

## The Girl Effect

With amazement, I am watching a YouTube film called '[The Girl Effect](#)', with over 60 other young talented people from 30 different countries. Invest in a young girl and the future of a village, the country, the whole world, sure why not, humanity itself, is in your hand. Multiply that by 600 million girls in developing countries and count your profit. And that in times of crisis. Welcome to the first International SER Summer School!

The effect is enormous. You can hear a pin drop. The message is clear. We're not here to fool around for a week (though we are allowed every now and then). We've been brought here with a mission. After a week's training we will be ready to shape the future of social dialogue in our country, from the organisations we work at. This will lead to more democracy, balanced economic growth and more equality in the world. What a beautiful idea! SER-chairman Alexander Rinnooy Kann calls us "an investment in the future", making the world a better place.

Through FNV Mondiaal, different trade-union people are participating, from Indonesia and the Fiji Islands to Taiwan, the Ukraine and the Czech Republic. All 60 of us come from trade unions, employer organisations, or SER-like institutions. Contradictions do not seem to exist. I say 'seem', because all of a sudden at dinner someone exclaims with conviction, 'Oh gosh, you're my enemy!' and then laughs and keeps on eating.

We learn how we can improve social dialogue in times of globalisation and crisis from trainers, who also spend time brushing up the knowledge of strapping CEOs (I suppose they're super busy in these times of crisis). We need to have complete conviction, dedication and persuasiveness, show our leadership qualities and, most important of all, not be afraid, simply go for it.

### Quote in newspaper

Prihanani Boenadi (Nani to her friends), a self-taught, trade-union leader from an Indonesian metal factory shows us how. I barely recognise her. The giggling, young woman, who spoke very little English, whom I met two months ago in Jakarta at the metal trade union, stands up now, full of confidence. The hall is packed, she is the only one wearing a djellaba, and she has a question for the World-Bank economist with a PhD who is addressing us. 'Labour-market flexibility in my country, Indonesia, means no bonuses for workers, no social security, no pension and low salaries. How can we change that?' She has kick-started her week, thanks to two months of tutoring in English, in addition to her work in the factory, in addition to her trade-union work. I am glowing with pride. She just got herself a quote in the national Dutch newspaper, the NRC.

### No EPZs in the Netherlands!

After interviews with SER stakeholders later in the week, we're walking across Dutch-parliament grounds. Nani frowns fiercely: 'Where are the export-processing zones here (free-trade zones)? I don't see any factories!' She has difficulty grasping it at all when I tell her there are no EPZs in the Netherlands. 'Where are all those people going on their bikes then?' I try explaining things like the service economy. 'Compare it to Singapore, for instance', I tell her, 'Singapore doesn't have factories either, except those on the Indonesian islands close to its coast'. Jos Brocken of FNV Bondgenoten, who negotiates national collective-bargaining agreements for metalworkers in the Netherlands, says he'd be pleased to meet Nani and explain to her how it works over here. Nani is all ears. Two general, binding, sector-wide, collective-bargaining agreements for a total of 600,000 employees in the metal and craft-metal industries, almost no strikes, no corrupt courts, freedom of press. Nani is speechless.

### Tears and determination

On Saturday morning, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of August, just before she leaves, we get proof that Nani's reality is a different one. A message comes for her from Indonesia, from Vonny, vice-chairman of the national metal trade union and leader of the trade union in the Toshiba factory where strikes have been going on for the last four months. This due to a conflict about non-observance of the factory's Collective Bargaining Agreement. He tells her that the trade union has just concluded an agreement with Toshiba. The 'agreement': 697 employees are allowed back at work again, 15 trade-union leaders from the factory will be fired (including the women leader of the strike, Aghni, an important inspiration for many women in the trade union) and a new trade-union management, still to be chosen, must pick up once more the thread of negotiations for a new, factory, Collective Bargaining Agreement.

Nani's eyes fill with tears. She is fully aware of the personal sacrifice trade-union leaders like Aghni make, active in the trade union, sometimes against the will of the family, single, practically giving up any idea of marriage as an active trade-union woman, no job and no income any longer, and, as a 37-year-old, trade-union

activist, no chance of getting another factory job. Indignant, Nani says, 'this is nothing but union busting. However, without food and money, we simply can't allow ourselves to keep on striking.'

#### **Convinced of 'The Girl Effect'**

Naturally, I ask her if she still believes in 'The Girl Effect', despite what is happening to Aghni right now. Nani brightens. 'Of course!' she says, 'a woman can change everything, wherever she is!' Her personal mission is still the same: to improve the world and social dialogue through the trade-union organisation. 'All workers and members in the trade union need me. Especially now.' Then she tells me about her personal plan-of-action for when she returns.

Invest in a trade-union girl and she will do the rest. No big deal. Nothing but the future of all the metalworkers in Indonesia.

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