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## SOMO News - June 2009

### In this newsletter:

- Electricity companies leave poor in the dark
- A step forward in the unethical testing issue
- Uranium workers in Namibia unaware of severe health risks
- Shareholders give stock-exchange listed companies a dressing down
- Thousands of consumers call for fair mobile phones
- Final touches to new international CSR guideline
- New publications

### Electricity companies leave poor in the dark



According to the recently published SOMO report [Down to the Wire](#), the presence of transnational electricity corporations often does not benefit local communities in developing countries. Rather than contributing to sustainable development, the activities of electricity companies can exacerbate the precarious living conditions of adjacent communities and harm the environment. Researchers are calling for the development of international normative standards for sustainable electricity provision and are urging companies to put their CSR policies into practice and to engage all stakeholders.

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### A step forward in the unethical testing issue

Medicines for the European market are tested in developing countries in an unethical way. This is contrary to European law in the matter. The European Medicines Agency (EMA) has announced in response to the reports of SOMO and Wemos that it wants to implement improved monitoring of compliance of ethical guidelines. This lobbying has been successful, but it is important to maintain the pressure. On International Clinical Trials' Day 2009, Wednesday 20 May, nine European ministers of health were urgently called on to ensure that the EMA keeps its promise, and international attention was requested for the FairDrugs.org campaign.

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### Uranium workers in Namibia unaware of severe health risks



Research of SOMO and her partner LaRRI has shown that uranium workers in Namibia still fear for their health and lifestyle due to the environmental impact of uranium mining. As well as causing cancer, the 'low level radiation' can contribute to birth defects, high infant mortality and chronic lung, eye, skin and reproductive illnesses. Last autumn SOMO organised a series of workshops in the Southern African country to inform mineworkers and communities on the high risks. This resulted into awareness raising activities and the sharing and incorporation of the research results into international campaigns and networks aimed at improving working and environmental conditions around uranium mines.

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### Shareholders give stock-exchange listed companies a dressing down

In preparation for the shareholders meetings from March to May 2009, SOMO carried out research into the CSR policy and practice of ten Dutch stock-exchange listed companies in 2008. SOMO has drawn up a profile for each of these companies, on which the VBDO issued a voting recommendation. This publications led to a critical position of the shareholders towards the companies. At the Unilever shareholders' meeting for example, interested parties raised the issue of the working conditions of workers in Pakistan, India and Kenya. The [SOMO overview of Unilever](#) showed that the company is increasingly recruiting workers in Asia on the basis of temporary agency contracts rather than permanent contracts.

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### Thousands of consumers call for fair mobile phones



The SOMO coordinated [makeITfair](#) campaign and the [GoodElectronics](#) network last months gave an impulse to the social awareness of electronics companies. Thousands of signatures, collected by [makeITfair](#), were delivered at mobile companies on May 17. A clear signal that also young consumers are fed up with unfair mobile phones and want the companies to take their responsibility. During the [Round Table](#) organised by [makeITfair](#) and [GoodElectronics](#) in May 2009 civil society organisations and companies discussed effective strategies to bring about lasting improvements in the whole chain of production of electronics.

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### Final touches to new international CSR guideline

Following five years of development and negotiation, the International Standardization Organisation (ISO) is putting the final touches to a new international guideline on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). SOMO staff member Bart Slob was involved as an expert in the development of the guideline. This voluntary guideline, the ISO 26000, will contribute to a worldwide basis for uniform agreements regarding CSR, and is expected to have a positive impact on the business community in developing countries.

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### New publications

- [Down to the Wire](#)
  - [Computer Connections](#)
  - [Out Of Controle](#)
  - [Clinical Trials in Developing Countries](#)
  - [Playing with Labour Rights](#)
  - [Uranium mining in Namibia](#)
  - [The dark side of cyberspace](#)
  - [SBM Offshore - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [Shell - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [AkzoNobel - Overview of Controversial Business Practices 2008](#)
  - [Ahold - Overview of Controversial Business Practices 2008](#)
  - [AEGON - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [Heineken - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [Unilever - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [Reed Elsevier - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [TNT - Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
  - [Philips Electronics – Overview of controversial business practices in 2008](#)
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**Established in 1973, the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO) is a non-profit Dutch research and advisory bureau. SOMO investigates the consequences of Multinational Enterprises' (MNEs) policies and the internationalisation of business worldwide.**

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