

Action Plan by PRDS
“ CHILD LABOUR ELIMINATION PROGRAM THROUGH
INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITY MEMBERS & PARENTS ”

Current Scenario:

The Ministry of Labour recently issued a notification banning children below 14 years age from working in residences and the hospitality sector. After agriculture, these areas are where children are employed in the highest numbers, and it is hoped that prohibiting their employment in homes and at dhabas (road side Hotels) will address a large lacuna in the current laws against employing children. The prohibition was brought into force by adding these areas in the list of hazardous occupations under the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986. This can be regarded as insufficient approach to child labour because unless the underlying causes of child labour are addressed and the rights of children are properly secured, India will remain prone to widespread child labour. Many gaps still remain in the legal provisions against child labour and even the ones, already in existence, cannot be effective without proper enforcement & rehabilitation provisions. For real change to occur – the root causes of child labour have to be addressed e.g. causes like the lack of a coherent education policy, insufficient schools, poverty, marginalization, migration etc that force children into work.

Irreversible change is only possible when children, parents, community groups and local government come together to identify, address and resolve the issues that confine children to economic activities. Banning Child labour completely will not serve the purpose, because if we look at the socio-economic profile of such children we will find that these children belong to a totally marginalized and poverty stricken caste/community. Hence, any provision made for children that totally bans child labour one has to take into account the poverty factor because if we ban child labour completely, without a proper rehabilitation/economic concern of such children and their family, it may lead to other kind of anomaly e.g. crime or offending behaviour of various kinds. Even within the judicial and constitutional limits, there are significant gaps:

- The prohibition is restricted to servants at home, hotels, dhabas and other recreation centers. It is not clear whether this applies to the household manufacturing sector, where a vast number of children are employed in similar working conditions.
- The conviction rate for the already existing Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 is abysmally low – so low, in fact, that is hardly a deterrent for employers. Without strengthening both enforcement mechanisms and provisions for rehabilitation, making additions to the list of prohibited employment for children has little meaning.
- The notification is premised on the belief that child labour needs to be prohibited in hazardous occupations only, but does not take a clear view of what children ought to be doing in their childhood – learning in safe and meaningful schools. An insular notification of this sort totally ignores children’s right to safe and facilitating environment for development that includes health, nutrition & education needs.
- National Child Labour Project has a mandate for bridge school to rehabilitate rescued child labour however for a limited period. What is the potential of the bridge school to ensure that the children do not re-enter the labour market but enter mainstream education? This depends on the education that is imparted in the bridge school. If this is even remotely akin to the education that our primary and secondary schools impart, it only makes the chances of children re-entering the labour market that much higher. For the sake of argument, even if we agree that the child completes the year at bridge school and enters the mainstream school, are we guaranteeing them education of a quality that is attractive enough? Parents, especially of children belonging to highly vulnerable backgrounds would naturally find sending the child back to work more attractive. The focus in bridge schools, therefore, ought to be more need on vocational education – something that would be useful to the children in the future, and something that would ensure them regular and good employment in the future. Mainstreaming the children to regular school is need not be the only option – which implies that the bridge school need not necessarily be a one or three year affairs. The vocational education may be imparted in the bridge school for as long as the children need it – subsequently, they can even be sent to regular vocational educational institutes. Why not let the children decide what they want to do rather than making the decisions on their behalf? Hence there is a need to establish Counseling centre and Vocational Skills Education & Training Centers.

Clearly, the journey is far from complete. The National Sample Survey 2000, reported 16.4 million Indian children aged 5-14 years were ‘engaged in economic activities and domestic or non-remunerative work’. Another 46 million children of school – going age are unaccounted for, neither enrolled in school nor officially working. These statistics gives India at least one reason to be No. 1 – home to the largest number of child labourers on the Earth.

What needs to be done: Therefore a very comprehensive and a complete package need to be developed taking into consideration their rehabilitation, education, vocational training, etc by involving every stakeholder and beneficiary category. A very focused and a **persistent campaign need** to be conducted to really get into the skin of the real problem and not just resorting to flowery speech. There is a need also to draw a line between a pure academic exercise and practical considerations, and then facilitate a way for their convergence too in order to make the effort complete and fruitful because academic and practicality should complement each other. Before developing such a campaign a **research study** must be undertaken to know the source of the problem. We need to develop strategies and action plans with scientific justification for a cause and an issue to be addressed. We need to replace the word ‘participation of children’ with ‘meaningful involvement of children’. Mere participation does not guarantee the voice or the concern of a child himself / herself. Unless we are able to add meaning to the involvement of the child we can never formulate a sensible or an effective campaign. It is a hard task and, therefore, we as responsible citizens not only of India but the world have to be persistent and supportive to the cause of our children.

Initiative by Panchavati Rural Development Society (PRDS): Panchavati Rural Development Society has identified following areas to work upon to support the children free from poverty and exploitation and to help them reach their potential:

* Research Study, Survey & Identification of Child Labour and Vulnerable children between 6-14 years age group. * To impart Education, Water, Sanitation and Health Education, Skills and to establish Skills & Vocational Training centers * Alternative income to their parents * To establish Health Care Centers. etc.

1. Research Study, Survey & Identification of Child Labour & Vulnerable

Children: Panchavati Rural Development Society has proposed to do comprehensive survey & identification of child labour and compile the information with concerned Department statistics and establish training centers. Despite rigorous efforts by all departments and social activists so far, still many child labour exists unaccounted. Panchavati Rural Development Society has scientifically developed training programs and it aims to employ one Child Labour Monitor (CLM) in each village area/ Mandal of Hyderabad & Ranga Reddy Districts. Continued efforts by Child Labour Monitors and associated team in each village area / Mandal will help us a lot to identify and remove illegal child worker with proper enforcement support, of course by Government. Once child labours are rescued it is the responsibility of Panchavati Rural Development Society to raise the children in healthy and conducive environment till they attain the age of 19. In this respect Panchavati Rural Development Society has following programs:

2.Education: Panchavati Rural Development Society believes that education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty and ending the exploitation of children. It is where social and economic development begins. Panchavati Rural Development Society is committed to build / run **one residential school** in each block / mandal and **one day school** in each Mandal of Hyderabad & Ranga Reddy .Districts. Every school is customized according to the needs of the community. To build, sustain and monitor the schools, Panchavati Rural Development Society will work with its representative Child Labour Monitor in association with reputable local partners. Panchavati Rural Development Society schools will provide children the opportunity to complete basic literacy and **to develop professional skills** according to their choice in safe & comfortable environment **till the attainment of 19 years of age**. This in turn allows them to make positive contributions to their communities. These children have the potential to transform an entire community in a single generation. Panchavati Rural Development Society firmly believed to educate girls, who are at particular risk of being denied the chance to go to school. When girls are educated they earn more income, are more productive at work, delay marriage and have fewer & healthier children.

3.Alternative Income to Parents : Panchavati Rural Development Society’s alternative income programs are focused on helping parents find sustainable sources on income to provide for their families, thus freeing their children to go to school. Many young children cannot go to school because they are forced to work to help support their families. In areas of low employment, poverty is the normal state of affairs, and parents do not have the skills or the money to provide properly for their children. Children have no choice but to help the family; the alternative is starvation. Recognizing that, parents want to provide for their children, Panchavati Rural Development Society intend to inform various poverty alleviation and employment generation schemes of the government. In addition Panchavati Rural Development Society plans

to implement alternative income projects that give those disadvantaged families a sustainable source of income by providing them with productive & sustainable resources that they otherwise would not be able to purchase e.g. agricultural implements, animals, small machinery, etc. When parents can meet their basic income needs they are able to remove their children from dangerous working conditions and send them to school. By way of providing alternative income program Panchavati Rural Development Society helps to reduce child labour, increase school attendance rates and improve literacy rates.

4. Health Care Centres: Panchavati Rural Development Society is committed to help communities becoming self sufficient and meeting their basic health care needs. It will allow families to lead healthy and productive lives. **Health care center is proposed to be developed along with school.** Many of the diseases that plague children & their families are preventable and treatable. This is why we intend to promote health & family life education (e.g. cholera, dysentery, typhoid, fever, etc.) in our schools and in the communities in which we work. Each health care center will provide primary health care services, community health workshop, medical referrals and basic pharmaceutical services, which can help to reduce the occurrence of preventable diseases. In addition to the above we also intend to establish number of rehabilitation projects to cater to the needs of children affected with various disabilities. This will allow challenged children to become involved and valued members of their communities.
