

Nora Wolters, Consultant 12/05/2017

On April 6th, Sedex hosted the 2017 Sedex Stakeholder Forum (SSF) and Sedex Conference, separate events held on the same day. Sancroft Consultant Nora Wolters, who previously worked for Sedex and was directly involved in the organisation of these events, participated in the meetings and shares her highlights:

The SSF is a group of around 100 industry experts including brands, retailers and auditors who meet bi-annually to drive a common understanding in ethical trade, and create collaborative tools through various working groups. This year's Meeting not only saw a productive work group session but also the presentation of the latest effort of the group: The launch of the recently reviewed social auditing methodology – SMETA 6.0.

This open source audit methodology has been reviewed by the SSF to meet current challenges and future developments in social auditing. Not only has the format been streamlined to make reporting easier, there have also been some relevant additions:

- A Universal Rights section has been added that covers the UN Guiding Principles. It encourages businesses to implement systems that assess and measure the Human Rights impact of their operations.
- The addition of the possibility to report on Workplace Impact. Measuring data such as absenteeism or number of complaints is intended to give a holistic picture of a site that goes beyond recording findings.
- In order to reflect current discussions about Responsible Recruitment, a special section has been added to SMETA 6.0. This is to ensure that suppliers understand the entire recruitment process, and assess all labour recruiters and intermediaries against legal and/or ethical requirements.

Another milestone for the group was the departure of Louise Nicholls (Head of Human Rights, M&S) as the SSF Chair after 16 years of working with the group. Louise will certainly leave big shoes to fill and her insight will be greatly missed by all.

The fruitful morning Meeting was followed by the official start of the Sedex Conference in the afternoon, hosted by 'Mr. Goodvertising', facilitator Thomas Kolster. This year's conference motto 'Continuous Improvement, In Practice' was delivered through a mix of panel sessions, master classes and spotlight talks.

One particularly interesting panel session provided practical recommendations for businesses on how to establish robust systems to mitigate the risk of forced labour in their supply chains. This ranged from accepting the possibility of finding these issues in your own supply chain, navigating the plethora of resources available and – most importantly – collaborating with other businesses to tackle the issue. The session yielded hands-on advice by expert speakers who were representing different areas of the supply chain - from retailer to labour provider.

The rest of the afternoon saw an interesting mix of spotlight talks. Ed Gillespie from Futerra entertained the audience while making the case for innovation across supply chains. This was followed by an ambitious discussion about changing business practices and whether guidance or legislation is more effective. The conference provided both inspiration and a great deal of relevant and new content delivered by knowledgeable and engaging speakers.

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