

**Handbook for organizations for the
'area-based approach'
to eliminate child labour
and universalise education.**

Based on M.V.Foundation's experience in working to create
'CHILD LABOUR FREE ZONES'

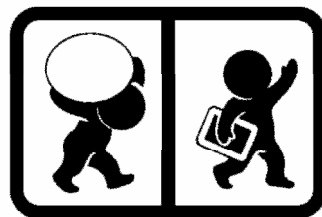


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1. Introduction

This handbook articulates the principles that have led to the declaration and maintenance of hundreds of ‘child labour free zones’. This is based on twenty-five years of experience of successfully implementing the program of social mobilisation for a total abolition of child labour and making education a reality for every child in varied and diverse contexts. Given a committed facilitator like M.V.Foundation (MVF), we have found that it is possible to bring children from out of work in urban slums, ghettos, sweat shops, on garbage dumps, children engaged as domestic child labor and so on back to the school system. Like wise we have demonstrated that parents of children in rural areas engaged in all forms of work in all kinds of agricultural operations like cattle herding and working in quarries and mines, were willing to send their children to schools once they gain confidence of the facilitating agency. This was true even of communities living in remote villages in the forests and coming from diverse ethnic and tribal cultures. Over 600,000 children benefited from the area based approach programme initiated by MVF. Within this framework of principles, there is scope and a necessity for organizations to adapt the programme to their context and capabilities.

1.1 What is an area-based approach?

The area based approach means concentrating on protecting the rights of all children and ensuring that all of them attend full time formal schools. For those children who are out of school, it is necessary to draw up specific plans to withdraw them from work and make all arrangements to prepare such children to be integrated into schools. For those who are already in schools, planning needs to ensure that they are retained in school and continue to be so without any disruption. By doing this, child labour is prevented and children’s rights are protected. Ultimately, the area based approach enables the declaration of ‘child labour free zones’ which would act as an inspiration for all others to join the movement.

1.2 How is the area-based approach different from other approaches?

The area-based approach differs from other programmes which revolve around the ‘harsh reality’ of child labour, targeting only some children and relying on measures such as compensating parents for the loss of income from child labour etc.

The majority of such programs operate on negative premises which assume that parents cannot and will not withdraw children from work and enroll them in schools. Such a view freezes the response of parents and does not allow for a scope to give them confidence in taking the decision to send their children to schools. It also does not draw any energy from the innumerable instances where poor parents have indeed sent their children to schools against all odds. Instead, by offering some compensation in terms of financial incentives for loss of income, the approach undermines the capacities of parents to actually stand by their children’s education.

There also exists a belief that all forms of child labor cannot be eliminated. Since such an approach is overwhelmed by the problem of child labor, it seeks to be practical in their approach. Thus, the approach would start first by focusing on children engaged in hazardous labour. In practice we have seen that even if the program is successful in withdrawing some children from the workforce there will always be others taking their place which ensures that there is no end to child labour even in the so called hazardous sector.

Since it is simply assumed that children have to work, piecemeal approaches are adopted such as part time schools for a couple of hours that allow for children to work as well as learn. Further, this approach fails to see the issue from a child rights perspective. From a rights

based perspective, it is impractical for children to join any form of labor force and be denied their right to education and all other entitlements that accrue to them as full time students in formal schools.

The area-based approach is built on positive principles which recognize that parents, even poor parents are motivated strongly to provide a better future for their children through education. However, the components of the strategy are not new. Many organizations have implemented programs for enrollment, community organization building, message dissemination, teacher supplementation, school building, abolition of child labour, bridge courses, accelerated learning centres etc. Even with the most advanced strategy there are variations in success. What is new is the principles adopted and the framework of implementing these strategies.

1.3 The outcomes of an area-based approach

- The sustained norm within a community becomes ‘no child should work’.
- The school is developed as an institution that takes care of all aspects of a child’s development.
- Community takes ownership of child rights
- Neighbouring communities change their norms
- Institutions are sensitized to reduce the barriers to communities changing their norm to ‘no child should work’.
- All children are in schools and enjoy their right to education in the project area.
- The project area becomes a resource centre for all other areas in the country.

1.4 Fundamental beliefs on which the area-based approach is built

- All forms of child labour can be eliminated
- Parents want a better future for their children.
- Parents are willing and capable of making the necessary sacrifices to ensure that their child does not go to work but to school instead.
- Parents do not need financial incentives to substitute for their child’s income.
- Communities want the norm ‘no child should work.’
- Communities can plan and implement programs to ensure no child works but goes to school
- The State is responsible for providing schools with adequate infrastructure and school teachers and there shall be no setting up of parallel systems competing with the State.
- The State shall make all preparations to receive first generation learners into the school system.

1.5 Non Negotiables

Charter of basic principles for emancipation of child labourers:

- All children must attend full-time formal day schools
- Any child out of school is a child labourer
- All labour is hazardous and harms the overall growth and development of the child
- There must be total abolition of child labour. Any law regulating child work is unacceptable
- Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.

2. Community selection

Since the aim is eventually to cover the whole area, there is no hard and fast rule about which communities to target initially. Selection may be based on where links with the community have been established and where there is a particularly progressive community based organization or where there is a high incidence of child labour.

If there is no prior relationship with the area, then a widespread awareness raising activity such as a bicycle rally can be used to sensitise many communities to identify and select the most receptive communities to act as change leaders.

3 Interventions involved in implementing an area-based approach.

These interventions need to be adapted based on the depth of relationship you have with the community. The following steps need to be undertaken in your selected community:

3.1 Build a rapport

Get to know people and generally discuss issues that are important to them. Depending on your prior relationship with the community, it may be necessary to repeatedly go to the community and listen in a neutral way to build up contacts and trust.

3.2 Gather information

Work with interested community members to do a survey of all children in the community. This survey enables the collection of data on the total number of school and non-school going children in the area. It will help you establish contact with the community in the area and announces the need for elimination of child labour. Members of the community who take a keen interest in the survey can be identified as potential education activists.

While reaching out to all children, it must be kept in mind that not all children will be found working. Many forms of child labour are not visible as it is behind close doors or in places not easily accessible. Also, some communities may not be recognised as part of the village population because of various forms of caste/race/ethnic differences. Hence, identifying ALL children in the age group of 5-14 is necessary for the strategy to work.

3.3 Revealing survey information

Raise the issue of out of school children in the communities through appropriate awareness raising activities:

- Hold public meetings, rallies, marches and use every public function to highlight the child rights issue.
- Hold conferences with members of local elected representatives, school management committees, women's groups, youth groups.
- Induction of teachers through trainings, provision of support structures in the villages.
- Street theatre, child to child campaigns and use of children as resource persons
- Petitions to the government by the locally elected representatives and school management committees for enhancing school infrastructure and highlighting issues that can be solved by higher authorities.

The starting point for any programme to withdraw a child from work and enroll him/her in school is to promote the norm within the community that no child should work. Analysis from the survey can be used in the different interactions. Have a discussion with the community as to the reasons why some parents send their children to school and others do not. Rather than simply accepting that parents are too poor or circumstances are not right,

you probe deeper and look at the root causes such as bonded labour, lack of awareness, lack of accessibility and cultural factors that make parents feel that school is not for their children. Do not accept the poverty argument at face value and design inputs to mitigate that. The aim is to generate a consensus on the norm that children should not work.

3.4 Create a formal committee of interested individuals

Those who have shown the most positive attitude and commitment to the preceding processes should be selected. In time this committee should become the Child Rights Protection Forum for the community. The role is to fill the gap between formal institutions (school, school education committees, and local elected bodies) and children. Progressively the capacity of these institutions is built and the CRPF can take a monitoring role to identify lapses in child rights.

The main purpose of initial discussions should be to check the village's level of preparation to tackle the issue. Over several meetings the need to withdraw children from the labour force, the people who need to be involved in the process, the role of village elders including elected non-officials, the role of the school and the school teacher are all discussed. Ultimately this leads to preparation of a plan of action with two elements. The first is that it targets all children out of school and not just sections of the child population. Secondly specific duties and tasks are allocated to all the committee members – typically co-ordination with the school, conduct of community level meetings, discussions with employers of children, lobbying with the officials and non-officials for better facilities at the school. A list of all out of school children is prepared and the plan of action covers each one of them.

The committee should explicitly demonstrate the norm that all children should go to school and agree to the non-negotiable charter for the emancipation of child labour.

3.5 Implement the plan

Take a position in the community based on the non-negotiables and build a consensus on the norm that all children should go to school. The non negotiables need to be introduced to the community so that there is a move from an exploratory process to a more focused and determined set of discussions, where parents and employers are challenged to send children to school. Different views in the community are gradually used to change attitudes towards the norm that all children should go to school.

Members of the committee need to become motivators and be actively involved in the task of withdrawing children from work. Training should be provided to the motivators to do this. To begin with there is always some amount of resistance from various sections in the community and so potential for confrontation does exist but with proper training motivators need not necessarily precipitate this confrontation.

The motivation of all families and employers to send children to school must be thorough and extend to all children. The process of persuading the most difficult cases will deepen the commitment of the community as a whole to the norm that all children must go to school. The motivators also play a key role in identifying which of the children can be enrolled directly into school and those who have to go through a longer process.

3.6 Support first generation learners to enter full time formal education

3.6.1 Short-term camps

Children from nearby villages are brought together at one place for a short period. These children have never been to school or are dropouts and they draw strength from each other in these three days. They gain confidence to pressure their parents to send them to school. They realize that they are not alone in their struggle and that they have a vast support group. They also work out methods of persuading their parents. Simultaneously the adjustments parents have made in sharing the work of the children while they were away during that time are tracked. These evidences are used as arguments to discuss with parents while motivating them.

3.6.2 Children in the 5-8 age group

In general these children can be directly enrolled into school after a well planned enrollment drive where every parent is met and facilitated. Contact should be maintained with the parents regularly.

Along with the swelling numbers of children, there may be an acute problem of accommodation and teachers. The response to this demand should be in the form of new classrooms being constructed and hire more teachers. The community should be encouraged to mobilise funds for the same.

3.6.3 Children in the 9-14 age group

Older out of school children need to go through a longer process designed to provide orientation towards education and accelerated learning so that they do not necessarily have to start in the lowest class.

3.6.4 Motivation centres

Older children in the 9-14 years age group are enlisted in motivation centres. Wherever possible, they are established under the auspices of the school headmaster. Such children are given confidence to study through the centres. In the mean time they are also motivated to abandon work and join into schools. The centres also become forums for assertion of rights especially for girl children. Many a time these girls share information about their marriages being fixed and seek help for getting out of the proposed marriages. Once most children in the motivation centres are withdrawn from work and enrolled in schools (via residential bridge courses) the motivation centres are automatically wound up. These centres also demonstrate that the parents can manage without the child's income and that older children can study.

After short term camps and motivation centres, children are put through a bridge course that is either residential (camp) or conducted at the school level directly.

3.6.5 Residential bridge course camps

Children in these camps are prepared to be students and this also helps them gain confidence to go to classes according to their age. These camps not only convert the children's focus towards education but also prepare the parents, teachers and community at large into accepting the norm that children ought to be in schools. The camps also serve the purpose of mobilization, training and resource needs of the programme. They demonstrate the efficacy of the arguments on child labour and related issues. (Annexure... for more details)

3.7 Strengthen the school system

The formation of the plan automatically results in the school becoming the focus of all further attention, which in turn strengthens the school itself. As the role of the school grows, interventions can assist the strengthening process.

3.7.1 Teachers

In the struggle to abolish child labour, the school necessarily becomes the place which will keep children out of work. Engaging the teachers to make the school a child friendly place will thus become important. Teachers have a very large role to play. In the initial stages the teachers may be somewhat reluctant to associate with the program but through dialogue on the role of the teacher in the context of child labour it is possible to have them totally identify with the program. For the first time teachers take up a totally different role – that of a protector of the rights of children and thus ensure the child’s right to education. In many cases they work hard at evolving new teaching techniques specially designed for the working child. The success of this role and these techniques has greatly increased the self-esteem of teachers and their sense of empowerment.

Over time it is possible to mobilise teachers, who actively participate in such processes for children, into a forum. The teachers in such forums must work relentlessly to bring every child in the village to their schools, advocating the cause of eliminating child labour through education. By reaching out to children out of schools, the teachers of this forum will not only have gained respect of the community but also made the school child friendly. Schools will then emerge as vibrant institutions in the village.

3.7.2 School committees

The community committee established for elimination of child labour can either directly or indirectly work with formal community education committees to enable them to play their full role in strengthening the school.

The School Education Committee is an important body that ensures that the processes and functions in the school are in a child friendly and proper manner. The role of the committee with respect to bringing children back to school and for abolition of child labour is as follows:

- Facilitate admission of children, the newly enrolled and also the older children into schools by insisting on flexibility in admission procedures.
- Identify school dropouts and irregular children on a regular basis, contact the family and ensure that the child rejoins school.
- In case of absence of children due to adverse circumstances at home such as ill health of parents, and also children’s own ill health, help in their readmission in schools without insisting on medical certificates and so on.
- Facilitate the issuing of transfer certificates to children as and when necessary.

The School Education Committees will play an active role in negotiating with the employers to withdraw children engaged in bonded labour from work and also in stopping of girl-child marriages. In fact in the process of their involvement in bringing children into schools, the SECs will be involved in the improvement of infrastructure in the schools and engage with the teachers to make the school a friendly place for the children.

3.6.6 Retain children in schools

The retention of children in schools is as important as mobilising children out of work. The probability of former child labourers dropping out from school is very high. After admission into schools the following activities are to be taken up to retain them in schools.

3.7.9 Child Tracking

The children are tracked on an everyday basis to ensure they attend school and their transition into formal schools is smooth. According to an individual's capacity and motivation levels, different members of the community can take on this activity – teachers, elected representatives, youth or appointed activists. The important thing is that it is done.

3.7.10 Supplementary support: Accelerated Learning Centres in Formal School

Some children need extra care and the teachers have to be sensitised to their needs, adapting the educational process to suit first generation learners. To cater to these children the teachers need support. When these children are large in numbers, there should be a separate class for them in the school. Soon these children are trained to go into classes according to their age. On the other hand if there are only two or three children at a time, they can join children of their age group and the with extra inputs from the teacher these children will catch with their colleagues. This programme can help the older children learn in their local schools without having to join a residential camp. There will be spin off effects too. The process of teachers evolving child specific plans results in the teacher designing and planning for the progress of every child. Autonomy in designing the lessons for children enables the empowerment of teachers. The quality of schools too improves vastly with the teachers' high sense of motivation to retain children.

The constant pressures on children to be pushed out of education means that the CRPF must be constantly vigilant and cannot become complacent.

4. Sustained follow-up of children

Work for the continuous maintenance and improvement of rights afforded to all children is a necessary condition because as children become older there is an increased likelihood that they, especially girls, will drop out of school to be married or employed. The CRPF must stimulate dialogue on these issues and motivate the parents to retain these children in schools. If the school is not seen as providing learning outcomes for children then there is a possibility that parents will again question the value of education and start to withdraw children from school. The CRPF must support the community to look instead at how to work with teachers to improve the quality of education imparted so that this questioning disappears.

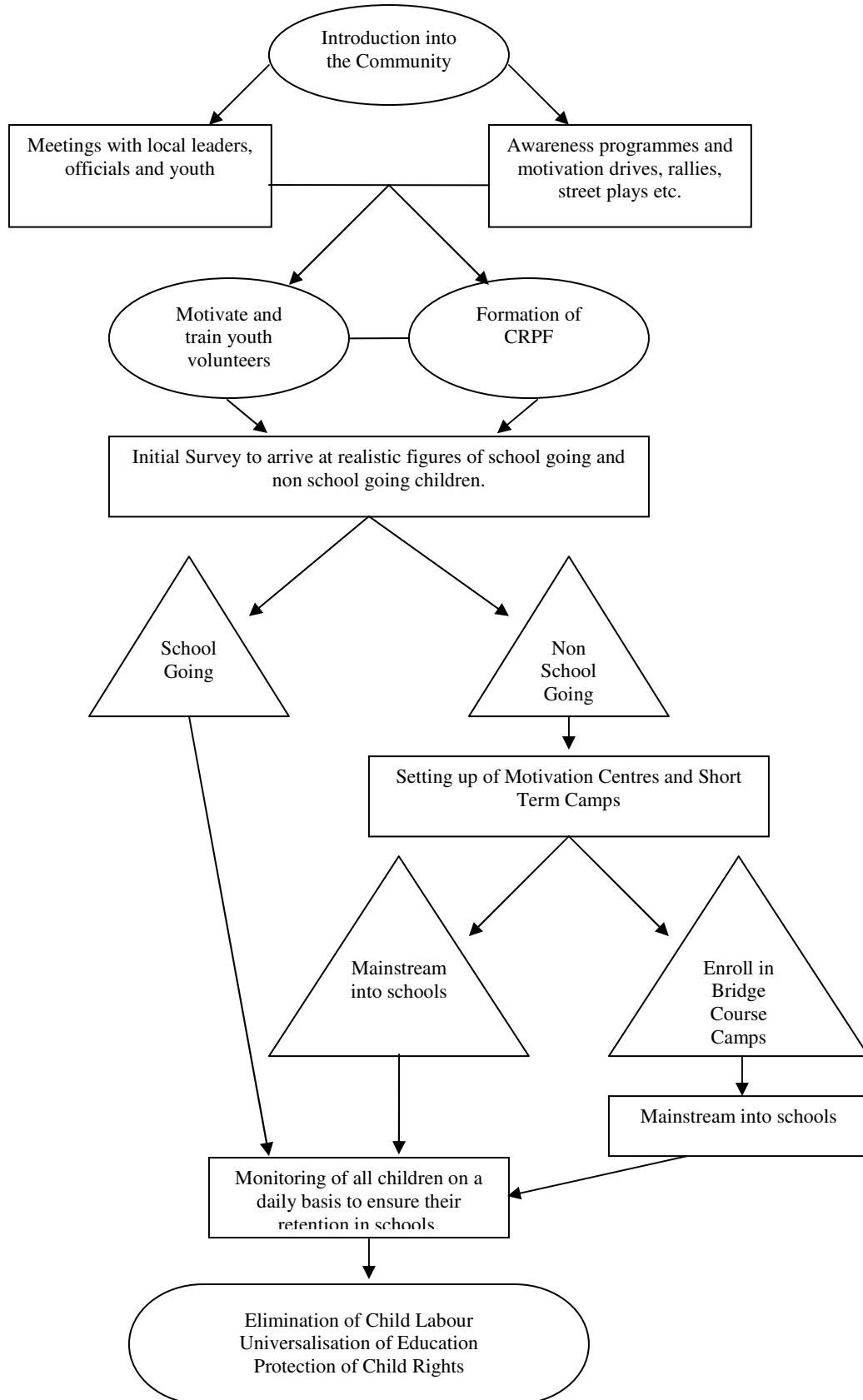
Where all children are in school and learning, the emphasis of the CRPF can shift to other issues such as health of children and mothers. The CRPF must progressively inculcate its values in the community as a whole and specifically within the school system and elected representatives. Education professionals must increasingly identify their role as creating institutions that look after the development of all children. Elected officials must be aware that working to protect and nurture all children is the best way to satisfy the electorate. Through these interventions it is possible for communities to declare themselves 'child labour free' and make continuous progress towards a more just, humane and egalitarian society.⁵

5. Progress of the intervention

Progress is measured in terms of achievement of a sustained change in norms. 'Sustained mobilisation' in the child labour context can be defined as the follows:

‘When a community has changed its norm and is providing support to other communities to change their norms. Ideal is where community is proactive in developing support to nurture children and prevent violations of child rights happening.

Annexure 1: Flow of activities for achieving child labour free zones



Annexure 2: Role of an Education Activist

An education activist is a crucial force behind all interventions. The education activist will be responsible for each village. Some of the activities are illustrated below.

- He/ She would conduct a survey and identify non-school going children.
- They mobilise children to join schools.
- As education activists they counsel children and help them cope up with school.
- They also facilitate school teachers in conduct of bridge classes of older children in schools.
- They follow up with dropouts and encourage them to rejoin schools.
- Most important of all they establish close contracts with parents and inform them regarding the progress of their children and create an atmosphere to support children's right to education.

To sum it up, the education activist is a person who constantly debates, negotiates and challenges the system that is keeping children out of school.

Annexure 3: Child Rights Protection Forum

The members of the CRPF are all those who

- Respect children and their rights at home and in the public sphere
- Protect children from being abused physically and mentally at home and in the public sphere
- Work towards stopping child marriages
- Abide by the non-negotiable principles on child labour and education i.e believe that there must be total abolition of child labour and that all children must attend full time formal schools

The objectives of the CRPF are

- To work towards building a social norm for protection of child rights
- To work towards the protection of all the rights of children as enlisted in the Convention of Child Rights of the United Nations
- To ensure total abolition of child labour and to ensure that every child goes to school and is retained in schools
- To act as a vigilance committee on all public institutions related to child rights
- To involve the various organs of the State and the government including Departments of Education, Social Welfare, Labour, Health, Revenue, Police, Women and Child Welfare, local bodies and elected representatives in favour of children's rights

Annexure 4: Teacher's Forum for Child Rights (TFCR)

The school is the only institution that keeps children out of work. The TFCR recognises this fact and work towards making the school a child friendly place. Therefore, it looks into modifying the policies of admissions, promotions, retention and attendance to make them simpler and more sensitive to the first generation learner and to ensure that she/he does not get 'pushed out of school'. It recognises that older children require special attention to prepare for studentship and bring them on par with other children of similar age group in school.

The 'Non-Negotiables for Schoolteachers and Schools

- All children must join schools into classes according to their age.
- School teachers must recognise that every child has the capacity to learn and that it is the responsibility of the school to give children a guarantee that they would learn.
- School teachers must provide a guarantee to build competencies of children in order to reach the class in accordance with their age.
- School teachers must guarantee that corporal punishment will not be used in the classroom to discipline children.
- School teachers must ensure that all children feel wanted and are comfortable in the school.
- Schools must ensure that there is no violation of child rights in the school as well as in the community.

Annexure 5: Residential Bridge Course (RBC) Camps

Why is a camp necessary?

- To keep the children away from work
- To help child labourers make the transition from workers to students.

For whom?

- For children from 9-14 years

What is the purpose of the camp?

- To enjoy childhood
- To give older children the confidence that they can learn and join formal schools.
- To gain self-confidence from education.
- To prepare children for school by creating interest in learning.

How does exposure to the camp change people's attitudes?

Camp Teachers

- develop a positive attitude towards the students and learn the need to be patient with them
- learn to be friendly with the children
- learn about children's behaviour.

Parents

- the visit dispels any fears they may have had
- see a change in the children and begin to feel proud of them
- become role models for other families.

Youth

- become motivated when they see the camp activities
- are impressed when they hear children describe how they were encouraged to come to the camp by youth volunteers in their village.

Government teachers

- learn that it is possible to teach without using corporal punishment.

Representatives of local bodies

- become aware of child's rights
- go back to the village and create awareness on the issues of child labour and education.

Annexure 6: Role of Elected Representatives

The elected representatives are important institutions to take up the twin tasks of abolition of child labour and strengthening of the schools. The strength of the people's representatives have to be built upon individual households and this process of linking household to the elected representatives through setting up of CRPFs, Girl Rights Protection Forums (GRPFs), and youth groups become necessary. Once this link is established and the dynamics of the interaction between households and elected representatives settled, the entire community works in unison even on an issue which affects the various segments differently, often adversely. In the case of child labour the youth, parents, employers of the children and teachers are all affected in very different ways but the involvement of all of them in the program ensures its success and also a greater understanding of each other's view point. This in turn leads to the crystallisation of their respective roles.

The role of the elected representatives is as follows

- Provide support for withdrawing children from work and utilise its offices to harness the officialdom in case of its inability to tackle the issue.
- Be involved in the functioning of the school and support the SEC and the school to prevent dropouts.
- Mobilise local resources for the school and also generate resources by bringing pressure on the higher level of education bureaucracy.
- Participate and take up responsibility in planning and implementation of the programme for universalisation of elementary education by abolition of child labour at the village level.

Annexure 7: Role of the Education Department

School systems need to be more sensitive to the needs of the poor and be more considerate towards them. The bottom line is in finding out if a particular rule has resulted in a child dropping out of school to join the labour force or has helped the child in continuing in school in spite of adversities. In the case of the girl child, her survival in a school is even more precarious. All these obstacles are magnified to a large extent since the social atmosphere condones her being illiterate in any case.

Often even the most benign of rules and regulations appear deviously intractable and seem to have been formulated with the sole purpose of preventing any child from joining or continuing in school. Without being overwhelmed by the problems at hand, it is necessary to grapple with the intricacies and quite often the absurdities of the various formal and informal systems that have evolved in the course of managing the schools which push children out of schools. It is necessary to modify some of these systems keeping in view the specific circumstances from which the children have come.

Admission Policy

First of all schools have no policy to accommodate late starters and thus they are not ready to accept older illiterate children or school drop outs who desire to join schools. Thus children who have been left out for no fault of their own are condemned to join the labour force never to aspire for formal education. The Government has passed an order to accept children withdrawn from work seeking admission into schools at any time during the course of an academic year. The purpose of such an order and its implications for universalisation of education needs to be discussed, debated and accepted by the entire education bureaucracy.

Provision has also to be made to save such children the embarrassment of joining in class I by introducing special coaching classes and bridge courses enabling their smooth transition as students and into classes according to their age.

School Dropouts and Issues Relating to Health

At times children may be absent due to indisposition in the family such as illness of either of the parents. Children especially girls stay back at home to keep the home going when either of the parents fall ill. These children are not able to rejoin as they are in no position to document the cause of absence, which the school can find acceptable. It is even possible that parents do not even attempt to send their children back and thus children drop out, because of all the misgivings that parents have about schools and its discipline. With regard to older girl children they face a peculiar problem of having to be absent for a long duration of time when they attain puberty. Due to social and cultural compulsions a lot of ceremonies follow the event and the girl is in no position to come back to school almost immediately. Or children are genuinely unwell and parents are not able to produce a medical certificate. In all such cases the members of the SECs should be authorised to take a more positive view of the situation and encourage the children in rejoining schools. Thus the proactive role of the SECs constantly monitoring the retention of children would circumvent the bureaucratic and impersonal systems which push children out of schools.

Corporal Punishment in Schools

This practice is still predominant in many schools and is used in a routine fashion. Teachers have no misgivings about using the stick and indeed feel that it is a matter of right that they should beat up the children and subject them to punishments. These acts are considered as

essential to discipline the children and inculcate in them the values and discipline of learning. There are innumerable children who need help in coping with such violence as this has endangered children continuing in schools. There must be a grievance committee in every Mandal, which would take up these issues, take stern action and send a message that corporal punishment would not be tolerated.

Annexure 8: Other Government Departments

The programme of abolition of child labour simultaneously entails the fulfilment of the agenda of strengthening of the school system. In other words the preparation of the community and the society at large, in support of the child's right to education must necessarily result in creation of a supportive administrative structure and culture to achieve this goal in response to the demand for schools.

Government at the district level must provide the atmosphere and mood for the functionaries of every department to make its commitment for the programme of abolition of child labour and eventually protection of child rights.

- The Department of Revenue has the responsibility of taking a proactive role for identification and release of bonded labour.
- The Department of Social Welfare has the responsibility of ensuring that specific issues of children in difficulties are dealt with in a sensitive manner in order to facilitate the continuance of children in the hostel. There is a need to strengthen the community involvement in the functioning of the Social Welfare hostels.
- The Department of Police must take up issues of child abuse and early child marriages and register cases.
- The Department of Health has an important role to play in ensuring that children do not suffer from lack of access to health care. Clear messages must be sent that physically abused children will no longer be invisible and will be accounted for and treated properly.
- This would also apply to the Department of Women and Child Welfare and Department of Labour

The Department of Education must seek the support of all the departments in order to reach out to children and protect their rights.