

THE CONCERNED FOR WORKING CHILDREN - A NOTE

The Concerned for Working Children (CWC) a secular, democratic, national, private development agency is one of the first organisations in India to work exclusively on the issue of child rights.

CWC works with local governments, communities and working children to implement viable, comprehensive, sustainable and appropriate solutions in partnership with all the major actors, so that children do not have to work. CWC believes that child labour can be eradicated.

The Programmes of the Organisation:

CWC presently implements its programmes in four rural Districts and 2 urban centers of Karnataka State in India. The rural programme now covers 8 Panchayats¹. The urban programme covers 24 field areas of Bangalore and Kundapura Town. This programme has proved successful to the extent that a couple of areas are ready to declare themselves child labour free and an expansion of the programme is planned.

The main activities:

- **Children's Participation:** CWC is committed to facilitate children's empowerment through information and organisation so that they can access political space and influence decision-making processes.

- a. CWC's efforts to empower working children by enhancing their protagonism led to the formation of Bhima Sangha, a union of, by and for working children. Bhima Sangha has a membership of 13,000 working children in Karnataka and is an equal partner of CWC in implementing its programmes. The union is a powerful advocate of rights of working children. It is equally concerned about improving the quality of life of children, families and communities.

¹ A Panchayat is a political division that consists of a cluster of villages.

- b. Local Panchayats, CWC and Bhima Sangha have facilitated the formation of Makkala Panchayats (Children's Village Councils). The children of their respective Panchayat elect the members of the Makkala Panchayat to office. These councils enable all children to participate in the development of the village in partnership with the local Panchayat in a more child friendly and child entered way.

In each of the Panchayats, CWC has enabled the formation of a Task Force.² The role of the Task Force is to identify and prioritise the problems that children face, as they perceive them. The Task Force provides a forum for child-centered development, where the different actors, both adults and children, can work together.

The Task Force implements and develops action plans based on proposals from the Makkala Panchayat and monitors the results. They contribute towards identifying alternative opportunities for working children and their families.

In effect, the Task Force functions as a link between the children and the local government. As children are formal members of the Task Force by being representatives of the Makkala Panchayat (Children's Council), there is an implicit accountability to children, which is built into this structure.

- c. CWC facilitates children to conduct Participatory Rapid Appraisals (PRAs) and door to door socio-economic survey in each of their areas/Panchayats. The information acquired enable children to view the village from their perspective, identify and prioritise their problems, trace the relationship between micro and macro issues and suggest alternatives.

Children are reporters and editors for 'Bhima Patrike' and 'Bhima Miditha' (wall magazines for, by and of working children) and 'Bhima Vani' (an audio periodical for children). These are circulated among the members of Bhima Sangha, Makkala Panchayats and their communities and others. They carry reports, statistics, views and analysis about issues that concern their lives.

² Task Force is a tripartite body consisting of representatives of local self-government, of children and of business.

- ❑ **Provision of services:** The programme aims at strengthening existing infrastructures and making basic facilities accessible to children and their communities.

- a. A major component of the intervention is Appropriate Education Programme (AEP), which makes education more appropriate, relevant and accessible to working children. The issues related to education such as teaching methodologies, inadequacy of educational infrastructure and exclusion of working children from the education system are addressed in three ways.

CWC has established extension schools with volunteer teachers who are trained by CWC, and which operate at times convenient to working children. The 'Makkala Panchayat' manages these extension schools and the education authorities in the sub-district have recognised them as part of the formal school system. As a result, children who have completed the curriculum of the extension school are able to enter the formal school.

More child-friendly teaching methods and material have been introduced into both the extension schools as well as the existing formal schools: These methods and material are developed in-house and are based on the Montessori method.

Vocational training coupled with education and life-skills training are provided for working adolescents. CWC has established a Resource Center called 'Nammabhoomi' near Kundapura Town. The Resource Center houses a residential vocational school for ex-child workers and encourages those children who wish to pursue formal education.

- CWC's education programme has been recognised by the State Government of Karnataka as a pilot project.
- This programme has been implemented in 55 government schools of eight Panchayats in Karnataka.
- Through this programme, 3500 children have been benefited in the last year.

- Through the Extension Schools³- 1000 children who were school dropouts have been able to access education.
- The education programme also includes work with 53 Anganwadis (child-care centers) and 11 extension Anganwadis through which 2700 children are reached.
 - b. Youth above 18 years of age have formed “*Naama Sabha*” which is an association of young professionals who apart from working with the children, organise and strengthen the economic base of the community.
 - c. Large number of Self-Help Groups (SHGs) have been formed in these communities, which help the adult members to pool in their economic resources, to have an access to the existing government programmes that enhances community development.
 - d. CWC provides both health education and care. The programme strengthens state run and private health facilities to make them function effectively and accessible to all. Special attention is paid to issues related to disability serious ailments such as AIDS. CWC-Khorshed Fund has been set up for the welfare of disabled children. Regular health check ups and health camps are conducted. CWC has recently launched an AIDS control programme in all the areas where the organisation is active. Children and their communities are provided information of the nature, cause and methods to prevent illness and the root causes are identified and solved.
- ❑ **Protecting children:** CWC aims to create a safe environment for children. Several structures have been put in place to ensure this. For instance, in all the ‘Toofan’ Panchayats, children have identified ‘Makkala Mitras’ (Children’s Ombudsman) who are adults committed to assist children in times of crisis. In addition, all the children in this Panchayats are linked to Makkala Sahaya Vani (children help line) through which they can seek the assistance of a larger community support programme, which includes the police.

³ An extension school is a school run by the village Panchayat for children who cannot access the formal schools for reasons of distance, work timings, age etc. All children in the extension schools are registered in the formal schools and follow the same curriculum and syllabus as the formal schools. They appear for the same public exams.

- **Preventing child labour:** While addressing the issue of child labour, CWC considers the basic economic causes that force children to labour. Appropriate vocational training programmes are conducted for adolescents and youth to create viable economic alternatives. Technical inputs are provided to the communities to manage information, mobilise resources, and sustain and develop the existing resources.

For more details please log on to our web site www.workingchild.org

Contact: Mr. Damodar Acharya
Executive Director
The Concerned for Working Children
303/2, L.B. Shastrinagar,
Vimanapura Post
Bangalore - 560 017
Email: cwc@pobox.com

MEMBERS OF BHIMA SANGHA FEEL THAT THEY ARE THEIR OWN FIRST LINE OF DEFENCE AND SO HAVE THE RIGHT TO ORGANISE THEMSELVES. THEY ALSO BELIEVE THAT THEY ARE PROTAGONISTS AND CAN IMPACT ON SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC STRUCTURES IN ORDER TO MOULD THE SOCIETY CLOSER TO THEIR VISION

Members of Bhima Sangha have interfaced with Ministers of State, government officials and the police to bring about changes which have bettered their lives. They have formed enquiry commissions and conducted in-depth studies collecting first hand information on circumstances of accidents which have proved fatal to other working children. These children have had a tremendous impact on other social actors such as the media, policy makers and the community at large. They have inspired their parents and adults in the community to form unions and to act together to solve their problems and demand services. They have recognised the need to participate in political processes and have chosen and supported candidates for local elections. They have received political recognition in eight local governments (Panchayats) and are playing an active role in the micro planning of their Panchayats.

Members of Bhima Sangha have launched the Makkala Panchayat (Children's Panchayat) in eight panchayats of Karnataka, India In order to have a voice in development process of the village, children identified a need to have children's forum to participate at the level of their Panchayats.

Makkala Panchayat is a parallel local government by, for and of working children. It is presently in Udupi, North Kanara and Bellary districts of Karnataka. Its electorate consists of all working children (6-18 year old) in the village, with representation for all children. Its office bearers include the President, Vice President and Members (12-18 years old). All the children of the village (0-6) are registered in the Makkala Panchayat roles and this provides valuable data on the status of all children in the village.

The Makkala Panchayat enables working children to participate in the local government and to raise issues concerning them; it enables children to plan their village in a way that it relieves them from their burdens and is more child centered and friendly; and prepares children to participate in local government as adults.

"The idea originated with the emergence of the Shishu Panchayat in West Bengal, India. We felt that if we have a representative in the Panchayat it would be of great help to us. Also, when adult representatives are elected, they are not able to fulfill the aspirations of the electorate. It is difficult to even meet or talk to them. When they (the elected body) become big people, they do not remember us."

"All the members in the elected body do not have a clear picture of the functioning of the system. They do not recognise us (the children). The [Toofan Programme](#) provided us a gateway to participate in the Task force. Two to three children were official participants and they were able to carry with them the needs and problems of a larger group. Our voices were heard, but then as it was an adult's Panchayat, our needs were taken into consideration only if they conformed in part or whole to the need of the adult group. It was a combination of these factors that led us to the creation of the 'Makkala Panchayat'. The Children's forum presents the views and opinions on the development process of the village. This will help to address the root cause of working children's problems." - [Nagaraja Kolkeri](#), President Namma Sabha and a founding member of Bhima Sangha.

Bhima Sangha is one of the four members of the International Organising Committee of Working Children. They are currently planning the launch of an Asian Movement of Working Children and are actively working to enable the formation of working children's unions in India and other countries of Asia.

[Bhima Sangha's stand on Child Labour:](#)

- Bhima Sangha believes that it is possible to create a world where there is no child labour.
- In order to do that, the basic causes of child labour need to be solved.
- Working children themselves must participate in identifying the problem and identifying solutions and only then are these interventions likely to benefit children both in the long term and short term.
- However in the immediate context, children working in intolerable situations need to be provided appropriate alternatives both for themselves and their families. These alternatives should be sustainable.
- Other working children, working in relatively safe occupations have the right to work in dignity and be provided with tools and skills to change the structures that cause these situations.
- Education should be seen as a part of the alternatives created, but in doing so, education has to be redesigned to meet with the requirements stated below:

Bhima Sangha's stand on education:

- Bhima Sangha believes that education is the right of every child, irrespective of whether the child happens to be working, differently abled or in a remote area.
- The right to education is not abdicated by a child just because the child happens to be a working child. This is a universal right.
- This right to education should be translated as a right to an appropriate and relevant education that is made accessible to us and which enables us to be agents of change.
- This education has to be recognised as part of the formal system and should be given the same dignity and appropriate budgetary allocations to make this education of a very high quality.
- If this is done then education, which is part of the child labour problem can actually enable working children to break the

Under this programme, children from around the world have been selected to participate in a daily online forum for six months starting August 1, 1998, three months before and three months after the summit which is scheduled for late November 1998.

The goal of the online forum is to decide which of the ideas children write about can be turned into "action projects" - which will be led by children - to address important problems in the world, and then to determine ways to act on them. The forum will be an avenue for children to challenge society's assumptions on what children can do and to develop creative and radical ideas about how things can be done differently in the future, especially with support from new communication technologies.

The forum will be a showcase for technologies that encourage a multimedia, multilingual, online community. Above all, the forum will be run by the children themselves.

Participants in the forum will select delegates to attend a week-long international summit from November 15-21, 1998, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, all expenses paid.

The other children on the online forum will participate in the summit through video-conferencing and other communication technologies.

Say Bhima Sangha's representatives: "Our involvement will have long-lasting benefits especially with regard to networking, data collection and process documentation relating to working children

in Udupi district. This process will enhance the nature and scope of our participation in planning for our own villages. This will also ensure that local governance will become increasingly effective and efficient. "These developments will contribute to comprehensive development in the communities which are involved in this process."

The Junior Summit will address pressing global issues such as children's rights and how to eliminate the barriers between the digital "haves" and "have-nots". Delegates will determine how to use a one million dollar working fund to initiate several action projects, and will present their ideas to an audience of global mediapersons, Nobel laureates and world leaders. The Junior Summit participants will also decide on the format and plans for the next meet, Junior Summit 2000.

By the time Junior Summit 1998 winds up, proposals will have been made to allow all children's voices to be heard, the way adults understand childhood will have been changed and children will have begun to play a bigger role in designing the future.

The Concerned for Working Children needs support to:

- Uplink directly through satellite connections from Kanyana village to access the internet:
- Instal computer networking among the five panchayats - Belve, Uppunda, Keradi, Balkur and Alur - and Namma Bhoomi at Kanyana village; and
- Access 6 computer terminals which can be used by Bhima Sangha.

Until these systems are in place, CWC's office at Bangalore will provide Bhima Sangha access to internet.

[Bhima Sangha's Introductory Letter Online](#)