

EVALUATION REPORT

NGOs and Trade Unions Against Child Labour

**Project Implemented by M V Foundation
and Supported by FNV**

2008 – 2010

INTRODUCTION

A. BACKGROUND

M.V. Foundation (MVF) has been working in Kurnool District in the south Indian state of Andhra Pradesh since 2006. When they started work in this district, there were over 160,000 children in the age group of 7-14 employed in the production of hybrid cottonseed and various other forms of child labour. This number is greater than the combined total strength of children employed in the carpet, glass bangles, gem polishing and limestone industries in India. The hybrid cottonseed production is concentrated in South India particularly in the Telangana and Rayalseema regions of Andhra Pradesh and Northern Districts of Karnataka.

Due to lack of intensive social mobilisation, there was insufficient pressure both on the government to take action and the Multi National Corporations (MNC) to stop engaging children in work. This project was based on the premise that consistent action for at least three years through multiple stakeholders – the Child Rights Protection Forums (CRPF), Gram Panchayat¹ (GP), youth groups, trade unions and teacher' unions – would serve as a pressure tactic to bring about the required change and it will be possible to withdraw children from work and put them back where they belong, that is in school.

The present project was designed to build on the objectives and achievements of the existing interventions as continuation of activities on the ground through CRPFs, GPs, youth groups, trade unions and teachers' unions. It aimed to further strengthen the coordination and cooperation between the Joint Action Committee of the Trade Unions and the CRPF. The project also responded to the requests from the Trade Unions, CRPF and GP for continuation of activities both in the two target mandals and in the neighbouring mandals to ensure a complete elimination of child labour, not just in cotton seed farms but in all sectors. The aims of the project were thus to

1. To facilitate the processes of strengthening of all local institutions such as Gram Panchayats, CRPFs and trade unions to ensure that
 - a. They take up the responsibility to support the struggles of the poor for accessing school.
 - b. No child works and remains out of school.
 - c. All children in the village enjoy their right to education (through access to schools, transitional arrangements such as bridge course etc...)

1 Gram Panchayats are local self government

- d. Have access to mid-day meal and nutrition programme, learn well, and complete school without any disruption until they finish high school i.e. tenth class.
 - e. Have access to quality education in schools and gain class wise learning competencies.
2. To equip the gram panchayats, CRPF and trade unions to ensure proper functioning of government departments related to children as well as the smooth functioning of the local government
 3. To enhance the capacities of the gram panchayats to review the status of children and their rights in the respective constituencies and the trade unions to negotiate with the government for bridging the gaps.
 4. To take the role of the trade unions from the village and mandal level to the district and state level.
 5. To pressurize the seed companies from employing children on the cottonseed farms.

The aims of the project are consistent with and reflect MVF's non negotiable principles and builds on the fact that all the stakeholders were totally committed to these principles. Given the above objectives, the project was designed to move towards the overall objective – *Abolish child labour (at least 1200 children who are out of schools) in two mandals of Kurnool district covering 53 villages in 33 gram panchayats focussing on areas with large concentration of children, especially girls, engaged in production of hybrid cotton seeds and enrol them into full time formal day schools.*

Activities were designed to achieve the following results:

- Result 1: Child Rights Protection Forums, trade unions and gram panchayats have been equipped to take up all issues concerning violation of children's rights to abolish child labour in their respective constituencies and retain children in school. The following activities were planned to achieve this result:
 - Establish Child Rights Protection Forums (CRPFs) in two mandals of Kurnool
 - Training of members of gram panchayats, trade unions and members of CRPF through exposure visits to take up issue of abolition of child labour
 - Monitoring and retention of children in schools through gram panchayats facilitated by MVF staff
 - Review the status of children in and out of schools by CRPFs in the village on a monthly basis and at the mandal on a quarterly basis.
- Result 2: Concerned departments of labour, revenue and education have been sensitised to take action in support of children's release from work and retention in schools and their systemic capacities built. The following activities were designed to achieve this result:

- Collect information and data on out of school children /child labour by MVF staff
 - Build profiles of children and take up their cases for action by concerned authorities in the government, labour, revenue and education departments by CRPF,youth groups, trade unions and teachers unions.
- Result 3: Issue of exploitation of children in cotton seed production by MNCs and National companies has become a public issue increasing pressure on them not to employ children. The following activities were taken up to achieve this result:
- Give publicity through media to the actions taken and build a tempo against child labour in the area, with focus on children working in production of hybrid cotton seeds.
 - Build pressure on MNCs and National Companies not to employ children through campaigns and public meetings of members of youth groups, CRPF, trade unions, teachers unions.
 - Build alliances for joint actions through public meetings by CRPF, youth groups, trade unions and teachers unions.
 - Issue joint statements and joint petitions to the government.
 - Orient teachers unions and trade unions in the project area through trainings and workshops on child labor and education.

B. DESCRIPTION OF THE OPERATIONAL AREA

The hybrid cottonseed production is concentrated in South India particularly in the Telangana and Rayalseema regions of Andhra Pradesh and Northern Districts of Karnataka. Girls are enticed to work on a contract basis through payment of advances and loans to their parents. The contract is between the local farmer and the family of the girl. In reality, however one can trace the chain to the large-scale national and multi-national companies who have financed the entire operation. They have layers of contracts and sub-contracts ultimately reaching to the girl child whose rights are grossly violated. It has been acknowledged that MNCs like Bayer, Syngenta, Unilever, Emergent Genetics, Advanta have 50% of investments in the production of hybrid cottonseeds and the National seed corporations for the rest of the production in the area who together are responsible for the gross violation of rights of the girl children. These girls are made to work for as long as 11 hours a day for extremely low wages in sub-human work conditions. Many of them are trafficked away from their homes into sheds on farmyards in the peak season.

Yemmiganur and Uyyalawada mandals in Kurnool have had a high concentration of cotton seed

farms, and where there are cotton seed farms, there is bound to be child labour. In Kurnool district, Uyyalawada and Yemmiganur have a significant role in the cotton seed production. While Uyyalawada is the mandal of production, Yemmiganur is the mandal of supply. When MVF did the survey they found that there were about 2500 children working in the different farms in Uyyalawada. These children were not all of Uyyalawada – significant numbers came from the neighbouring Yemmiganur, thus forming a demand – supply chain. Children in Uyyalawada itself, apart from working in the cotton seed farms, worked in several different ways.

MVF has been working towards highlighting the plight of girl children who are engaged in production of hybrid cotton seeds in Kurnool and Mahbubnagar districts. It conducted studies on the issue and has given wide publicity to the fact that children are being exploited on a large scale in these two districts. It had also established how MNCs like Bayer, Syngenta, Monsanto are also involved in investing in seed production. Through systematic pressure both from the ground as well as through the advocacy groups in Europe through financiers, investors and share holders meetings it has been able to bind these companies to accept that they are indeed part of the problem and therefore should take up the responsibility for providing a solution, by not employing children.

Several joint meetings of M V Foundation were held with the companies. Joint monitoring teams called the Child Labor Elimination Group (CLEG) was constituted to find out if children were actually being employed by the MNCs and take spot action on the same. It has been found that the farmers were fore warned about the inspection visits and children were not found on the farms on the day of the visit. It was also found that there was a lack of transparency in sharing of information and data on the lists of farmers, number of acres under cultivation and so on. At the same time the MNCs preferred to publicize that it is collaborating with MVF and thus using MVF as a mask to continue to exploit children.

On taking stock of the above it is observed that both big and small local farmers, who were adversaries to the cause of release of child labour, and were even converted, have agreed to sponsor the education of those children whom they had previously exploited. However, for farmers who are enmeshed in a complex web of relations with the seed industries, both national and global, they and the children they employ are pitted against heavier odds. Building alliances with such farmers in support of children's rights is constrained as they are locked in an unequal relationship under contractual obligations with the powerful industry. Thus, powerful global players as well as national seed companies, who claim to adhere to high codes of conduct and corporate social responsibility, have flouted all norms of human rights and values. They have shown little concern and commitment

to protect democratic values and human dignity.

In view of these factors MVF chose to set up its independent monitoring teams through the Child Rights Protection Forums, gram panchayats and trade unions to carry on the campaign by bringing pressure on labor department and other concerned authorities to take action against all those engaging children as laborers in production of cottonseeds. It also proposes to build alliances with gram panchayats, trade unions, teachers unions and youth groups to compel employers not to employ children by bringing to the notice of press and media on gross violations of children's rights.

C. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

MVF commissioned the study to undertake an impact assessment of its programme "**Social Mobilization against Child Labour in Hybrid Cotton Seed Farms in Two Mandals of Kurnool District**" during the period 2008-2010. This is an internal review with the main objective of assisting MVF to reflect critically on its activities during this period, elicit lessons learnt and suggest ways forward for the next phase of its work. Specifically, the study will:

- Scrutinize the consistency between the aims and objectives of MVF and the means employed to reach them
- Assess the impact of MVF's work in preparing and strengthening local institutions such as the Gram Panchayats, Child Rights Protection Forums and Trade Unions for elimination of child labour
- Analyze how far the local bodies, CRPF's and Trade Unions are equipped to ensure proper functioning of government departments related to children as well as proper functioning of local governments
- Assess the extent of institutionalization of MVF activities
- Analyze the impact of MVFs programmes on children, families and communities.

D. METHODOLOGY

The study included perusal of project documents such as reports and field data and a visit to the operational area. The visit included meeting with a variety of stakeholders for Focus Group Discussions to determine the impact.

Details of visits:

Yemmiganur

- Visit to Thimmapuram village to meet with members of the community. Community members met included the sarpanch, representatives of the PRI, youth group members, SHG members, CRPF members, etc.
- Visit to KGBV school to interact with staff and children who were formerly child labourers.
- Meeting with members of Trade Union, Teachers' unions and other people's organizations.

Uyyalawada

- Meeting with Mandal Parishad President, cotton seed farmers, former child labourers and members of other people's organizations
- Visit to Narsipalli village – a child labour free village – this included a meeting with community members, farmers and brokers.

Documents reviewed:

- Project proposal submitted to FNV
- Project progress reports submitted to different donors for programmes implemented in the project mandals

KEY FINDINGS

MVF's work in the two mandals – Uyyalawada and Yemminganur – since 2007 has been effective in bringing about change. The number of children working in the cotton fields has come down drastically. Presented below are the key findings vis-a-vis the parameters specified in the scope and purpose of the study.

CONSISTENCY BETWEEN AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF MVF AND THE MEANS EMPLOYED TO REACH THEM

MVF's aims and objectives are grounded in the non negotiable principles listed below.

- 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.
- Any justification perpetuating the existence of child labour must be condemned.

These non negotiables form the basis of all work that MVF does and this was evident in the current project too. Strategies that are the hallmark of MVF's work are:

- An inclusive approach that attempts to bring about all stakeholders together
- Mass awareness and education on child rights
- Cooperation and coordination with the government
- Maintenance of extensive databases of children and the use of these not merely for reporting purposes but for internal monitoring
- Close monitoring of all children by the community

Visit to the project area and interaction with the community members saw all of the above strategies in use. The project focussed on bringing about attitudinal change rather than invoking the law, which was done only when all else had failed. For example, all the farmers met with testified that they would never employ children to work in their farms and asserted that children need full time formal education. The aims and objectives of the present project are in itself reflective of the overall aims and objectives of MVF's work.

In both Uyyalawada and Yemmiganur, work progressed in the following manner and the following are some of the successful strategies that were used.

- Conducted a survey of children in the village to determine those who are out of school.
- Once the out of school children were identified, a meeting was conducted in each village to which the key government functionaries at the mandal level – Mandal Development Officer, Mandal Revenue Officer and Sub Inspector of Police – were invited and the findings were shared.

- In addition to identifying out of school children from the village, given that children were migrating from other areas to work in the cotton seed farms, number of children working in the cotton seed farms was also determined through different means.
- Conducted awareness raising events such as jeep jattras – going from village to village to spread the message that child labour is illegal and the best place for the child is the school.
- Used strategies to ensure that conditions were good for children to come to school. An example – ensuring that teachers came to school on time and performed their duties as expected by formally inviting them to come to school.
- Even though the project focussed on children in cotton seed farms, the information was collected for all children out of school and follow up done for all children, both in and out of school.
- Set up residential bridge course centres and enrolled children in these centres to prepare them for reentry into the formal education system.
- Submitted petitions to the government to draw their attention to the issue.
- Set up seasonal hostels for children to stay while the adults migrated.
- Through all of the above strategies, MVF and its partner community organizations have succeeded in creating an environment of intolerance for child labour in the target mandals.

IMPACT OF MVF'S WORK IN PREPARING AND STRENGTHENING LOCAL INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS THE GRAM PANCHAYATS, CHILD RIGHTS PROTECTION FORUMS AND TRADE UNIONS FOR ELIMINATION OF CHILD LABOUR

Creation and strengthening of local institutions against child labour has always been one of MVF's core strategies, and this was observed in the target mandals in Kurnool district too. During the past four years in the two mandals, MVF worked closely with the different community organizations. The strategy of selecting the gram panchayats with the highest number of child labourers and working towards developing them as model mandals has been instrumental in bringing down the numbers of child labourers. 8 cotton seed farm villages in Uyyalawada were selected as model panchayats and the model that has emerged in these villages is that of model child friendly villages with sound mechanisms for child protection.

One of the most important impacts of MVF's work with the local institutions has been the emergence of **good governance for children**. Action planning groups comprising of the Panchayat members, Trade union members, and other people's organizations such as SHGs, youth groups and teachers' unions, have been set up in 29 project villages. These groups meet regularly to discuss issues related to children and to pressurize farmers to refrain from engaging child labour in their

fields. As a result, the number of children working in the cotton seed farms has come down by more than 50%. This has also resulted in a decrease in the number of farmers who are coming into these mandals for lease farming for cotton seed production. During the course of the project, close to 700 children have been rescued from cotton seed farms and put back in school. This has also led to the setting up of a bridge course camp for those children who dropped out of school.

Protection mechanisms such as groups acting as vigilance committees and panchayats imposing penalties have also played an important role in bringing down the number of children working in cotton seed farms in these mandals.

Strengthening local institutions has resulted in an environment of non tolerance for the practice of child labour. This was evident from the statements made by community leaders in Narsipalli in Uyyalawada mandal - “It is not only in cotton seed farms, children should not work in any sector. They should be in school.”

In building capacities to combat child labour, local awareness and knowledge regarding policies and programmes related to child protection has increased. Every group met with spoke of the Right to Education (RTE) Act as an important instrument that adds strength to their struggle. Further, in trying to come up with means to combat child labour, the groups have gone beyond rescuing children from labour situations to engaging with the local school in a monitoring and strengthening capacity. Actions such as providing additional materials that children require, leading enrollment drives, monitoring the attendance of teachers, demanding additional teachers, monitoring the quality of mid day meals etc., were reported in all the villages visited.

Engagement of the local institutions with the programme has led to an increased demand for quality education for children. Community members now demand and access quality education in the local schools. Actions such as regular submission of petitions and locking up inadequate schools has forced the education department to take appropriate action to improve the conditions in the school.

EXTENT TO WHICH THE LOCAL BODIES, CRPF’S AND TRADE UNIONS ARE EQUIPPED TO ENSURE PROPER FUNCTIONING OF GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS RELATED TO CHILDREN AS WELL AS PROPER FUNCTIONING OF LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

Interaction with the local bodies, CRPF members and Trade Unions showed that they are well equipped to take action to secure the interests of children. The CRPF in these two mandals alone has 436 members, and a CRPF exists in each of the project villages. There are a total of 28 CRPF

committees.

Training for over 250 CRPF and gram panchayat members has resulted in sound knowledge on child rights and taking up issues of violation of child rights. This has had an impact on enrollment, retention and decrease in child marriages. As a result of the training and increased awareness, the local institutions have submitted over 150 petitions to the government on issues of rights violations. There have also been instances of filing of FIRs against employers of child labour. But most members spoke of the need for increased cooperation from the government officials.

The local institutions, especially the CRPF, meet regularly on their own to discuss issues related to children. Meetings at the village level are conducted once a month or more frequently as events warrant, and at the mandal level – once a quarter. The CRPF comprises of membership from different local organizations and cuts across political party lines.

INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF MVF ACTIVITIES

The project has systematically worked in coordination with the Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) at the local level. With this involvement of the local government mechanism, the activities of the project have seen an institutionalization process. In 23 villages, the PRI is active and closely involved with monitoring the situation. Regular meetings regarding children and inclusion of child rights issues in their regular meetings as a specific agenda item has led to a model of good governance for children in these villages. The PRI along with the CRPF and other local institutions are actively involved in ensuring that children are in school and lobbying with the higher authorities on issues related to children. As an outcome of this, the panchayat has gone beyond monitoring school age children to start monitoring at birth – birth registration is done at the panchayat level and registers are maintained and certificates are issued at the village level itself, making it easier for poor parents to obtain the basic legal documents for their children.

With the involvement of the local institutions, enrollment drives are conducted as a matter of policy at the beginning of each school year. Community members along with the school teachers go on a procession through the village to identify children of school going age and bring them to school. As the sarpanch of a village said “It has now become a habit for us to ask any child in our village who is not in school at school time – *'why are you not in school?'* . This points to an institutionalization of attitude among the community.

When rights violations occur the PRI members take the lead in condemning and seeking retribution. For example, sarpanches took the lead in publicizing and successfully seeking justice in the murder case of two young girls working in the cotton seed farms. In another instance of corporal punishment in the local school, the sarpanch took the lead in taking action against the headmaster of the school.

Activities introduced by MVF are being taken up by the village level organizations themselves and all village groups indicated that the activities would continue even if MVF were to withdraw. However, the MVF volunteer serves as an important resource person to these groups to advise on strategies and activities. The community also sees the volunteer as an important part of the programme and the community in maintaining vigilance.

IMPACT OF MVF'S PROGRAMMES ON CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

Children: The impact of the programme is most evident on the children. During the past two years, nearly 800 children have been withdrawn from cotton seed farms and put back in school. The number of children in the cotton seed farms in year 1 of the project came down from 2500 to 1000. Apart from children rescued from cotton seed farms, children were rescued from other forms of labour too. The number of working children has come down by half in both the project mandals. In addition to a decrease in the number of children working in these mandals, there has been an increase in the retention rates in schools. The average retention rate in these two mandals is at 85%.

There is an environment of child protection in the target villages. The attitudinal change in the adults towards is evident in the regularity with which community groups meet. Meetings are held at least once a month and more often when warranted. The seed villages have taken steps to stop children from coming into their village to work, thus spreading the impact beyond the immediate village to neighbouring villages also. The model of development can be termed a child centred development model.

Convergence with the work of other organizations has also led to an increased vigilance for violation of child rights. For example, enlisting the support of an NGO that was doing a survey of agricultural practices helped the community groups to gain information about children working in the cotton seed farms.

The programme has also infrastructural improvements in child spaces, such as schools and hostels. Once the norm that no child should work is established, the programme naturally progresses to

looking at the infrastructure available for children. This results in improvements in the schools and close monitoring of hostels and other child centred programmes such as the mid day meal and ICDS. Improvement can be noted in these programmes too.

Setting up of seasonal hostels is amongst the best strategies that the project has used. Recognizing that it is unavoidable for adults to migrate, creating facilities for the care of children who can be left behind to continue their schooling is an effective strategy in preventing drop out.

The single biggest impact for children is the fact that they are being thought of and treated as children again. Expectations vis-a-vis children have changed – while earlier it was acceptable and expected for children to work and contribute to the family income, the current expectation is that they will be in school. Adults also demand quality education for their children – the slogan in a press statement - *“we don't want half hearted attempts to educate our children”*.

Families: The impact on families too is commendable. When asked, 100% of the parents said that withdrawing their children from work has **not** impacted their economic status. In addition to the fact that adult wages are higher than that of children, this is also partly due to the implementation of the NREGS programme which has increased the bargaining power of the labourers. While the wages earned by children had added to the family income, increased awareness on child rights and the benefits of education, the increased access to government schemes for children such as bridge course camps, KGBV schools, and scholarships have offset the costs. In addition training on family expense planning has helped the poor families to plan better and ensure that their children continue in school. As mentioned earlier, seasonal hostels have also had a major role to play in ensuring that children do not drop out of school and accompany their parents when they migrate, as parents are assured of a safe place for their children to stay while they are away.

Communities: Interaction with community members pointed to a change in attitudes towards children. In those communities where the activities were intense, especially in Uyyalawada mandal, it was evident that children belonged to the community as a whole and not to a set of parents. The programme has been successful in instilling a sense of social responsibility and the target communities have the necessary knowledge and skills to demand their rights. In general, an increased awareness of laws and policies was evident making it possible for communities to demand good governance. The programme has led to empowered communities being able to identify problems and seek solutions. The stress on good governance was especially evident in Uyyalawada mandal where the sarpanches came across as people's representatives with high levels

of accountability and transparency. Further, it was evident that change had been institutionalized sufficiently so that it is not dependent on any one individual. The fact that members with different political affiliations were able to sit together and talk about the children of their village points to a single minded purpose of the community vis-a-vis children.

It is interesting to note that even farmers, who can be termed as those who were adversely impacted by the programme, were quite vocal in their support of children continuing in school. While admitting that they were forced both by the pressure from the community and the law to stop employing children in their fields, they also said that an increased awareness of child rights was also responsible for their “responsible and ethical farming practices.” But it must be mentioned that this is the case primarily with local farmers. It was not clear if such attitudinal change had occurred in the case of migrant farmers as there is no system of tracking and keeping in touch with them. The brokers, who are part of the cycle of child employment, have also stopped bringing in children to work. This is again due to increased pressure and vigilance from the community. Such vigilance mechanisms have served to bring in a certain level of formality into the informal sector of agriculture labour where age certificates have to be furnished in order to obtain employment. While there is lacuna in this system – primarily of falsification of information – this is a step in the right direction.

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND LEARNINGS

The programme implemented by MVF in partnership with the community organizations such as the Gram Panchayat, the Trade Unions, the CRPF and others has been successful in creating the necessary environment and conditions for every child to be in school. However, the work is far from over. There continue to be children out of school and there is need for the programme to be implemented in the neighbouring mandals also. Detailed observations are given below vis-a-vis the stated objectives and expected results of the project.

OBJECTIVE 1:

To facilitate the processes of strengthening of all local institutions such as Gram Panchayats, CRPFs and trade unions to ensure that

1. They take up the responsibility to support the struggles of the poor for accessing school
2. No child works and remains out of school.
3. All children in the village enjoy their right to education (through access to schools, transitional arrangements such as bridge course etc.)
4. Have access to mid-day meal and nutrition programmer, learn well, and complete school without any disruption until they finish high school i.e. tenth class.
5. Have access to quality education in schools and gain class wise learning competencies.

Objective 1 has been achieved in that intensive training and meetings with the local institutions has resulted in these institutions taking the lead in identifying working children. Lists are maintained at the village level of all children of school going age and they are followed up for attendance. The local institutions have been instrumental in leading the campaigns against child labour at the village and mandal levels. Therefore, the foundation for ensuring points 1-5 under objective 1 has been laid. However, there is need for additional activism to ensure that all the children are out of work and in school. Also, there is need for more transitional arrangements as the facilities available currently are insufficient to meet the demand. There is need for additional bridge courses, seasonal hostels, and upgraded schools to handle the intake of children. This lacuna was pointed out by practically all the groups that participated in this exercise. For example, the KGBV school has the facility for only 125 children while the number of children who need such a facility is about 10 times the number. This has resulted in children continuing to be out of school.

While great inroads have been made as far as children in cotton seed farms are concerned, similar efforts are required for children working in other sectors as well. While MVF has been stressing the need to monitor all children, the vigilance in other sectors such as hotels and establishments, vehicle repair shops, etc. appears to be inadequate. This could partly be due to the fact that the main context of entry into these mandals was that of high numbers of children in cotton seed farms. But this needs to be addressed.

While the local institutions have been making interventions in the realm of quality education, given that the representatives of these institutions are not education experts, there is need for additional capacity building vis-a-vis quality and monitoring of academic quality. Currently, the local institutions are doing a commendable job of monitoring the adequacy of resources – material and human – and taking the necessary steps to ensure that the resources required for children's education are adequate. Teachers' unions could play a greater role in ensuring academic quality in the schools and other institutions. Establishing stronger relationship with the state level BKVV could make a difference here. Currently the teachers' unions are also engaged with bringing children back to school but it is not clear how much they have intervened to bring about adherence to quality standards among their colleagues.

In conclusion, local institutions are fully equipped to take the programme forward. This is largely due to the monitoring systems that have been set up at the village level and the regularity of meetings.

OBJECTIVE 2:

To equip the gram panchayats, CRPF and trade unions to ensure proper functioning of government departments related to children as well as the smooth functioning of the local government

Objective 2 has been achieved in its fullest sense in the two mandals. The local institutions have submitted more than 200 petitions to the government on a variety of issues related to children seeking better functioning of the government departments. These petitions ranged from bringing the numbers of children working to the government's notice to demanding better facilities in their village schools. Further, the strategy of involving the relevant government officers from the start of the programme has ensured the cooperation of the government machinery. At the start of the project, meetings were held with the MRO, MDO, MEO, the labour department and the police department to enlist their support in the work. Where the officials were found to be unresponsive,

these institutions took up actions such as issuing press notices and bringing the issue to the attention of the District Collector. In the model panchayats a model of good governance for children has emerged. This has served to empower the local government and make it aware of its responsibilities in all development areas. Regular panchayat meetings are evidence that local governance mechanisms are working.

CRPFs and Trade Unions are the back bone of the programme and are largely responsible for the success of the programme. They have gone beyond personal and political affiliations to stand together for children. The formation of action planning groups in 29 villages has been an important initiative in bring together people against child labour.

In addition to the above institutions, engaging with the farmers to form farmer cooperatives against child labour would add strength to the programme. While fully aware of the challenges associated with such a strategy, it would be worthwhile for MVF to extend the lessons learned from its work with the teachers and the subsequent formation of the BKVV to extend similar activities with farmers. Strategies such as honoring farmers who do not employ children are already being used in the project area and this would build on such initiatives.

OBJECTIVE 3:

To enhance the capacities of the gram panchayats to review the status of children and their rights in the respective constituencies and the trade unions to negotiate with the government for bridging the gaps.

As mentioned above the capacities of the GPs to review the status of children and their rights and the trade unions to negotiate with the government have been enhanced. In 23 panchayats, the GP meet regularly to discuss the status of children and maintain lists of children in their panchayat. During the interactions it was clear that the GP knew every child in its panchayat and also, in the case of the labour destination mandal – Uyyalawada – the GP was aware of children who were coming in from other villages or mandals to work in their village. Initiatives such as imposing fines on farmers who employ children have been instrumental in preventing the violation of child rights. The GP have gone beyond child labour and taking up issues of child marriages too. Narsipalle village in Uyyalawada mandal honors those who marry after the age of 18 and offers incentives. These GP are also maintaining birth registration details and ensuring that every child is registered at birth. This has been made with the support of MVF who has supplied the birth registration registers and certificates to the villages.

Trade unions play an important monitoring role and have been instrumental in collecting the child labour data and bringing it to the notice of the authorities. Given that farmers too are members of trade unions, the involvement of the trade unions in the anti child labour movement has ensured that the message percolates among its cadres.

OBJECTIVE 4

To take the role of the trade unions from the village and mandal level to the district and state level.

Objective 4 has been partly achieved. The trade unions have been meeting regularly and conducting activities at the village and mandal level. There is also some level of engagement at the district level when pressure tactics at the village and mandal level fail. Meetings have been conducted at the district level and close to 200 press notifications with child rights violations have appeared at the district level. But activities at the state level are limited. Increased efforts to link the Trade Unions to state level initiatives will strengthen and support them further.

Formation of the Aikya Vedika – a forum of all Trade Unions has been a strength to the program as it brought together Trade Unions with different affiliations on a common platform to act against child labour. However Trade Union members who are part of the programme did refer to a lack of support from their leaders who felt they were spending too much time on child issues rather than union work. While in principle the trade unions are with the programme, it is not clear how far this has been institutionalized. Drawing in the trade unions to engage more closely at the leadership level will have added benefits as the trade unions are powerful organizations that can influence their members. Working towards a formal inclusion of intolerance towards child labour as one of the unions' objectives will add great strength to the programme and increase impact. This can also result in reaching out to mandals where the programme has not reached. For this, dialogue with the unions from the state level downwards should be made an inherent part of the programme.

OBJECTIVE 5

To pressurize the seed companies to stop them from employing children on the cottonseed farms.

MVF recognizes that the seed companies are important players in the fight against child labour and

that they have the capability to bring about change. Seed companies that have their farms in the two mandals are Monsanto, Syngenta, Tulasi seeds, Nuzvid seeds, Bayer and Proagro. During the initial years of the project, a Child Labour Elimination Group (CLEG) was formed with representation from the MNC seed companies. Seed companies vowed to work towards the elimination of child labour in cotton seed farms and included clauses in the agreements with farmers to this effect and included clauses related to penalties. However, this commitment remained on paper and no attempt was made to enforce the terms of the agreement. This has resulted in a dissociation between CLEG and the programme. However, given the important role that seed companies play in this cycle, it would be worthwhile to find ways and means of engaging with them and making them accountable.

As of now, some of the strategies used for ensuring accountability have been to publicize the issues widely, bring the officials to the farms where children are working and force action. These have worked as threats to bring about change, but there is little evidence of attitudinal change within the seed companies. The situation is further complicated by the fact that while the seed companies might show sensitivity at the headquarters level, at the local level the situation is quite different and the need for profit overrules ethical practices. MVF can engage with the seed companies to design monitoring mechanisms from company headquarters to the field level so that the company is aware of practices right down to the farm level.

While the MNCs such as Monsanto, Syngenta and Bayer did show some level of commitment and included bonuses for those farmers who produced seed solely with adult labour, the local seed companies have turned a blind eye to the incidence of child labour in their farms. In fact, some of the farmers interviewed said that local seed companies had said that they could employ children on their farms. Even in the case of the MNCs, often it is the sensitivity of the individual organizer at the mandal level that is responsible for ensuring ethical practices. For example, Monsanto representative in Uyyalawada – Mr Brahma Reddy – is one such sensitized individual who has extended his cooperation to the programme and tried to ensure that no children are working in the Monsanto farms. Here again there is need for institutionalization of change as if children have stopped working in the fields it is not due to a change in the seed companies and farmers but because of community pressure and laws. This is evident in the fact that farmers and seed companies try to get round the problem by getting false age certificates for the children working in the farms.

The CRPF, Trade Unions and others working against child labour faced one major problem in linking child labour to specific seed companies, as the boundaries between the farms of the different

seed companies are not very clear and it became easy for seed companies to deny that a particular piece of land on which children were working was theirs. Here again, restructuring CLEG to include representation from all seed companies and putting in mechanisms for accountability will have a long lasting impact. The result would be similar to the change observed at the community level where the commitment to eradicate child labour cuts across political party lines. If a well developed and sensitized CLEG of the seed companies exists, this would result in change coming from within.

It can be said with certainty that the programme has resulted in pressurizing seed companies to look closely at who is working in their fields. Community pressure along with law enforcement measures has been successful in making it difficult for seed companies to permit the farmers to use child labour in their farms. But the fight is far from over – there is need for continued vigilance and pressure until there is evidence of attitudinal change.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

1. Creating an environment of intolerance for the practice of child labour in the project mandals

The project has been successful in creating conditions that make it difficult both for parents to send their children to work and for employers to employ them. Intense community mobilization and widespread awareness raising events have been instrumental in sensitizing communities on the evils of child labour and the impact it has on both the child and the family.

Given the increased vigilance, farmers in seed farms found it difficult to employ children as the community groups pressurized law enforcement officials into taking action and even effected a couple of arrests. This served as an effective deterrent to other farmers.

Panchayats gave out clear messages that children should not work and should be in school – this served to improve enrollment in schools and increase retention. Further, ensuring that schools were adequate to impart quality education and monitoring of institutions and programmes meant for children by the Panchayat and other community organizations contributed to keeping children in school.

Sensitization of families by taking them to see bridge course camps and one on one meetings to influence change was also instrumental in bringing about a changed environment.

Regular talking about children and the issues of child labour has led to an increased awareness of

child rights and the potential of the RTE in keeping children in school.

2. Creating a model of good governance for children

The setting up of model panchayats which engage closely with children's issues has led to creation of a model of good governance. The fact that these panchayats have gone beyond the primary issue of child labour in cotton seed farms and taken up issues of missing children, child marriages, corporal punishment, birth registration, anganwadi and school functioning shows that it is possible to have child protection mechanisms at the community level. Further, given that it is the local government bodies that are taking up these cases, there is a process of institutionalizing such mechanisms so that it continues even after the project has ended. This is one achievement that is likely to have spill over benefits into other areas of governance too. Apart from engaging in good governance by themselves, the local government bodies are insisting on good governance at the mandal and district level and pressurizing duty bearers to fulfill their responsibilities. Awareness in the community about the duties of the panchayat will continue to empower the community to demand good governance from the panchayat regardless of which party or individual is heading it.

3. Community groups are equipped to use different means to draw attention to issues.

Throughout the project period, community groups have issued close to 200 press notices drawing attention to issues of child rights violations. This has been effective in getting the attention of the officials at the district level, which in turn has led to the officials pressurizing their colleagues at the mandal level to take action.

Community groups have also become adept at drafting and submitting petitions at the mandal and district level to seek solutions to the problems. Close to 200 petitions have been submitted on a variety of issues that children face. This has led to arrests of farmers who employ child labour, getting anganwadis for their village, getting additional infrastructure for their schools, getting scholarships for the children, preventing brokers from taking children for work, improving the quality of mid day meals in the schools, etc.

Public awareness measures such as conducting rallies and campaigns covering all villages in the mandal and conducting mass meetings at the village and mandal levels has kept the issue in the public eye.

With the introduction of RTE and all community groups trained on the Act, the community groups see this as one more important tool that they can use in their struggle against child labour.

4. Changes in attitudes towards children

From discussions with community groups it is clear that there is a shift in thinking regarding children. Children are no longer considered just another mouth to feed or another hand to work. There are groups in the community that are looking at and after the children and their families to ensure that the children do not forgo their right to education. The wide membership in the CRPF is proof of this. The programme has also increased the visibility of children and put them in the public eye, so that a child who is not in school on a school day is noticed and questioned. Farmers too have changed in their attitudes and were quite emphatic in stating that they would not employ children in their farms under any circumstances.

5. Multi stakeholder engagement on a single issue

By engaging with a variety of stakeholders in as non confrontational manner as possible, the programme has been successful in bringing together diverse stakeholders together. Farmers who used to employ children now speak of the need to eradicate child labour in other sectors. Brokers who brought children in to work from other mandals are now members of the CRPF. Teachers who were indifferent to their work are now active campaigners for child rights. Parents who said they needed the income from their children's work are now supporting and adjusting household expenses to ensure that their children have all the materials needed for work. Children who were formerly child labourers are now activists who bring mobilize and bring their working peers to the bridge course camps or schools and act as informants on children working. Community members who belong to different political factions are able to sit together in one room to talk about their children and their needs.

CHALLENGES

- Collecting information related to children working in the cotton seed farms as the activists and volunteers were prohibited from entering the fields.
- Lack of support from the government officials makes it difficult to take action.
- Lack of commitment on the part of the seed companies to enforce the terms of the agreement. Seed companies are profit oriented and local seed companies especially do not have any awareness regarding the need for ethical practices, which includes the prohibition of child labour.
- Given that the programme was focussed in two mandals only, children continue to come in

from the other mandals where there is no programme.

- Intensive focus on the child labour in cotton seed farms led to a lack of attention in other sectors.
- Political interference hampers rescue work as the government officials are intimidated by the politicians.
- Farmers have a lot of political clout and backing which makes it difficult to take action against erring farmers.
- Inadequate numbers of bridge course camps and hostels to cater to the demand generated by action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is no doubt about the impact that the project has had in the two mandals and there is need for continuation of the programme.
2. There is need to pay more attention to Yemmiganur mandal in the future to make sure that the changes are institutionalized as in Uyyalawada.
3. The project will benefit from reviving and revitalizing CLEG as it is important to bring about change among the seed companies. For this it might be necessary to engage with the management heads of the seed companies and devise ways and means of monitoring right down to the farm level.
4. While the project has been successful in bringing about an attitudinal change in farmers who are residents of the mandal, it is unclear if migrant farmers too have changed. A system of follow up of farmers would benefit a wider group of children. For this, forming a forum of farmers against child labour at the village, mandal and district levels may be considered.
5. While the teachers' unions are taking action, there is not much evidence of the strength that BKVV in other MVF districts display. Linking the teachers' unions to state level BKVV and arranging for interaction between teachers of the project mandals with teachers from other districts and mandals will strengthen the teachers' unions.
6. Engage with the leadership of the Trade Unions at the state and district level so that the involvement of the trade unions is not limited to these mandals but rather is integrated into the unions' manifesto.
7. The support offered by the MVF volunteers to the community is valuable and despite the fact that the CRPF has the capacity to carry out the programme, support by the MVF volunteers is necessary for at least three more years.
8. Sarpanches from these mandals have participated in state level sarpanch meetings. Such

initiatives should continue as the mutual support and learnings that such meetings offer are invaluable.

9. While there is an extensive system of collecting information related to children at different levels, systematization of the storage of information will lead to easier retrieval and use in planning.
10. Continued lobbying with the government for additional educational infrastructure for the children.

CONCLUSION:

The project in the two mandals has brought about sustainable change as the activities were designed to bring about attitudinal change. This is in keeping with the guiding principles of MVF which towards establishing a norm that no child shall work and every child shall be in school. MVF has worked in these mandals for the last four years and the impact is commendable. However, it must be acknowledged that four years is too short a period to completely eradicate child labour and therefore there is dire need for the project to continue till its logical conclusion.

The greatest strength that MVF has is in its staff at the field level who once inducted into the programme stay on with a commitment to children. It is imperative that MVF continue to find the resources to support these volunteers to continue the work.

While challenges exist, MVF has a fund of experiences and strategies to draw on and it is clear that internal reflections and re-strategizing are constantly done. This should support MVF and its partner communities to overcome the challenges.

It is strongly recommended that MVF continue with the activities in the two mandals and if possible expand to additional mandals from where children come in to work.