

# Early Childhood Care in Bangalore's Garment Industry

## A Multi-stakeholder Consultation



**Date** 29th May, 2015

**Venue** United Theological College,  
Miller Road, Bangalore

**Organisers** Cividep India

## PROCEEDINGS

Twenty-three representatives from civil society organisations, global apparel brands, Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives (MSIs), supplier factories, unions and government and non-government bodies participated. Deepika Rao of Cividep India spoke about previous research and initiatives towards improving childcare in Bangalore's garment factories by the Karnataka State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR). Despite the efforts of civil society and the government over a period of several years, very little information is available on the childcare needs of workers at garment factories and the extent to which these needs are met.



## PARTICIPANTS' VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILDCARE AND EXPECTATIONS FROM THE CONSULTATION

There was a discussion on participants' perception of the importance of childcare, and their expectations from the consultation. Mr. Shivarajegowda, member, KSCPCR wanted to know what initiatives and critical steps had been taken by manufacturers towards improving childcare. Mr. Badrinath Gulur of Social Accountability International (SAI) pointed out that childcare was important from the point of view of businesses, as parents' productivity was affected by the lack of adequate childcare.

Cividep board member Ms. Lalana Zaveri said that adequate childhood care was a basic human right, and that it was a fundamental requirement for factories employing women workers in the reproductive age group. Dr Bobby Joseph of St. John's Hospital pointed out that the demographic segment employed in garment factories was women between the ages of 20 and 35. Ms. Subhadra Gupta of the Fair Labor Association (FLA) mentioned that the legal mandate was for factories with thirty workers or more to have crèches, and that this needed to be followed.

Ms. Anita Cheria, Vice-President of Cividep spoke on the overwhelming presence of women in the garment industry, where they made up 90% of the workforce. Children below the age of six were at a vulnerable age, when proper care was crucial for their holistic development. She stated that mothers of children below the age of 2 years should be given lower production targets and time to breastfeed their children, and should not be made to work overtime. Ms Cheria wanted to see a perceptible improvement in the quality of childcare. Mr. Vijay Kumar Bolwar member of Child Welfare Committee (CWC), President of Cividep underlined the importance of the years 0 to 5 in the development of the child. Eighty to ninety per cent of brain development takes place by the age of five. Mr. Shivarajegowda said that for proper development of children, care needed to be taken right from pregnancy.

Mr. Satyananda of All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) said that laws were already in existence, but the question of taking action against those who do not comply needed to be addressed. Ms. Lalana Zaveri thought that it was also important to explore compliance beyond legal stipulation. Ms. Varalakshmi of Center for Indian Trade Unions (CITU) mentioned that unions were not allowed to organise in the garment sector and this affected the implementation of labour laws, including those pertaining to child care. Legal requirements for maternity leave and benefits were often neglected in both the organised and unorganised sectors.

## **WAVE ANALYSIS**

The purpose of the activity was to map dying childcare practices which were on their way out, current practices in childcare, which would be mapped at the wave's crest, and future practices or trends that need to be adopted. The audience was asked to envision new practices after contemplating those going out of vogue and those which were still in existence but needed to be discarded.

### **Dying Practices**

Some of the dying practices documented were differences in the manner of care

based on the gender of the child, economic status and formal or informal care facilities everywhere in India, the breakdown of joint families which were the traditional support systems providing childcare, and untrained caretakers for children. The use of force against children with learning difficulties or other disabilities is also declining. It was observed that the nature of interaction between the mother and the child is changing, with more women entering the workforce. Child labour in Bangalore's industries is dying out, but some industries like that producing incense sticks still employ children. Another dying practice likely to have an impact on childcare in factories was the randomisation of the labour inspection system, where inspectors could no longer visit factories at will.

### **Existing Practices**

There was some overlap between the dying practices and existing practices. The emphasis on rote-learning, discrepancies in childcare provisions based on gender, social inequalities and whether the facility is factory-run or private, the fact that a childcare facility is often provided only to meet statutory requirements, the lack of trained staff, the refusal to admit children below the age of one to factory crèches, and the absence of minimum standards of hygiene, comfort, special requirements and professional care were brought up.

### **New Practices**

The audience discussed innovative practices to change the face of early childhood care. Licensing practices to run day-care centres need to be in place, with eligibility of applicants being ascertained through a background check. Authorised inspections at childcare centres and the use of CCTVs for monitoring was a must. The need for shared parenting between the mother and the father was agreed on. Traditional gender roles needed to be transformed in an age of nuclear families. The employment of contract workers needs to be curtailed, since many employers are uninterested in investing in childcare while there is a floating population of workers. The law needs to be developed, and must be made more equitable, so that men are equally accountable for child care, and factories are required to serve the childcare needs of both young fathers and mothers.

## **STUDY FINDINGS**

Parvathi Madappa of Cividep presented initial findings from a needs assessment study under Cividep's childcare project. A total of sixty women from four garment factories will be interviewed, of which thirty workers from two randomly selected factories have already been surveyed. Both these factories have crèches. Additional data has been collected through a Focus Group Discussion.

The research considered the topics of safety, quality, exclusion and provisions that are lacking. Regarding safety, it was found that despite the specification of physical dimensions and features that meet safety standards in crèches by the Karnataka Factories Act Rules, external health hazards like dust from a construction site, and those within, like a stove inside the crèche, exist. Quality-wise, the crèches were found to be lacking. The Karnataka Rules require one nurse and one helper to be engaged for every twenty children in the crèche, but up to forty children are cared for by only two crèche staff. Moreover, there are no toys in the crèche, since children fight over any toys that are available. In terms of exclusion, children below the age of one and above the age of four are not admitted to the crèche, while only one child from each family is allowed in the facility.

Workers are obliged to provide diapers for their children, which is an unaffordable practice, no snacks or milk are provided during overtime, and a meagre Rs 200 is paid monthly for external childcare where there is no crèche at the factory. Some other points of concern included the low worker-child ratio, the lack of medical records, and instances of mothers being called to clean up when children soiled themselves. There were some cases of children being abused for soiling themselves, which led to bedwetting at home and a fear of disclosure. When there is no good crèche at the workplace, mothers are forced to quit their jobs after giving birth. Workers said that they would have greater peace of mind and would stay in the same job if there was a good childcare facility at the factory. This would mean a lower rate of attrition and higher productivity.

## COMPLIANCE CODES AND AUDIT MECHANISMS

Participants from MSIs, brands and manufacturing companies were asked to describe their organisations' compliance codes and audit mechanisms.

## MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVES

Social Accountability International's SA8000 Standard documents an auditable social certification standard to be used across sectors and is based on the UN Declaration of Human Rights, the conventions of the ILO and the UN, and national law. It follows international standards on child labour and occupational health and safety (OHS). Factories are required to comply with these clauses in order to be certified. An auditor observes whether the crèche is away from the production facility, and whether it is healthy and safe. A crèche on the first floor would not be certified, since the ability to evacuate during an emergency would be compromised. The Fair Labor Association's main strategies include CSO engagement in South Asia with organisations like Cividep, and external assessments of

affiliated companies. The section on health, safety and the environment in the FLA's Code of Conduct applies to the safety standards for childcare facilities and expectant mothers. A crèche should not be situated near a production facility.

## **MANUFACTURERS**

Factories of the Aditya Birla Group have two separate crèches, for very young children (i.e., infants and toddlers) and for older children under six. Trained teachers are present at the crèches. Where there are more than a hundred workers, the company sets up a new unit through a micro-management organisation so that women have to travel less with their children. After-school care is also provided to children over the age of 6 years. Mothers prefer to bring their children to the crèches, since they provide facilities that are not available at home. India Designs stated that it has a functional crèche with medical records, monthly check ups and regular vaccinations.

## **BRANDS**

H&M is involved in many projects with the cooperation of its manufacturing business partners. It is not directly involved with childcare-related projects, but has an overall approach to social compliance that includes dialogue with workers on a number of issues. The German brand s.Oliver has no specific guidelines with regard to childcare, but follows the law of the land on the subject. It verifies standards at manufacturing factories through audits.

## **ORID (OBJECTIVE FACTS, REFLECTION, INTERPRETATION AND DECISION-MAKING)**

ORID stands for Objective Facts regarding the state of childcare, Reflection on the emotions generated by this knowledge, Interpretation of the reasons for the situation and Decision-making towards a plan of action. Some of the points that came up during this activity are described below.

Several points were made under objective facts. Childcare is not seen as a separate area in itself, but is seen within the larger context of business and industry economics by HR departments. The low worker-child ratio is either a fall-out of the lack of faith in facilities provided by factories, or a lack of capacity. Factory crèches are extremely important and need to exist even if community crèches are provided, since mother-child proximity is crucial. However, merely providing a crèche space is not enough. It should have all required facilities, so that workers are encouraged to bring their children. Medical care is crucial for the age group

0-6 years, but the legal mandate on adequate provisions for a medical emergency at the factory is usually disregarded. Lastly, attrition can be controlled and worker absenteeism significantly reduced if childcare facilities are provided.

While reflecting on their feelings regarding the situation, many present admitted to anger, sadness or disappointment at the situation, but most were hopeful about the future of childcare in the industry. Space constraints were cited as a major challenge in Bangalore. Assumptions and fears regarding childcare facilities, and structural inequalities with regard to gender were other cited as major roadblocks. There was a need for greater male responsibility, since the target group for childcare is currently limited to women employees. There is a lack of awareness about the importance of childcare and the correct steps to take.

Steps that needed to be taken were then discussed. Community crèches with public-private partnership were necessary, since transporting children to factory crèches was often difficult. There needs to be proper training for childcare providers. Identifying and showcasing best practices and a booklet for the education of workers, owners and the managements would be beneficial.

## **COMMITMENT TO A WORKING GROUP**

The following participants made an initial commitment to form a working group:

1. Sushma Nagaraj of Child Rights Trust
2. Badrinath Gulur of SAI
3. Nishwath Hassan (Pedagogy, curriculum development and engagement with stakeholders)
4. Subhadra Gupta of FLA
5. Varalakshmi of CITU (Research, training and the production of a booklet for awareness-building)
6. Representatives of GLU

Ishrath Nisar of Samvada separately committed to helping with trainings for crèches.



## STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION TO IMPROVE CHILDCARE IN BANGALORE'S GARMENT FACTORIES - MAY 29, 2015

### Participant Contact List

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