

# A New Way Forward For Verification

## Verité Hosts First of Several Meetings to Guide Cocoa Verification Board

Boston, Massachusetts, USA

On December 18, 2007, Verité convened a multi-stakeholder consultative meeting titled "A New Way Forward for Verification." The discussion and outcomes that resulted from this meeting will strengthen the verification process - the crucial next step in the larger effort of identifying and remediating the Worst Forms of Child Labor on West African cocoa farms. Industry, NGO, union and academic representatives gathered at this meeting offered valuable feedback to the International Cocoa Verification Board (ICVB) in order to assist it in developing a credible, effective and sustainable verification process. Their advice initiated more methods for all sectors to collaborate constructively. Opening remarks focused on the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement to ensure a robust and independent process for implementing the Verité Road Map. All stakeholders engaged in the dynamic discussion to define the next steps in the verification process.

### Discussion and Themes

Prior to the consultative meeting, professional facilitators **Grady McGonagill** and **Maggie Herzig** conducted interviews with a wide range of stakeholders to help shape the meeting's agenda. During the course of the interviews, the facilitators recognized that one of the meeting's most important goals was to arrive at a common understanding regarding specific steps in verification, including ways to maintain information flow and collaboration between stakeholders not serving on the ICVB. All stakeholders were eager to move forward with renewed clarity and were energized by the diversity embodied in this newly inclusive approach to verification. The conference included a mix of roundtable and interactive plenary discussions. In one exercise, attendees individually recorded the issues and concerns that they felt were most important to the verification process on paper hexagons. The facilitators then arranged the hexagons according to subject. The exercise showed six clear-cut groupings of the concerns that were shared among the stakeholders.



Hexagon exercise displayed the central concerns addressed at the



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*consultative meeting.*

The resulting subject clusters were: independence, technicalities, transparency, governance, mandate and funding. The meeting participants then broke into small groups to discuss each item in greater depth.

The group discussing **independence** focused on:

- The ICVB selection process. Who was involved?
- Identifying verifiers who are both credible in the field of data collection and unbiased in reporting findings
- Clarity and accessibility surrounding what is being verified and how remediation is carried out

The group discussing **technicalities** focused on:

- Clear specifications for defining the Worst Forms of Child Labor, verification and remediation, while remaining culturally sensitive
- Importance of transparent communication mechanisms to provide information on budgets, reports, feedback and selection criteria for verifiers

The group discussing **transparency** focused on:

- Availability of the methodology, processes, reporting, funding/budgets, and verifier selection criteria used by the ICVB
- Immediate access to reporting and translation of ICVB meeting minutes

The group discussing **governance** focused on:

- Importance of streamlining a flexible verification process
- Importance of including local partners and research organizations; facilitation of investment in local education and training where necessary; creation of consensus-based decision making by the ICVB

The group discussing **mandate** focused on:

- Acceptance and alignment surrounding the certification model
- Clarification of remediation: How independent should remediation be from verification? Should a "Remediation Board" be considered?
- One measurement of success would be for the Verification Board to "run itself out of business"

The group discussing **funding** focused on:

- Need to develop a diversified and independent funding source to prevent biased motives
- Importance of generating long-term funding and forward-thinking funding cycles
- Need to avoid an industry "Catch-22" - non-funding of verification and remediation leads to negligence accusation; funding leads to accusations of vested self-interest



## Panelists



Speakers listed from left to right.

**Anne Kielland** brought to the discussion her expertise in Social Science research methodology in the West African context. Her presentation emphasized the importance of efficiency, focus and the development of clear indicators in surveying the cocoa industry. She expressed her confidence that initial technical challenges could be overcome and the significance of focusing on the needs of children, who are the ultimate stakeholders in this process.

*Ms. Kielland works with Fafo and consults with the World Bank, NGOs and corporations in the area of child protection. She co-authored the book Children at Work, about child labor conditions in Africa.*

**Peter McAllister** detailed how verification is a key process in eliminating slave and child labor. He explained that processes such as data collection, reporting and remediation should be reinforced by verification.

*Mr. McAllister is the Executive Director for the International Cocoa Initiative (ICI). Prior to his work for ICI he worked for CARE as a pioneer of rights based programming. McAllister also has extensive experience in education, HIV/AIDS and micro-finance.*

**Sylvia Hinson-Ekong's** presentation focused on the challenges associated with certification, particularly regarding cultural variations and reaching a common definition of terms crucial to the verification process. She cited examples of how terms such as "certification," "child," and "caretaker" can be defined differently in different contexts.

*Ms. Hinson-Ekong is the Executive Director for the Rescue Foundation. She previously worked for the International Labor Organization and has dedicated her career to eliminating child trafficking and child labor.*

**Nina Smith** urged the attendees to focus on the issues at hand. She encouraged attendees not to permit the complexity of the situation to hinder the development of possible solutions.

*Ms. Smith is the Executive Director of RugMark Foundation USA. Prior to founding Rugmark, Ms. Smith was a fair trade advocate and marketing professional for over 12 years as well as president of the Fair Trade Federation (FTF).*

**Jeff Morgan** discussed industry cooperation with the governments of Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire. He noted that although there is not a "one size fits all" definition of certification, a process must be in place to monitor and report across the entire sector.

*Mr. Morgan is the Director of Global Programs for Mars, Inc. He has been highly involved in finding ways to eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor and following the signing of the Harkin-Engel Protocol has focused much of his efforts on its successful implementation.*

Speakers not listed in order of appearance.

## Closing Plenary

Verité and the facilitators reviewed the proceedings and flagged the following three topics for further consideration and discussion in the last plenary session.

**Certification:** Throughout the day there was a recurring need for clear definitions of verification, certification and remediation. Sylvia Hinson Ekong reviewed her presentation and reiterated the core features of certification as originally designed under the Harkin-Engel Protocol. She underscored that the word "certification" in this context is not the same as certification in, for example, a fair trade label.

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**Certification: NGO Briefing**  
by Jeff Morgan

**[Certification: NGO Briefing](#)**

**Verification Challenges**  
by Anne Kielland

**[Verification Challenges](#)**

**Cocoa Certification and Verification: The Realities on the Ground**

by Sylvia Hinson

**[Cocoa Certification and Verification: The Realities on the Ground](#)**

Participants were urged to move past this definitional stumbling block and move forward with the established definitions.

**Funding:** Attendees were assured the project is well-funded for a year. Funding beyond this timeframe must be addressed by the ICVB and stakeholders were asked to continue to contribute their thoughts and suggestions for additional funding sources.

**Remediation:** There was a lengthy and thoughtful discussion regarding the scope of the verification activity. While an effort to evaluate the effectiveness of all remediation would be beyond the scope and mandate of the verifiers, there was a clear consensus that the verification effort should strive at all times to guide and strengthen remediation, including remediation implemented by governments, NGOs or the private sector.

As the Secretariat, Verité noted these views and brought them to the attention of the International Cocoa Verification Board during their first meeting in January. A full report of this meeting will be released in the upcoming weeks.

The meeting was held at the **Commonwealth Hotel** in Kenmore Square in Boston, Massachusetts and directed by professional facilitators **Maggie Herzig** of the [Public Conversations Project](#) and **Grady McGonagill** of [McGonagill & Associates](#).

### **About Verité**

*Verité is a US-based nonprofit and award-winning pioneer in the social auditing, training, research and consulting field. The organization has over a decade of experience working with Fortune 500 corporations and their local suppliers through our global network of NGO partners. Verité works in over 60 countries to empower companies, factories, NGOs, governments, and workers to create sustainable workplace practices in the factories and communities where our consumer goods are made. Verité was named winner of the 2007 Skoll Award for Social Entrepreneurship. For more information on Verité please visit <http://www.verite.org>.*