

Annual Report 2017-18

Centre for Labour Research and Action

The main work undertaken by CLRA in the current year was a Study of Incidence of Child Labor in Cottonseed production areas of North Gujarat and South Rajasthan. In view of extensive floods in North Gujarat, some organizational funds were spent on flood relief.

Child Labour Study: Every year thousands of tribal children from South Rajasthan are trafficked to cottonseed plots of North Gujarat for cross pollination work in the rainy season. The trafficking had been going on for at least two decades but the issue flared up in 2006 because of the efforts of the Dakshini Rajasthan Majdoor Union, a workers' union promoted by Prayas Centre for Labor Research and Action, a local NGO. The campaign created a major impact and drew state and national level attention. The state issued a protocol recognizing the movement of children as trafficking and constituting District Level Task Forces to combat it. The Employers were forced to negotiate with the Union and sign collective agreements hiking wages and not to employ children. The campaign drew the attention of national and international NGOs who initiated projects to tackle child labour.

Nearly ten years down the line, the issue has faded from public memory. The state as well as civil society has moved away. The media has lost interest after fairly intensive coverage. The large projects got over with claims of having tackled the issue successfully. The task forces set up to combat child labour have become inactive.

However, there are indications that child labour continues. Village level surveys carried out by the Union indicate that children are still being trafficked. There are instances of vehicles being intercepted. The movement now takes place very unobtrusively, in public transport rather than separate vehicles. Some cottonseed production has shifted to tribal areas – reducing child trafficking but continuing with child labour. Within Gujarat, there are reports that cottonseed cultivation has diversified to areas other than North Gujarat. Most importantly the wage rates have stagnated and remained at levels where only children and adolescents are likely to find work.

CLRA undertook a study of the existing situation to estimate the current incidence of child labour in cottonseed plots. The study would depend on household surveys in source area as it has become very risky to visit cottonseed plots as farmers impose a blockade on entry of outsiders and resort to violence. This was backed by (i) selective visits to destination plots (ii) assessment of areas where cottonseed cultivation has spread (iii) mapping of contractors.

The study findings are that the

- Incidence of child labour has reduced, especially children below 14 years
- However, there continues to be some child labour and significant incidence of adolescent child labour
- Cultivation has shifted to tribal areas where child labour gets passed off as family labour that does not attract provisions of the Child Labour Prohibition Act and gets hidden

Flood Relief: The rainy season of 2017 saw extensive flooding of Banskantha district. In view of extensive past engagement with the area, it was decided to allocate some funds for flood relief. A total of Rs. 1.8 lakhs was spent on flood relief. A CLRA team visited the area with housing and food material.

Purchase of office: It was decided to purchase own office space as frequent shifting of office created problems. Running of office in residential colonies is always problematic. Hence an office space was purchased in Baronet Complex at an expenditure of Rs. 10 lakhs.

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2016-17

Institutional Developments

CLRA got Section 80G registration

Income tax return filed for 2016-17

FCRA return filed for 2016 in December

Projects and activities undertaken

Evaluation of the rehabilitation of the bonded labourers released under the Bonded Labour Act in five districts of UP and Enumeration of bonded labourers in three districts of UP: While the field work for the project had been undertaken in the year 2015-16, the report writing continued in the current year. The reports were submitted to the District Officers who commissioned the study and the central office at Kanpur. The payments were all received by the end of the financial year.

Western UP districts have seen a number of cases being filed under the Bonded Labour Act, nearly all in brick kilns. The workers are given a rehabilitation grant of Rs. 20,000 per worker. Labour Department of Uttar Pradesh sponsored a study to assess the process of release of workers, release of rehabilitation grant and the current status of the rehabilitated workers in five districts. These districts are Aligarh, Bulandshahar, Muzaffarnagar, Baghpat, and Mirzapur. In three districts, enumeration of bonded labourers was undertaken. These districts are Aligarh, Badayun, and Baghpat. The reports have all been submitted to the Labour Department.

The studies reveal that a small proportion of the beneficiaries, appx 10 percent, is yet to get the benefits. There has been significant leakage from the funds disbursed. Nearly 20 percentage of the rehabilitation package of Rs. 20,000/- was lost in transaction costs. The most important finding is that majority of the workers – two third – continue to work in brick kilns. However only 40 percent reported taking advances for working in brick kilns.

Exposure visit of German professionals: CLRA hosted a group of German professionals for an exposure visit in South Rajasthan sponsored by Exposure and Dialogue Program EDP eVGodesberg Allee 125, 53175 Bonn, Germany. There were seven members in the group, representing civil society, trade unions, and development support organizations. The exposure was intended to expose participants to work conditions in cotton supply chain. The participants stayed in houses of cotton workers for three days in the first half of February. Five households were selected – three from child workers at cottonseed plots and two from cotton ginning workers. The theme of the program end consultation organized in Delhi was 'From Migrant Work to Homework –Decent Work along the Global Value Chain and Chances for transnational empowerment and solidarity for workers in the informal economy'. One outcome of the visit has been that one of the participants has agreed to support a study on child labor in cottonseed plots.

Organizing sugarcane harvesting workers of South Gujarat: CLRA undertook mapping of sugarcane harvesting workers of South Gujarat. The mapping was undertaken with financial support from a German well-wisher Tandiwe Gross and her colleagues at ILO. She made a personal donation to support work in South Gujarat.

Ongoing work in 2017-18

Cottonseed child labour study: CLRA is undertaking a study on incidence of child labour in cottonseed plots during the 2017 season. The study is financially sponsored by Sudwind Institute, Bonn, Germany. The study will take a stock of the situation since the last 10 years when the issue was first highlighted into public domain through the previous work of CLRA and support organizations in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The number of child workers was estimated to exceed 100,000/- at that time. There have been multiple state and civil society in the past decade to address the issue in Rajasthan and Gujarat. The issue has lost its novelty and media and administrative attention with the key actors indicating that the issue is resolved. CLRA has constantly monitored the situation while its own intervention has reduced considerably. The ground reports indicate that though the numbers have reduced and nature of arrangements made to traffic children have changed, there still continues to be a significant incidence of child labour in cottonseed production. The study will test this hypothesis and also open up avenues for future interventions.

Work conditions in cotton supply chain: CLRA receives frequent calls for support and collaboration from journalists, media persons, and academic institutes in doing stories and articles on the cotton supply chain. Most of these calls, but not all, are from abroad, mostly Europe. The stories mostly target corporate retail textile companies in Europe for the poor working conditions in their supply chain in India and other exporting countries. CLRA has assisted these groups as it directly works with workers in the initial stages of cotton production – cottonseed production to ginning. It is hoped that pressure on retail companies will force them to clean up their supply chains.