

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Impact Centre Erasmus





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Abbreviations

CII-ITC	The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) Centre of Excellence for Sustainable			
	Development			
CRB	Centre for Responsible Business (Indian organization)			
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility			
CtC	Clothes the Circle			
MVO	Maatschappelijk Verantwoord Ondernemen (Responsible Business Conduct)			
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety			
OECD/DAC	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/			
	Development Assistance Committee			
Oml	Omzet met Impact ("Business with Impact")			
RBC	Responsible Business Conduct			
RVO	Rijksdienst voor Ondernemend Nederland (Netherlands Enterprise Agency)			
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals			
SME	Small and Medium Sized Enterprises			
TERI	The Energy and Resource Institute (Indian organization)			
ToC	Theory of Change			
ToR	Terms of Reference			





1. Introduction

This report describes the main features, activities and results of the INDUS Forum in India and the Netherlands. This project is co-financed by MVO Nederland's 'Omzet met Impact' ('Business with Impact') programme and the Dutch Embassy in Delhi and is managed by MVO NL. Implementation of this project started in India in 2017 (see Section 2). The report furthermore assesses the project in terms of its effectiveness and impact (Section 3), its relevance and sustainability (Section 4), as well as its additionality and leverage (Section 5). Conclusions are presented in Section 6.

INDUS is a bilateral forum conceived by the Dutch Embassy in Delhi. Its aim is to contribute to sustainable trade and investment between India and the Netherlands by facilitating matchmaking and promoting sustainable & inclusive trade.

The mission of INDUS is Making Indo-Dutch trade and investments sustainable and inclusive. As we believe that 'no organization can respond to sustainable challenges like business' (vision), INDUS strives to becoming the go-to place for sustainable and inclusive business between India and The Netherlands (objective).

(MVO Nederland, 2018)

2. Brief description of the project

INDUS Forum (Indo Dutch Sustainability Forum) is a bilateral forum conceived by the Dutch Embassy in Delhi. Its aim is to contribute to sustainable trade and investment between India and the Netherlands by facilitating matchmaking and promoting sustainable and inclusive trade. The approach of INDUS is online and offline matchmaking between challenges and solutions, building an online and offline community by connecting and innovating for people, planet and profit.¹

Connecting is done by supporting companies to describe their sustainability challenge on the online INDUS Forum webpage.

In this way a request is developed for connections with sustainable and inclusive business opportunities. In response to these requests or challenges, solutions will come up among the community members, and/or

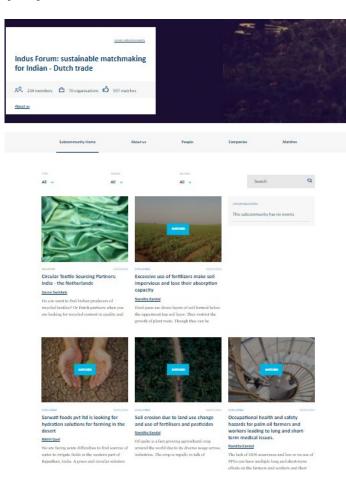


Figure 1: Online INDUS Forum webpage

solutions can be searched for by a community manager. INDUS Forum is aiming to connect Indian and Dutch businesses this way in so-called matches.

¹ Project Summary document and INDUS Platform website https://futureproof.community/subcommunities/indus-forum-en#home or www.indus-forum-en#home or www.indus-forum-en#home or www.indus-forum-en#home





SOLUTION

Interall Group as a production network of sustainable and circular gifts and promotional items

karin stoevenbeld

The company Ecowings in India turns old inner tubes of trucks into all kinds of

CHALLENGE

Leather Tanneries looking for new innovation in recycling, up-cycling, value addition to byproducts for solid waste

Nandita Kandal

Leather making, leads

Figure 2: Illustration of online matchmaking

This project is co-financed by MVO Nederland's 'Omzet met Impact' ('Business with Impact') programme and the Dutch Embassy in Delhi and is managed by MVO NL. An Indian-Dutch team was formed for the following roles: Community management, project management, communication and pilot project management. MVO NL selected the Dutch team, whereas the Indian team was selected by the Dutch Embassy and MVO Nederland. The Indian organizations — TERI, CII-ITC Centre of Excellence for Sustainable Development, and Centre for Responsible Business (CRB) were partnered to draft around 10 challenges for the online community. Due diligence has been executed with regard to the implementing partners in India (MVO NL 2018). Initially there was not a specific focus on sectors or problems, all organizations were welcome to post challenges or solutions. Since 2020 MVO NL collaborated with Solidaridad Asia. This has resulted in a sector-focused approach (initially sugarcane and leather, later cotton) and a substantial growth of content on the platform in 2020 compared to previous years. Solidaridad selected the sectors and indicated the main problems/challenges per sector. MVO NL searched for solutions that could be provided by Dutch firms.

The project directly aims to contribute to SDG 17 Partnerships for the goals, SDG 8 Decent work and Economic Growth and SDG 12 Responsible Consumption and Production (MVO Nederland 2020b: 28-29).

The Project Summary document mentioned that there were no RBC risks as such related to the project itself. There was no check on RBC risks related to the companies involved in the matchmaking. The success of the online platform is to a large extent dependent on:

- willingness of both Indian and Dutch businesses to present their challenges and solutions online;
- implementation by the Dutch as well as the Indian community management team; and
- competition with other online communities.





One of the goals of the project was to create a plan for the INDUS Forum after 2020 to make sure the INDUS Forum could sustain when the initial funding would end.

3. Effectiveness and impact

This section addresses the evaluation questions with respect to effectiveness and impact. General evaluation questions addressed in this chapter are:

- 1. Have the activities described in the proposal of the project been carried out?
- 2. Have the goals and targets described in the proposal been reached?
- 3. Were the assumptions and trajectories described in the ToC proven to be correct?

The online community was launched in Delhi in November 2017, followed by a launch in Utrecht in January 2018. The expectation was to have an active digital platform in one year time with the first successful pilot projects in place. The KPI formulated for that was 100 successful matches and 10 challenges drafted for the online community in 4 years. Ideally, INDUS would be fully integrated into the wider agenda of the embassy – and the Dutch ministry of foreign trade – in terms of offline trade missions, offline meetings and implementing CSR policy frameworks.

The Project Summary document from 2018 included the following activities, which have all been completed:

- Developing a format and instruction for Indian/Dutch companies for posting challenges and solutions;
- Providing the digital infrastructure for the online community (ongoing);
- Filling the database with a variety of challenges and solutions (ongoing);
- Drafting of a communication plan. Part of the communication plan is the collaboration with local Indian and Dutch stakeholders and media partners;
- Matchmaking between challenges and solutions by the Dutch community team (ongoing);
- Implementation of two pilot projects on circular textiles and agricultural waste;
- Developing and launching the online community platform pre-launch mid November 2017 in India, official launch in the Netherlands on 18 January 2018 (New Year's event);
- Communication campaign for broadening the outreach of the platform in the Netherlands; and
- Develop a second pilot project January-April 2018, implemented since 2018.

For the INDUS Forum there is no separate ToC available. However, from the project description it is clear what the ambition is for the INDUS Forum and what the line of reasoning is:

"to contribute to sustainable trade and investment between India and the Netherlands by facilitating matchmaking and promoting sustainable & inclusive trade through INDUS Forum, an online and offline matchmaking between challenges and solutions, building an online and offline community by connecting and innovating for people, planet and profit."

The Indus Forum currently has 234 members, 69 organizations and 597 matches have been made until now. ² These connections were either formed by the Futureproof community manager or by the members themselves. The output numbers - 234 members, 69 organizations and 597 matches – would

² INDUS Platform website https://futureproof.community/subcommunities/indus-forum-en#home (accessed 3 July 2021).



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not have been possible without the support and the persistent efforts of MVO NL and its partners in India.

Although INDUS Forum is only a tool for online matches, the actual matches are of course leading (MVO NL, 2020). At output level, matching Indian and Dutch companies, the results are larger than initially expected. The KPI formulated was 100 successful matches, while already 597 online matches were realized on 3rd of July 2021. A qualitative match is seen when two parties have an exploratory conversation with each other and afterwards have the intention to look further for possible cooperation. In the collaboration with Solidaridad, the INDUS Forum aimed to improve the quality of the matches by facilitating matchmaking meetings within sectors (sugarcane & leather). Two projects – Clothes the Circle and Biomass India – actually reached the implementation stage and for leather there is potential for a pilot project. Unfortunately, the project has been interrupted and affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

One of the additional aims was to make sure that the INDUS Forum would continue to exist and could be 'sold' to another party. Within the project, there were no official targets defined for MVO NL related to this. However, a plan for the INDUS Forum beyond 2020 was created in June 2020 by MVO NL.

Despite this initiative several interviewees said that MVO NL could have invested more to show the potential impact of the INDUS Forum. Interviewees argue that it would have been better to formally include time for transferring the results of the program to make sure that all activities could proceed after formal stop of the programme. The follow up from the INDUS Forum need to be given also higher priority by the Ministry of Foreign affairs.

Based on the Annual Plan 2020 a results chain for the INDUS Forum has been drafted based on the planned activities and expected results (Table 1).

Table 1: A results chain of the INDUS Forum

INDUS Forum				
Impact	Contribution to SDG 8, 12 and 17			
	Positive effect on RBC and sustainable business models			
	Enhanced sustainable trade and investment between India and the Netherlands			
Outcome	Cooperation leads to trade or business			
	Conversations lead to intentions to further investigate potential for cooperation			
	Matches lead to exploratory conversations			
	INDUS Forum will still exist after 2020			
Output (2020)	Challenges posted on the forum (n=35)			
	Solutions posted on the forum (n=35)			
	Matches by the forum (n=120)			
	Develop a plan for the future for the INDUS Forum after 2020			
Activities (2020)	Linked-In campaign			
	Analysis how the impact and quality of the matches can be measured and improved			
	Creation of content (challenges, solutions and matches) and management of the Online platform.			
	Stakeholder analysis			
	Develop a stronger INDUS proposition by focussing on specific themes (i.e. circularity) or sectors			

Source: Based on MVO Nederland (2020a). Annual Plan 2020

3.1 Effectiveness

Relevant evaluation sub-questions in the ToR addressed in this section are:

- 1. How much ownership of the projects lies with the SME's and with MVO NL?
- 2. To what extent did the projects result in lasting trade/investment relations between the Dutch SME's and the local trade partners?
- 3. To what extent were other stakeholders, such as civil society, meaningfully included in the development and execution of the programme and projects?



This section also refers to the earlier-mentioned general questions:

- 1. Have the activities described in the proposal of the project been carried out?
- 2. Have the goals and targets described in the proposal been reached?
- 3. Were the assumptions and trajectories described in the ToC proven to be correct?

The responsibility of the INDUS Forum as technical platform itself lies fully with MVO NL. However, making matches is up to the Dutch and Indian SME's involved, supported by the Indian partners. By creating an ecosystem of promoting collaboration, trade can be used as an effective mechanism to transit markets and value chains of trading partners to become more sustainable. Practice showed however that it is not always as obvious that the online matches actually lead to offline matches ending up in real business.

The collaboration between the Dutch Embassy in Delhi and MVO NL appears to be strong. The role of the local partners (TERI, CII, CRB) in identifying businesses and organisations, and their challenges was instrumental to the start of the platform. The collaboration with Solidaridad in 2020 appears to have worked well too. The interviewees indicated that it takes time to create bonding with the local partners. The culture and way of working are quite different. It takes time to get used to each other, to fully trust each other and to get the best out of each other. Seeds have been planted. There is potential to further flourish for the cooperation.

Solidaridad took a sector approach to find challenges. Sugarcane and leather and cotton were the sectors of focus; other sectors explored were palm oil and agriculture, but did not materialise as much.

In general we can say that the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the activities in 2020.

The number of matches that have been made through the INDUS Forum until now³ bears that the platform achieved its purpose of bringing solutions to challenges. For online matches to translate into meetings of interested business partners often requires additional actions. A qualitative match is seen when two parties have an exploratory conversation with each other and afterwards have the intention to look further for possible cooperation. Of course, fructifying those solutions to formal business collaborations is dependent on specific requirements of the interested businesses, and the financial and technical feasibility of solutions. Although two projects actually reached the implementation stage, it is not possible to determine outcomes and impact because not much has progressed beyond just the partners meeting; this is largely due to the pandemic. Next to that, financial support for implementation is not provided, which also makes the implementation difficult. Therefore, it is too early to claim that these projects will lead to lasting trade/investments relations between the Dutch SME's and the local Indian trade partners (please also see the case study reports of Clothes the Circle and Biomass India).

Solidaridad and MVO NL aspired to add more value to the online matches made between challenges, solutions, people and organizations on the INDUS Forum. Therefore, they did a follow-up pilot for the online matches made for the sugarcane sector. Out of the 13 unique matches that were made for the sugarcane challenges, two solution providing parties (Nx-t Fertilizers and solutions for irrigation and use of nutrients) were invited for a meeting with Solidaridad Asia to explore a potential collaboration. Those two meetings took place on 15 October 2020. In the survey held among the participants of the meetings, the meetings scored a 4.25/5 and all of the participants would recommend INDUS to other companies. They reported that the meeting met their expectations. Moreover, they reported that the

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³ INDUS Platform website https://futureproof.community/subcommunities/indus-forum-en#home (accessed 3 July 2021).

⁴ INDUS Impact Report November 2020



meetings triggered collaboration possibilities. One of the participants stated: 'We would like to get further in touch with the other party and exchange more and concrete information to see if we can actually come to a collaboration'. Lastly, according to the participants, the INDUS Forum could perform a further role for them as 'a guide and source of information'. Another meeting for sugarcane took place on February 25th 2021 (with Paperwise) and one for leather took place on April 15th 2021 (with CooLoo). The last one led to more follow-up meetings and discussion about collaboration to use leather waste for furniture material.

3.2 Impact

This section focuses on the project's impact.⁵ Impact refers to results within the project's sphere of indirect influence. The relevant evaluation sub-question in the ToR with respect to Pillar 1 is: "To what extent can project results be seen as (potential) contributions to the SDG's?"

The INDUS Forum project contributes to SDG 17, Partnerships. Partnerships is the bedrock to achieve other SDGs. The INDUS Forum is designed to create an ecosystem for partnerships between Indian and Dutch businesses to solve specific sustainability challenges.

The *Progress Report 2019* (MVO Nederland 2020b:29) refers to two relevant targets concerning SDG 17:

- 17.7 Promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed; and
- 17.16 Enhance the global partnership for sustainable development, complemented by multistakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the sustainable development goals in all countries, in particular developing countries.

It furthermore indicates that the INDUS project is expected to contribute to the SDGs 8 and 12 – and specifically to, respectively, the targets 8.1 and 12.5 (ibid. 28-29).

Interviewees at Solidaridad, as well as interviewees related to the two projects currently under implementation — CtC and Biomass India — confirmed that project results of the partnerships will contribute to achievement of project-specific SDGs.

With the funding support of the Dutch government, MVO NL managed to create two pilot projects in circular textiles and in agricultural residue. Both projects have demonstrated that the solutions could be scaled up; upon scale, each project could potentially create positive impacts on environment and society across the value chains.

4. Relevance and sustainability

This section assesses the INDUS Forum project in terms of development relevance and sustainability of the benefits of the project.

4.1 Relevance

In this section we will assess how relevant the INDUS Forum project has been in terms of (expected) project impact versus identified challenges. The Forum's aim is to contribute to sustainable trade and

⁵ The adjusted OECD/DAC definition of impact is "The extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.", see OECD/DAC (2019).



investment between India and the Netherlands by facilitating matchmaking and promoting sustainable and inclusive trade.

The interviewees consider that the project is very relevant from a development perspective, as it addresses challenges that are identified in various sectors that have huge social and environmental impacts.

Sugarcane:

- i) bagasse problem at the farm site and sugar mill site; farmers typically burn bagasse
- ii) sugarcane is a water-intensive crop growing in arid areas; use of IoT or drip irrigation methods
- iii) chemical inputs for productivity.

Leather and cotton:

- i) volume of water used and effluent discharge;
- ii) chemicals use with environmental impact;
- iii) OHS concerns for farmers and their children.

Next to these effects, the interviewees emphasized that the INDUS Forum contributed to awareness raising of environmental problems and potential solutions. New business models like circularity were not discussed in previous years, but have gained much attention in the last two years. New business models and the commercial opportunities related to these new models are now put more explicitly on the agenda of Indian companies and intermediaries.

4.2 Sustainability

OECD/DAC (2019) defines sustainability as the "extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue." This definition includes "an examination of the financial, economic, social, environmental, and institutional capacities of the systems needed to sustain net benefits over time." This section will look at selected dimensions of sustainability and address the question: "to what extent is the INDUS Forum project suitable for upscaling?"

Solidaridad has developed a business plan and submitted it to MVO NL. One of the recommendations in the business plan is that the INDUS Forum needs to be more than just a matchmaking platform, to become a true accelerator platform. India is still in an infancy stage related to RBC, circularity and sustainability. There is huge potential to further increase awareness leading to better RBC performance and to actually solve sustainability problems by circular solutions.

The two pilot projects - Clothes to Circle and Biomass Valorisation - that MVO NL undertook strengthen the case for the platform to scale up. Those projects were made possible with funding from the Dutch government, which may not be possible in every Indo-Dutch business arrangement. That creates opportunities to think of other means and sources of financing.

Whether the INDUS Forum will be able to attract financial support to extend the project is not clear yet. Initially the Dutch embassy was positive about funding this project, but due to personnel changes, this idea has not been capitalized yet. Interviewees are positive about the potential of the INDUS Forum to upscale to more matches and in the end, commercial business, but see mainly a role for the local supporting agencies like CRB.



5. Additionality and leverage

This section assesses the INDUS Forum project in terms of additionality and leverage of the project.

5.1 Additionality

ToR evaluation sub-questions addressed in this section are:

- 1. To what extent was cooperation with RVO helpful in the development and financing of actual projects?
- 2. To what extent would the SMEs that are part of these projects, have taken similar actions related to the identified RBC risks and sustainable business opportunities without this programme, and how dependent were the SME's on MVO NL throughout the projects?

According to the Annual Plans (MVO Nederland 2018; 2019; 2020a), for the INDUS Forum a total of 87,304 Euro was budgeted for 2018, 108,408 Euro for 2019 and 54,125 Euro for 2020 (Table 2). External funding was received from EKN India in 2018 and 2019, respectively 43,333 Euro and 52,000 Euro. The Dutch Embassy actually invested 156,000 Euro in the INDUS Forum over a three-year period. From 2020 on, the money was provided directly to the local partner.

Table 2: MVO NL Budget for the INDUS Forum

_	2017	2018	2019	2020
Personnel cost		€ 50,157	€ 67,680	€ 46,100
Various Out-of-pocket expenses		€ 37,147	€ 40,728	€ 8,025
Total		€ 87.304	€ 108,408	€ 54,125
External Finance EKN India		€ 43,333	€ 52,000	

Source: MVO Nederland (2018, 2019, 2020a). Annual Plans 2018, 2019 and 2020

All interviewees emphasize the importance of the role of MVO NL in the project. It is due to MVO NL and their network that the INDUS Forum has performed well at output level. MVO NL invested much time and effort in the cooperation with the local partners, e.g. Solidaridad.

Foremost, another bilateral platform like INDUS Forum does not exist. One could argue that it confines only to businesses from the two countries. But that is still better than not having a platform at all. According to the interviewees, this does help in furthering bilateral trade and investment especially in sustainable/responsible businesses. Without the INDUS Forum most of the matches would not have occurred. This is especially the case for the match in the leather industry. Using waste of the Indian leather sector as input for other firms and, generally, thinking in a more circular way would not have been developed independently form the INDUS Forum. The INDUS Forum was also at the basis of two running initiatives in India, Clothes to Circle and Biomass India. If discussed whether these two initiatives would have existed without the INDUS Forum, it was said that without any doubt one could argue that that is questionable.

All parties involved in the matches have been informed about the existing RVO instruments. Both CtC and Biomass India managed to attract funding from external donors. INDUS Forum itself did not receive any additional funding from RVO.

According to the interviewees, Solidaridad decided to partner with MVO in 2020, because of common origins, i.e., the Netherlands. Moreover, Solidaridad is open to partnerships, and believes that accelerator platforms can be helpful in addressing sustainability challenges. Solidaridad is already

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working in 10 commodities and operates in nine countries in Asia; it has networks with private and public organisations. Therefore, the INDUS Platform was a natural fit.

5.2 Leverage

Leverage of the project in terms of 'the ability to influence behaviour beyond the applicant' or 'the influence of Dutch policy on various actors' (see IOB 2019: 16, 25) can be seen as the extent to which behaviour of various actors in the project (or of actors beyond the project) is influenced. There is no doubt that the actions of the MVO Nederland staff involved in the project influenced the behaviour of other project stakeholders. But there are also examples of influence beyond the project areas.

Discussion, challenges posted and solutions posted certainly have led to increased awareness that there is a business case for sustainability as mentioned by the interviewees. Thinking in a circular way was not common yet in India. The INDUS Forum has shown that (Dutch) companies are interested in solving sustainability problems, in using specific waste as input for their product. This has for sure leveraged awareness for sustainability issues.

Financial support from the Dutch Embassy in Delhi (i.e. 156,000 Euro) has had leverage in seed funding the INDUS Forum. That said, the members involved in posting challenges and providing solutions have managed to leverage the platform, thus creating a demand-supply system.

6. Conclusions

INDUS Forum is a unique bilateral Indo-Dutch business platform that matches solution seekers with solution providers. The output numbers indicate its success in matchmaking. All interviewees emphasized the role MVO NL has played to make the Forum a success at output level. However, sustainability of these matches is not sure. It is too early to see results on outcome and impact level and sustainability.

The relevance of the INDUS Forum is clear. Without the INDUS Forum the matches would not exist. Next to that, it is emphasized that the Forum contributed to awareness related to responsible business and sustainable business models and circularity. To see that there is commercial interest in solving Indian challenges related to environmental and social problems is important for Indian firms.

The matchmaking meetings provided a first step. The next step however, transforming matches into business deals, is much harder to realize. More resources and expertise are needed to further accelerate these potential partnerships. Covid-19 has had its effect on the outcome results, but also limited funding availability played a role. It does not only take more time to realize the intended outcomes, it could also be further supported by providing financial support to further facilitate this process (e.g. facilitate meetings, small scale pilot projects). It seems that the plug is pulled out too soon. It is uncertain whether the INDUS Forum will continue to exist, as funding for the coming years is still uncertain, while the relevance and potential of the forum is seen as important by the interviewees.

This assessment is not comprehensive, as it is based on a limited number of interviews. The response on the interview requests from Indian firms was limited. One company responded that it did not want to spend time on this, as requests from his side have never been answered. A comprehensive assessment including the partner organizations in the start-up phase could have provided better insights.





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Appendix 1: Stakeholders interviewed

Name	Position	Organisation
Nandita Kandal	Assistant Manager	Solidaridad
Samir Mirza	Assistant Programme Manager	Solidaridad
Peter van Rosmalen	Founder & Owner	Paperwise
Pals Brust	Co-Founder of Up-Set Textiles	Up-set Text
Ricco Fiorito	Commercial director	Cooloo
Louise Pfāltzer	Second Secretary Economic and	Royal Netherlands Embassy,
	Commercial Affairs (08/2018 –	New Delhi
	08/2020)	
Leonie van der Stijl	Second Secretary Economic and	Royal Netherlands Embassy,
	Commercial Affairs (10/2016 – 10/2018)	New Delhi
Michiel van Yperen	Transition manager for circular	MVO NL
	product innovations in	
	international value chains.	
Sanne Swinkels	Project staff member	MVO NL
Wies van Leeuwen	Business Development	RVO
	Coordinator India & Private Sector	
	Development Coach India, Nepal &	
	Bhutan	
Bernedine Bos	International programme manager	KplusV
		(previously CSR Europe and
		MVO NL)