

# Formal and Non-Formal Education for Child Labourers

Country: India



## Millennium Development Goal:

**Goal 2: Achieve universal primary education**

**Duration:** March 2006 to October 2009

**Beneficiaries:** 1,500 children and 10,000 families in the project area

**Partners:** Ministry of Education, local schools, local panchayat (local government unit), community-based organizations (CBOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as HAQ, Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), Marg, Vidya Niketan, Butterfly, Prayas

**Total project funding:** US\$150,000

**Funding source:** Private donations

**Project goal:** To assist at least 200 children to experience their rights and facilitate the well-being of girls and boys engaged in child labour in Bhalswa Diary and DI Resettlement colony

## What we are trying to accomplish:

1. Prevent children from engaging in child labour through educating parents, awareness campaigns on child rights, networking with other NGOs and government labour department
2. Help families improve their livelihoods by providing youth and adults with technical and vocational skills training
3. Provide children with opportunities to receive informal education and enroll them in formal education classes
4. Improve the health of child labourers and their family members

## Project Overview

India is home to the highest number of child labourers in the world. In 2006, a United Nations International Children's Fund (UNICEF) survey found that 12 per cent of children between the ages of five and 14 were regularly engaged in child labour. Many other children are on the streets begging or scavenging and those who live at home spend hours caring for siblings, cooking and doing household chores while their parents work. An estimated 100 million children are out of school, of whom 60 per cent are girls.

The United National Development Program (UNDP) defines a working child as "a child between five and 15 who is doing labour, either paid or unpaid, and is working within or outside the family; basically, a child who is deprived of the right to education and childhood. What makes this definition important is that it makes it unambiguously clear that all out-of-school children are child labourers

in one form or another. It does not make a distinction between children working in the so-called hazardous industries and children working as part of family labour."

While the Indian government has ratified six International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions relating to child labour, these efforts have not significantly improved the situation for most child labourers. In fact, globalization has created more industries in which children are routinely employed.

World Vision is working in North Delhi where about 3,200 children in our target area are involved in various forms of labour. About half of them work as rag-pickers, a third as porters and others as maids, factory workers and street vendors. All of these children are exposed to a variety of hazards, including abuse and exploitation, tuberculosis, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Child labour is both a result and a cause of poverty. Families in Delhi's urban slums often count on a child's income to survive, especially families who migrate to the city in search of work. Yet, when children are sent to work, they are deprived of their childhoods, their right to basic education and ultimately, lack the skills they need to escape a lifetime of poverty and suffering.

## World Vision's response

Our humanitarian work is focused on eight communities in North Delhi where the incidence of child labour is high. We are implementing a comprehensive strategy to eradicate child labour that includes prevention, restoration and advocacy. Through this education project, World Vision is addressing the root causes of poverty that prevent children from going to school.

## Education offers new hope for Poonam

**F**ifteen-year-old Poonam is one of thousands of evicted slum dwellers now living in Holambi Kalan, a community on the outskirts of New Delhi. After her family was resettled, Poonam could not gain admission to the local government school. And since her parents worked far from their new tenement, Poonam stayed home to take care of her siblings and do all the household chores.

Last year, one of the teachers at World Vision's 'bridge' school began working with the family. Poonam's parents allowed her to start attending classes in the morning. Staff at the centre helped Poonam with her studies, and she was able to pass the Class VIII exam through an open learning program. Now she is studying to pass her Class X exam. Poonam has also been actively involved

in the children's club, where she encourages other girls who are not able to attend school because of work.

Poonam's success at the bridge school has opened opportunities for further education.

She is one of 58 girls enrolled in a six-month nursing assistant certificate course through Jan Shikshan Sansthan, a government-supported vocational program. Poonam will learn basic nursing skills and intern at a hospital, which will provide her with valuable experience for securing a good job when her studies are complete.



Our prevention efforts focus on helping to create a 'Bal Mitra Gram' (child-friendly village), where no child is involved in labour and every child is enrolled in school. The project supports this goal by helping to raise community awareness of child rights and the importance of education, especially for girls. The children themselves have been organized to help spread this message and motivate the community to adopt new attitudes and practices.

For children who are already engaged in child labour, World Vision has opened 'bridge' schools where children have access to non-formal education. Volunteer tutors help students learn and prepare them to enroll in the formal school system. Project staff members make this opportunity for education possible by meeting with families to gain their consent and support.

In addition, World Vision provides parents with start-up capital and training in skills such as tailoring, paper-making and food processing. This is to enable them to generate income, or enhance their current source of livelihood, to offset a child's lost income.

World Vision is equipping a variety of community-based organizations with

legal knowledge and skills to advocate independently for the children in their own communities. We help organize children's clubs that teach children to be self-advocates, taking part in rallies and demonstrations where they can speak about the issues that affect them.

### Project results

Twelve-year-old Babita once worked as a domestic servant. In the evening she attended a World Vision 'bridge' school, where she proved to be a diligent and enthusiastic student. Last year she chose to enroll in the government school and continued to work hard. After the examinations in March, Babita stood third in her class and has become an encouraging role model for other girls in similar situations.

In 2007, 600 students like Babita studied in five 'bridge' schools in North Delhi. With the support of project staff, over 300 of these children were registered in formal education. The 'bridge' school staff have maintained contact with their students and provided support for their continuing studies. Of these students, 95 per cent were able to pass the school examinations held in March 2008. These encouraging results have motivated other

children and families to pursue education.

As a result of the interventions, 679 children are studying in 16 bridge schools that serve all eight communities and 695 more children have been enrolled in formal or open schools. Project staff actively work to retain these students by making regular home visits and engaging the children in other activities like children's clubs where they are taught how to be self-advocates in the community.

### Parents' support is vital to success

Securing the cooperation of parents represents a major challenge in preventing child labour and returning children to school in North Delhi. The majority of adults in the community are illiterate, uneducated and have minimal understanding of the value of education, especially for girls. Children who want to go to school against the wishes of parents often face abuse. Regular home visits, honest counsel and ongoing encouragement are vital in establishing home support for a child's education.

In North Delhi, many parents leave home very early in the morning and return late at night. Long working days



*These children are among the 3,200 child labourers in North Delhi Area Development Program who work to help support their families.*

make it very difficult for field workers to contact parents and talk about their children's education. To achieve the goal of eradicating child labour, project staff will need to find creative ways of engaging these parents.

The low quality of education in government schools sometimes stands in the way of children completing their education. Schools in North Delhi often lack qualified teachers, or have no teachers at all. In other schools, children who are absent for three days are struck from the roll and must wait an entire

year to re-enroll. These issues are being addressed by advocating with government and community partners to press for improved education. In the short term, these children are receiving additional support, and some are encouraged to enroll in Open Schooling classes.

### **Looking ahead**

Many parents we have reached in the community have shown great support and mothers are now sending their youngest children directly to primary school, rather than out to work. The reality

remains that even though parents may understand the importance of education for their children, it is often a choice between going to school or having food that day. The ongoing commitment of all stakeholders will be required to ensure the changed attitudes are adopted in every household in the community. The children themselves have been enthusiastic advocates for change and they represent the greatest source of hope for the future in North Delhi.

### **Results to date:**

1. A 'Bal Mitra Gram' (child-friendly village) was created where no child is involved in labour and every child is enrolled in school. Families were consulted to gain support and consent.
2. Sixteen 'bridge' schools were opened for children engaged in child labour to be able to access non-formal education. Volunteer tutors were trained to support students and prepare them to enroll in the formal school system.
3. Children's clubs were created where children learn to be self-advocates and take part in rallies to motivate the community towards adopting new attitudes and practices.
4. Parents were provided with start-up capital and skills training for income generation.
5. Community-based organizations were equipped with legal knowledge and practical skills to advocate for the children in their respective communities.

### **What we learned from this project:**

- Changing the mindsets of both the parents and the community about children's right to education is a major challenge. Regular home visits, education about child rights and ongoing encouragement are critical in establishing home support for a child's education.
- The low quality of education in government schools is a barrier that prevents children from completing their education. It is vital to work with the government and community organizations to improve the quality of public education.