



From bondage to schools in brick kilns (Tamil Nadu, India)



International
Labour
Organization

BACKGROUND

“Promoting Decent Work in Brick Kilns”, a pilot project in Kanchipuram District of Tamil Nadu in India, has been operational since July 2008. The Project was jointly initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Employment of the Government of India and the ILO, and is implemented in collaboration with the Department of Labour and Employment of the Government of Tamil Nadu. The partners of the project include the Joint Action Forum of Trade Unions (JAFTU), the Chengalpattu Area Brick Manufacturers Association (CABMA) and government agencies. The ultimate beneficiaries are 12,000 men and women workers and their children, of which over 90% are migrants coming from other parts of Tamil Nadu.

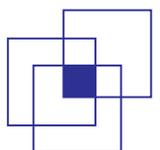
The project aims to reduce brick workers’ vulnerability to bonded labour, and was designed in response to needs expressed by the various stakeholders. Most of the workers come from families that have worked in brick kilns in different parts of the State and are not aware of their rights or the welfare measures the State and Central governments offer them. The vicious cycle of debt begins when these workers take loans at exorbitant rates of interest from moneylenders in and around their villages in order to meet their financial needs for ceremonies and health care. Lack of income generating assets, adequate local employment opportunities and access to micro-credit from formal financial institutions compels them to borrow from moneylenders. In order to repay these loans, families resort to securing huge advances from labour agents by pledging their labour for the next season of brick production.

The workers who have taken advances migrate to the brick kilns in January each year, to live and work until July. They work as family units for long hours to repay the advance. The wages are often lower than the prescribed minimum.

A rapid appraisal study, commissioned by the ILO, and a number of consultative meetings with the stakeholders revealed that more than 80% of the children who migrate with their parents to brick kilns did not go to school for the following reasons:

- Lack of interest among parents and children in education;
- Parents receive a larger advance from the employers by counting their children as working members in the family. The advance obligates the families to engage the children in order to produce more bricks to repay the advance;
- Distance of regular schools from brick kilns and lack of transit schools nearby;

Good practice



- Some children have to take care of younger siblings (which enables the mother to work without interruption);
- Day care centres run by the government are located too far away from the brick kilns;
- Employers are concerned with productivity and the recovery of the advance; whether the bricks are produced by adults or children does not directly concern them.

The Project adopts a multi-pronged strategy to address all the issues concerning vulnerability of workers, including withdrawal of children from work and ensuring their right to education.

ACTION

Enthused by the support from the ILO, the Employers' Association (CABMA) took up the challenge of combating child labour. CABMA partnered with the ILO to carry out a number of activities promoting the welfare of workers and improving workplace facilities. CABMA has a membership of 37 employers who own 50 Brick Kilns in which approximately 12,000 workers are engaged.

In February 2009, CABMA requested technical support from the ILO to collect data on out-of-school children in brick kilns. A survey was designed in consultation with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) – a central government scheme on Education for All – and local literacy volunteers were trained in data collection. About 600 out-of-school children, aged 6-14, were identified in the 50 brick kilns.

The ILO Project team arranged for a consultation meeting of the employers and SSA officials to discuss the child labour issues and to explore solutions regarding the education of these children. In response, 174 children were enrolled in the regular schools, and SSA came forward to open 20 centres in the brick kiln areas to educate the rest of the children. A team comprised of SSA educators, Village Education Committee (VEC) members, local government school teachers and the field staff of CABMA met the parents in brick kilns and motivated them to send their children to schools.

SSA provided Rs.1,000 per month for the salary of literacy volunteers, and the ILO provided an additional Rs.1,000 per month. CABMA contributed by providing a space in which to conduct the classes and by meeting the midday meal expenses.

CABMA also conducted evening classes in 32 brick kilns to provide supplementary education to 962 children for five months. In total, Rs.384,770 (approximately \$8,300 US) was contributed by the Employers' Association in 2009 towards the education of children.

The World Day Against Child Labour was observed by the SSA and Employers Association with the support of the ILO on 12 June 2009. A Children's rally, workshop and talent competitions were conducted in order to engage the children. Trade unions, Employer Association representatives, elected local representatives and Education Department officials also participated.

ACHIEVEMENTS/ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The survey conducted was an eye opener for the Employers Association, local schools, VEC and SSA to understand the situation of migrant children.

Through 20 SSA centres, 424 children were educated for three months and were issued transfer certificates which would enable them to enroll in regular schools when they return to their home communities in July. SSA provided free uniforms, educational materials and school bags to the children. As a follow up, 400 children were enrolled in regular schools through the facilitation of worker educators, recruiting agents, trade union volunteers and SSA officials in source areas.

During the current work season, 32 Bridge Course Centres, in which 841 children (440 boys and 401 girls) are studying, are being run in the brick kilns by the SSA. Of these, about 87% are children from Scheduled Caste families, 12% belong to backward classes and 1% belong to scheduled tribe families. Some 155 children were enrolled in regular schools near the brick kilns in February 2010.

Inspired by the success of the pilot experience, SSA is considering replicating the approach in brick kilns throughout Tamil Nadu, which are approximately 3,000 in number.

The ILO Project team shared their experiences, sparking the interest of stakeholders in Andhra Pradesh, who now wish to replicate the approach in brick kilns, quarries and stone crushers operating in their state. This new project is currently under preparation.

SUSTAINABILITY

Workplace committees constituted under the Project in the brick kilns have now taken up the responsibility of motivating the parents to send the children to schools. This year, all the children who are attending the SSA centres will get transfer certificates at the end of the work season (July/August 2010), and they will be enrolled in regular schools in their home communities with the support of concerned District SSA Offices, workplace committee members and the trade unions.

Significant changes in the attitude of the employers and parents have been observed. Employers have provided classrooms for the bridge-education centres and have met part of the volunteers' honorarium (Rs.1000 per month), which was previously paid by the ILO. All the expenses are now shared by the employers and the SSA.

The SSA has agreed to continue running these centres in the coming years using their own funds, along with some funding support from the Employers' Association.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Targeting the economic sectors that engage child labour and involvement of all stakeholders including the employers and the recruiters is essential to success;

- Intensive awareness-raising and motivation of stakeholder groups is necessary;
- Collective action and contribution by the Employers' Association, local government school teachers, village education committees, SSA and enforcement officials is required in both source and destination areas for the successful reduction of child labour.

NECESSARY CONDITIONS

- Law enforcement and sensitization of employers and recruiting agents should go hand in hand.
- Convergence of existing schemes and pooling of resources from the employers is essential to ensure sustainability.
- Advocacy to modify the rules of government schemes, such as SSA, is necessary to reach out to hitherto unreached poor migrant children.

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