

**THE ROLE OF NGOS TO THE ELIMINATION OF CHILD  
LABOUR IN THE MATCH INDUSTRY BELT OF TAMIL NADU**

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**Introduction:**

The role of Non Governmental Organisation (NGOs) in the promotion of human rights at international, and regional levels is widely recognized and endorsed by the international community. NGOs contribute significantly to the United Nations Human Rights programmes. They serve as a unique source of information; assist in the identification and drafting of new international standards; seek to obtain redress for victims of human rights abuses; and play an important role in promoting human rights education, particularly of the non-formal level. Non-governmental organisation such as Amnesty International, the International League of Human Rights, the Minority Group and other International and Regional NGOs are doing an important investigative and communicative functions in the area of human rights.<sup>1</sup>

NGOs maintain a consultative status with the United Nation and its specialized agencies and international conferences. The contributions of NGOs, including fact finding, monitoring at international level are impressive. These agencies create a flow of information as well as exert pressure through lobbying in national states as well as international forums.

The World Conference on Human Rights (1993) recognized the important role of non-governmental organisations in the promotion of all human rights and in humanitarian activities at national, regional and international levels.<sup>2</sup> The conference appreciated their contribution to increasing public awareness of human rights issues, to the conduct of education, training and research in this field, and to the promotion and protection of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

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NGOs have made their contribution to this process of standard setting, especially within the UN Commission of Human Rights and its sub-commission, where NGO experts are welcomed in the working groups, which draft these documents. For example, the chairman of the working group drafting the proposed convention on the rights of the child has publicly thanked the NGOs for their contribution to its work. The following are the NGOs who are directly involving in the field of eliminating of child labour from the match industry belt of Tamilnadu.<sup>3</sup>

They are Centre for Education Development Action and Research (CEDAR), Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW), Association for Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA) and Navajeevan Educational and Welfare Society (NEWS). Though more number of non governmental organisations are working in the field, they are mostly concentrating on running the government programmes like National Child Labour Project (NCLP) and International Labour Organisation's International Programme on the Elimination of Child labour (ILO-IPEC). The major activity undertaken by this programme is running the special schools.<sup>4</sup>

### **Centre for Education Development Action and Research (CEDAR):**

CEDAR was established in December 1994, by a group of professionals having considerable experience in the development field, to support the small and emerging NGO's in the region and enhances their efficiency and effectiveness. The group also perceived that advocating professionalism and accountability between NGO's was important. Zurich Financial Services (ZFS) community trust (previously known as Allied Dunbar Charitable services community trust) was interested in CEDAR's effort and not only committed a five year funding support but also Capacity Building support to CEDAR through ZFS staff being sent on assignments. During the first four years the organisation had two major thematic programmes - NGO Capacity Building and Child Labour Action Research Project. In addition offering support to academic institutions and fostering links between institutions in the North and South was carried out as activities. The latter half of this period also witnessed CEDAR expanding its field operations to implement the Women's Development Project of the Government of Tamilnadu.<sup>5</sup> The NGO Capacity Building Programme was initiated after identifying thirty NGO's using a complex criteria and also deciding on the scope and range of support services. The Capacity Building effort commenced in 1997 and focused on aspects of Organisational Development and Project

Management, with different partners requiring different level of inputs.<sup>6</sup>

The Child Labour Action Research Project of CEDAR was started in the Kovilpatti Block, Tuticorin District, a well-known Match Industry belt with a high concentration of Child labour. CEDAR team carried out extensive surveys in the block prior to identifying the 12 villages where they decided to work. The team of professionals in the organisation had expertise on health, education, community organisation, women development and project management. This team decided to pursue a sectoral approach to development in the 12 villages, in addition the Women Development Co-ordinator was also entrusted the task of expanding the activities of the "Mahalir Thittam" project in forty three other villages during 1997.<sup>7</sup>

### **Education:**

In the education sector the project continues to run three pre-schools benefiting forty eight children between three and five years, ten Supplementary Education Centres covering 246 school going children and three special schools where 124 displaced children from match work are getting academic as well as vocational education. The special school initiative is supported by the government programme through the District Administration.<sup>8</sup>

### **Health:**

The health focus within the field project was perceived as an integral part of the wider development effort of CEDAR in Kovilpatti. Preventive health care education and referral services for the community formed the thrust of this task. CEDAR as an organisation has grown in stature to establish its credibility within a short span of four years to be well known amongst a range of NGOs in Tamilnadu for its unique role, capacity and the level of professionalism. This is proven by the number of NGOs actively associated with CEDAR for the past three years and many other NGOs seeking professional assistance and guidance. In addition, the field level interventions of CEDAR has come in for a lot of appreciation from the community. The level of professionalism of CEDAR staff has been appreciated by both NGO partners as well as the community.<sup>9</sup>

## Association for Sarva Seva Farms (ASSEFA):

### **Project Background:**

ASSEFA has started its project at Virudhunagar District. In the perception of ASSEFA, the below are prime causes for the prevalence of child labour.<sup>10</sup> The Virudhunagar District in the Southern part of State of Tamilnadu is known for its periodical drought conditions. Rainfall is very scanty and erratic. The climate is hot and dry. This district is not getting nominal rainfall in both monsoon i.e. South West monsoon and North East monsoon.

Due to the above environmental conditions agriculture is difficult and most often below subsistence level. Most of the holdings are very small and fragmented. The hot and dry climate was not conducive to the farmers but helped the match/fire units flourish. A major advantage for the industry was the large body of low paid labour available as the struggling marginally farmers gladly took to this employment. Further the enterprises prefer child force for the industry, as the children are nimble, swifter, more active and then more productive. They are more docile and can easily be bullied by the adult supervisors into doing this bidding.

### **Intervention of ASSEFA/CWOP:**

ASSEFA has been working in Virudhunagar District since 1987 and this has a rich and wide experience in this area. Some of the major functions that have been carried out are running of special schools of child workers in collaboration with of National Child Labour Project (NCLP), Virudhunagar. ASSEFA has been working in four blocks in the Virudhunagar District, i.e. Kariapattim Sivakasi, Watrap and Vembakottai.

Virudhunagar is the another block, which has concentration of the child workers working in match, and fire works industries. This is the crux of the problem that the Child Worker Opportunities Project launches its project to mitigate the issue. The Child Workers Opportunities Project was launched in 1999 by ASSEFA in Virudhunagar Block with the support of the save the Children Canada.

Over the past few years, international attention has been focused on child work in India, particularly on situations considered to be; exploitative and hazardous. Recent studies by the Government of India and the Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) have estimated the number of child workers to be as high as 77 million.<sup>11</sup> It is estimated that India will soon have

the highest number of child workers unless appropriate steps are taken.

The most visible child work occurs in factories including matchstick making, glass, fireworks, and carpet industry. However the formal sector represents only a tiny portion of child work in India, both in terms of number and types. Focusing attention on the formal sector of child work masks the complicity of the issue. For example, the agriculture sector is the largest employer of children in India but is not considered for official purposes. Many of these unorganised and invisible forms of child work are unpaid and, in fact, more exploitative and damaging than the visible ones. A major problem is lack of appropriate information.

#### **Navajeevan Educational and Welfare Society (NEWS):**

Navajeevan Educational and Welfare Society (Popularly known as NEWS) is a registered, non-profit, voluntary social action group for educated and Socio-Economic Development of poor, needy, downtrodden and under privileged segments of rural communities. Education and organisation of Rural Communities so as to enable the rural poor to participate fully in their development in the integrated approach of the society. As an organisation it came to being in the year 1989. It was registered under the Tamilnadu State Society Registration Act 21 of 1976 on 06.06 1989. Eminent educationalists and young people are the members of the NEWS.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Indian Council for Child Welfare (ICCW) History and Background:**

The Indian Council for Child Welfare, Tamilnadu was started in 1953 in the State of Tamilnadu in South India and is affiliated to Indian Council for Child Welfare (National), New Delhi.

#### **Vision of ICCW, Tamil Nadu:**

A society which cares for its children by giving first priority to their needs, rights and protection thereby ensuring opportunities for the fullest development of the innate potential of every child leading to the well being and happiness of both individuals and families.

The main objectives of ICCW as stated in the Constitution are as follows:

- a. To ensure for children their basic human rights to survival, physical, mental and social development and opportunities to grow to their full potential.
- b. To work for the protection of children against neglect, abuse and exploitation.
- c. To initiate, support or undertake any activity for betterment of families and communities, which will ultimately enhance the quality of life for children.

d. To initiate, undertake or aid directly or through its District Councils or Institutional Members, Schemes for furtherance of Child Welfare/Development in Tamilnadu.

e. To promote dissemination of knowledge and information and to educate public opinion for Child Welfare/Development programmes on a scientific basis.

To promote enactments of legislation and relating to matters concerning children and their welfare and to work towards the implementation of the provisions.

### **Action Programme on Child Labour In Virudhunagar District:**

According to ICCW, Around 1920s the matchstick factories were established in Virudhunagar, Tirunelveli and Tuticorin districts of Tamilnadu. Since then, the practice of employing children is said to have existed in these factories. There is no common consensus arrived at as to the estimates of actual number of children employed at the match stick factories located in Virudhunagar district, as different sources estimate differently. Irrespective of the statistics, the fact is that the child labour practice is prevalent and is growing every year in this district.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above analysis it is evident that the non- Governmental organizations such as CEDAR (Center for Education Development Action and Research) ASSEFA (Association for Sarva Seva Farms), NEWS (Navajeevan Educational and Welfare Society) and ICCW ( Indian Council for Child Welfare) done a valuable work for the elimination of child labour in Tamil Nadu, particularly in the match industry belt areas.

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