

# UNACCEPTABLE

SUPPORTED BY THE TOBACCO INDUSTRY, A NEW FOUNDATION IS FIGHTING CHILD LABOR IN LEAF-PRODUCING COUNTRIES.



Marc Hofstetter

**Marc Hofstetter**

is director of the Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing Foundation. He is a 39-year-old Swiss national with extensive work experience in the private sector and in nonprofit organizations.

Hofstetter spent 12 years with the International Committee of the Red Cross, providing humanitarian aid to the populations of Iraq, Sudan and Tajikistan. He is a graduate in economics and holds a master's degree in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy in Boston, Massachusetts, USA.

**T**hey work long hours and carry heavy loads. They may face poor sanitary conditions and are sometimes exposed to pesticides. They also work in extreme weather conditions—intense heat and pouring rain. The continuous demands from work leave them little time for leisure or personal development. Who are these tireless toilers?

They are children.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) estimates that worldwide, 250 million children aged five to 17 are working, primarily in developing countries. Driven by poverty, child labor

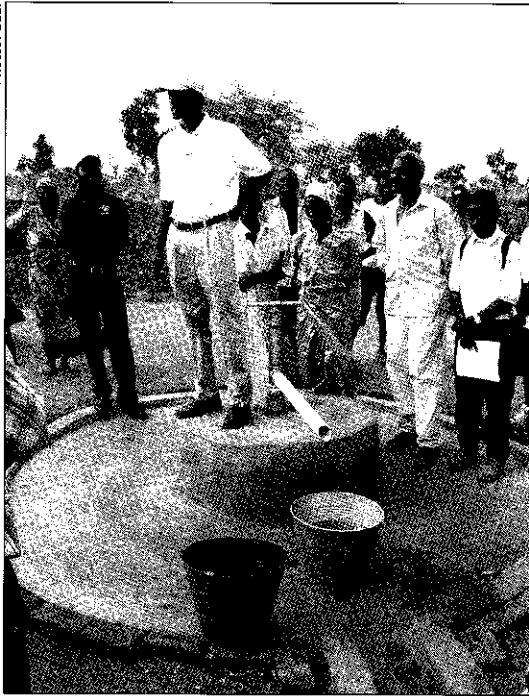
occurs in all industries, but because the economies of most developing countries are based on agriculture, the issue is particularly pressing in the farm sector, and tobacco is no exception. Although information about the number of children working on tobacco farms is hard to come by, the industry is addressing the issue where it can make a difference—in its leaf-sourcing countries, many of which are in the developing world.

Eight cigarette manufacturers—Altadis, British American Tobacco, Gallaher, Imperial Tobacco, Japan Tobacco, Philip Morris International, Philip Morris USA and Scandinavian Tobacco Co.—and three leaf companies—Dimon, Standard Commercial and Universal Leaf—have joined hands with the International Union of Food, Agriculture and Tobacco; the Allied Workers Union; and the International Tobacco Growers Association to combat child labor in the tobacco industry.

The stakeholders are working together in the Eliminating Child Labor in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT), which was established in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2001, and is headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, close to the United Nations headquarters.

The ECLT Foundation believes that one of its main assets is the fact that it has members both inside and outside the tobacco industry. “This alliance provides a strong credibility to our approach, which might have been criticized as a PR exercise if only tobacco companies had been involved,” says Marc Hofstetter, director of the ECLT Foundation. The ILO, too, is represented

Photos: ECLT



Fetching water is traditionally a child's job in Malawi. By building wells closer to villages, the ECLT ensures that children have more time for nonwork activities, such as schooling and play.

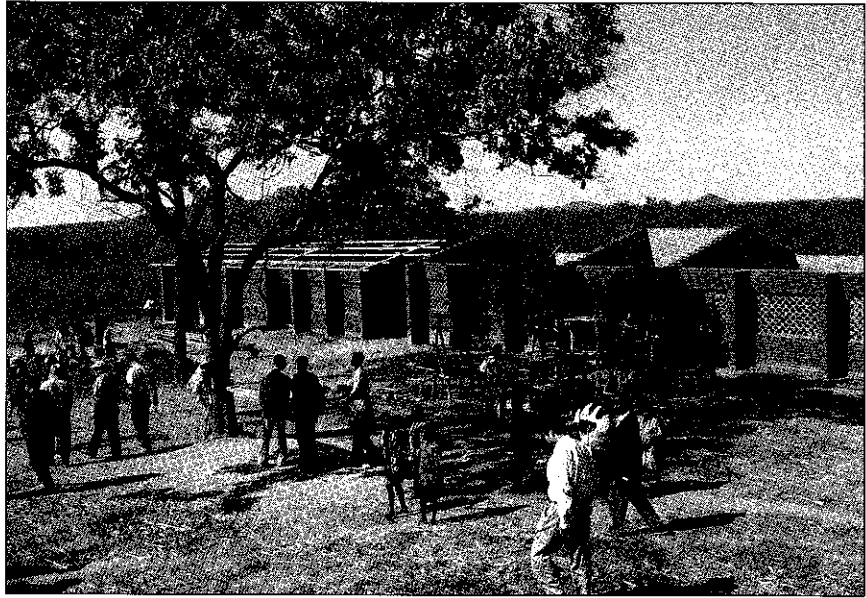
in the organization, in an advisory function.

"I am very proud of this multi-stakeholder partnership," continues Hofstetter. "We are now being copied by other sectors, such as the cocoa industry. In the countries where we are actively involved, we are trying to duplicate a similar multi-stakeholder approach. We need, however, the tobacco farmers associations and the tobacco companies' local affiliates to get more actively involved."

The ECLT is dedicated to many comprehensive objectives, including increasing the number of children going to school by moving them out of tobacco fields; raising awareness for tobacco farmers on the dangers of child labor and on the importance of sending children to school; increasing tobacco farmers' living conditions through crop diversification, food security and development of new skills; encouraging multi-stakeholder dialogue among social partners in order to improve labor standards; and involving the communities in the development and implementation of projects in order to make them sustainable and with a long-lasting impact.

Hofstetter says that there is a difference between child work and child labor. "In rural areas, children are associated with their parents' activities, as a means of socialization. Helping parents with activities such as gardening or housecleaning is therefore not a problem. However, child work becomes child labor when the activities become detrimental to the child's education, health and right to play." Hofstetter says that many children do not attend school at all. And even when they do, they are often forced to drop out during the tobacco crop's peak season.

**MALAWI.** The ECLT's first project, which was initiated in July 2002, is in the Dowa and Kasungu districts in Malawi, where tobacco growing is the main economic activity. The project is aimed at addressing child labor at its root causes—mainly poverty—by improving the general living conditions of children and their communities in 60 villages.



This primary school has recently been completed in a village in Malawi's Nkhosakota region. It will be ready for use in January 2004.

The four-year project, which is expected to cost US\$2 million, is already yielding results. For example, shallow wells are being built close to villages, which will provide clean water to the communities. Fetching water has traditionally been a child's task in Malawi—one that can take considerable time considering that the nearest wells are often many miles away. Having the wells closer to the village will enable the children to fetch the water quicker, leaving more time for other, nonwork activities.

The Malawi project also includes a reforestation program, which preserves the soil and provides wood for the households. Children fetching wood will be able to do so closer to their homes, freeing up time for schooling or play.

The ECLT is also providing irrigation pumps to help tobacco farmers diversify their crops. With the additional income, it becomes easier for them to send their children to school. Hofstetter is pleased with the results so far. "After only one year, we have seen an increase of 22 percent of children attending school

and a decrease of 97 percent in cholera cases. Our challenge is to see that these improvements continue in the long run."

Also last year, the ECLT implemented a second project in Malawi. This two-year project with a budget of \$170,000 assists children in the Nkhosakota district, where tobacco is also the main crop. The goals are to build a junior primary



In its efforts to eliminate child labor, the ECLT mobilizes all stakeholders. Here, members of a Malawian village come together to discuss a new project.



Drama representations and plays help raise awareness of child labor.

school and raise the awareness of parents, estate owners, local leaders, partners and the general public of the consequences of child labor. "More than 150 children, who were not attending school, will start education as soon as the school opens in January 2004," says Hofstetter.

The ECLT's successes in Malawi have also encouraged change in neighboring communities. "Our projects are already having a snowball effect," says Hofstetter. "In Malawi, rural communities that are not part of the project but are located near the areas that benefit from our involvement have been so enthusiastic about [our] results that they have set up their own schools and other projects without external funding."

**PHILIPPINES.** The ECLT reports progress in other parts of the world, as well. Last year, Philip Morris International evaluated the child labor situation in the Philippines' tobacco-growing sector. The study prompted the ECLT to set up a partnership with the Philippine Ministry of Labor and Employment. In May 2003, the partners launched an initiative to reduce child labor among children

aged seven to 17 in 100 villages.

The project aims to raise awareness of child labor, improving access to education for former child laborers and providing small income-generating projects to the poorest farmers. Other participants include the Philippine National Tobacco Administration, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Health, various trade unions, and other companies. The project has a budget of \$90,000.

**TANZANIA.** In August, the ECLT launched a child-labor-elimination campaign in Tanzania, covering 25 tobacco-growing villages, 1,000 children and 250 families. The ECLT's partner in this new project is the ILO. The three-year project, which focuses on getting working children back to school, includes training and income-generating programs for farmers, and has a budget of \$560,000.

**BUILDING A FUTURE.** The ECLT continues to target regions that need assistance. Hofstetter says that following a study commissioned by BAT, the ECLT is finalizing a project proposal in Uganda. The ECLT is also closely watching developments in southern Africa. The deteriorating political and economic situation in Zimbabwe has

prompted neighboring African countries to increase tobacco production. While this may be good for their economies, there is a risk that, in the haste to bring production up to speed, child labor may increase accordingly.

The ECLT is also working on a project proposal with trade unions and the tobacco industry in Kyrgyzstan. In addition, the ECLT and the ILO are investigating the child-labor situation in tobacco-producing countries such as Indonesia and the Dominican Republic, as well as the impact of HIV/AIDS on underage workers in sub-Saharan Africa.

While the ECLT has made considerable progress, Hofstetter concedes that its efforts are somewhat hampered by the controversies surrounding tobacco. "Whereas many international organizations and donor aid agencies have been impressed by our coalition and its results, they still are reluctant to be associated with our initiatives due to the nature of the product we are dealing with," says Hofstetter. "We have to live with this reality, but hope that our results and impact will prove the sincerity and effectiveness of the ECLT Foundation." 