

Letting the future in:

World Vision & Child Labour in India



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ABBREVIATIONS

ADP	Area Development Program
BDO	Block Development Officer
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CDC	Community Development Coordinator
CPC	Child Protection Committee
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
INDUS	Joint India United States Child Labour Project
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
NCLP	National Child Labour Project
NFE	Non Formal Education
NGO	Non Government Organisation
NPE	National Policy of Education
OBC	Other Backward Castes
SC	Scheduled Castes
SHG	Self Help Group
SSA	Sarva Sikhsa Abhiyan
ST	Scheduled Tribes
UN	United Nations
WVI	World Vision India

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

World Vision has been working with exploited and vulnerable children in India for over 50 years. Specific program attention has been given to working children and the issues surrounding child labour since the early 1990s beginning with the Global Famine Initiative. World Vision India launched child labour focused projects in 19 areas around India, several of which are still operational in Gudiyattam, Kolkatta, Rajahmundry and Guwahati. In September 2005 a workshop, bringing together staff from World Vision India, Support and other Country Offices, as well as representatives of the UN and like-minded NGOs, was held in New Delhi to review World Vision's response to child labour for over more than a decade. This was followed in May 2006 by a workshop, with a high degree of participation from working children, in Chennai, to develop a program strategy for World Vision India's child labour work through to 2012. The strategy and an accompanying photo book, My India, were launched on World Against Child Labour Day, 12 June 2006, when they were officially presented by working children to the President of the Republic of India in New Delhi.

This report was commissioned to supplement the strategy by giving a voice to child labourers and those who work closely with them in the slums, villages and schools of India. The purpose of the report is to review the experience of World Vision with India's working children since the 1990s and to give an opportunity for the children to speak of the successes and lessons that they and World Vision together have learned in their struggle to eradicate the practice of child labour.

World Vision's work has shown that the fight against child labour is slow but winnable. The causes of the practice are multidimensional and the range of cultural, political, economic and educational factors that create an enabling environment for child labour are strong and resistant to rapid change. Yet World Vision can take credit for contributing to a decline in the practice in thousands of communities across India. Where World Vision has achieved greatest success has been in those communities and projects where child labour is a distinct focus and an integrated community-owned response forms the approach.

In such projects the report finds that World Vision has indeed achieved its goal of transformational development. Close, trusting relationships with working children and their families, built over a number of years, are the key to World Vision's success. The organisation's rights-based approach, that keeps children at the centre but includes interventions that support the economic and social viability of the child's home and community, has also been critical and well implemented. Children are real and active participants in the most successful projects and the Self Help Group (SHG) model, while simple, has been developed and used extremely effectively by World Vision in almost every project area.

While World Vision's efforts in combating child labour have generally had a positive impact there are areas that continue to require further attention. The Community Based Organisations (CBOs) supported by World Vision need to be coordinated more thoughtfully if their true collective potential is to be realised. At the same time, World Vision will need to approach public advocacy, especially with the highest levels of the Indian Government in new ways. And finally, key strategic partnerships with like-minded organisations will need to be forged, nurtured and matured to deliver the ambitious goal of eradicating all forms of child labour in over 5000 communities by 2012.

The report is structured into six main sections and is framed around the stories of four children. An overview of the global and Indian child labour contexts is provided in the second section. Section three discusses the linkages between poverty and child labour, and in particular, the horrible practice of bonded child labour in the bidi industry. The challenges faced by girls and a discussion of domestic child labour, often referred to as the 'hidden' form of the practice, is discussed in section four. The fifth section examines the role and relationship between elementary education and child labour. The participation of children and the broader community in World Vision's projects is highlighted and discussed in section six. A concluding final section summarises the success factors of World Vision's experience in India as well as suggests some areas where further attention will be focused in the coming years. Readers with an interest in more statistical information pertaining to child labour will find this in the Annexes. The key objective of the research was to document success stories and lessons learnt of child labour initiatives in World Vision India's Area Development Programs and discrete projects.



Children from across the world are engaged in various forms of child labour.

METHODOLOGY & CONSTRAINTS

A consultant, Nathan Rabe, was appointed to research and write this report. Nathan Rabe has worked in international development and humanitarian programs for nearly 20 years. Born and educated in India, he has served in management and leadership roles in the UN system, the NGO sector and the Red Cross Red Crescent Movement. He speaks fluent Hindi and Urdu.

Research for this report was carried out at eight project sites across various regions of India between May and July 2006. The findings are largely derived from semi-structured interviews, group discussions and individual interviews with the children, their families, members of World Vision supported community based organisations (CBO), staff and volunteers of World Vision and other non-government organisations (NGO).

The report's author also consulted a very wide range of literature on the issue of child labour in the form of academic studies, official reports of UN agencies, NGOs and governments, World Vision evaluation and monitoring reports and articles from the mainstream and online media.

Given the diversity and complexity of the subject matter and the scope of World Vision's child labour projects across India, the author in consultation with World Vision Australia and World Vision India focused the research on four particular aspects or sub-issues within the larger debate on child labour:

These were:

- Bonded child labour
- Domestic child labour and the girl child
- Education and child labour
- Children's participation in the fight against child labour

The report has not been conceived as a technical paper and makes no pretensions in this regard. Rather to meet one of World Vision's main aims, namely, for the reader to 'hear the voices of the children', the style is journalistic rather than technical or scientific.

The author did not face any significant constraints in carrying out the research or in the preparation of the report.

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This report could not have been completed without the excellent support and cooperation of many people, particularly in World Vision India. David Raj and Panneer Selvam were extremely generous with their time, experience and knowledge. Dr Anjana Purkayastha's insight into the complexities and subtleties of child labour was inspiring. I learned much from her. To all of the Community Development Coordinators and Project Managers in all the projects who expended so much effort to make my visits productive and interesting: V. Shanti, Bahadur Singh, Joseph Wesley, Remi Manoj, Tabitha Francis, P.V. Krishna, G. Dhayalan, N.A. Eliazer, Priscilla Barnabas and many more, thank you. You are the heart and soul of World Vision's success. Sarojitha Arokiaraj and Jayanth Vincent in the media department provided great support and of course my trips would have been complete failures without the excellent coordination of James Arumairaj. In World Vision Australia, Despina Demertizidis' support and insight deserve special mention and thanks. Finally, to the many hundreds of children who welcomed me with smiles and enthusiasm and, who are so committed to stopping child labour, this report is in your honour.



Nathan Rabe
Author



A working child in Bangalore practices his speech on how to eradicate child labour, at a World Vision sponsored competition.

I. INTRODUCTION

“There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.”

Graham Greene

Ugrashil was a notorious and violent bandit who led his gang across the countryside terrorising innocent people. After several years his wife gave birth to a son. Ugrashil loved to play with the little boy's hands and the baby's smile and gurgling voice filled him with love and joy. Ugrashil began to speak gently and his banditry became less violent. During his burglaries, if the house contained children, he would stop and play and kiss them. His gang members complained; “If you keep this up we will all be caught. Stop spending so much time with the children.” But as much as he tried Ugrashil found it impossible to revert to his heartless and cruel practices. Soon his gangsters turned on him and tried to kill him and his wife and baby boy. Ugrashil decided, come what may, he would surrender to the king. Upon receiving the infamous bandit the king was so impressed with his change of heart that he gifted him a hundred gold mohurs and let him choose a new and safe place to live anywhere in the kingdom.



Balakrishna

Indian folklore and religion are full of stories, such as that of Ugrashil, celebrating the special transforming power of children. Indian children are regarded as mini-deities by many parents who are happy to make superhuman sacrifices for them. Offspring are extolled as the wealth of the family and great spiritual lessons are learned from stories of the lives of mythological characters and gods when they were children themselves. One of the most beloved and popular depictions of Lord Krishna is that of him as a chubby infant, Balakrishna, who steals and gorges himself on his mother's freshly churned butter. Balakrishna represents for millions of Indian families the ideal infant boy: mischievous, full of fun, loving and well-loved.

And yet, for too many of India's children, life is far from divine. Rather than being the centre of the universe or valued for their insight, their lives are stained with misery and hopelessness. Because of the social or economic standing of their families in the village, or perhaps because of their gender, they are forced to become adults just as they begin to taste the fruits of childhood. Tens of millions do not attend school. Other millions toil in fields, shops, factories and streets scraping together just enough to keep them and their families alive. As modern India surges towards its goal of being a world economic superpower, a huge number of children are sucked by the wake into the cities and towns as a malleable and vulnerable work force. Somewhere between 45 and 80 million Indians below the age of 14 are working every day across the country. Most of them work long hours in harsh conditions on India's farms. Many others are sold or 'mortgaged' into a modern form of slavery to make firecrackers, matches, locks and souvenirs for export. One of India's most lucrative and famous exports, hand-woven carpets, preferred throughout the 'Western' world, remains one of the cruellest employers of young children. Recent studies indicate that as many as 300,000 children are weaving carpets in the famous 'carpet belt' of eastern Uttar Pradesh.

The deliberate and systematic exploitation of children for their labour is, sadly, a relatively recent but universal social phenomenon. Children around the world have always helped their parents and other adults in running farms, tending animals or chores around the house. In European countries apprenticeships may have started when boys and girls were 10 or 12 but learning crafts and trades was seen as a long process, with children only taking on adult tasks progressively. The exploitation of children, as understood today, was relatively infrequent.¹ It was the rapid industrialisation of Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries that saw the practice of employing young children, often below the age of 10, to do adult jobs, become commonplace. Although, by the late 14th century some Italian states had banned the employment of children under the age of 13, four centuries later this enlightened attitude was largely ignored by industrialising Europe. Children, often runaways or orphans, were regularly transported, below decks and often tethered to horses, to the American colonies in the 17th and 18th centuries as domestic and agricultural labourers. So prevalent were working children in the United States that in the early 19th century they provided a full 30% of the workforce. By 1890, twenty percent of all American children were working full time.

Over the same period, social reformers and others opposed to the industrial revolution, began speaking out against what they termed 'child labour'. The ugly unhygienic and dangerous urban conglomerations of England were the inspiration for many social movements and were harshly criticised by artists of the day, such as Charles Dickens. Parliaments passed bills that first regulated but eventually banned children from working. Probably of more significance was that, as a rural world quickly changed into a highly industrial, urban one, everything was up for redefinition. The meanings of 'child' and 'childhood' were no exception. These words demanded new definitions, especially when they came up against totally new modes

¹ Heywood, Colin. "Child Labor." In Encyclopedia of European Social History, Vol. 4, edited by Peter N. Stearns, 513-523. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001.

of livelihood, and as education became accessible to more than just the elite. It has been argued that the notion of childhood as a stage that is suddenly exited (around age 18) for another known as 'adulthood' is entirely modern. Historically children advanced more subtly to maturity, taking on at various stages adult responsibilities including, when necessary and appropriate, work.² In the 'West' where child labour, for the most part, has been eradicated, such insights seem banal.

But consider India. Some 74% of the population is rural and largely untouched by industrialisation. The Indian Government has committed itself to extending the reach of primary education to all parts of the country. The economy is growing at one of the highest rates in the world. Indeed, many parts of India are experiencing industrialisation for the first time. Determining who exactly is a child and when she should begin work is a contentious issue. India needs workers. Families and children need the income. Underlying much of the debate on child labour in India today rests uneasily an unresolved and disparate concept of 'the child' and the purpose of 'childhood.'

Current estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) on the number of working children in the world today are as high as 250 million. Nearly one in 10 of all the world's children. Of these, about half (126 million) work in hazardous industries such as firecracker factories, mines and the sex trade. But gathering accurate figures on the prevalence of the practice is problematic. Countries have defined 'children' differently. No standard for counting working children exists. Over time industries have restructured themselves in ways that hide child labourers. In other instances, national laws are poorly drafted and only address certain visible parts of the economy. Public awareness has grown over the past two and a half decades about the exploitation of child labourers. As a consequence, employers and even the children themselves, are aware of how to avoid inspectors, journalists and activists. But the main reason, according to the ILO "for the relative paucity of statistical data on child labour is the low priority it tends to receive. If the elimination of child labour were to become a more fully mainstreamed development objective, it would attract the necessary resources to fill the gap."

Whatever the final tally, a figure will never capture the actual pain and emotions of the child who is compelled, often for the simplest reasons, to spend years in bondage or labour.

These children's lives are defined by a strange state of limbo. They are waiting, usually unseen and unheard, for something. They know that this is not what life should be like and yet they are unfamiliar with anything but sore limbs, exhaustion and closed doors. They hope. They daren't demand, but they hope, that something will change in their world. They are waiting for that moment, when the door opens and they are free to be children. The moment when they meet their future. This is the moment, the end of child labour, that World Vision in its work with India's children is striving to bring about.

1.1 Defining child labour

Before one can eradicate a thing one must first define what that thing is. Arriving at a definition of 'child labour' is a challenge in itself. Many definitions, each offering a slightly different perspective or focus, are frequently jumbled together as child labour. The resulting lack of clarity makes pinning the 'beast' down more difficult. What exactly are we talking about? The practice of child labour, also, looks different in many parts of the world and varies from industry to industry. Multiple, unclear and overlapping definitions can also (wittingly or otherwise) hide the issue behind a wall of bureaucratic statistics on 'marginal workers', 'child workers in non-hazardous activities', 'children neither studying nor working'. This variety in its form and interpretation is one of the difficulties those who are committed to eradicating child labour confront; if there is no global agreement on the definition, or its manifestations, it is all the more difficult to monitor and eventually abolish.

Not all work done by children or young people should be labelled 'child labour'. A large number of children around the world help out with household chores, around the farm or work part time in holidays to earn extra spending money. At the same time most of these children are also studying and the work they choose to do is neither hazardous nor hinders their wellbeing. Rather than being detrimental to the child such work is a powerful way to develop social and emotional skills. Such children are considered, by the ILO, to be 'economically active children'. "To be counted as economically active, a child must have worked for at least one hour on any day during a seven-day reference period."³ This positive form of work performed by children is not child labour.

Embedded in the struggle to arrive at a definition is a deeper concern. Who is a child? How we choose to identify and define the young people and children of this world will help us define child labour. Unfortunately, even though we all 'know a child when I see one', the legal definition is similarly multifarious. The most widely accepted definition of a child is the one laid out in the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) adopted by the UN in 1989. Article 1 of the Convention states: "For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of 18 years, unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier." While this definition is now almost universally accepted, within the statement lies one of the fundamental challenges to mounting an effective campaign against child labour. The second part of Article 1, which allows for each State to determine the age of majority, also creates a major loophole ready to be exploited by those with an interest in preserving child labour. India, like many countries, has acceded to the CRC. However, in its most important piece of child labour legislation the Indian state declares that a "child means a person who has not completed the 14th year of age." Immediately one is confronted with a potent contradiction. Who is a child? Is she below 18 or below 14? In addition to such contradictions in the legal frameworks of nations, there exist the traditional demarcations of childhood. Or, more correctly, when a child attains majority. Many traditional societies mark the border between child and adult at puberty, especially for the girl, at which time she is forced to live a more confined life, in some societies get married and take on other adult responsibilities. Even within one family or community children may be defined differently depending on the social norms and traditional beliefs of the family. Boys in Jamaica, for instance, are seen as more suited to earning a living and are encouraged to pursue economic activities rather than continue in school like their sisters.

² Heywood, 513-523.

³ The End of Child Labour, 5.

THE MANY MANIFESTATIONS OF CHILD LABOUR:

- **Children in the Worst Forms of Child Labour** – *practices similar to slavery including the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage, forced or compulsory labour, prostitution or pornography, and drugs-related work. Such work includes work underground, underwater, at dangerous heights or in confined spaces, work with dangerous machinery, work with hazardous materials, and working long hours including night work.*
- **Child Trafficking** – *'any act or transaction whereby a child is transferred by any person or group of persons to another for remuneration or any other consideration'. This category refers to the commercial exploitation of children.*
- **Child Prostitution and Pornography** – *'the use of a child in sexual activities for remuneration or any other form of compensation' - this category includes using images of children involved in real or simulated sex.*
- **Children Used for Crime** – *'the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs...' It is important to note that this category is different than the broader category of juvenile crime, which includes the cases of children committing criminal acts, but it does include almost all cases of children selling drugs, as they are usually being used at the distribution end of a larger business chain.*
- **Children Used in Armed Conflict** – *the involvement of children as combatants or support workers in armed conflict, whether by government forces or rebel forces.*
- **Domestic Child Servants** – *children working in household duties for extended hours at the home of an employer - many of these children are working in slavery or slave-like conditions, many have been trafficked and are considered to be 'invisible' since they neither appear on work or school registers.*

courtesy: www.schoolisthebestplacetowork.org

One of the most powerful (and controversial) definitions of a child labourer is simply a child that is not in school. This speaks to the strong dynamic that exists between education and child labour. Given that the concept of 'child labour' is based on the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138), which represents the most comprehensive and authoritative international definition of minimum age for admission to employment or work, it is important to refer to this Convention. "The minimum age for admission to any type of employment or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is likely to jeopardise the health, safety or morals of young persons shall not be less than 18 years."⁴

Any definition can be refuted or improved and needs, therefore, to be sensitive and appropriate to each local situation. Convention 138 itself recognises that by including in Article 1 "...a Member whose economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed may, after consultation with the organisation of employers and workers concerned, where such exist, initially specify a minimum age of 14 years."⁵

So in the end several definitions of 'child' and 'child labour' exist. Which one is evoked depends on the motivation or agenda of the institution or person.

1.2 Worst forms of child labour

In 1999 the ILO unanimously adopted Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour, the aim of which is to take urgent and comprehensive steps to eliminate and prohibit hazardous child labour. According to the ILO, "hazardous work" by children is any activity or occupation that, by its nature or type, has or leads to adverse effects on the child's safety, health (physical or mental) and moral development. Hazards could also derive from excessive workload, physical conditions of work, and/or work intensity in terms of the duration or hours of work even where the activity or occupation is known to be non-hazardous or 'safe'.⁶

Much of the collective effort of governments, the UN and civil society since 1999 has been focused on eradicating these 'worst forms of child labour'. As the latest ILO global report on child labour demonstrates, this collective effort has had a very positive effect with countries around the world registering a decrease of 33% in the numbers of children between the ages of 5-14 working in the most hazardous industries.⁷ As trafficking of children becomes an increasingly widespread phenomenon there remain very strong reasons to continue to sustain these efforts. Most of the public, consumer-driven campaigns against the use of children in manufacturing have targeted these hazardous industries, which are, at the same time, the most visible. The products of these industries, carpets, clothes and shoes, are those most valued by the affluent consumers in the developed countries. Campaigns such as Rugmark⁸ have proved remarkably successful in this regard. Although targeting the worst forms of child labour has been very effective it has the potential to deflect the world's attention away from the broader issue of exploiting children's labour. One of the dangers of a strong focus on the worst, or most hazardous, forms of child labour is the temptation to believe that a drastic reduction of the most exploitative forms of child labour means the battle is largely won. Most child labourers, in India and the world, do not make carpets, make sneakers or work in apparel sweatshops. They work in the agricultural sector, or are hidden within the homes of the more well off where they work as domestic servants completely beyond the scope and reach of most laws.

While the battle to free children from these dangerous and degrading forms of labour is urgent, World Vision is convinced that such debates about 'hazardous vs.

⁴ Article 3, ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (No. 138)

⁵ Article 1, Convention No. 138.

⁶ The End of Child Labour: Within Reach, ILO Geneva, 2006, pg.5.

⁷ Ibid., pg. vi.

⁸ A label certifying that no children were involved in the manufacture of the carpet.

non-hazardous' are ultimately secondary. Child labour, however it manifests itself, by its very nature is harmful to a child. All forms of child labour must be eradicated; all working children must be given their inalienable right to enjoy their childhood and develop themselves for lives as productive adults.

With this in mind, and while accepting the CRC definition of a child, World Vision recently defined child labour as:

The exploitation of children and their labour, and a child labourer as:

- A child under the age of 14 who is forced to work or
- A child between the ages of 14 and 18 who is forced to do work that is illegal, detrimental to her/his right to education and hazardous or exploitative.⁹

1.3 Roots of child labour

When you meet a girl or boy who is only 11 years old and who works for a pittance that is the family's sole income you ask yourself, why does this happen? And more often than not, when you ask that boy or girl you will be told, "I have no choice. We are a very poor family." Indeed, poverty is the most common answer to the question. It is no surprise that those who constitute the largest number of this global children's workforce are already the poorest. And the most vulnerable. Indigenous and tribal peoples, migrants and outcastes, girls and displaced persons, the disabled and minorities are the most susceptible to child labour often because they are the least powerful members of their society and already bear other burdens of discrimination. The labour recruiter and the middleman target these people because they have few defenders and are unused to raising their voices against their exploitation. All too often those living on the periphery of the community are compelled to take up hazardous work because even a meagre income is better than none. Poverty is, without a doubt, one of the strongest reasons why children enter the workforce. In India's cities especially, to which hundreds of thousands of children migrate every year, most in search of better economic opportunities, 'wage poverty' is the primary reason for children being sent to work. Those who benefit from the labour of children are strong advocates of the poverty argument. "At least we are providing work and some income to their poor families," the employer says. "Without us they would die even poorer." But World Vision has observed that poverty is linked to child labour in a more insidious way. Rather than alleviate poverty, child labour actually perpetuates it.

In India, some estimates of the number of child labourers roughly equals the number of unemployed adults. By hiring children employers deny those who rightfully deserve to be working, an income. Where children are in the workforce, the general level of wages tends to be suppressed depriving even adults of the opportunity to earn a decent living. Since child workers are paid less, employers do not invest in technology thereby keeping jobs basic and suitable for children. Further, children do not organise themselves. Therefore unions, which have been a key factor in raising wages and improving working conditions around the world, are kept out. Communities in these situations find it impossible to break out of the cycle of poverty.

1.4 Causes/reasons for child labour

World Vision has learned from its work across India that education often plays as great a role as poverty in determining whether a child becomes a labourer. If parents have received some education or are literate, they tend not to allow their children to become labourers. If parents themselves are unable to read or write and have never been to school then they are more sceptical of the benefits of education. At the same time, where schools are neither close to home nor of sufficient quality to provide a tangible benefit, parents prefer to send their children into the workforce. But time and again studies and experience from the field have demonstrated when given the opportunity, many of the poorest people in the world will readily give up the supposed 'income' of their child if she or he can be enrolled in a school.

Caste System

Deeply inculcated belief systems enforced by religious practice are another influential reason why many children are forced into work. The caste system in India is an intricate hierarchical social scaffold that determines each person's 'role' or function in relation to others. Some castes are to be served and serviced by others. And often it is customary for the 'serving' castes not to expect to be educated or aspire to anything beyond their congenial status. In such a system, society not only 'approves' child labour, it demands it.

Economic Shock

World Vision's field work with child labourers and their families in India has shown that one of the most common causes for children entering the workforce and not being educated is what are sometimes called, 'economic shocks'. These are incidents such as illness, accidents, disasters, and ceremonies that are cultural and customary that require access to credit to fill a temporary need. One of the features of villages in India is a usurious money lending system. Reasonable and transparent credit is generally unavailable. To fill the gap caused by the crisis, poor families often have no other option than to send one or more of their children to work to make up this demand for temporary income. In this way, child labour is a coping mechanism. However, the sad reality is that rather than 'smooth' the gap created by the shock, the child is very often lost for many years and often for life, usually for a small amount of money. It is in this nexus between the lack of access to non-usurious credit and child labour that the 'poverty' argument is difficult to deny or diminish.

Inconsistent Legislation Enforcement

Ironically, one of the most significant ongoing supports of child labour is legislation designed to address the practice. Most countries of the world have acceded to the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Fewer have ratified the ILO Conventions (No. 138 and No. 182). But it is rare to find a country that does not have laws directly limiting or banning the practice. And yet child labour continues. Non-enforcement, or the inconsistent enforcement, of laws is a part of the environment that enables the exploitation of children's labour to continue. Hand in hand, a lack of political will or deprioritisation of compulsory universal education, again something that most countries endorse in one way or another, is a strong factor in sustaining child labour.

Agricultural Need

The causes as well as the 'faces' of child labour vary widely from rural areas to cities. Most child labour in the world is rural and agricultural. India is no exception. Children help out their own, but often, other families to plant, harvest, process

⁹At the Cost of Childhood: Responding to Child Labour. Chennai, World Vision, 8.

and market the produce. In rural settings customary practices and social orders are generally more readily accepted and valued. One of the less recognised aspects of the caste system is that while it is extremely hierarchical it is a system based upon mutual obligation. Even high castes have certain responsibilities towards those below them, which can, in times of crisis, serve as a (insufficient) safety net of sorts. Rural child labour is frequently seasonal and a part of a larger community, family enterprise. No doubt it can be dangerous and detrimental to children, especially when chemicals and pesticides are involved. The urban scene differs in that children are often a part of a broken or split migrant family. They have been brought or come to the city with one purpose—to seek work.

1.5 The girl child

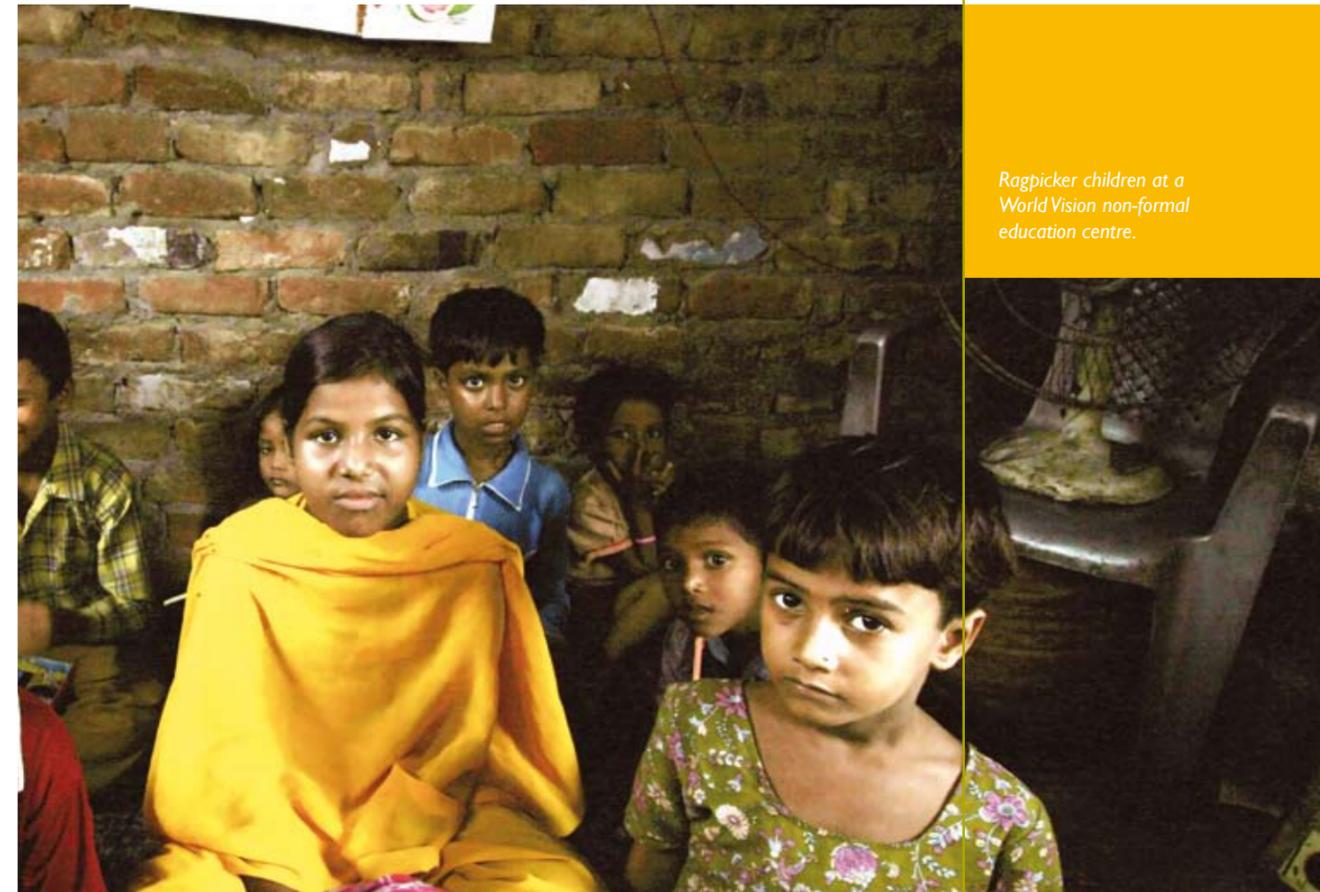
Child labour affects boys and girls differently. Their experience of the working life and even their susceptibility to it depends in large part on their gender. Some argue that child labour is becoming increasingly 'feminised'.¹⁰ Girls are valued differently than their brothers in many societies. Unlike boys who are (generally) encouraged to be educated and enjoy life, girls are expected to help out at home. Education is an extra luxury or an indulgence for a few years in early life. She is also expected to preserve herself for marriage, which can mean that she is required to stay at home, learn domestic tasks like cooking, sewing and raising younger siblings. If she is in school she also is usually the first sibling to be withdrawn at times of economic shock regardless of whether she is doing well or not. Rather than attend school many girls are forced to accompany their mothers to work as 'domestic servants' in other people's homes. This is seen as a natural environment for the girl and if she is able to supplement the family income, all the better.

While the ILO estimates that more boys than girls are working as child labourers, especially in industries that can be considered 'hazardous',¹¹ in the youngest age group of child workers (5-11) they are roughly equal. Such estimates, however, also do not account for the large number of girls working as domestic servants. World Vision considers child labour to be particularly unfair on girls as it is but one of multiple burdens that she is compelled to bear along with a range of other cultural, customary, religious and social proscriptions.

Millennium Development Goals and child labour

World Vision, like many other organisations working alongside the world's poor, has challenged itself to advocate for and contribute to the creation of the conditions that will see the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Launched by the United Nations in 1999 the MDGs commit the UN, donors, governments and development organisations to work collectively for a significant improvement in the lives of the world's poorest people by the year 2015.

While none of the MDGs address child labour directly, many of them share an intimate relationship with working children. By allowing or even forcing children to continue to work, the world creates the conditions that the MDGs, in particular the first three, seek to ameliorate. At the same time, if these goals are achieved then the number of children who are forced to toil away their childhood will be substantially reduced. For this reason, World Vision sees the Millennium Development Goals as an important benchmark and tool in the fight against the practice of child labour. In its recently developed strategy 'At the Cost of Childhood: responding to child labour', World Vision's commitments are grounded in the framework of the goals.



Ragpicker children at a World Vision non-formal education centre.

¹⁰ Elementary Education And Child Labour In India , Gerard Oonk, India Committee in the Netherlands , July 1998
¹¹ The End of Child Labour, pg. 7.

2. PERSPECTIVES ON CHILD LABOUR

2.1 THE GLOBAL SITUATION

The ILO has given its most recent global report on child labour an optimistic title, *The End Of Child Labour: Within Reach*. The UN body charged with monitoring and taking the lead on developing international policy on child labour makes a strong case for such optimism. Since 2002 the total number of working children has decreased globally by 11%.¹² In the hazardous industries, or 'the worst forms' of child labour, the fall is even more dramatic: 26% overall and 33% for children between the ages of 5 and 14.¹³ Over the same period, more states have ratified the two international conventions targeting child labour (Convention 182 and 138), with 158 states, and 77 states, respectively, officially party to the conventions.¹⁴ "The global picture that emerges is that child work is declining, and the more harmful the work and the more vulnerable the children involved, the faster the decline."¹⁵

World Vision welcomes this positive trend. Its own work with children in hazardous industries, such as the quarries of Andhra Pradesh in southern India, supports ILO's conclusion. Only six or seven years ago countless children as young as seven were readily found working at the quarries, lifting heavy stones, working around explosives and loading vehicles. Today it is almost impossible to find a single child. In other parts of India too, and in other industries, in urban and rural areas, World Vision has noted a tremendous rise in the level of awareness among children and their parents about the hazards of child labour and the value of education.

Although much of the world's attention and efforts have focused on children working in the high visibility industries, often producing goods for export to the 'West', the largest number of children across the world is employed in the agricultural sector. While some agricultural processes and activities are prohibited as 'hazardous', all agricultural work that is not on the child's family's own land should, some argue, be categorised as such. Children are often exposed to chemical based pesticides and fertilisers as well as dangerous agricultural equipment in this industry, which can result in serious injury or debilitating health problems and diseases. Even labouring exposed to the elements, usually without proper equipment or protective clothing, for long hours is enough to be considered hazardous.

Of all regions in the world the Asia Pacific has the highest concentration of child workers in the world. Most of these are concentrated even further on the Indo-Pakistan sub-continent. Other regions have made impressive progress, particularly Latin America and the Caribbean, which are now on par with most developed countries. This latter trend holds hope for other regions, that indeed, child labour can be substantially reduced and eventually eradicated. The report's overwhelming message is that child labour is no longer an 'inevitability'. With the right mix of policy, law and action child labour can be a thing of the past.

Legal framework

The international debate on child labour sits firmly within the broad discussion and framework of human rights in general. The Convention on the Rights of the Child is considered to be one of the most important human rights treaties of the last 20 years. The rights of working children are addressed indirectly in a number of international human rights conventions, such as the Convention on the Protection of all Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (1990) as well as myriad national laws. A number of important international conventions are in place as well that deal directly with child labour, the two most important of which are ILO Minimum Age Convention (No. 138) and ILO Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No 182). Convention 138 stipulates that no child should work unless he or she has reached the

age of completion of compulsory education or age 15, whichever is higher. Light work can be done by children over 12 years of age in developing countries but hazardous work is restricted to those aged 18 and over. Seventy seven countries have signed this convention over the past three decades but they do not include India, Brazil or Pakistan, all of which have major concentrations of child labour.

Many States believe Convention 138 to be "too complex" and "difficult to apply". For many the designation of 15 as the age of employment is unrealistic. Others have argued that the implementation of the convention is linked to other equally thorny policy areas, such as universal elementary education. In any case, countries such as India argue that their own national legislation is rigorous enough and ratification of Convention 138 is unnecessary. In response to these criticisms in 1999 the ILO adopted Convention 182, which called for the prohibition and immediate elimination of the 'worst forms of child labour'. Convention 182, while important in its own right, can also be seen as a compromise position which focused the world's attention on the most horrendous exploitation of young people and their labor, while allowing States to maintain high levels of working children in categories deemed non hazardous.

Article 3 of Convention 182 states:

"For the purposes of this Convention, the term 'the worst forms of child labour' comprises:

- (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict;***
- (b) the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances;***
- (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties;***
- (d) work, which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children."***

In addition to the two ILO conventions, which together set the parameters of the sorts of labour that are unacceptable under international standards, another landmark and very significant convention is that of the Rights of the Child, adopted in 1989. This convention outlines a range of rights that adhere to children, encompassing education, leisure, opinion, security, trafficking and the like. Article 32 of the CRC stipulates the right of the child "to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's education, or to be harmful to the child's health or physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development."

The CRC is the international convention that has been ratified more quickly by member states than any other. Addressing as it does a whole range of interdependent rights, rather than just one particular type, it is probably the most fundamental and useful international convention for combating child labour. Its recognition and valuing of the whole child and her family as being indivisible gives the CRC an extra weight that the more narrow ILO conventions, understandably, lack. World Vision's work is motivated by a desire to achieve a life of fullness for every

¹² A more detailed insight into various aspects of child labour statistical information is available in the Annex section.

¹³ *The End of Child Labour: Within Reach*, ILO, Geneva, pg. vii

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pg. xi

child. "All our efforts will be carried out with the conviction that the needs of child labourers are best met by addressing holistically the total needs of her/his family and community."¹⁶ In the fight against child labour in India, World Vision uses the CRC as its most basic and powerful weapon. The convention is explained to children at every forum and occasion. Children are encouraged to talk to their parents and employers and cite the convention. It forms the most important framework of World Vision's work, not just for child labourers but all of India's children.

It is perhaps useful to remember, "no one has yet drafted the perfect treaty and... the Convention on the Rights of the Child is not without (its) problems. The provisions of the convention do leave quite a bit of room for interpretation. Nevertheless, the standards are far from illusory and all treaties rely primarily on the good faith of governments for their implementation."¹⁷

2.2 THE INDIAN SITUATION

By virtue of the size and diversity of its cultures and population, tackling child labour in India is an extraordinarily difficult task. Simply coming to grips with its manifestations is a challenge. With a predominantly rural population most working children are difficult to trace, identify and follow up. Extending quality educational services into the hinterlands is always troublesome. In recent years as India speeds ahead economically, the government has given priority to urban infrastructure and development that benefits the middle classes. Rural development, and in particular farm policy, has received less attention. Therefore, any 'accurate' count of the numbers of children engaged in full-time work, or economic activity or the worst forms of child labour in the countryside is dubious. The very same rocket that India rides to the moon, means that urbanisation is an ever more powerful trend. There is hardly an Indian city or town that is not experiencing this urgent economic surge; cranes and bulldozers are everywhere. Roads are being widened. New subways are being gouged out of the earth and new skyscrapers hit the sky. Urban migration has always been a trend in developing countries but in India it is bringing millions into already stretched urban areas in search of work. In such an environment, children are even easier to exploit. They arrive with or without their families in a strange place, often unfamiliar with the language and local culture. They are willing to accept almost any income, which most claim is better than the incomes they were able to make back home. Employing migrants, and especially their children, makes good economic sense for booming businesses that are eager to cut their costs while they gain a foothold in the globalised market.

Both undergirding and imposing itself upon this dynamic maelstrom of activity, movement and dislocation, sits one of the most ancient, durable and, arguably, unfair social structures in the world, the caste system. The "thoroughgoing recognition that men are not the same, and that there is a hierarchy of classes, each with its separate duties and distinctive way of life, is one of the most striking features of ancient Indian sociology. The fourfold division of society was regarded as fundamental, primeval, and divinely ordained. The four varnas (lit. colours; classes) of India developed until a situation arose with a dominant fair minority striving to maintain its purity and its supremacy over a darker majority. Tribal class-divisions hardened, and the dark-skinned aboriginal found a place only in the basement of the Aryan social structure, as a serf with few rights and many disabilities. Theoretically all Aryans belonged to one of the four classes, with the exception of children, ascetics and widows, who were outside the system."¹⁸

Some scholars of child labour and education in India make a powerful argument that the reason India has been unable to make the same advances in compulsory education and the eradication of child labour as other similarly or even less developed countries, is directly attributable to the deep seated set of beliefs, which essentially uphold "the Indian view of the social order, notions concerning the respective roles of upper and lower social strata, social classes, and concerns that 'excessive' and 'inappropriate' education for the poor would disrupt existing social arrangements."¹⁹

When you meet and talk with working children it is clear that almost without exception, all belong to groups at or near the bottom of the social ladder; Scheduled Castes and Tribes and Backward Castes, in contemporary Indian legal parlance. During the course of carrying out the research for this report, as I traveled across India, I met one child, out of more than over 1,000, who did not represent the lower castes or tribes. Eradicating child labour in India, therefore, requires more than policy and laws. An appreciation of the particular social reality of India is essential.

2.2.1 The scope of the practice

Over 12 million children are recognised by the Indian Census of 2001 as being child labourers. This is up from 11 million the previous decade. However, given the invisibility of so many children who work in the unregulated or 'informal' sectors, a more accepted figure is 44 million. If the definition, 'every child out of school is a potential child labourer', is accepted, the number rises to an alarming 80-100 million.²⁰ Children make up 3.1% of the total workforce. As in most countries, the majority of children who work are in the agricultural and fishery sector. Indian children have long been taken to work far from home by 'relatives' and recruiters. But the outright kidnapping and trafficking of children across India and the sub continent is an alarming trend. Boys from the deep south are found working in sweatshops in Uttar Pradesh. Girls from Nepal are among the most popular in the brothels of Mumbai and Chennai. Young boys are exported to the Gulf States to work as camel jockeys. As with any numeration, it is nearly impossible to identify how many children are trafficked in India, as criminal-commercial gangs who work well outside of the law, restrict access to them.

According to official figures, the child labour workforce is made up of 60% boys and 40% girls. However, given the invisibility of girls behind the walls of their own or other people's homes it is impossible to be certain of this ratio.

2.2.2 The legislative framework

The Constitution of the Republic of India has several provisions that address child labour and related practices. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings and forced labour. Article 24 prohibits the employment of children below the age of 14 in factories, mines or other hazardous industries. Article 39 (e) and (f) establishes principles for the non-exploitation of children for economic purposes and the holistic development of the child. Finally, free and compulsory education through the age of 14 is provided for in Article 45.

In addition to the constitutional guarantees there exist an impressive range of laws, enacted at both the national and state level, that target various aspects of child labour. But no law bans child labour outright. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986), the cornerstone of Indian legislation on child labour, prohibits

¹⁶ At the Cost of Childhood: Responding to Child Labour. World Vision India, Chennai, 2006, pg. 8.

¹⁷ Human Rights by Hurst Hannum, in The United Nations and International Law, edited by Christopher C. Joyner, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 1997, pg. 152.

¹⁸ Basham, A.L. The Wonder That Was India (3rd revised edition). 137-138, New York, Taplinger, 1967.

¹⁹ Weiner, Myron. The Child and the State in India. 5, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1991.

²⁰ Kanth, Amod K. and Sahay, Anupama. Globalization, Vulnerability and Child Labour: Indian Context. 5, National Seminar on Globalisation and Child Labour, Noida, 2004.

the employment of children in certain hazardous occupations and processes and regulates working conditions in other, non-hazardous sectors.²¹

The reality for Indian children is that even though many laws including Juvenile Justice Care and Protection Act 2000 and their nation's constitution seek to protect them, they continue to be exploited. This is not just because enforcement of the laws is inconsistent. This is undeniably the case. Labour inspectors are few and overworked. Like most government servants they are poorly remunerated and therefore, often collude with employers to ignore violations of the law. When charges are laid, years pass before the case is heard and then usually a token fine is assessed, if any at all. Children themselves, often feeling the responsibility of being the 'sole earner' for their family, cooperate with employers to avoid inspectors.

The issue of compulsory education is intimately linked with child labour. Any strategy to eradicate the latter depends on effective and robust implementation of laws relating to the former. Similar to child labour laws, Indian states as well as the central government have enacted a range of laws that address compulsory education. However, like the child labour acts, no education act, above the local level, insists upon compulsory and universal primary education. Rather, "they merely establish the conditions under which state governments may make education compulsory in specified areas."²² And indeed, no Indian state, including Kerala, with the highest literacy rate in the country (91%), has legislated compulsory elementary education.

Despite these flaws, many officials, politicians and activists are working determinedly to enforce existing laws and re-write and introduce new ones. World Vision is among these and has made it a strategic priority to "strengthen the implementation and enforcement of national policies and laws that address child labour at the district, state and national level."²³ Two recent laws in particular present new opportunities for World Vision and others. The Right to Information Act (2005) in place since July 2006 allows any Indian citizen to request information from any official body or institution in regard to why a particular law or procedure was not followed. In August 2006 the government banned children from working in restaurants, hotels, roadside cafes (dhabas) and as domestic servants. These have been welcomed, albeit cautiously, by World Vision and other organisations, as limited steps in the right direction which will succeed only if they are backed by the political will to enforce them.

2.2.3 Policy and Programs

In 1987 after the enactment of the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, the Indian government adopted the National Child Labour Policy. The main aspects of the policy were twofold: to establish a Child Labour Technical Advisory Committee and to monitor the enforcement of the Child Labour Act (1986). The main tool of the policy and Ministry of Labour has been and continues to be the National Child Labour Project (NCLP). This was launched in 1988 in areas of high concentration of child labour and is area-specific and timebound. The primary focus of the NCLP and the more recent joint project with the US Department of Labor, INDUS, is on the release and rehabilitation of children from hazardous occupations. World Vision implements 3 NCLP projects in India.

Another important national campaign is the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (Universal Education Program) that seeks to provide elementary education to all children including those in marginalised groups, including child labourers.

Ultimately, however, policy can only provide a framework for action. India has established a strong legislative and policy framework upon which new laws can be built. India has acceded to the Convention on the Rights of the Child and ILO Convention 182 on the Prohibition and Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. India possesses the intellectual, political and fiscal resources to eliminate the practice, if it so wishes. Political will, not policy is what is lacking. As the 2006 ILO report on child labour states, "We know today that with the political will, the resources and the right policy choices we can definitely put an end to this scourge in the lives of so many families worldwide."²⁴

REGULATION NOT PROHIBITION

Among the many laws that address working children and their exploitation are the Factories Act (1948), the Indian Mines Act (1923), the Employment of Children Act (1938), the Plantations Labour Act (1951) and the Beedi and Cigar Workers Act (1966). All of these, and other acts, regulate different aspects of child labour such as the minimum age of employment, banning certain industries and processes from the employment of children and setting minimum standards for workplace facilities. None ban child labour outright.

²¹ Weiner, 77.
²² Ibid., pg 101.
²³ At the Cost of Childhood, 14.
²⁴ The End of Child Labour, vii.

SUKUMAR'S STORY

Two years ago my dad died. When I was five or six he left us and went away. Disappeared for five years. My mother has been mentally ill for as long as I can remember. She walks around our village talking to herself but she can feed herself. I haven't been home for some years. I have an older sister, Sukumati, who is five years older than me. She works in a local leather factory. She's not married; we couldn't afford the costs involved.

She makes 25 rupees (US\$0.25) a day and on that she supports herself and my mother. If I get a good job, I'll make sure she gets married and that my family is supported. I have a few months more to go before I complete my bachelor's degree in Computer Applications and then I'll move back to Pernambut. I'm 22 years old now and my life has completely changed. But 10 years ago, when I was just 12, and had finished 5th grade, I became bonded.

This is how it happened.

My village, Pernambut, is in a part of Tamil Nadu that is famous for child labour. Here there are lots of leather factories that make gloves and jackets and things. Gudiyattam, another nearby town, is full of factories, houses really, where they make bidis. As you can see, all along the roads here the coir rope business is quite popular. Lots of children are working in all of these factories. Yes, like I was, as bonded labour.

My father took a loan of 1,700 rupees (US\$37) from a local moneylender to do some repairs on our thatch roof. I was given to him as a bond until the loan was paid off. They call it bonded labour but really I was the man's slave. I had to do whatever he, or his wife, asked of me. Who cared about whether it was day or night or whether I was tired. I had to do what they demanded.

Every morning I would start at the man's 'factory' between six and seven. For the next 12, or even some days 15 hours, I would sit with my legs crossed in a small room with no fan, it was so hot, and close the tips of bidis. My quota was 4,000 bidis a day. If I rolled less then the owner would beat me. Sure, he beat me a lot. Sometimes with a thick bamboo stick. I was paid 10 rupees a day but I never saw the money. It went straight to my dad. So I never know really how much I made or if the loan was being paid off. There were other children working there too, maybe three or four boys. We weren't allowed to talk during the day but we would try to support each other and be friends as much as possible.

I had to eat before I came to work or bring my own lunch. He never fed us. Many days I ate nothing. When I needed to go to the toilet I had to ask his permission. Many days I would work till 10.30 in the evening. I was so tired but then his wife would make me work for her, cleaning dishes or doing whatever she wanted. On festival days I had to clean their house. I complained to my dad many times about how they mistreated me but he would tell me to do whatever they asked."



Sukumar

My village, Pernambut, is in a part of Tamil Nadu that is famous for child labour.

SUKUMAR'S STORY

3. BONDED LABOUR AND THE POVERTY ARGUMENT

The bidi is an indigenous cigarette made of tobacco rolled in a leaf from the tendu tree. They are the preferred form of tobacco in India's rural areas and account for over a third of India's tobacco production. The bidi industry generates more than one billion US dollars a year and employs hundreds of thousands of children.²⁵ Bidi making is one of rural India's most important industries. It is promoted by government, industry sources, business, the scientific community and even political parties as having "a vital role in rural welfare and in promoting rural economy."²⁶ Historically, it is a cottage industry with most production being done by entire families in their homes or the home of a relative or friend. Contractors act as middlemen between the manufacturers and the rollers. The cigarettes are rolled at home and then delivered to the contractor who sources more materials for the labourers. Often the entire family, or several members, have been bonded to a local moneylender who serves as a middleman for city-based company owners and distributors. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act (1986) prohibits children from bidi making as well as handling tobacco in any form.²⁷

In order to really understand Sukumar's experience as a bonded child labourer it is important to be clear about what this terrible form of child servitude actually is.

3.1 Bonded labour

A bonded child is a child working in conditions of servitude to pay off a debt. Although the terms of their bondage vary, all bonded children have three things in common: they are working for nominal wages, in consideration of an advance (loan), and are not free to discontinue their work. The value of the bonded child's services,



When I was 12, I was sold into bondage. Suddenly I was making bidis, like these I'm holding in my hands, for fifteen hours a day. My name is Sukumar and I'm from Pernambut, Vellore District, in Tamil Nadu.

A bonded child is a child working in conditions of servitude to pay off a debt.

as reasonably assessed, is not applied toward the debt's liquidation, and the length of the services — how long the child has to work — is not limited or defined. The child is, in a sense, a commodity, exchanged between his or her parents and the employer. The employers use the loan to secure indefinitely the cheapest form of labour possible. The loan keeps the child from seeking other employment and is enforced with the threat of calling the loan due and, sometimes, with violence.²⁸

In effect, bonded labour, which affects not just children but the elderly and indeed entire families and communities, is a modern form of slavery. Conditions of bonded labour are hazardous, often violent and completely unregulated. As most bonded labour, especially in the bidi industry, takes place in homes it is officially protected from regulation by Indian law.²⁹ When a bonded labourer dies or is incapacitated and unable to work, his bond is 'transferred' to another member of his family, usually a child. Thus debt bondage can continue without ceasing for generation upon generation. "In some parts of Rajasthan unborn children are pledged into bondage by their parents," said Dr Helen Sekar, Fellow at the V.V. Giri National Labour Institute near Delhi.

The extent of bonded labour is widely debated. Some senior bureaucrats in the Ministry of Labour have adamantly denied the existence of bonded child labour. On the other side, some children's welfare groups believe equally strongly that the number is huge. Several hundred thousand children are known to work in the silk industry,³⁰ and more than 30,000 children are effectively bonded, in Delhi alone, to work in the zari (embroidery) industry. A conservative credible estimate for the total number of bonded children in India is 15 million.³¹

Vellore District in Tamil Nadu is one the major centres of bidi production in India. More than 100,000 people are employed in the industry and children form anything from 25%-30% of that number. Other industries, such as coir, matches and leather, are also common in the district and employ many children, in Gudiyattam taluk in particular.

The bidi industry is particularly cruel for children. Unlike in other occupations that exploit the bonded labour of children, the bidi industry does not permit any of the earned wages of the child to be used to pay off the principle or initial loan. The rates of pay are arbitrarily set by the employer and are far below not only legal minimum wage limits but also the market rate. In most situations the vast majority of the child's earnings are used to service the 'interest', often running to 300% - 500% annually, with the a small fraction directed towards repaying the principal. But the employer will not release the child until the entire original sum is returned in a lump sum. For a landless or poor labourer this is almost impossible. Rather, he is forced to seek an additional loan from the moneylender to make ends meet, and thereby, further indebted himself or his children. Indeed, in many instances, the moneylender himself will voluntarily 'advance' the family additional sums of money to ensure that the debt will never be repaid.

In 1998 in an urgent attempt to try to put an end to this extreme form of child abuse, World Vision began working among the bidi workers in the Gudiyattam taluk of Vellore District. Eight years on, even though impressive progress has been made, the Born to Be Free Project remains one of World Vision's most essential projects.

²⁵ In its 1996 report on Bonded Labour in India, Human Rights Watch estimated the number as 325,000. However, any estimate of the current number is nearly impossible due to a raising of awareness of the illegality of the practice and lack of government information on the sector.

²⁶ "Tendu Patta". The Minor Forest Produce Federation. (<http://www.mfpfederation.com/content/tendupatta.html>).

²⁷ Towards Combating Child Labour, 12-13. Noida, V.V.Giri National Labour Institute, 2005.

²⁸ Small Change: Bonded Child Labor in India's Silk Industry, 16. New York: Human Rights Watch, Vol. 15, No.2, 2003.

²⁹ Weiner, 78.

³⁰ Small Change, 7.

³¹ Small Change, 18.

SUKUMAR'S STORY

"When we started, the children worked in chains," explained Dhayalan, a Community Development Coordinator who has worked with the children of Gudiyattam since the beginning of the project. "Yes, it's true. Employers would put shackles on their ankles and chain them to the wall or together so they couldn't move. We saw this all the time."

In fact, the early impetus for the Born to Be Free project was a boy named Pattinathar. While World Vision was conducting a medical camp in his village, he approached the staff for treatment for scabies. He had a shackle on his ankle. When asked about this he told them that he was the bonded slave of a bidi contractor who had loaned his parents Rs.1,100 (US\$24). Pattinathar admitted that he was often beaten by the contractor and that he ran away. "But he sent his thugs to my house and they dragged me back to work. The contractor shackled me from that day on so I wouldn't run away again." Pattinathar was eventually released from bondage after World Vision staff paid off the family's debt to the contractor.

"These days things have changed a lot. You don't see chains much any more, but of course there are other ways to keep the children working. Seven or eight years ago you would see children working everywhere. It was so common and so accepted. They were in every village and almost every home. Under the trees and along the side of the road. No one knew that child labour was wrong or illegal then. Especially the parents. Never mind the children, they just did what their parents told them to. But over the past few years awareness about the problem and that it is illegal has spread throughout the community. No one can claim now that he doesn't know that making children work or bonded labour is wrong."

"Yes, it's true. Employers would put shackles on their ankles and chain them to the wall or together so they couldn't move. We saw this all the time."

In 1996 the Supreme Court of India issued a landmark verdict (M.C. Mehta vs. State of Tamil Nadu) in response to the terrible prevalence of child labour in the match industry in the town of Sivakasi. It called for the immediate release and rehabilitation of all the working children in the industry in the area and demanded that employers pay penalties as stipulated in existing legislation to the children. The ruling was widely discussed in the media and more than any single event raised the awareness of the Indian public about the practice of child labour.

In Gudiyattam, the bidi producers and the All India Bidi Federation discussed the ruling and pleaded that their industry was different and needed further incentives and protections from the government, not enforcement of laws that would destroy one of India's main domestic industries. Around the same time, World Vision began working with the people in 13 villages in the Gudiyattam area.

"We had to begin slowly of course," Dhayalan continued. "You cannot simply walk into a village and announce that child labour is wrong and education is wonderful. These people are very poor and have been oppressed for centuries. They don't have a natural trust of outsiders. There are a few middle-caste children working in the factories but really most of

"You cannot simply walk into a village and announce that child labour is wrong and education is wonderful."

the families are dalits (untouchables). They have few options and they do need the money. So you have to gain their trust."

How do you do that?

"By talking to them. By living with them and showing them that we care about their children and their futures. Changing people's minds about something is not easy. It took a lot of talking!"

"The best way to fight child labour is to raise awareness about it," said Sundaraj, another CDC. "And if you want to raise awareness the best place to start is with the women of the village. They are the mothers and they care so much for their children. They also understand what it means not to have money. Their husbands can waste their time and money drinking but it is the women who have to provide the food to the children."



Home-based bidi factory in Gudiyattam.

SUKUMAR'S STORY

3.2 Poverty and child labour

“Children work because their families are poor.” “The working conditions are harsh but the income the children bring in is a significant contribution to the family.” “Poverty will never be eliminated so it just makes sense that child labour will always be with us.”

These are popular opinions and easy conclusions to come by. Especially when the children and their families believe them. “My family was poor,” Sukumar said repeatedly. “I had no hope but my family was that way (poor).” The people in and around Gudiyattam are undoubtedly poor as indeed are most bonded and working children. National school enrolment statistics also seem to indicate that the poor must work: the gross enrolment rate of children aged five to six in 2003 was 96%, but the figure drops dramatically to 60% once the child hits the ‘working age’ of eight or nine.³² Even government officials and some activists contend that poverty is the main cause of child labour and advocate more poverty alleviation programs. These are indeed important. A recent study by the Global March Against Child Labour has shown that families who ‘always have a food deficit’ also had the highest percentage of working children.³³ The World Bank has also demonstrated that child labour is one of the main and most effective coping mechanisms of poor families to cope with temporary cash flow problems.³⁴

The truth of the matter is that child labour actually perpetuates poverty.

Yet as dominant as wage poverty is among the families of working children the evidence from the projects where World Vision works suggests that the relationship of poverty to child labour is not so straightforward. “Poverty is no longer the issue,” Dr Helen Sekar says. “India is a wealthy country. Rather it is the unequal distribution of resources and opportunities that is the problem.”

The truth of the matter is that child labour actually perpetuates poverty.

Because children can easily be paid less than adults (and girl children less than boys) in areas like Gudiyattam wages are generally kept low. Adults either are not employed because they demand higher wages or refuse to work for such meagre returns. This then serves to reinforce the employer’s argument that he must employ children. Because the working children are not in school they are unable to improve their skill base and thus are only ever qualified for poor paying jobs even as adults.

On a more macro level, studies have indicated that child labour can actually slow or hinder the overall development rate of a country. Because working children are generally in poor health, have higher fertility rates, are poorly educated, have less technical savvy and suffer from significant gender inequality, it can be argued that “child labour not only indirectly affects long term growth, but also directly affects (a country’s) social development.”³⁵ In other words, poor countries don’t necessarily create child labour, rather, child labour creates poorer countries.

Some of the states with the highest incidence of child labour in India are those that have high state domestic product. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra,

Karnataka and Gujarat all are economic boom states with higher child labour rates than the traditionally poorer states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. An interesting explanation of this apparent anomaly is that urban child labour is higher in ‘wealthy’ states where there is a greater demand for labour and where adult participation rates in the labour market are also high. In many of India’s cities employers have “created selective markets for child labour in addition to a labour market for adults.”³⁶ This suggests a further twist in the relationship between poverty and child labour and how the labour of children is exploited.

This finding highlights the differences between child labour in a hyper-dynamic urban environment and child labour in a more stable rural setting. In India’s cities World Vision has found that it is unrealistic and dangerous to downplay the overwhelming role that ‘wage poverty’ plays in fostering and maintaining child labour. Research has found that young children are frequently and regularly forced to accompany an adult member of the family to a city far from home with the sole purpose of working and contributing to the family’s collective income. The case of Andhra Pradesh is particularly suggestive in this regard. The state has one of the highest rates of child participation in the workforce and at the same time is experiencing tremendous social upheaval in vast agricultural areas of the state which have been in the grip of severe drought for many years. It is difficult to conclude that a significant proportion of child labour in Andhra’s fast growing cities is not a direct consequence of the immense economic pressure felt by farming families.

In rural communities generally, however, World Vision agrees with the strong emerging evidence that a far more potent cause of child labour is poor education. States and countries that have successfully extended elementary education to the widest numbers of its people, tend to have the lowest child labour rates. Many studies in India, again in some of the most notorious child labour ‘sourcing districts’, have demonstrated that even the poorest rural families, when given the option and assistance to enrol their children in school, most prefer to do so, rather than demand they work. Understanding the causes of child labour, therefore, is more complex than first glance may suggest. Wage poverty is clearly a strong factor, especially in certain environments, but in other settings, it is not necessarily the primary factor for the incidence of child labour. And yet, World Vision’s work has shown that an effective sustainable response to child labour must not totally ignore poverty alleviation, if for no other reason than the children and adults affected by child labour demand that their poverty be addressed.

3.3 Self help groups

With the experience of Sukumar and other bonded children in mind, World Vision has made poverty alleviation a central component of its child labour work. “We believe in a holistic approach,” Wesley, the manager of the Born to Be Free Project says. “What good is it if we help the child but his family is still unable to escape poverty? They’ll send him right back to the bidi or match factory.”

“One of my teachers had some contact with World Vision,” continues Sukumar. “When he noticed I wasn’t coming to school any longer he came to my house but I ran away from him. I was afraid he would take me away from work and my family wouldn’t be able to pay off the contractor. Eventually he got me to talk and found out that I was bonded. Dhayalan, from World Vision, told me one day that I shouldn’t go to the bidi factory. I complained that the contractor would send men

³² Joshi, Sudhanshu, Zutshi, Bupinder and Vajpeyi, Alok. Review of Child Labour, Education and Poverty Agenda. India Country Report 2006, 7. New Delhi, Global March Against Child Labour, 2006.

³³ Review of Child Labour, 21.

³⁴ Beegle, Kathleen, Dehejia, Rajeev H, and Gatti, Roberta. Child Labour, Income Shocks and Access to Credit. 20. World Bank Policy Research Working Paper, No. 3075, June 2003

³⁵ Galli, Rossana. The Economic Impact of Child Labour: 7. Geneva. International Institute for Labour Studies, 2001.

³⁶ Leiten, G.K. Child Labour in India: Disentangling Essence and Solutions. Economic and Political Weekly: 8. 28 December 2002..

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to bring me back, by force, but he said he would take care of that. He told me, 'I'll deal with him. You just don't go to the factory.' I found out that World Vision paid my father the money for the loan and he paid the contractor who then agreed to release me. My dad was so happy. He had never wanted me to be bonded.'

World Vision quickly realised that if it was to have any positive impact on bonded child labour in Gudiyattam and Pernambut then it would have to release the children by paying off the family's loans. This was important not just for the individual child and his family but to demonstrate to the community that World Vision was serious about fighting on their behalf. "The reason we are trusted by the people," Sundaraj says, "is because unlike many other groups who say they are going to help the people, we actually do what we say."

“ In eight years World Vision has been able to secure the release of over 600 bonded children. ”

However, while repaying loans has been necessary, World Vision always recognised that if child labour was ever to be eradicated in the community the people themselves would have to take on this responsibility.

Soon after starting the Born to Be Free Project, World Vision set about generating interest among women to form savings groups, called Self Help Groups or SHG. The concept of the SHG, promoted heavily by the Indian Government, is very simple. Fifteen to 20 women pool between Rs. 50 – Rs. 100 (US\$1-2) each month which is given or lent to members in times of crisis or for other members of the community. "If a family needs money for house repairs we give it to them. Or a marriage, same thing," said Shyamala. Over time as the pool grows the members are able to begin small businesses which provides the individual woman with her first taste of financial independence. And with that is born a sense of being able to protect and care for her children. The SHG has proved to be one of World Vision's most invaluable weapons for combating child labour. The model addresses the economic viability of the families whose children are most susceptible to being recruited or sold into labour. By saving a small amount each month and pooling their resources with other women they are able to establish a safety net of sorts to help them cope with the economic shocks of life which are one of the main reasons for child labour. In eight years, with the help of Dhayalan, Sundaraj Vethanayagam and other World Vision staff, more than 5,200 women in the Gudiyattam area have become members in 263 Self Help Groups. "Before we had to take money from the moneylenders and contractors who took very high interest and many times took even our children for the money they gave us," one member of a SHG said. "Now if we take Rs. 1,000 from the SHG we pay Rs. 2 as interest every month. The SHG has definitely improved our lives."

The SHG has proved to be so successful in most of World Vision's target communities that the prospect of truly alleviating the poverty of hundreds of families is slowly becoming a reality. In 2004 World Vision helped the SHGs in Gudiyattam form the Kalangium Womens Federation (KWF), which was registered as a separate organisation in 2005. The federation collects annual membership fees from the SHGs and serves as a coordinating body for the members. One of the critical features of Indian villages is the lack of access to reasonable and transparent credit. Banks are generally not visible in the villages and because the people have no knowledge of how, or courage to access the formal banking system, rapacious moneylenders are the only



A woman in a Self Help Group (SHG)

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option. The KWF has provided a real option for the SHGs to not just improve their families' ability to cope in times of crisis, but pull the families above the poverty line forever. "We act as facilitator for the SHGs to get loans from the banks so that they can finance bigger, more profitable businesses," Ms Shanthi, the Joint Secretary of the federation explains. Her office is lined with posters outlining the numbers of women in the SHGs, the numbers of children released from bondage, the amounts of money that have gone into the community for business development. "Our main focus is our children. So far we have spent more than Rs. 39 lakhs (US\$ 90,000) on releasing children from bondage or in paying for their education costs," she continues. "Whenever the community discovers a child who is bonded the SHG in that village makes a recommendation to the federation and then we make a decision about paying the loan to the contractor. Ninety percent of the recommendations are paid."

The federation meets regularly with the Block Development Officer, the local government official responsible for community development, as well as staff from commercial banks. It also helps the SHGs improve and maintain standards and comply with guidelines provided by the Indian Government. "The biggest benefit of the federation is that we are able to help our children and destroy the poverty of our families," Shanti says. "We knew nothing of our rights or of banks before the SHG. Now when the bankers see us coming they get nervous!" Shanti and the other women laugh with delight.

"I had heard of World Vision and the SHG," Roghini said. She is a young woman of 20 who had been taken as a bond by a contractor at the age of 13 to make match boxes. "I knew that they released children but all I could do was hope they would do the same for me."

Parvati, a tall woman with a serious and protective demeanour, nodded. "I found out about Roghini and our SHG made sure we paid the money off immediately."

The SHG and the Kalangium Womens Federation have proven to be absolutely essential in making World Vision's work in Vellore District successful. They have provided a platform upon which the community can begin to build an alternate and sustainable non-exploitative livelihood. They also have proven to be very effective in empowering women not just economically. "Our courage has really grown," Mrs Rachel, the president of the KWF says proudly. "We now meet officialdom confidently. We are helping ourselves. We have greater awareness about the law, our rights. We aren't afraid to talk to anyone. I'm even thinking of standing in the next election!"

3.4 Post-release

When I was released, after two years in the factory, I spent six months in a bridge school," said Sukumar. "This prepared me to get back into the government school system and when I did I was in grade six. I had lost a year of my life. But I eventually got placed in a hostel and in 10th grade I came first in all of Kanchipuram District in a speech competition! I'm just finishing up my Bachelor of Computer Applications Degree and then I'll return to Pernambut and take care of my family."

Had Sukumar simply been released it is very likely that he would have found himself back in the bidi factory before too long. However, he was fortunate to receive a six-month bridging course in a school funded by World Vision and then move back into the formal education system. Helping children make this transition is one of the hardest steps in the process of permanently removing children from child labour. "The key," according to Dhayalan, "is to take action early, when the children are still young. Once they are above 14 it is almost impossible to get them back into school. They feel shy and embarrassed about sitting in a classroom with much younger children and so quickly drop out. Or they are so used to working that they themselves want to return to work. It is the only way of life they have known."



Parvati, member of a Gudiattam SHG and Roghini, a former bonded child who was released by the SHG.

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“Once the debt of a child has been paid off, World Vision works with the family to ensure that the child is enrolled in a bridge or transit school.”

Here the children, many of whom have never been to more than a year of formal education, learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic. The teaching methods are designed for children who have not been exposed to reading but have an extensive vocabulary. Firstly, they are taught how to spell small, common words and then progress through more advanced words. Within 6–12 months most of the younger children are ready to take entrance exams for the formal government school system. Non-formal education (NFE) such as that used in bridge schools has its fair share of critics who argue that it creates a parallel system that continues to dispossess vulnerable and poor children of their right to formal education. If not implemented properly, or in isolation, NFE can be seen as preparing children for work or at least a system of providing education for them while they work. Indeed, the incentives that the Indian Government provides to children to attend NFE centres (Rs.100 per month) has in some places led to drop outs from the formal school system enrolling in the NFE system.³⁷ “What we want to avoid is creating a new class of literate child labourers,” Sudarashan, manager of World Vision's Hyderabad Area Development Program, explains.

One of the lessons World Vision has learned through its work with child workers in India, is that NFE cannot be offered as the final or only aspect of rehabilitation. In isolation and without consideration of how the released child integrates into an ongoing formal education stream, NFE all too often does fail in the ways its critics suggest. However, one cannot dismiss NFE outright. “We have learned to be flexible,” says Remi Manoj, manager of World Vision's Snehadeep street children project in Kolkatta. “I consider our work with street kids to be preventing child labour, because what future do these children have but to work from a young age? Their families have been street dwellers for decades. They do not have access to formal schools. If we don't provide them with training and an atmosphere conducive to learning they simply won't be able to ever get off the street. And the education has to be in a mode that the children will respond to. The formal school curriculum is so out of touch with what street children need to learn.” NFE is not the ultimate aim of rehabilitation, but a necessary step towards a more full and sustainable way of life. “Following up children once they are released is where we have often failed,” Krishna, the manager of World Vision's child labour project in Rajahmundry, says. “Once they are released we have tended to think the problem is solved. Even if they go to a bridge school for some time, we think we have succeeded. But the reality is every child needs to be followed up and supported to enter mainstream education and until they are settled in some respectable non-exploitive form of work.”

In most of its working children projects, World Vision has established tuition centres in the communities. The centres provide individual support to children who are struggling with studying as well as those who are especially gifted. In Gudiyattam, the Women's Federation pays the salaries of the tutors and SHGs monitor the attendance of the children and effectiveness of the teachers. For older children or those who will not fit into the formal government education system, skills training, often supplemented by economic assistance to the family, allows children and young people to escape the bonded labour trap.

This lesson is borne out by many other organisations battling child labour. “The most important group of children are those between 14 and 18 years old,” says Rajib Halder, of PRAYAS, an NGO based in Delhi, dedicated to fighting child labour. “If specific training and education that can lead to jobs is not developed and delivered to these children then they remain a huge potential for social disorder in India.”

Yet one of the ongoing challenges is linking released children with apprenticeships or trades that have 'market value'. Handicrafts such as doll and candle making can be absolutely critical in improving a child's sense of self-worth but probably have little long-term income potential. Although the conditions are almost always horrendous, one of the difficult realities of child labour is that children can frequently make quite a bit of money by picking rags or working in dhabas (roadside eateries). “If we don't provide children with a skill that can get them a real job then we are likely to fail,” Krishna, manager of the Rajamundry project said. “That is why we have responded to this situation by linking up with a local training institute to teach these older children desktop publishing. It is a much needed skill here in town.”

3.5 Advocacy

According to the 2001 Census of India, the officially recognised number of child labourers increased from 11% to 12.5% in one decade. Given that the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act was enacted during the same decade and the issue of child labour received immense publicity and became a key advocacy issue for many organisations, this trend is depressing. “The law is ineffective. Its only real value at this point is that it at least raises awareness about child labour. It is hardly a deterrent,” Dr Helen Sekar, a fellow of the V. V. Giri National Labour Institute said. “It is evident that, despite good intentions, certain loopholes in the act and the poor enforcement caused by a large number of exogenous factors have resulted in a very limited impact as far as the elimination of child labour.”³⁸

“We are constantly frustrated by those who are officially in charge of implementing the Child Labour Act,” says Wesley, manager of the Born To Be Free Project. He explained how businessmen, many of whom have an interest and investments in workshops that employ children, are often elected onto committees created to monitor infractions of the law. “At the same time, the labour inspectors, who can be sacked if there are any children out of school in their jurisdictions, collude with the school administrators who keep inflated and false enrolment lists that 'prove' every child is studying.”

Probably the most spacious legal loophole is the one that restricts the act from prosecuting home-based industries. In the case of bonded child labour this in effect protects the employers and pushes the victims further from legal recourse. In the view of some Indian experts, rather than present a tough stance against the exploitation of children's labour the act, in fact, legalises some of the worst forms and practices of child labour.³⁹

A simple step that would do much to help the prosecution of offenders is to register every child at birth. Not only is this best practice but it is an obligation of the Indian Government based upon its accession to the CRC. According to the Child Labour Act, prosecutors must prove that a working child is under 14 years of age if legal action is to be taken. When confronted by labour inspectors, most children and all employers will reply that all except the youngest children are 14 or above. As there is no birth certificate to prove the age of the child most cases are not pursued. “We need to work with the local authorities and Health Department to ensure that all children are registered,” Panneer Selvam, Manager of Program Quality in Children in Ministry, for World Vision India, states firmly.

³⁷ Discussion with Mr.V.Reddy of the MV Foundation, in Hyderabad, AP, 17 July 2006.

³⁸ Ghosh, Ruma, Singh, Nihkil Raj and Sekar, Helen R. Hard Labour at a Tender Age: Child labour in the Home-based Industries in the Wake of Legislation, 5 Noida.V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, 2002.

³⁹ Weiner, 78.

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"We cannot continue to do the same things if we are serious about our goal of eradicating child labour within the next seven years," says Dr Jayakumar Christian, National Director of World Vision India, highlighting the urgency for effective advocacy.

In May, World Vision sponsored a workshop on child labour in Vellore to which local representatives of the government, NGOs and the media were invited. The Gudiyattam Children's Parliament, established by World Vision as a method of involving children in the fight against child labour, as well as a large number of working children, participated in the workshop. For many government officials it was their first contact with child labourers. "The local government announced a few years ago that there was no child labour in Vellore District," Wesley said after the workshop. "They've stopped saying that now. And in fact, they agree that they have a responsibility to do more to eliminate it."

On World Against Child Labour Day, 12 June, 2006, nine former child labourers visited the President of India and presented him with a petition. They had the opportunity to talk with him alone about their lives and experiences. At the end of the meeting the president requested World Vision to work with the government to help it improve its own anti-child labour projects and implementation of laws designed to protect children.

After many years of effective advocacy at the community level that has seen bonded children released, local officials more engaged and more children in school, World Vision has learned that the fight against child labour must be both a bottom up and a top down process. "We have to do much more in the area of advocacy if we are really going to achieve the goal," said Dr Jaykumar Christian. "We have a great record of grassroots mobilisation and awareness raising and of affecting change. But we will have to develop strong partnerships with like-minded organisations at a new level than previously."



Boy making rope in Gudiyattam.



*My name is Satya.
I was born in Madivala
slum in Bangalore where
I still live.*

SATYA'S STORY

I was born in Madivala slum in Bangalore where I still live. My mother died a few months ago. After then my elder brother, who is also an alcoholic, and my three elder sisters, who've been deserted by their men, all live with me. So do my sisters' children.

After my father was killed we were in terrible need of money. My mother sold some vegetables from time to time but that wasn't enough. And besides, she was so upset about my father that she lost her mind. So I began working, selling onions for Rs.10 a day, which was just enough to buy a packet of food for me and my brother. My mother would just throw the food away.

Sometime later a friend told me about a family that needed a house helper and that's how I started working. I've worked for several families since I began. I get up every morning at five but if I'm tired then I get up at six! I walk about an hour to the house where I work. The family feeds me breakfast. They are a good family in that way. I am responsible for doing all the dusting and cleaning of the house. Watering plants and helping cook meals is also part of my daily routine. Of course, it is hard. What do you think? It is tiring work. I have to lift so many heavy things, like pots and pans and move furniture. And I don't have time to take a rest before I leave at three in the afternoon. Every day is the same. I don't get any days off. The religious holidays like Diwali mean only that I have to work longer and harder. I only get days off if I am ill. When I started I was paid Rs.200 a month. Now they give me Rs.500 (US\$11). On that I support my brother's education and my sister's child who has asthma.

Of course, it's a big burden to have to shoulder so much responsibility for my family, but what to do? Even though the family I work for are good they often take their anger out on me. If they are in a good mood then the job is okay. But when they are not happy or they are upset with their children then they like to shout at me. I don't like work because I don't have time to relax and play like a child should. It spoils my health and of course my chance to get educated. I've never been to school. Oh, except for 15 days! But then because my father died I had to drop out. My younger brother, Manjunath, is in grade seven now. I'm proud to be a girl. A girl can make or break a family but I have to work more than boys who seem to be more selfish than girls.

I am the president of the slum's Yelanakshatra (Tender Stars) group. At the moment we are talking to parents about 'children's rights'. But we like to dance too! We gather the parents in a community hall and tell them about the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the evils of drinking. Sometimes they listen and sometimes they don't like to hear what we say. But we have made a list of all the drinkers in the slum and some people have stopped and are now getting counselling.

Yes, I have to work hard to live. More than anything, I want my family to sit together and eat and be happy. But there is no time."



*My name is Satya.
I am 17 years old.*

SATYA'S STORY

4. DOMESTIC CHILD LABOUR AND THE GIRL CHILD

Satya is a 'nowhere' child. Not being in the formal school system she is not recognised or counted in any educational statistics. And as she works in the home of another family she is not considered legally or even culturally to be a 'worker'. She misses out being counted and mentioned in labour statistics as well. She, and many millions of other children in India and across the world, are simply 'nowhere' to be found in any official count.⁴⁰

The actual number of children, mostly girls, who are working in exploitative domestic situations or being deprived of education as a consequence of having to work as a servant in someone else's house is unknown. There exist no global or all-India estimates but the figure is undoubtedly very high. Recent studies have shown that in some countries nearly 50% of all girls below the age of 18 are employed as domestic servants.⁴¹ In India, keeping young children as helpers in the kitchen or as house cleaners cum baby sitters is spread across all regions, religions, classes and castes. Indeed, it is almost expected that any household that can afford to keep a servant, often a child, will. Though there are no accurate figures, the UN estimates that 20% of all Indian children under the age of 14 working outside the home are in domestic service.⁴² "The ILO estimates that more girl-children under 16 are in domestic service around the world than in any other category of work or child labour."⁴³

Domestic service is often referred to as the 'hidden' form of child labour. The children are hidden behind the walls and doors of private homes. They are also invisible in any official tabulation of child labour. The Indian Government's official statistic of 12.6 million child labourers does not include any estimate of domestic child labour. And in fact, many in India would still resist the notion of domestic service being categorised as child labour at all. In modern urban India, "keeping children as domestic servants has become not only a necessity but a fashion" for many young, married, middle class-and-rising couples.⁴⁴ Because they are largely invisible and because so little is known about their working conditions, many organisations, including World Vision, are now campaigning to have child domestic service categorised as a 'worst form' of child labour, thereby increasing its visibility and priority on the world's agenda.

Increasingly, child domestic service is seen as sharing an insidious link with child trafficking. Children working far away from their homes and families is not a new phenomenon, but the deliberate commercial sale and exchange of children for profit is something that is a sad facet of the contemporary world. In India children are trafficked both regionally and domestically. Many of them are girls who end up as servants in the home of the middle and upper classes. Trafficking of humans, and especially women and girls, is the "fastest growing form of transnational organised crime" and after arms and narcotics, the most profitable.⁴⁵ While trafficking has in the public's imagination been synonymous with sexual exploitation and prostitution, a significant number of children are 'sold' into bondage in small scale industries and domestic service as this short article from The Times of India (August 5, 2004) illustrates:

The south Delhi police on Wednesday arrested two persons for trafficking Nepali girls into the city. The two accused, Meena Lama and Sagar Lama, allegedly forced these minors to work in houses.

"The two are husband and wife who even tortured girls if they refused to work for them. They were doing this in the garb of running an employment agency. Their associates were recently arrested from near the Nepal border," said Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Praveen Ranjan.

The police recovered two minor girls from their house in Chirag Dilli. The two disclosed that they were brought from Nepal and were subjected to harassment and torture by the accused. A case under the Juvenile Justice Act has been registered against the accused.

4.1 What is child domestic service?

When discussing child labour there is no such thing as a universally accepted definition. This is perhaps especially so when it comes to child domestic service. Immensely powerful and deeply ingrained cultural notions about society and how it should be structured and who is obliged to serve whom are a part of the Indian reality. When such beliefs are coupled with equally strong attitudes about division of labour between the sexes and what is appropriate work for boys and girls, many will argue that child domestic service is not just inevitable but positive or even 'righteous'.

Domestic child service is generally described as exploitative work done by children in a third person's home or premises. "Where such exploitation is extreme and includes trafficking, slavery or practices similar to slavery, or work which by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out is hazardous and likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children, then this constitutes a worst form of child domestic labour."⁴⁶

Work that is done in one's own home is generally considered outside the definition. Household chores, learning to cook, contributing to the running of the home are common and important parts of a child's learning responsibility and socialisation.

"That distinction is good as far as it goes," says Karoline Davis, Gender Coordinator for World Vision India. "Domestic workers are almost 100% girls and women. We need to make the special needs of girl child labourers a focus of our advocacy. But domestic work, which is considered okay because it happens at home, can also be very exploitative as well."

Thenmozhi, a girl of 14 has studied up to grade five. She now works in a match factory and earns Rs.400 (US\$8.70) a month. "I work from eight in the morning to seven in the evening six days a week at the match factory. On the seventh day I work all day at home, doing chores. Why do I work?" She pauses, then continues, "we are poor."

"If my brother studies, then he can get a real job," she says when asked if her brother also works. "He's a boy. We give preference to them. We are told, 'as girls you'll only ever be domestics so what's the use of educating you? Boys can do anything so you girls have to stay inside.'"

Thenmozhi is typical of many millions of Indian girls. Education is considered acceptable by the family but only up to a certain point: usually grade five. And if others in the family have needs that require extra income then it is the girl child who is most frequently called upon to drop out. "I don't think that's right," Thenmozhi says as she crosses her arms and pushes back in the chair. "There are lots of girls who do things."

In keeping with its broader definition of child labour World Vision regards all exploitative domestic work, whether done in the home or outside the family home, and that interferes with the girl's development and education, to be child labour.

Domestic service is often referred to as 'the hidden' form of child labour.

⁴⁰ The concept of 'nowhere' children has been developed by Prof. D.P. Chaudhri of the University of Wollongong, Australia.

⁴¹ Helping Hands or Shackled Lives? Understanding child domestic labour and responses to it, 21. Geneva. IPEC, ILO, 2004.

⁴² Helping Hands, 15.

⁴³ Helping Hands, 14.

⁴⁴ Action to combat child domestic labour: a synthesis report of the ILO/Japan/Korea Asian Meeting on Action to Combat Child Domestic Labour. Chiang Mai, Thailand, 2-4 October 2002. 6. Bangkok: ILO IPEC, 2003.

⁴⁵ Helping Hands or Shackled Lives, op.cit. pg. 5.

⁴⁶ Still so far to go: Child workers in the world today. (Geneva, ILO, 1989) quoted in Helping Hands, 6.

SATYA'S STORY

4.2 A triple vulnerability

Girls who are compelled to work as domestic servants are vulnerable in three particular ways. First, they are invisible, statistically, legally and to all except the employer, even physically. Secondly, as girls they bear a terrible and specific burden of stereotyping, devaluation and discrimination that is derived from them being girls. And finally, they are particularly vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse. Domestic service and trafficking are two especially cruel ways in which child labour displays a feminine face.

TRAFFICKING

The most widely accepted definition of trafficking which has strong links to domestic child labour is

"... the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation or the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."

Agencies like World Vision are learning that it is essential to include trafficking in their child labour advocacy work.

"We just don't know how many girls are sexually abused in the homes of others, says Karoline Davis. "To even talk about sexual abuse is a big taboo in this country. Men and women alike maintain this curtain of silence and the girls will rarely admit to it."

In recent years in recognition that the girl child was especially at risk, World Vision has begun several projects that pay special attention to children in domestic service such as the Bangalore Girl Child Project, the Rajahmundry Child Labour Rehabilitation and Prevention Project, Snehaddeep Street Children's Project in Kolkatta and the Jagriti Child Labour Rehabilitation Project in Dehra Dun.

Children who work in other people's homes or businesses are particularly vulnerable because they are beyond the reach of most laws. The Child Labour Act (1986) specifically does not extend its purview into private home-based enterprises. Most people believe that within the four walls of their home they have the right to live life and conduct themselves in any way they see fit. The home may be one's castle but it is not a public domain. Therefore, because of the sensitivity around the privacy of citizens that is one of the essential cornerstones of democratic society, most governments, including India's, have chosen not to 'pry' into this realm. While this is understandable it can serve to place children at serious risk. Behind the curtains and gates and doors, the children are totally answerable only to the master or mistress of the home. Certainly no labour inspectors are able to investigate practices in the house. Even informal scrutiny by way of guests, friends and passersby is usually frowned upon. Most children understand this and only in the most extreme cases, and often even not then, reach out for assistance or support. This absence of scrutiny, this invisibility, is the core of their vulnerability. Indeed, nearly 20



Satya's family at home

years ago, the ILO stated, "youngsters working as household domestic servants may be the most vulnerable and exploited children of all, and the most difficult to protect."⁴⁷

When the risk of trafficking or bonded labour is added to the domestic service equation the child's vulnerability is especially acute. Not only are they invisible and inaccessible but they have often already been severely mistreated and abused, both physically and psychologically, by the time they begin their service.

⁴⁷ Oonk, Gerard. Elementary Education And Child Labour In India. 8. India Committee in the Netherlands, July 1998.

SATYA'S STORY

4.3 We have to accept everything

A I have never studied," Satya explains while sitting in the doorway of her small home in Madivala slum. "This is the worst thing about child labour: It destroys my chance to become educated." Satya has accepted her reality with a certain resignation. "Manjunath, my younger brother is in grade seven this year. We all agree that he should be in school and get educated." Her smile reveals a painful frustration. She laughs, then shrugs at the suggestion that this is unfair.

"I'm a good learner though, myself," she giggles. "I love to read too. Thanks to Laxmi, from World Vision, who helps me I can read Kannada (her mother tongue) easily now, only after a few months. Writing is a bit harder but I can do that slowly, as well."

Satya's experience of being denied an education and being asked to make sacrifices on behalf of the boys or men of the family is not unique. Girls in India are expected to stay home and take care of the younger children. If they do go to school, as Satya did for just two weeks before her father was killed, they are the first to be removed when a crisis hits the family.

"When my older sister needed to get married, my parents mortgaged me to a family that made matches in their home," says Roghini, now 20. "I was 13 years old. Our house needed some repairs too so my family took a loan of Rs.2,000 from the man. Since I was younger and only studying, it was my responsibility to go to work.

"I made match boxes. I was given the paper and glue and a wooden platform. I sat with my legs crossed for 11 hours every day folding and gluing the paper. I was paid one naya paisa for each one I made. My quota was 1,400 a day and they gave me Rs.14 (US\$0.30). There were 20 of us in the room. It was so dark and had no fan or light. We were all children there.

"Because so many of us were girls the man in the house used to shout at us and threaten us. He spoke very dirty words and language to us to make us feel bad and humiliated."

As she spoke the discomfort of reliving horrible memories was visible. She looked down, mumbled and seemed to seethe with each burst of information. She wanted to move forward in her story and speak about how well she was doing as a first year nursing student. The tall, stern woman who had come with her, Parvati, a member of the local World Vision-supported Self Help Group that had paid for Roghini's release broke in; "She took pills and tried to kill herself."

"That's true," Roghini whispers then pauses for a long while. "I was so distressed and always worried that I would never be released; that my dream would never be fulfilled. After three months I swallowed a lot of pills but my fate was otherwise."

Parvati, ram-rod straight and unsmiling, nods her head. She is obviously proud of what she and the other women have been able to do for Roghini.



At age 13 Roghini became a bonded labourer.

Amina Khatoon is 14 years old. "My family came to Kolkatta from Bangladesh many years ago. I don't keep track of such things. I was born on the street where my family lives." Amina has a thin pretty face and she is eager to chat when I meet her at a World Vision supported hostel for girls from the streets of Kolkatta. "I am so happy here. But I wasn't happy before. I had to work as a servant from the time I was nine. My family is so poor, there was no other choice."

Amina's family, like thousands of others, has lived on the street for decades. Life is as hard as the concrete they sleep, cook and play on. "For girls the street is particularly difficult," Remi Manoj, the Snehaddeep Street Children Project's manager says. "There is no place for them to bathe, except at the open taps where they are watched by every passerby. And at night, when they sleep out in the open, men, often drunk, just come and lie down next to them and try to molest them. A lot of them work as beggars or housemaids and most drop out of school after a year or so if they are lucky enough to get enrolled."

“In Haryana, girls cost less than cows.”

"The first family I worked for were terrible," Amina said. "They beat me a lot. Why? Because I broke one of their pots. I was nine and crying. I left that family and moved in with another one. I lived with them day and night. They paid me sometimes Rs.200 (US\$4), sometimes Rs.300 (US\$6) a month. When I was 10 I had to mind their children, cook the food, clean the dishes as well as make sure three big rooms were clean. The lady was nice to me but the master was not. He made me run around for everything, 'get tea', 'bring sugar', he never finished giving orders."

The Child Labour Rehabilitation and Prevention Project in Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, an area infamous for employing child labour in stone quarries, also targets young girls who have worked as domestic servants and dropped out of the formal school system. At the children's club in Ramadasspet it is the girls who are the most articulate and passionate. "We are discriminated against by society and even our own families," said Rajeshwari. "To our parents, sons mean money and income. Us daughters are seen as 'just wives' for someone. Get rid of them quickly, they think. All they can worry about is the dowry. And if we are educated then they will have to pay a bigger dowry so they don't educate us. We know we have rights but we have no job opportunities. They all belong to the boys. Boys have an easy life!" The girls break out in laughter. Some of the boys do too.

Another girl pipes up from the back of the room: "We work like slaves even in our own homes. There is no relaxation for us."

Achut, a cheeky boy in the front row stands up: "Hey, we have to go out and earn a living. The responsibility for feeding the family is on us."

"You stay in and do the housework then. We'll take on your responsibility," says Rajeshwari. I don't see a girl who doesn't agree.

Girls work longer hours and get paid less than boys. Some studies have estimated that for every 10 working boys there are 12 working girls, mainly in the hidden realm of domestic service.⁴⁸ Their enrolment rates in school are lower and their drop-out rates are higher than boys. They "work on average two times as much as boys of the same age. Most of this work is unpaid household work, which is primarily considered to be the 'duty' of girls and part of her 'socialisation' as a woman."⁴⁹ Rajeshwari's view that girls were seen as potential 'wives'

⁴⁸ Oonk, 10.

⁴⁹ In Haryana, girls cost less than cows - Human Trafficking in India by Sunil Kumar, Wilayah News Network, 26 May 2005."

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is born out all across India, in many parts of which early marriage is still a common custom. Her comments that girls were simply valued differently than boys and that (de)valuation made them vulnerable to a life of exploitation, is echoed in a recent news article.

"In Haryana, girls cost less than cows," screamed the headline. The article went on to explain that in one of India's richest agricultural states, a cow cost three to five times more than a girl and that the trade in girls was now big business, sending girls not just to brothels but into homes of the wealthy as servants.⁵⁰

Child marriage is a big problem in these communities," Priscilla Barnabas, manager of the Girl Child Project in Bangalore, explained. She was visiting working children in a Union Hall that overlooked one of southern India's biggest truck yards and wholesale markets. World Vision operates a bridge school here that prepares working children for entry into the regular government school system. "Most of the children here are forced to work by their parents who are migrants from northern Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and other states. It is dangerous work. They dart in and out of the trucks picking up fruit and vegetables that they then sell in the market. Their parents insist upon them bringing in Rs.30 – Rs.40 a day. If not they are beaten. Many of their fathers are petty criminals and very cruel.

"If they don't collect the vegetables they will not eat. The traders here are also cruel. I've seen many children beaten and even tied up. Their lives are so transitory it is hard to convince the parents to send the children to the bridge school, especially the girls. They are waiting to marry them off. The tradition is so strong here and the parents just don't listen. The girls hate it. Even though they won't live with the boy till they are much older the stigma they suffer among their friends is harsh. That's why many drop out of school because they are made to feel bad. 'You are a girl and you are already married!' they mock. Girls as young as 12 are being married off."

The Bangalore Girl Child Project is one of World Vision's direct responses to the feminisation of child labour: At the Peenya Bridge School girls between the ages of five and eight, often accompanied by their younger siblings, whom they must care for, learn to read and write Kannada, basic math and increase their vocabulary. The schoolroom is small



A girl is expected to babysit her younger brother and study at a World Vision-sponsored bridge school at the same time.

and grimy but no-one is willing to rent their rooms to migrant children or child labourers. The aim is to give the girls the basic literacy and numeracy skills that will allow them to be enrolled in government schools. Scattered among the children are several toddlers or new borns. "It is expected that the girls will take care of their younger brothers and sisters," Priscilla says. "We are working with the parents and trying to convince them that the girls can't be expected to 'work' at the same time as they study but still some girls have no option."

Marriage is an issue that cuts both ways for many girls. They are expected to work to pay for their elder sister's dowry. Thenmozhi told me that her family was using her meagre wage to buy eight grams of gold for her sister and four grams for her brother-in-law. If they continue in work the girls find that their families discover that few men want to marry a girl who is not educated and who has worked many years as a child. "They are caught in a vicious cycle," says Karoline Davis.

"That is why we have to work with the parents too. Especially the mothers. The fathers are too busy," says Ebenzer Augustine, a Community Development Coordinator on the girl child project. "We've learned that the key to any long term success is to convince the mothers. The children, with our support, explain the Convention on the Rights of the Child to their parents. We encourage the women to start a Self Help Group because once they do that they then can see how valuable a little investment in education can be. In fact, the SHG is our main weapon for attacking child labour and out-of-school girls. We also provide training on health, hygiene and legal rights to the women who are so eager to learn. Once they get this information and once they start to pool their money they become the strongest force against child labour and for the protection of children."

"The women are doing it all themselves," smiles Ebenezer. "We've learned to be flexible and respond to not just the needs of the community but to let the community's own ability and determination flower. The mothers have been totally involved from day one."

Being flexible is what helps World Vision respond so effectively to the girls from the streets of Kolkatta, agrees Remi Manoj. "World Vision has started to move away from putting children in hostels or residential schools because we believe that the best place for children to grow is with their families. But on the 14 streets of central Kolkatta where we are working 'family' and 'home' do not have the same meaning as they do in other places. How can a family protect and care for its children in the open air? Who can call a plastic sheet a home? The street is so dangerous. If we are serious about giving the girls a real opportunity to stay off the streets and avoid exploitative labour then they need to be removed from the streets. And not just for a weekend or a fortnight. At least a year or 18 months in the residences is needed to really give them a chance."

The importance and effectiveness of Kolkatta's approach of providing a specific solution to a particular group of girls is confirmed in Rajahmundry. One of the biggest weaknesses of many anti-child labour projects is their failure to follow up individuals once they are released from the working environment. World Vision has learned the hard way that it is not enough simply to have a child enrolled in the regular school system. "That's not the end of the story," says Sunil Kumar, one of the project's Community Development Coordinators. "Or maybe it is the end. The end of their rehabilitation. Many of the girls can't cope with school or continue to have pressure from families to go back to work."

In response to the unique pressure on girls to remain out of school, or once in, to drop out, or once completed, to get married, World Vision in Rajahmundry provides a range of options. Girls can choose skills training in craftwork, extra coaching in academics if they are keen to pursue further education, or computer (desktop publishing) training if they want to start a career. Many girls benefit from all forms of assistance, which is provided by qualified tutors, or choose the one that suits their circumstances the best.

⁵⁰ Census of India, 2001 quoted in India Country Report 2006, vi.

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Karoline Davis warns that girls are also particularly vulnerable to gender stereotyping. "We need to do more than just give girls the opportunity to learn to sew or make flower bouquets. If we are going to break down the gender discrimination that these girls face even in their own families, then we need to give them opportunities to do real jobs. And jobs that are not the typical ones girls do in India. That is why the desktop publishing is such an excellent option."

4.4 Making the law work

The battle against domestic child labour will require more than releasing and rehabilitating children. It will require more than organising parents into self help groups and raising awareness about children's rights. "Our approach to fighting child labour is not only about integration," Eliazer, manager of the Neethiya Jeeva ADP in Bangalore told me. "We really try to attack the root causes in society that cause children to become workers. Whether that is dysfunctional families, poverty, gender discrimination or a lack of education."

“We really try to attack the root causes in society that cause children to become workers. Whether that is dysfunctional families, poverty, gender discrimination or a lack of education.”

In its program strategy, *At the Cost of Childhood*, World Vision has committed itself as an international partnership to "raise public awareness about the plight of hidden child labour (in domestic situations) and to lobby the central government for the inclusion of domestic child labour in the definition of worst forms of child labour." The strategy also commits World Vision "to use all public forums to speak out about the special vulnerability of the girl child to domestic labour and customary practices which are harmful to them."

The Indian legislative and enforcement environment, flawed as it is, does present a strong platform on which to build. "I'm sure if the laws that were on the books now were enforced the incidence of child labour would decrease dramatically," said David Raj, Coordinator of Children in Ministry for World Vision India. "We have a great opportunity to really bring about a massive change for working children."

On 1 August 2006, the Government of India announced a new ban that prohibits "employment of children as domestic servants or in dhabas (roadside eateries), restaurants, hotels, motels, teashops, resorts, spas or in other recreational centres. The ban has been imposed under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 effective from 10 October 2006. The Ministry of Labour has recently issued a notification to this effect giving three-month mandatory notice. The ministry



Non-Formal Education (NFE) class for Mumbai ADP children, both sponsored and non-sponsored, who are unable to go to regular school.

has warned that anyone employing children in these categories would be liable to prosecution and other panel action under the act."

This is great news for Satya, Amina, Roghini and the many thousands of other girls trapped in a life of domestic servitude. But much will depend on World Vision and others to work with government authorities to make sure the ban is real and enforced.



Gulbarga in Karnataka State.

HASINA'S STORY

My family is from Gulbarga in northern Karnataka. My father and mother came to Bangalore before I did to look for work. I came two and a half years ago.

One of the main reasons we left Gulbarga is that there is too much fighting up there. I hate it. I saw a lot of fighting back home and so my parents sent me to live in Mumbai with my grandparents and uncles. I lived there for about a year but there I saw even more fighting and violence.

In Gulbarga we speak Hindi, not Kannada. Back home I studied in a school that taught in Hindi and enjoyed it a lot. But since coming to this place I've not been at school at all. My father says that the Hindi-medium school is too far away for me to attend. He doesn't allow me to travel that far to school. And since I don't know Kannada my education has been cut off.

My father is a qasai (butcher). He has a small shop and sells mutton. I can't stand the sound of sheep bleating when they are being killed so I don't eat mutton! My two older brothers work as day labourers around Bangalore. I have a younger sister and brother at home with me. I haven't worked outside the home but help my mother every day for five or six hours. I wash dishes and floors and clothes and help cook too. If I keep studying then I won't have to become a child labourer. I don't want to work like that.

I have been learning Kannada at the Peenya Bridge School since January this year. I have learned how to read and write Kannada in only three months. I can even do my times tables in English numbers, as well! Because I'm clever the teacher sometimes lets me lead the other children. Thanks to this bridge school I'll be able to enrol in the regular government school in June and resume my education.

World Vision recently arranged a three-day camp outside of the city for us children. I drew a picture of the river of life. This is how I would like to see life.

My dream. I want to live in a house by a river with lots of trees. The name of the house would be Shanti, which means peace. I hate fighting.

I've seen too much and I want a peaceful future.

At the moment you can see that the river of life is flowing and it is taking me to the Bridge School here in Peenya. I enjoy the school because the teachers are good and friendly and treat us well. I also get to do lots of activities with the other children. Because I've been able to learn Kannada quickly it means that I can now go back to the regular government school.

The river flows on and eventually takes me to a teachers' training college. I would like to be a teacher. Because I'm quite clever the teacher at the Bridge School requests me to lead the other children and teach them how to say the alphabet in Kannada. I like that and because the teachers think I am able I would like to be a teacher.

Writing Kannada is difficult. The letters are very different than the Hindi ones that I'm used to but I'm learning fast."



My name is Hasina. I am 12 years old.

“My dream. I want to live in a house by a river with lots of trees. The name of the house would be Shanti, which means peace.”

HASINA'S STORY

5. EDUCATION AND CHILD LABOUR

Hasina is not a child labourer. She works for several hours a day in her own home, which she finds tiring. But she is also able to spend some hours each day studying. Even though she is just 12, Hasina is aware that her best hope of avoiding an exploitative working life, like that endured by most of the other girls and boys she studies with in the Peenya Bridge School in an outer slum of Bangalore, is to remain in school. Many others believe the same.

"In my view, the only way to really make any impact on the numbers of working children is to make parents accountable. We need a system to trace every working child in India and if they are not in school then we should cut off government support to the parents," says Uttaranchal State Additional Commissioner for Labour, Mr G.S. Bisht.

"I used to beg for a living. My father has TB and can't work much. My mother ran away. My home is on the street in Bow Bazar. I hated begging but what to do? We had to eat. I thought I'd come here for a day or two but it's been over one year now. I've learned so much: how to use a computer and how to sing and dance too. I suppose one day I'll have to leave this place but now with an education I'll be able to help other street kids and those who are working," says Pokri, a 13 year old, in the Bob Pierce Home for Girl Street Children, Kolkatta.

"I failed my exams and so dropped out. I have a small cycle repair business here in Laxmipur. But just because I didn't succeed in school doesn't mean that my brothers and sister shouldn't. I'm working in order to keep them in school," Mostaqim, an 18 year-old-boy explains.

Child labour and education, especially compulsory elementary education, are intimately linked. Indeed, it is now almost universally accepted by those working against child labour in India, that every child not in school is already or potentially could be, a child labourer. Certainly the highest estimates of the number of working children are calculated by referring to the numbers of children not attending school. And these are high. The latest figures are 65 million for children between the ages of six and 14.⁵¹ Whether one subscribes to this sort of equivalency or not, it is impossible to ignore the absolutely central role education has in the fight against child labour. "Child labour and child schooling is not an either/or decision."⁵² Both issues are intrinsically entwined as malady and remedy.



Learning to write at the Peenya Bridge School, Bangalore.

5.1 India's educational environment

Education in India is a much studied, heatedly debated, politically charged and publicly volatile subject. In May 2006 riots broke out all across India after the government announced that 27.5% of all tertiary admissions would be reserved for a category known as Other Backward Castes (OBC). A similar announcement 15 years earlier had led to the same unrest and even deaths of protesting students. Some academics have condemned India's elite for being self-interested and hypocritical in not promoting mass primary education. Other studies, many by the Indian Government itself, point to the huge inadequacies of infrastructure. "In a survey conducted by the Ministry of Education in 1992, a large proportion of primary schools in the country are devoid of permanent structures (40%), no structures (9%), blackboards (40%), drinking water (60%), library facility (70%), playgrounds (53%), and toilets (89%). A significant proportion of schools (35%) have only a single teacher to teach three or four different classes. Many of these centres remain without any teacher for varying periods of time. Even teachers are subcontracted for teaching work. The study found that 31% of primary schools did not have any classrooms, while only 58% of schools had two or more than two classrooms."⁵³

Any summary of India's educational system, its successes and challenges, is beyond the scope of this report. However, some major milestones and trends need to be noted.

“Free and compulsory education for all children to the age of 14 is guaranteed in Article 45 of the Indian Constitution of 1950.”

Free and compulsory education for all children to the age of 14 is guaranteed in Article 45 of the Indian Constitution of 1950. This right has been reiterated several times in subsequent national and state legislation and policies such as the National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1985, which envisaged improvements in quality, and universal access and retention through the age of 14. The government has also implemented a range of Centrally Sponsored Schemes (CSS) specifically focused on improving enrolments and quality of elementary education. Such schemes include Operation Blackboard (to provide a second teacher to single teacher primary schools); Midday Meal Scheme and; the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya program (access to primary education for minority and socially disadvantaged girls). Most recently, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (Universal Education Program), launched in 2001, "is an effort to universalise elementary education by community ownership of the school system. It is a response to the demand for quality basic education all over the country."⁵⁴

⁵¹ Does Cost of Primary Education Matter: Evidence from Rural India. S. Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) in India, 1999.

⁵² India Country Report, 2006, 9.

⁵³ SSA Framework. I. Ministry of Human Resource Development (<http://ssa.nic.in/ssaframework/ssafram.asp#1.0>)

⁵⁴ Shanta Sinha of the MV Foundation, quoted in Oonk, 12.

HASINA'S STORY

The National Child Labour Policy provides for educational services in specially designed Non-Formal Education (NFE) centres for child workers released from hazardous working conditions and environments. By 2005 more than 4,000 such schools had been established across 13 Indian states.

Despite this positive policy and legal environment India's people suffer from a severely stressed and inconsistent educational system. Historically India has focused on developing the higher levels of education, especially university and colleges. Basic primary education, a key to the alleviation of poverty and child labour, has received less attention. School quality, especially in the rural government-funded schools, is poor, with high student-to-teacher ratios. Teachers are often not qualified to teach and are poorly remunerated. Motivation is very low. Curricula are often irrelevant or inappropriate to local realities and teaching methods ineffective and sometimes, even brutal.

A significant and highly visible proportion of India's population is extremely well educated and capable. Some of its educational institutions are among the best and most competitive in the world. And yet, the reality for most rural and poor children, those who make up the bulk of India's working children, is that the educational system is inaccessible, sub-standard and expensive. Repeated government programs to increase participation, maintain retention rates and be more inclusive have consistently performed below expectations. Poor planning and management, corruption, apathy of officials and the general public, as well as the challenges of delivering results to a vast and extremely diverse population, all have contributed to India's overall poor educational record.

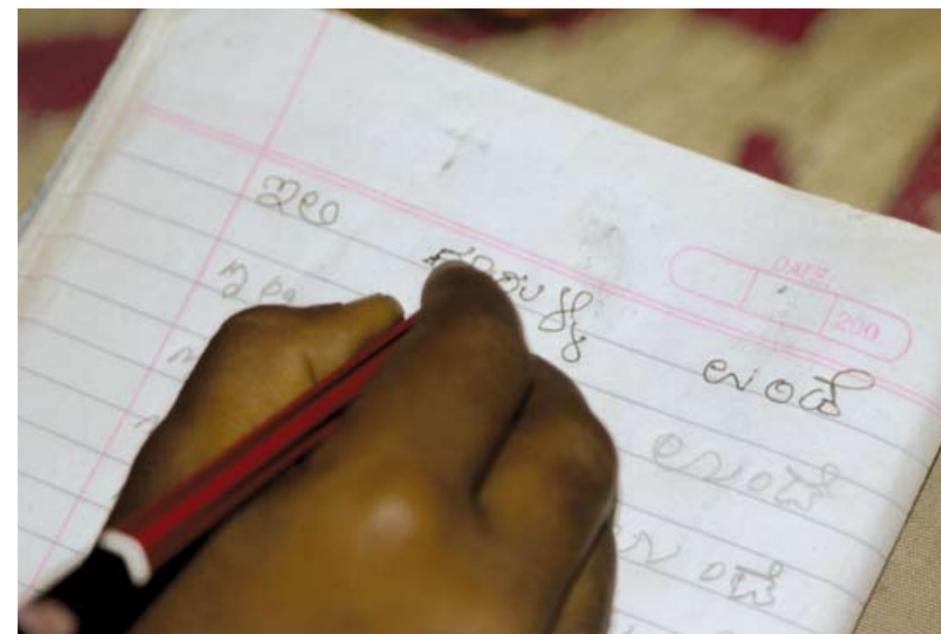
5.2 The role of education

The cruelty of child labour, besides its physical and psychological brutality, lies in its depriving the child of the opportunity to 'let the future in.' Her security and chance to achieve her full potential, one of the most basic of human rights, is denied by keeping her out of school. If a child is not in work, where should she be? In the words of one NGO, school is the best place to work. Education is at the very heart of the battle against child labour. Once a child has been rescued or released from bondage or the working environment, every effort is made to place them in an environment in which they are able to learn, study and grow. The failure of all Indian governments to make elementary education compulsory, universal and free is felt so strongly by those fighting child labour precisely because anything less than that, such as evening classes or vocational training, tends to condone and reinforce the practice rather than eradicate it.

One need only spend some time with working children to understand how powerful and essential is the link between education and child labour.

At a World Vision-sponsored training school outside of Kolkatta, Tumpa, a 12-year-old girl who lives on the sidewalk of a main avenue in Kolkatta, told me: "I studied up to second grade but then my mother made me go to work. My father had died and we were so poor. The family I worked for treated me like I was an untouchable, I hated it. I'm so glad to be in this school now because it will help me stand on my own feet for the first time. Then I'll be able to see what I can do."

Her friend, Sitla, who just turned 16, cuts in. "I began babysitting for a family when I was eight. They were okay but I didn't get to go to school. My father used to pull a rickshaw but he died when I was five or six, I can't remember. One of my sisters has mental problems and keeps trying to kill herself. My mother is handicapped and can't work. She lives on the charity of others. That's why I want to be educated and become a teacher. So I can take care of my mother."



Girl writing in Kannada at Peenya Bridge School in Bangalore.

"One of the exciting things about working with working children," says Bahadur Singh, a Community Development Coordinator for World Vision in Dehra Dun, northern India, "is to see what they can accomplish when given the opportunity: lots of the ragpickers that have gone through our Bridge School have performed so much better than the children who come from better homes and haven't worked. They are really motivated."

Sukumar and Roghini, both former bonded children, are now completing professional training or university courses. "I always had a passion to study and learn," Roghini told me. Her voice was edgy as if just talking with me meant time away from pursuing her dream of becoming a nurse. "As soon as I was released from bondage I entered school immediately."

One of the arguments put forward by proponents of child labour is that it teaches the children a skill or craft. And that without this, they will not be able to contribute economically to their own future or that of their family.

The reality is far different. Sukumar learned nothing more substantial than how to close a large number of bidis in a given timeframe. Roghini learned how to make a match box. Neither of these 'skills' has any meaning or value outside of the 'factory' where they were enslaved. Even in industries that require skills of a higher order, such as the fine bead and embroidery work, zari, on saris, the child's work is monotonous and repetitive. On the contrary, child labour in such industries, many of which could increase productivity and quality by improving technology, keeps the skill base low thereby perpetuating the need for more children.

In Rajahmundry, World Vision supports a computer training centre where former domestic child labourers are taught Photoshop and desktop publishing. "When I'm done with this course," Usha said as she brought up a range of wedding and birthday cards she'd designed on the screen, "I'll get a job and earn at least Rs. 2,000 (US\$43) a month."

How much did she make as a housemaid?

"Between Rs. 200 (US\$4.30) and Rs.300 (US\$6.50)."

Education, whether it be formal, skills based, or non-formal, is the foundation stone of a child labourer's future.

HASINA'S STORY

In every World Vision project that supports working children or street children, indeed, in every Area Development Program (ADP), education is a central program element. In many ADPs World Vision has achieved impressive results especially in the area of girls' enrolment and retention. But providing training or education to working or street children presents World Vision with unique challenges and the projects are searching in various ways to find solutions that work for the children.

"Many of the released children are unwilling to go to school. All they've known all their lives is work and they don't feel comfortable in schools," says Panneer Selvam, the Program Quality Manager, Children in Ministry for World Vision India. "Our challenge is to find the way to give them skills that will keep them from rejoining the workforce."

Once again, the key is flexibility. "Our responses need to be based upon the need of the child and the conditions of the local community," said Bahadur Singh, CDC in the Jagriti Project in Dehra Dun. "What works in one part of India doesn't always work in another. And in fact, what we have seen is that the urban environment for working children is much different than that in the rural areas, just a few kilometres from here. In the rural areas, the children at least have a sense of belonging to a larger community. The panchayat and the various community groups and their friends and relatives all are there, even if just in small ways to help the child or his family. But in the town, the ragpickers are migrants from other parts of India, like Bihar. They often come by themselves or with one other member of their family. They are alone. And the reason they have migrated is to find work. So they expect their children to be part of that. Education is not on the agenda. They are less trusting and open to us. We have to work harder on building that trust. And once we have it we have to give them a realistic alternative to picking rags because they can actually make a fair amount of money from the trade."

Dr Anjana Purkayastha has wide experience with working children. In her 10 years with World Vision she has carried out extensive research in some of the harshest child labour areas in northern India, such as the lock industry in Aligarh and the brass workshops of Moradabad. She is currently the Associate Director of World Vision's Delhi Program Monitoring Office. "We had to take a very non-threatening approach when we first began working with child labourers as the employers and the children themselves were always suspicious. And Non-Formal Education was one of the best ways to gain the acceptance of the children."

Non-Formal Education (NFE) has its critics. "NFE provides a convenient framework of education which does not interfere with child labour. Its greatest failure is in its assumption that working children cannot be withdrawn from work while the fact that there is an unfulfilled demand for formal education even among the poor in rural areas has been totally denied."⁵⁵

After more than 10 years of working at the very grassroots, on the streets and in the slums with working children and their families, World Vision would qualify such criticisms. "Every form of child labour is different and so every response needs to be slightly different. The same solution shouldn't be applied to every situation," Anjana explained. "The first time we entered the neighbourhoods where the children worked in Aligarh all the shops immediately shut up shop. They thought we were politicians. When we finally got into the factories everyone was very nervous. We were walking in rooms where they were using very dangerous chemicals and acids. They could easily have doused us with them. It was life threatening at times."

Through that experience, Anjana explained, World Vision learned that progress sometimes needs to be slow. "Of course, our ultimate aim is to stop children from working, not to just educate them while they are working. The government school system is the best place for the children, but that could not happen immediately in Aligarh and Moradabad. Well intentioned efforts can sometimes produce worse conditions for the children."

THE HARKIN BILL

A high profile anti-child labour bill championed by US Senator Tom Harkin in the early nineties, resulted in the 'positive' reduction of child labourers in Bangladesh's garment industry, by 50,000. However, further investigations by the UN and local NGOs traced some of the children who left the industry only to discover that rather than returning to school they had been swallowed up into even more hazardous forms of labour, including sex work.

Sometimes urgent, well-intentioned action can have devastating results.

By providing a safe, clean, friendly space such as an NFE centre where children can get used to being with other children, playing or singing and where they are encouraged to learn basic skills, World Vision has been able to break down walls of mistrust and hostility. "These people are mostly tribals and they are suspicious of outsiders. So many NGOs and other organisations have come here and told them they will do this or that but have always disappointed them," explained Tabetha Francis, the manager of the Vizag ADP on India's southeastern coast. She is watching young girls many of whom are domestics or ragpickers, do a dance. "A centre like this where they are able to get real help for their real problems, and learn in a positive and safe environment, demonstrates to them that World Vision is serious and reliable."

While NFE is a way to galvanise a fractured community this is not the sum total or ultimate aim of World Vision's educational activities.

Ultimately the government of India is the only player who has the resources to eradicate child labour and this responsibility lies upon the government more heavily than any other institution or organisation. Therefore, World Vision actively promotes and supports the government school system even though that system is far from perfect. B.P. Krishna, the manager of the Child Labour Project in Rajahmundry, introduced me to a young girl at the Children's Club. "Her case is very common," he said.

The young girl sat at the back of the room and seemed slightly embarrassed when she was addressed. She looked at the ground and whispered the answers. But with Krishna's encouragement she got bolder. "I was enrolled in grade one many years ago. I didn't mind school but my family needed me to work so I dropped out and went to work as a domestic servant for other families. Every year I would go back to school on the first day of the year and I would find that I had been promoted to the next grade." She flashed an embarrassed smile, wanting to make it clear that this is what happened and she didn't approve. "I never went to classes, or hardly ever. It was all quite easy. But then when I was old enough and had 'completed' grade six my teacher told me that I would have to take an exam to get into high school. I knew I would fail. I mean, I had not attended classes for years, they had simply entered my name on the register year after year. Without knowing anything I had reached high school! I dropped out and went back to work rather than take an exam I would definitely fail."

The high drop-out rate in Indian schools gets more pronounced the higher the level of education: 39% in primary school, and 54.6% in upper primary school.⁵⁶ Girls drop out in higher numbers than boys. World Vision's work, and the case of the girl above, supports the observation of many scholars that rather than drop out, the Indian school system, pushes children out. Inappropriate exams are just one problem. But a lack of sanitation facilities, even books and buildings all contribute to parents keeping their children out of school. And often, in work. Indeed, academic research and field studies have demonstrated that rather than poverty, the main reason poor families keep their children out of school is their poor quality. "What will she learn that will be of use to us," asks Nellayah, a 40-year-old father of three, who works in a quarry in Rajahmundry. He shrugged his shoulders during a short break from breaking rock. "And besides, it takes too long to be educated."

⁵⁵ India Country Report, 10.
⁵⁶ Oonk, 8.

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Convention on the Rights of the Child

"States Parties recognise the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall in particular, (a) make primary education compulsory and available free to all."

Just as child labour perpetuates poverty it can also be a factor in the maintenance of a sub-standard school system. The acceptance of child labour and the practice of keeping children out of school weakens the quality of the schools themselves. And then the poverty argument is used to justify a situation, which seems inevitable. "Child labour, apart from other detrimental effects, should therefore not be underestimated as a factor which justifies and reinforces the continuing neglect of good education for the poor, the casteless and girls."⁵⁷ It is only when child labour becomes an unacceptable practice and working children are enrolled full time in government schools, that the authorities will have an incentive as well as a need to repair the system. Indeed, according to Dr Helen Sekar, "It is only when the Indian public demands that child labour cease and the education system be open to all levels of society, that we will see the eradication of child labour."

"These children enjoy a right to a quality education, as much as the wealthy classes that have their own schools," Dr Anjana says explaining why the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is so vital to World Vision's rights-based approach. In all its child labour projects World Vision takes special care to promote Article 28 of the CRC, which guarantees every child's right to education. When children learn about this their sense of confidence seems to raise several notches. "We never knew we deserved these rights," they say in amazement.

In a number of project areas World Vision has supported the government school system by providing materials such as books, bags and blackboards. On the outskirts of Hyderabad and in Rajahmundry, World Vision has constructed school buildings in communities that are without them and then handed these over to the local education department. In the Gajuwaka industrial area of Vishakapatnam, where the employment of children is rife, World Vision has provided bicycles to girls to get to school which has seen families support their girls getting schooling and the enthusiasm of girls themselves for education rises. "The boys want bikes now too," said Tabettha Francis, the ADP manager.

At the same time, World Vision project staff work with the Sarva Siksha Abhiyan, the government's Universal Education Program, which trains World Vision volunteers in NFE and teaching methods while familiarising them with the government curriculum.

Although World Vision provides support to, and works with, the government school system in its NFE and bridge schools, there is still much to be done. Studies and World Vision's own community based work has shown that when at least one parent, and especially the mother is literate or has herself been exposed to some formal schooling, the incidence of child labour decreases substantially. In the absence of adult literacy or education classes, the SHG model again, has been used by World Vision very effectively as a tool to get parents to champion education for working children. In a slum of South Delhi a group of proud Punjabi women speak boldly to me about the change in their own lives and those of their children since they have formed an SHG. "We used to never dare leave our houses. If we went out men would look at us as if we were shameful. What bad purpose are you up to," said Jasbir Kaur laughing. "Now we make sure our children come to this school regularly."

And the men?



Mothers like these in a south Delhi slum are key to keeping children in school. If mothers can read they generally keep their children out of work.

"They completely support what we are doing!"

It is not just a problem of drop/push outs. "It is the older children, those between 14-18, who are at greatest risk of re-entering or never leaving the labour market," Elizabeth Dayal, a CDC, in Dehra Dun tells me. "We've had great success here over the years. This is an area that is industrialising very fast ever since Dehra Dun became the capital of Uttaranchal. But in these villages there is no child under the age of 14 who is working. But I'm not too sure about those above that age."

Older children, especially those who've not attended more than a year or two of formal schooling, are particularly difficult to withdraw from the workforce. They are used to the working life, which is not to say that they enjoy it. But they have not developed the aptitude and skills for formal education. They feel embarrassed to sit and study with children much younger than themselves.

⁵⁷ 92% valued education for girls and 100% valued education for boys, according to a study quoted in India Country Report, 2006.

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Mostaqim is an 18-year-old boy in Laxmipur, Dehra Dun District. He is a 'push out' from the system. He failed his exams to the next grade and left school. "My father was going blind and could no longer work. I have some skills as a plumber and like working on cycles. I learned that trade from my uncle." As he lived in a village where World Vision was working with child labourers and their families, World Vision was able to address his specific needs, recognising that formal school was not the right option. "I was able to get some assistance in kind (tools) from World Vision and have been able to set up my own cycle repair shop. I'll open a second one soon," Mostaqim told me as we sat on the verandah of his house with his family. "Just because I haven't been able to complete school doesn't mean that my brothers and sister shouldn't. I will work to pay their fees."

Once a child is over 14 it also gets tougher to make the case that he shouldn't work. The Indian legal system and constitution has set 14 as the minimum age of employment for children, even though it accepts the CRC definition of a child as any human under the age of 18. As a group of child labourers speak of their experiences most of them claimed to be 14 or even 17, even though it was clear they were no more than 11 or 12. "Awareness about the problem of child labour has really increased," said Wesley, manager of the Born to Be Free Project in Gudiyattam, who had brought the children together to meet government officials. "The children know that it is illegal for them to work below the age of 14 so they all will tell you they are at least that age! And they can make some decent money as well. That is another incentive for them to work rather than go to school."

In a number of areas I met grown men who had never been educated. "I've been doing this job all my life. I started when I was eight. Now I'm 39," says Narayanan who sits with three other men, like him, who have rolled bidis all their lives. "Of course I regret that I didn't study but in my day who was talking about education for us? It was our destiny to do this sort of work." His hands move quickly as he talks. Laying out, cutting and then rolling dried tobacco in a heavy, brown tendu leaf. "One or two hundred rupees a day is what I earn."



Mostaqim, a 'push out' of the school system is old enough to work to support his brothers and sisters education.

ELEMENTARY EDUCATION IS THE BEST WAY TO FIGHT CHILD LABOUR: THE CASE OF KERALA

Kerala, a state on India's southwest coast, has shown how effective elementary education is in the fight against child labour. For most of the years since India's independence in 1947, the state has been governed by a communist government, which has prioritised education, and especially elementary education as one of its main development priorities. Sixty years on, Kerala boasts the highest literacy rate in India (91%) and one of the lowest rates of child labour of less than one percent. This has been achieved without the enactment of any particular anti-child labour legislation or policy. Rather, the state has spent more of its GDP on education than any other state in the Union. It also spends more on teacher salaries, primary school pupils and leads the nation in virtually every educational category.

Kerala is a 'middle ranking' state in terms of GDP and cannot be considered to have more wealth to spend on education. Rather it has made education the policy of government with the result that more Keralites can read and write and fewer are child labourers than almost any other state.



Working children 30 years on. These men have never been to school and have done nothing but make bidis. "Who was talking about education when we were young?"

"This is why we emphasise education so much," said Subba Rao, a CDC with the Rajahmundry project "These men are essentially full-grown child labourers. Had they been given the opportunity for education they would be better off and they would never allow their children to work."



Gudiyattam Vellore District in Tamil Nadu

THAVAMANI'S STORY

I am a native of Gudiyattam, one of the places in India that has a lot of working children. I've had to work myself twice in life. The first time I worked making lungies (sarongs) at a local weaver's house. Ten rupees a day I was given for this work. I was in grade five at that time. Just twelve years old.

I have no father. He died when I was less than one year old. We are a very poor. My mother is living and she still works in the local weaving industry. After my father died we struggled to eat one meal a day. My mother was earning just Rs.15 a day at that time. That was one of the reasons I had to go to work, simply to keep food in our stomachs. We don't have our own place and live with my grandparents. There are five of us in the house these days. We had no electricity and so once again I had to go to work to pay off the loan of Rs.1,000 that my family had to borrow to pay for this. I worked in a cement shop and had to interrupt my studies again. Luckily, it was only for six months that I had to work.

In my case poverty was the reason I had to begin work. That is what I want to fight against now. There are too many children working when adults are unemployed and unable to work. I want to change this situation to what it should be: children in school and adults in jobs. For this we still need to do a lot of awareness raising among the people.

When I was in school I joined a Children's Club run by World Vision. I eventually became a member of the Children's Parliament as an ordinary member but then was elected by the other children as president. This is the second time they have elected me to be president. I guess they think I am good at the job!

Many children around here don't know that they have rights. That is the main reason for the parliament, to help them defend those rights.

The main problems in this area that affect children are child labour and early marriage. We want to convince more children not to work. I'll take my Law Minister with me when I meet the authorities. And we'll work with them to make sure that they enforce the laws that already exist against employing children.

I have already met with the police when they attended a National Movement for Working Children meeting and they said they will work with the Children's Parliament to do this. In our villages the decisions are made by the panchayat, which is hardly aware of our needs and desires as children. I am going to target the panchayat and work to ensure that children are included in their meetings so we can be consulted on a regular basis. Already the panchayat in my village has taken up some of the issues we've raised and has begun a child welfare project as a result.

The Children's Parliament meets every month at the World Vision office in Gudiyattam. We discuss the problems that we face and try to think of ways to overcome them. But we like to talk about our victories as well. We like to have one major issue to work on. At the moment that is child marriage.

We hold exhibits in town here with children's paintings and at the same time tell others about the convention of children's rights. We don't have regular meetings with government officials but the parliament is well known. They always make time to see us if we ask them for an appointment."



"I want to enable children to realise their rights."
Thavamani, President of the Children's Parliament, Gudiyattam and former child labourer. Age, 17.



Gudiyattam's Children's Parliament. May 2006.

THAVAMANI'S STORY

6. CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

The stated mission of World Vision is 'transformational development'. This is understood as not just an improvement or change in one aspect of a community's wellbeing but a holistic transformation of the people's lives, families and attitudes for the better. Such transformation, when it is met, is immensely powerful. It is a high standard and one that is not always achieved but in many of the ADPs and projects that work with street children or working children, the deep and positive impact of real change and hope is impossible to deny.

Whether it is on the streets of central Kolkatta, one of Asia's largest mega cities, or in the dry rocky quarries on the far outskirts of Hyderabad, in the narrow alleyways of urban slums in Bangalore and Dehra Dun, as well as in the half-constructed colony by the railway in Vishakapatnam, and the beedi rolling communities of Gudiyattam in Vellore, World Vision has developed a connection with working children, their families and the broader community that is quietly compelling. Indeed, the hallmark of World Vision's work among the children of India is the strong enduring bond that has been established at the grassroots and the change that has been able to blossom from that relationship.



A ragpicker's slum in south Delhi. One of over 5,000 communities where World Vision is working to eradicate child labour.

"The key to our success is our relationship with the community," is the belief of dozens of World Vision staff and volunteers across India.

"In this community, Shanthinagar, the people consider us a part of their families. And so do we," Shanti, a CDC in the Vishakapatnam project, says. "We live as close as possible to the community, if not right in it. That way we are with the children and their families every day. Even at all hours. They know that they can call on us for support. We can't solve all their problems of course, and in fact, we try not to solve any of them but get them to find their own solutions."

The work of World Vision at the grassroots level is best understood as community mentoring. Working alongside children, their parents, extended families and their neighbours to develop the skills to "stand on our own feet" in the words of a former working girl in Kolkatta. It is work that proceeds slowly. Its end is a changed world view that leads to transformed circumstances and lives.

“Our approach is to put the child at the very centre of everything we do, whether it be working with street kids, education, economic development, skills building or developing community organisations.”

“Our approach is to put the child at the very centre of everything we do, whether it be working with street kids, education, economic development, skills building or developing community organisations,” David Raj, Coordinator of Children in Ministry, explained. “Our approach to working with the children is through the family and the community to address the social, economic and even moral structures that surround the child. We don't believe in 'single' or isolated interventions on behalf of child labourers. Through our integrated approach and through several forums we aim to raise the voices of children to eliminate child labour in their own communities.”

And the best way to achieve that almost organic dynamic is by taking the children seriously.

The president of the Sinthakanavai village Children's Club, a young boy of 12, spoke rapidly and excitedly. “We used our own pocket money to rescue Kalpana, over there, from the match factory. We paid Rs.1000 to the munshi. There was another girl too that was rescued by the SHG and we got her into a tailoring class. One time we approached the sarpanch (leader) of our village with a petition to put bulbs in the lamp posts but he ignored it, so we went out and bought some bulbs ourselves and put them in. It is not just children who can't see after dark. Why should everyone have to stumble around? We are always talking to the adults in the village about sending their children to school. Sure, sometimes they get angry with us and tell us not to tell them how to bring up their children but we keep at them. Many of our parents don't understand us so we do skits to make them understand. Big dramas! We tell them they must stop drinking and send their children to school. But we fail sometimes. Look at Alexander there. His father won't let him go to school and makes him work in the brick kiln. He should be in grade 10 but his father won't be convinced to let him go to school. I go to school and look how nicely dressed I am. But he doesn't and he's not!”

“There are 100 children in this village and 38 belong to the Children's Club. We meet once a week, every Tuesday in the Tuition Centre. Did you know that we run that centre. It's true. We hired the tutors who work there, against established criteria. I like the Children's Club because I've learned so much general knowledge. But most important we've all learned about our rights as children. We tell others about these rights, the right to play, the right to study, the right not to work, the right to speak our voice. They listen. We've also got discipline now. We know how to talk and how to interact with adults and others. Before we were just wild. If World Vision closed down this club we'd open another one right away.”

Getting children involved in the fight against child labour is one of World Vision's most important strategies. Children listen to other children. They know how to speak to each other and have the ability to persuade. “The children have a courage and frankness that is very powerful,” says Dhayalan, a CDC in Gudiyattam. “Once they are made aware of their rights and the value of education they are no longer afraid of employers and argue with them openly.”

THAVAMANI'S STORY

6.1 A strategy for and by children

We've heard so often that 'the voices of children' are valuable but this is the first time anyone has really taken us seriously." Akbar, a former child labourer from Bangalore, speaks passionately. He is sitting in the board room of World Vision India's national office in Chennai. He and five other working children have just finished an intense two-day strategic planning session with a number of senior World Vision India staff and directors.

"That's right," says Kalpana, a pretty girl and former domestic servant. "In school or at work no-one asks us our opinions and if they do it is just a joke. I didn't expect, when we were invited to participate in this planning, that we would actually be listened to. But we have been. I'm really happy."

In May 2006, World Vision invited a group of six former child labourers to participate in the development of the new child labour program strategy. Some of the children had participated in a workshop several months earlier in Delhi but most had never been in a situation like this before. "I don't know what to expect or what is expected of me," Sukumar says when asked about his expectations for the workshop. "But I am glad to be here. Thanks for inviting us."

Many of the directors around the table shared Sukumar's views; not sure what to expect and how a plan could be drawn up with those who had no experience of the process. But within a very short period of time, the children not only sensed the pulse of the meeting but made it beat faster. Having come without preparing anything for the workshop, they were particularly articulate about the issues that were of importance to them and that they wanted to see included in the final strategy.

R. Bakhiyalaxmi, a shy-looking girl, speaks up immediately: "The educational system in our villages is not attractive to kids. In our villages World Vision gives books, which is a good incentive but the quality of education has to be improved. Parents are not sending their kids to children's clubs or other groups for children. They need to be made aware of how important kids' participation in these clubs and groups and in school is."



Akbar, a former working child, participating in World Vision India's strategic planning workshop. May 2006.



Current and former child labourers help develop World Vision's strategic plan. May 2006.

"There are World Vision staff who are not really aware of what the needs of working children are," interjects Akbar, who has a way of getting to the nub of the issue. "It is not enough just to rescue kids. The home life of working children is bad and needy. A lot of kids go back themselves to work because they want to help their family. The necessity to go back to work is very strong because of the home situation. Family based action is needed, not just focusing on kids and rescuing them. Kids need to be key participants in the program cause they speak with authority and experience to other kids."

For Thavamani, one of the urgent issues is putting adults to work and letting children study. "Employers prefer kids because they do more work and require less pay. I want to know what is World Vision going to do about employers who keep hiring children?"

The room is silent. No-one had expected, perhaps not even the children themselves, to speak so forcibly and with such insight into the issue. For the remainder of the day and all of the next, Akbar, Bakhiyalakshmi, Thavamani, Sukumar, Arulasi and Pradeep continue to challenge World Vision staff, seek clarification and help the team develop the goal, objectives and outputs of the strategy. The concepts are new and strange at first, but with a bit of explanation they pick them up quickly and debate them passionately.

One of the key areas of discussion is around the definition of a child. An earlier draft of the strategy had held that no child under the age of 18 should be working. "I disagree," says Sukumar. Akbar and Pradeep nod in agreement. This surprises most other participants. Why are children defending child labour, is a thought that is probably running through many minds. "Sometimes there is no other option than to work. If the family has a crisis and the father or mother is unable to work then someone needs to support the family."

But the CRC says that a child is a person under the age of 18 and the ILO says they shouldn't be working, one of the directors says. Sukumar is unmoved. "If the parents of a family cannot work, maybe they are sick or crippled, or in my case run off, then is World Vision saying that that family should starve? We have the right to work as well, to support our families."

While the room considers this unexpected right, Arulasi a young dark girl looks at Sukumar and says: "What we need is for parents to value education, not jobs and work. Most parents can think only of money and how much their children can earn. We should be studying."

THAVAMANI'S STORY

"Yes, but to say that you shouldn't work until the age of 18 is unrealistic," Sukumar countered. "Especially in India. And as a boy, I can tell you it was expected that I would go and earn the money."

In the end after more such exchanges, the group agreed that World Vision would commit itself to ensuring that no child under the age of 14 should be out of school but that older children, between the ages of 14-18, should be allowed to work if the circumstances were not exploitative and did not interfere with their education.

"We now have a strategy that is genuinely of, by and for the children," Paneer Selvam, Program Quality Manager, smiled and said at the end of the two-day workshop. "We can be confident that we are really tackling the issues that affect and are of concern to the children."

“We now have a strategy that is genuinely of, by and for the children.”



The Right to Independent Expression of Opinions. A poster in Hindi illustrating one of the rights of the child. Used by the Children's Parliament in Dehra Dun.

6.2 Community based and community owned

The participation of working children in World Vision projects and programs is not limited to high profile events like the one described above. In every community where World Vision works there exists a range of forums in which children are encouraged to participate. Over time World Vision has drawn lessons from practical field experience across many parts of the world, which indicate that there are some absolutely critical success factors to ensuring that children participate fully in projects and programs that affect their lives.

6.3 Participation is a right in itself

The starting point is an understanding that children have a right, just as adults do, to participate in the activities that are done 'on their behalf' or 'with them'. World Vision has grasped the CRC as the basic tool for this and adopted a 'rights-based' approach to child labour. "We see every child possessing some basic, fundamental rights, regardless of their circumstances, class, gender or caste," says David Raj. "Of course, these rights may be denied to them. Our job is to try and restore to working children, their childhood and those rights." The CRC is actively promoted at every forum where working children meet and is used as the basis for combating child labour. The rights are explained to children and they are encouraged to tell other children and their parents, who are often more skeptical. As Akbar told those sitting around the table, "Before the Childrens Forum we knew nothing of the CRC. Now we know that even for recreation we have a right. So we got the kids together and demanded a playground based upon these rights. We got it. Some who used to work late at night would be mugged and robbed by goondas (thugs). We met with police at their annual get together and presented our problems to them. We explained that we have a right to be safe like everyone else. And kids who are employed in inhuman conditions. This is a violation. We explain these things to them. We are not alone. When we talk to employers we told them we represented a large number of children so this impressed and influenced them."

6.4 Meaningful participation of children requires a good environment

Children may have a right to participate and they may enjoy or even demand to participate but the conditions often mitigate against it. And in order for participation to blossom children require a safe, child-friendly environment in which they feel secure and cared for. World Vision has developed or adopted a number of such forums for children such as Children's Clubs, Youth Forums (for older children), NFE Centres, Child Protection Committees and the Children's Parliament. In each of these 'forums' different children are encouraged to participate in a variety of ways and at different levels.

"I love the Children's Club because we get to play cricket," a small boy shouts as he wallops a tennis ball for a six.

"I love to dance and sing. One day I think I would like to dance in the films. Dancing makes me feel happy and peaceful," a sad-faced working girl named Madhuri said after she and some friends had danced several numbers to Telugu pop songs extolling the benefits of education. In an NFE centre for children ragpickers in Kanwali Basti in Dehra Dun, only one girl is studying. She sits copying the Hindi alphabet into a notebook perched obliquely on one knee. She is oblivious to the din around her as her classmates play caroms. Is this a typical day?

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"Yes, it is," the volunteer teacher, Suresh, says. "The children come here for two hours to study but they also learn by playing and it relaxes them. They don't have such chances to play caroms at home. So we encourage them to take a break and play."

In the Children's Clubs and NFE Centres the youngest working children learn of their rights and how to read and add and subtract. They also learn discipline. "The best thing that I've learned since I began coming to this centre," Pushpa, who lives in a Vishakapatnam slum says, "is how to speak to other people. Before I had no manners. I didn't know how to address adults or anybody else. But now I'm punctual and know how to deal with people. People treat me better because of this."

“ This is all about creating leaders,
Dr Anjana says. ”

Each club has office bearers that are elected by the children. Each club keeps meticulous records of events and happenings and decisions. One young president in a village in Tamil Nadu proudly shows off a record book of all the children in the village and whether they were in school or not. "We also make sure that the teachers show up at the Tuition Centres on time and are doing their job."

Niraj Kumar is a farmer's son of 17 in Dehra Dun District. He is finishing high school but also enjoys his role as Minister of Export in the local World Vision-founded Children's Parliament. He explains that he and his colleagues meet once every three months to discuss problems facing children in the area. He then begins to list the improvements the parliament has been able to bring to villages in the area: 37 family toilets, 42 water taps, three borewells, one tubewell, two drains and four toilets in local schools. "We tell everyone, especially parents, not to send their children to work. This year the parliament arranged the entire World Against Child Labour Day celebrations in Dehra Dun for World Vision. Yes, it was very successful. Adults are starting to take us seriously now. They see we are capable and even bring their issues to us to solve. Like the taps. They were the ones who requested us to do something about taps in the villages!"

"This is all about creating leaders," Dr Anjana says. "By participating in the parliament, the children are learning about democracy and how government and society work together. These are very valuable lessons."

6.5 Real participation

Participation must be genuine and substantive for a sense of ownership to develop. Often consultation is substituted for participation: simply asking children their views from time to time on an issue is not participation. Rather it is the ongoing sense of ownership of an activity and cooperation that distinguishes participation. One of the challenges is determining what 'real' participation looks like. Most of the time it means including children in decision making. Or in activities such as program planning that produce options for other decision makers. At the same time, the limitations of children must be understood and they must not be asked to participate in ways that are beyond their capability.

World Vision is increasingly involving children in the monitoring of critical aspects of project activities. Whether that be identifying children who are not in school and in work, or children who have dropped out, or ensuring that the volunteer teachers and facilitators show up on



The hallmark of World Vision's success is the strong bonds that have been developed and nurtured with children and their families says Niraj Kumar, Export Minister in the Dehra Dun Children's Parliament as he discusses project activities with Bahadur Singh, Community Development Coordinator.

time, it is the children who are the ones who do this best. "The children with some support from the SHG or our staff are basically running the project themselves. They are talking with other children, they've created a Working Children's Club where child labourers can come and get support and talk with others, they meet local councilmen with the women's groups. Everything that we do here arises from a need or an issue identified by the children or their families," Shanthi the CDC in Shantinagar says proudly.

In some projects children have been involved in carrying out evaluations and in others children have given important input into project design. "We have included the children in our annual program planning process," Abishek, manager of the Jagriti Project in Dehra Dun, told me. "We let them know what we are planning and ask them to give us their feedback. In the group discussions during the evaluation, children let us know that their main concerns were a lack of places to play and the poor hygiene in the village. We've adjusted our plans to include addressing these points."

Participation of children in program evaluation does remain a challenge though. World Vision doesn't do it enough, is the view of many project managers. "We need to understand that we work for the children not just with them," Dr Anjana says to illustrate her point that children need to be included in forums and opportunities to hold World Vision projects and staff accountable. Wesley, manager of the Born to Be Free Project, feels the same way. "The children should be encouraged and given skills to carry out evaluations and audits of our performance as an organisation and as individuals."

In many projects the bulk of local advocacy and mobilisation of the community is handled by the children, whether it is calling the parents and adults of a slum for meetings in the community hall, or staging skits and plays that highlight their concerns or visiting employers and government officials with petitions demanding changes in working conditions. "We tell everyone we meet about our rights," one child told me in Vishakapatnam. "No one likes to be rude to children so they listen."

THAVAMANI'S STORY

6.6 Networking with adult organisations and the broader community

Another critical factor in child participation is facilitating opportunities for children's groups to network and interact with peer groups. According to Thavamani, the issue of child labour is far too big for any one organisation to tackle on its own. "We need to link children's groups and children's parliaments all around India. The various NGOs are not doing enough work together and this is wrong. Government officials come to World Vision meetings. SHGs are releasing children from bondage. The opportunity is already here to work together."

So strongly did children believe in the importance of extending their networks and linking up with other children's groups that they insisted that it be included as one of the objectives of World Vision's strategy. "We have seen that when we have lots of children the officials take us more seriously. We need to create a national network of working children's groups so people will listen to what we have to say more seriously," said Akbar.

Niraj Kumar explained how exciting it had been to go to Delhi and attend a workshop on child labour and participate in children's parliaments. "We learned a lot from each other and realised we face a lot of the same problems no matter which part of India we belong to."

World Vision has developed a number of community-based organisations in addition to those directly focused on working children. The self help groups, Mahila Mandals, (women's forums), village and slum development committees, child protection committees and even in some places, men's groups and Alcoholics Anonymous groups. Through its focus on child labour and by placing the child at the centre of its approach, World Vision has created a very powerful combination of organisations for community transformation. Each of the groups has its specific focus, whether economic sustainability, empowering women or making the community safe and healthy. Each has a different role to play but is made more effective when they join forces on behalf of the children. Hence, in Gudiyattam the Kalangium Women's Federation has made the release of children from bonded labour the number one priority for its members. "We also realise how important it is for our children to have teachers at the tuition centres, so we pay the salaries of all 48 teachers in all the villages," the secretary of the Kalangium Women's Federation explained.

When a child identifies a problem or needs some assistance, whether financial, moral or otherwise, it is the children's club that debates it and takes it the SHG or Child Protection Committee (CPC) or even the local government authorities. Many children's club members meet with officials frequently to present petitions and seek assistance. "We always tell them about the CRC and our rights as children and even that they must enforce the laws against employers who hire children," an eager president of one children's club said.

The SHGs, because they almost always include mothers of working children, work together with the children's clubs and youth forums to run enrolment campaigns at the beginning of every school year. This networking has helped to increase the awareness in the community on the CRC, child labour and the value of education, which is often misunderstood. All the community based organisations now understand and see their role as ultimately to support their children and their futures.

In keeping with Kolkatta's radical, politically-charged tradition, a SHG of women living on the streets of central Kolkatta, staged a sit-in behind a block of public toilets which, for a number of years, had been used as a school for their children. The municipality decided the time had come to upgrade and expand the block into pay toilets. The children were told to find another location. "Can you imagine! In this city to find a piece of land to put a cup of



A women's self help group in Mewat ADP.

THAVAMANI'S STORY

tea on is impossible. How would we find a big plot for a school, and one that was free too," exclaimed Puleshwari Devi, the imposing president of the SHG.

"On the day the building was to be torn down, all of us women and children planted ourselves in front of it and informed the workers that we would not move until another site was provided to our children for studying. Of course, they didn't know what to do. All these women staring at them." After initially refusing the demand, the municipality agreed to do something. "This is the building and land they gave us," Puleshwari spreads her arms around the large one-room building on one of Kolkatta's main boulevards. "Now we have a much better place for our children than before behind those toilets! Chee!"

When women are asked how their community has changed as a result of World Vision's work their eyes light up and they speak wholeheartedly of how their children are now

“When women are asked how their community has changed as a result of World Vision's work their eyes light up and they speak wholeheartedly of how their children are now in school, their husbands, rather than keep them at home, respect them for their work and how they are able to provide for the poor in their community.”

in school, their husbands, rather than keep them at home, respect them for their work and how they are able to provide for the poor in their community. One of the most powerful affirmations came from a woman in Vishakapatnam. She was sitting outside an NFE centre built next to a wide and long flight of steps that climbed the main hill on which the community's houses stood. "We are a mixed community. Hindus, Muslims and many different castes. Some of us have come from other parts of Andhra. We always used to squabble and fight. But now we are united. We help each other. We support each other. It doesn't matter about religion or caste. We want our children to be well educated and not work as labourers. We all see the advantage of saving money. We have got the confidence now to question the local authorities. No one can take this away from us now."



Five year old Sonia loves living in a World Vision supported residential hostel near Kolkatta.

7. CONCLUSION

In the recently launched strategy, *At the Cost of Childhood: Responding to Child Labour*, World Vision has committed itself to “eliminate the practice of child labour in 5,835 target communities by 2012.” In many of the communities in which World Vision works the exploitation of children’s labour has decreased dramatically already. In the quarries around Rajahmundry in India’s southeast, and in the villages around Dehra Dun in the north, it is rare to find a child under the age of 14 working. There is no doubt that the parents, communities, local authorities and most especially the children themselves have a heightened awareness of the evils of child labour and the rights of children not to have their labour exploited. A recent survey in Gudiyattam revealed, according to Dhayalan, CDC in the Born to Be Free Project, “that the incidence of child labour in our target areas is down 70%.” This is a positive foundation as well as an encouragement to continue the fight.

How has this transformation in so many communities come about? What has made the difference? What have been the success factors in World Vision’s work? What needs further attention if children are to be protected from a life of toil and exploitation in the future?

7.1 Success factors

The participation of children and the community

Akbar, a former working child in Bangalore, believes that the key to a successful fight against child labour is the children themselves. “Kids have ideas within them that need to be brought out. We need to be listened to and not just told what to do and what our ideas should be,” he says confidently. His view is shared by World Vision, which has learned that making space for children, their families and communities in all aspects of their work is the most important reason for any success. “The community is tackling the problem of child labour on its own now,” says Tabettha Francis, manager of the Vishakapatnam ADP. “In many places where we are active there is virtually no child labour and that is because the community itself has taken up the responsibility.” “The decision making lies with the community,” according to Premathi, a CDC with the SnehadEEP Street Children Project in Kolkatta. “All the activities we support have originated with them. We may have to help them get it up and running but the ideas are theirs and they quickly take it on.” Dr Anjana Purkayastha, the Associate Director of the Delhi PMO, is adamant. “Participation is the key to everything. But it has to be real. We can never have enough participation.”

Relationships with the community based on trust and proximity

In a thatch roof shack that is the only community building, including school, in a colony of quarry workers on the hills of Sabithanagar, the community has assembled for a discussion with World Vision community workers. One man who admits he is struggling with alcoholism says: “Before World Vision came here no one had told us good things about ourselves.” The overflowing crowd nods and exclaims in agreement. A woman sitting just outside the shack stands up: “We trust World Vision. But it took time. Lots of people have cheated us. They come around here and declare schemes for us. This will happen and that will take place. But they did nothing. The government took no action. World Vision takes no bribes or commissions.” These sorts of views reveal another important reason for World Vision’s success. As Eliazer, manager of the Neethiya Jeeva ADP in Bangalore put it, “We trust the community by being transparent about our processes and motivations. They return that trust to us and that is why we are able to accomplish

things many other agencies and officials are not.” World Vision has encouraged CDCs to relocate into or as near to the communities they work in as possible. “We spend time with the families on the streets. We eat with them, gossip with them and visit them when we are passing by, even if we have no official reason to do so. They are our partners,” says Premathi, a Community Development Coordinator in Kolkatta. Shanti, a CDC, in Vizag, lives in the same slum, Shantinagar, as the children and families she works with. “I suppose they trust me because I’m honest with them. I don’t have ulterior motives.” A local leader with the beard of a holy man



“No one ever told us good things about ourselves.” Sabithanagar quarry workers.

interrupts: “Ms Shanti is genuinely concerned about poor people. She lives here and works here. She is a part of our lives.” In several projects a decision has been taken to limit the amount of time staff spent in the office. “We are in the community seven days a week. We come to the office once a fortnight for a meeting or something; the rest of the time we are with the people,” Shanti explains. The personal and organisational commitment of World Vision to establish strong bonds with the community is critically important to its success.

Taking a holistic approach

Because the causes of child labour are so various and tangled any meaningful response to it requires a sophisticated approach. It is not just enough to rescue children and yet ignore what keeps them in poverty. Simply providing economic assistance to a family without understanding where and how education ranks in their priorities is likely to fail. Many international and Indian agencies are involved in the battle against child labour. And many are truly innovative and achieving significant results. “A lot of other agencies involved in child labour are quite small and have the capacity to focus only on one community or aspect of the problem,” Abishek, the manager of the Jagriti Project in Dehra Dun, points out. “World Vision is fortunate to have greater resources which allow us to take a holistic approach to the problem.” Even though studies have shown that even the poorest families positively

value education⁵⁸, it is beyond doubt that the poor themselves see their poverty as the main reason for child labour. Whether it is with migrants, ragpickers, trans-generational street dwellers, quarry workers or urban labourers, World Vision's program strategy includes an element of economic development. Sometimes grants are provided to particularly vulnerable people for emergencies, but usually it's small business loans or start up funds for savings groups or microcredit initiatives. In one village poor families were given milch cows and training on how to care for them. "From the money we've made from selling milk we will buy earthworms and use the cow's manure to make fertiliser," a woman says at an open air meeting under a banyan tree in Synthakanavai village. The president of the Chandrababu Naidu Nagar Slum Development Committee, Ms Tangaveli, explained the value of the SHGs, founded by World Vision. "We have three SHGs in the slum now. The savings help other poor people get small loans to start some business or the other. It also helps pay the education expenses so our children can stay in school and no longer have to work." World Vision's goal is a holistic transformation of individuals and communities. This is done by an integrated set of interventions that target the economic, educational, psychological and social needs of the community. "The key to long term success is sustainability," Wesley, the manager of the BTF project in Gudiyattam says. "And by having the community able to provide for its children economically and educationally themselves, sustainability is far more likely." Ms Tangaveli agrees. "Even when World Vision leaves this community we'll continue with this way of living. They have changed our attitudes and given us knowledge that no one can take away from us."

Caring for the child by caring for the family

Ask Sukumar who is the most influential group or person in the fight against child labour and he's absolutely clear. "Parents. If parents have a good relationship and value education they'll bring up their kids better. If they want to educate them they can. The government after all provides schools and meals at schools. If parents are good their children will be good and India will shine." He's not alone in his opinion. Most working children understand that it is the dysfunction, or crisis, or ongoing lack of opportunity or grinding poverty of their families that drives them into ugly work conditions. World Vision's program approach is to keep the child at the centre of the family and the family as part of the community. Remi Manoj, the manager of the Snehaddeep Project in Kolkatta explains that, "After three years of working with street children we've learned how important it is to include parents. Parents, of course, need to teach children. But children have a lot to teach parents too. We need to work with both groups if we are going to successfully prevent child labour in the long term." One of the strategies World Vision has adopted to get children into schools or not drop out is to work with their siblings. "Children are very powerful communicators," says Dr Anjana. "We found in Dehra Dun that they would usually tell 10 others." In the slums of Rajahmundry World Vision staff estimate that 60% of the men abuse alcohol, which has a major impact on families' ability to cope. Alcohol makes the man unable to work, domestic violence sometimes disables the other adults from working and deprives the family of income for education and other basics. "The women of the community have come to us and requested help in setting up Alcoholics Anonymous groups for their men," says Subba Rao, CDC. "We have arranged for family counselling for several families by professionals and try to facilitate as much support for their problems as possible. No other agency does this and the people of course respond. Once they see we are serious about helping them they get the courage to help themselves." In the words of a member of the Kalangium Women's Federation, in Gudiyattam: "The biggest change is that we now have courage to deal with our families' and children's problems."



The brother of these two boys is a child labourer. Working with siblings who then persuade or encourage their brothers or sisters is an effective way to get children into school.

Local solutions to local problems

Child labour has many manifestations and many causes. Some children, like Thavamani, find themselves in and out of the full-time labour market at various times in their lives. Others are enslaved for their entire childhood in bondage. Others work full time and try to squeeze school in a few hours a day. Girls experience child labour in a different way than boys. Regional differences exist as well. In some regions such as Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan, feudal rural social systems require a different approach to restoring children to their rights than in a chai (tea) shop in Mumbai. "Every form of child labour is different," says Dr Anjana. "Therefore, any response needs to be based on solid research which will reveal the appropriate way of working with a community." In Kolkatta, World Vision manages two residential homes/training centres for girls. Institutionalisation is not necessarily the ideal situation for children who live with their families. But in Kolkatta if there did not exist a 'refuge' from the streets where girls can get more than just a few days respite, then it is very likely that the investment World Vision has made in the children's lives to date would be for naught. "Where else will they go if not back to the streets to be exploited by everyone who passes them by," asks Remi Manoj, the project manager. Urban home-based industries, where access to working children is very difficult, need a different approach than for those children who work seasonally in the fields of their village.

⁵⁸ 92% valued education for girls and 100% valued education for boys, according to a study quoted in India Country Report, 2006.

Cooperation with the government

In all of its projects and programs World Vision has committed itself to supporting existing government initiatives and structures. Where there has been a need to fill a gap, such as in a slum where World Vision built a school where there was none, World Vision seeks to hand over the structure to the government as soon as possible. World Vision implements three NCLP projects in Gulbarga ADP, Vishaka Patnam urban ADP and Krupasagar ADP. Many projects are accessing education programs through Sarva Sikhsha Abhyan. It also coordinates its NFE curriculum with the government and tries to link the community with existing government services, such as public health clinics, education officers or panchayats. In the words of Dr Helen Sekar, of the V.V. Giri National Institute of Labour in Delhi: "Don't view the government as the enemy but work with them and strengthen government's programs. We need NGOs. They have access, we have resources."

7.2 Future vistas

As World Vision looks ahead to 2012 there are some areas in which it recognises it will need to scale up and build its own capacity and expertise. Some of the key areas ahead:

Advocacy

World Vision has a strong platform on which to build its advocacy against child labour. The new strategy identifies advocacy as one of the key strategies to achieve its goal of the total elimination of child labour by 2012. New approaches to advocacy will need to be considered, especially target audiences. While local officials are extremely important and influential at enforcing laws and stopping child labour in the local area, World Vision will need to develop key messages and effective ways of delivering them for the central government, regional and even international audiences. In the words of one senior World Vision manager: "We are going to have to take more intensive advocacy efforts if we are going to attain our goal."

Networks and partnerships

In many projects World Vision is working closely with other NGOs, CBOs and government bodies. However, more will need to be done in this regard. Opportunities to lead the field in networking children's groups not only in India but across the world on the issue are there. World Vision will need to work on more proactively learning from other Indian groups who have had a great success in combating child labour.

Adult literacy

One of the key findings of research is that in a family where the parents or at least one parent is literate children are encouraged to go into and remain in the school system. World Vision will be looking at including adult literacy courses in its centres on the agendas of the SHGs.

Better integration of CBOs

While the CBOs are generally effective, World Vision will be working towards getting them to work together more coherently. While the SHG has repeatedly demonstrated its potential, much more could be done, especially in the area of advocacy, if activities were better integrated with other CBOs.

More proactive extension of livelihood initiatives to directly benefit working children and their families

It is undeniable that 'wage poverty' is one of the most pervasive causes of child labour. In India, World Vision has developed a number of successful program initiatives, such as IMPACT, that seek to directly alleviate the poverty of families and communities. If these programs were systematically and proactively extended to child labour projects, World Vision would be able to significantly increase its impact against the practice.

8. ANNEXES

Estimated Categories of Child Work Globally

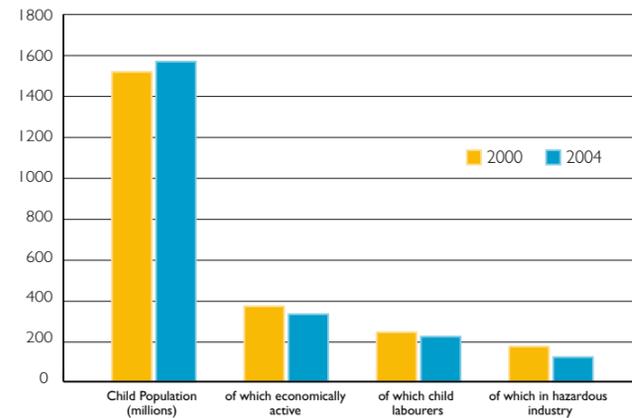


Figure 1.

Overall, across the globe, in the period 2000-2004, the International Labour Office recorded a decline in all categories of child labour, but most particularly in the 'hazardous' industries. However, such statistics, gathered by world governments, are notoriously unreliable as few countries have made the enumeration and eradication of child labour a major development priority. Whole categories of working children, numbering in the tens of millions worldwide, such as domestic child labour, and those working in cottage industries, are not included in official statistics such as used in this chart.

Working children by sector

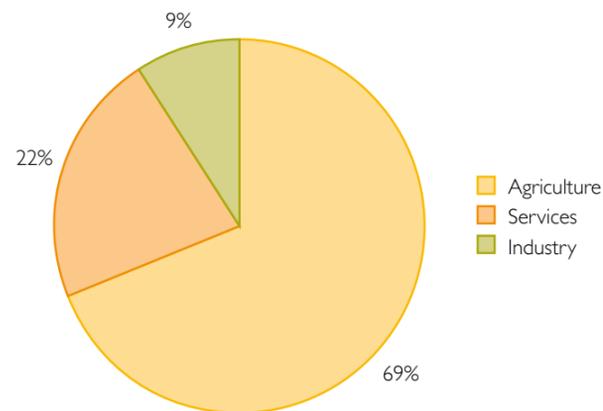


Figure 2.

Child labour is predominately a rural phenomenon, with most children working in the agricultural and related industries (fisheries, sericulture and forestry).

Child labour by age, gender and type

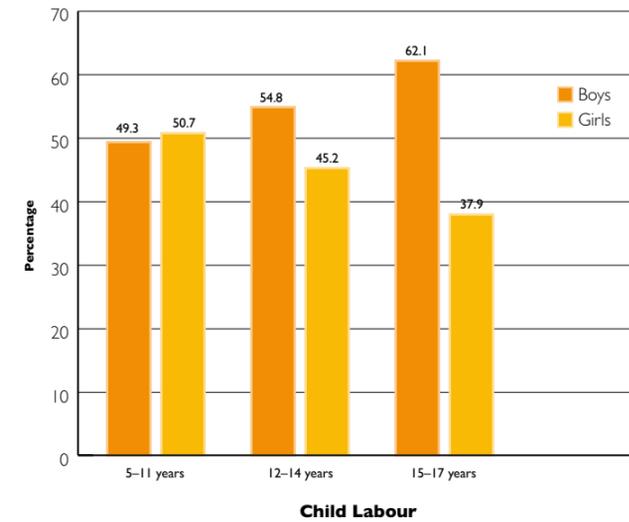


Figure 3.

Girls are slightly more involved in child labour at the youngest ages with boys dominating in the older categories. This reveals a number of interesting gender issues: that as girls get older their movements outside the house are more restricted and early marriage. However, as no official statistic includes domestic service, performed almost entirely by girls, this chart is interesting for the large number of child labourers it does not include.

Rates of Child Participation in Workforce

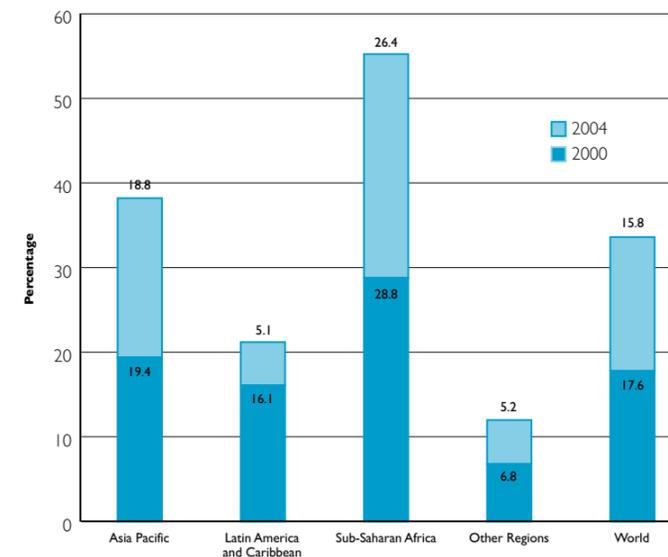


Figure 4.

The percentage of children participating in the workforce across the world. Some regions, such as Latin America, have made impressive progress against the practice, whereas the Asia Pacific region continues to struggle.

Figures 1-4:
The end of child labour:
Within reach
Report of the Director-General
Global Report under the follow-
up to the ILO Declaration on
Fundamental Principles and Rights
at Work
International Labour Conference
95th Session 2006 Report I (B)
International Labour Office
Geneva

Child Labour by Sector

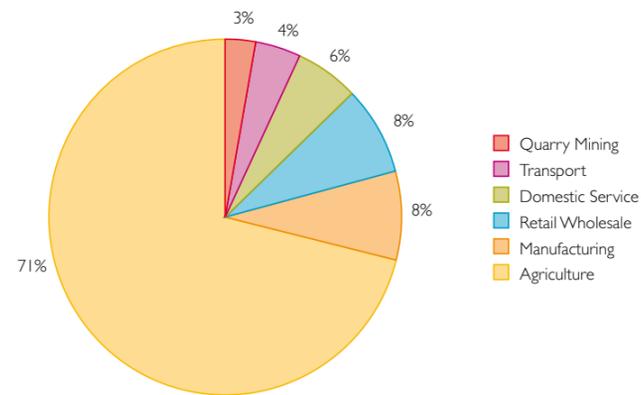


Figure 5. India conforms with the global pattern of most child labour being concentrated in the rural/agricultural sector.

Child Labour by Indian State

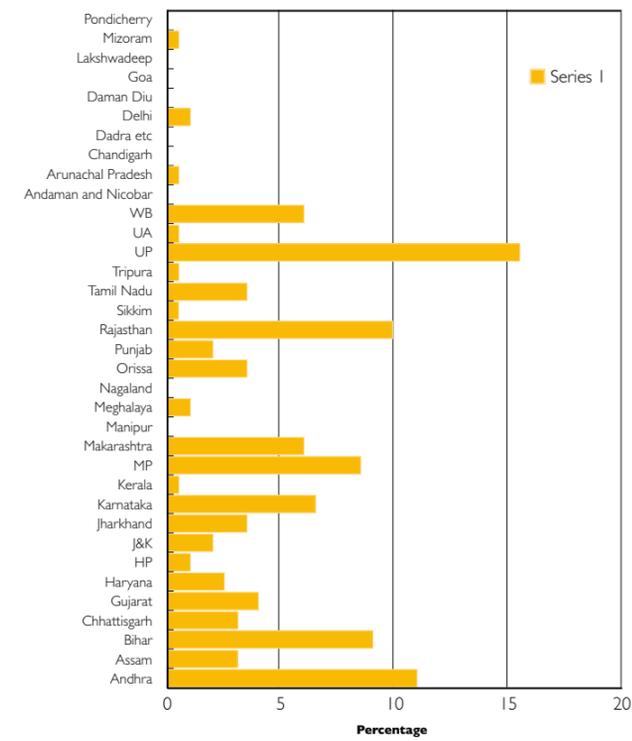


Figure 6. Some of India's most prosperous and economically-booming states have the highest rates of child labour. Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka all have strong economies and are well linked with the global marketplace. Some of the poorest states, such as Assam, Jharkhand and Orissa, have relatively low rates of children in the workforce. This suggests that poverty is not always the most important cause of child labour. More interestingly studies have shown that there are correlations between 'boom' economies and child labour. In major urban centres working children exist where there is a surplus demand for labour. In states with lower adult participation in the workforce child labour tends also to be lower. Another interesting insight is that states such as Kerala that have invested heavily and consistently in primary education have low child labour rates, which highlights the strong link between the school and the factory.

Child Labour and Food Security

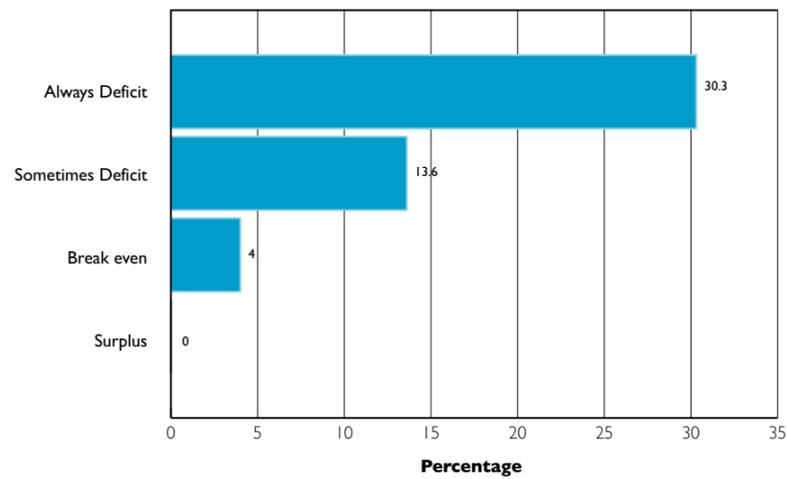


Figure 7.

While wage poverty is not the main determinant in whether a child is pushed into labour, it is not possible to completely discount the role of poverty. As this graph illustrates, families that 'always experience a food deficit' are the families with the highest percentage of child labourers. The survey by the National Sample Survey of India (2005) found no working children in families that reported always enjoying a surplus of food.

Poverty Rates and Child Workers

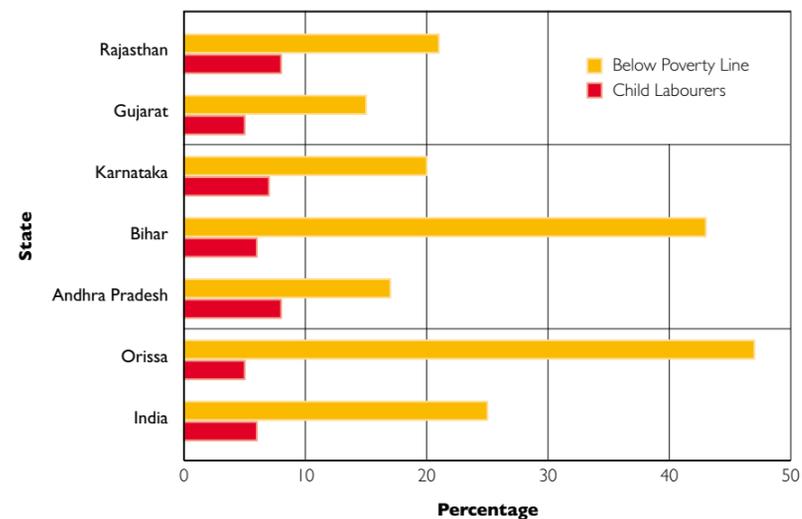


Figure 8.

This illustrates that the link between absolute poverty and child labour is not straightforward. Some of the 'poorest' states have lower child labour rates than wealthier states, in particular Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka.

Poverty and Out of School Children (6-11)

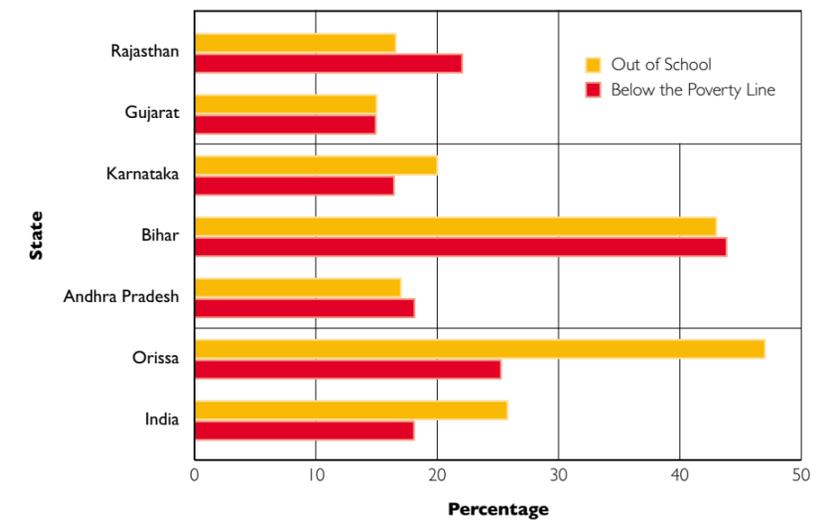


Figure 9.

If one accepts the definition, 'every child out of school is a potential child-labourer' then the link between poverty and child labour emerges strongly.

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