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Corporations not making sufficient interventions in eliminating child labor on farms producing cottonseeds in India

The International Labor Rights Forum (ILRF) along with international partners including OECD Watch, India Committee of the Netherlands, Deutsche Welthungerhilfe and Eine Welt Netz NRW, released a report [1] today focused on the impact of interventions by the multinational corporations Bayer and Monsanto on child labor on farms producing their cottonseeds in India. The report was released in advance of World Day Against Child Labor, which takes place on June 12.

The report, titled “Seeds of Change [1]” and authored by Davuluri Venkateswarlu, assesses the follow through by the two companies on commitments to a joint action plan. While both companies have heralded their efforts as a big success, there is still much to be done to eliminate child labor in their supply chains. As original research based on farm visits, prove, the number of children working in this sector has declined since the action plan was initiated, but has not been eliminated.

Additionally, the companies’ investments in education have not been making the necessary impact on the ground. The Creative Learning Centers which Monsanto and Bayer helped to fund have not been able to reach the constituency they are meant to serve: children who formerly worked on cotton farms. Monsanto and Bayer have also failed to address the issue of a fair procurement price for farmers, which is a major factor in the continuation of cheap child labor.

Another important concern revealed by the study is that Bayer has not been completely transparent in sharing data from their field visits and follow-up research. While Monsanto has disclosed most information from these monitoring activities, Bayer has stalled on release of information.

Bama Athreya, Executive Director of the International Labor Rights Forum, said, “As we recognize World Day Against Child Labor, it is essential that we increase pressure on multinational corporations to stop this illegal practice. While Monsanto and Bayer have made some progress in ending child labor on India’s cottonseed farms, there is still a long way to go.”

Venkateswarlu writes in his report, “A responsible company must have a policy regarding child labor (and other labor rights) for all its locations and operations as a matter of principle and as a matter of consistency with its own code of conduct or corporate responsibility policy.”
ILRF and its allies around the world will continue to monitor child labor in the cotton industry and pressure companies to take action.

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