

Mainstreaming Child Labourers in Schools

Issues, Challenges and Alternatives

2021

This study was carried out with financial support
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Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai



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Abbreviations

BRC	Block Resource Centre
CCI	Child Care Institution
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CRC	Cluster Resource Centre
EFA	Education For All
JJ	Juvenile Justice
ICPS	Integrated Child Protection Scheme
IEC	Information, Education and Communication
ISTE	Inservice Teacher Education
KGBV	Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya
MDM	Mid-Day Meal
MGML	Multi Grade Multi Level learning
NCERT	National Council of Educational Research and Training
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCFTE	National Curriculum Framework for Teacher Education
NCPL	National Child Labour Project
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NPE	National Policy on Education
NSS	National Service Scheme
NYK	Nehru Yuva Kendra
PSTE	Pre-Service Teacher Education
RBC	Residential Bridge Camp
RTE	Right to Education Act
RTI	Right to Information
SCERT	State Council of Educational Research and Training
SMC	School Management Committee
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SSA	Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan
ST	Special Training
STCs	Special Training Centres

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Executive Summary

Child labour is not an issue or phenomenon that is unknown or unfamiliar to us. It has been an issue of concern worldwide and has existed in almost every corner of the world and it continues to remain an issue of policy interest. Child labour refers to the exploitation of the labour of children who are either too young to work, or are of working age but work under conditions that subject them to risk. Children who are in the age of going to school work in factories and fields, they work in mines and serve as domestic help at homes and denied their rights to childhood and a good quality formal education. Child labour has been associated with inadequate educational opportunities, poverty and gender inequalities. It is the combined product of many factors, such as poverty, social and cultural mindsets, lack of work opportunities, migration, and times of crisis amongst many others. It is both a cause and an effect of social inequalities prevalent in different societies based on varied determinants.

In the context of globalization new forms of child labour are emerging in India. The census figures show that the number of child labourers decreased from 12,666,377 in 2001 to 4,353,247 in 2011. However, given the hidden nature of work done by children, a substantial number of children may remain uncounted.

Considering the complexity and the magnitude of the issue, the National Policy on Child Labour announced in 1987 emphasised the need for strict enforcement measures in areas of high child labour concentration. The National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme is a Central Sector Scheme. Under this Scheme, the children in the age group of 9-14 years are withdrawn from work and put into NCLP Special Training Centres, where they are provided with bridge education, vocational training, mid-day meal, stipend, health care etc. before being mainstreamed into the formal education system. In the Indian context, mainstreaming of child labourers is one of the core objectives of the revised National Child Labour Project (NCLP) which is based on the amended legislation.

Despite various laws and legislations attempting to prohibit and regulate child labour, despite the efforts of non-governmental organizations in eliminating child labour, the problem persists. Challenges have been encountered in implementation and enforcement of legislation and the various schemes introduced by different organizations. Studies conducted in this area have frequently surveyed the number of child labourers in many states, but there has been a mismatch in the actual number and the number obtained through data due to various reasons unknown.

Data about the special training centres that prepare child labourers prior to entering the mainstream schools and about the mainstream schools where child labourers are enrolled, is limited. Most of the studies have strongly linked child labour and education and emphasized the importance of educational initiatives in reducing and eliminating child labour.

The present study attempts to focus on cross-section of efforts towards mainstreaming child labourers in school education through special training conceptualized under the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2009. The study aims to investigate the issues and challenges of pathways of mainstreaming child labourers in education, and explore field level alternatives and solutions for improving the mainstreaming process.

The field visits for data collection were planned in the months of March-April. The Covid-19 situation and the lockdown came as an unprecedented crisis that enveloped the whole world, due to which schools had to be shut and the mobilization of any kind of resources including human resources got stunted. The special training centres were also closed and there was no scope of going to the field to collect data. The field visits were postponed to later months in anticipation of re-opening of the special training centres. In the meanwhile, the study also laid out alternative plans of collecting data through virtual modes of communication that had almost become the new normal in the education sector. Unfortunately, neither schools nor the special training centres opened till date, and hence all the required data was collected in a virtual mode through telephonic interviews, emails and Zoom platform as per the convenience of the respondents. The researchers felt that visit to the field for collecting data could have enriched the study through observations of the special training centres and the mainstream schools and also interviews of children at these schools. However, due to the times of crisis, these field visits were not possible. Yet, there was no compromise made on part of the researchers in the data collection process. All respondents as contemplated at the commencement of the study were interviewed to obtain all possible data required to attain the objectives of the study and data from the subject matter experts were also elicited in detail. Teachers of the special training centres and of the mainstream schools were identified through various sources and were interviewed to get the relevant data. The researchers tried all means of getting necessary data from the relevant sources.

The study reveals mixed findings about the working of the special training centres and the mainstream schools. There are systemic, situational and area-based issues and challenges. Poverty, migration, societal, cultural and traditional worldviews, gender differences, rigid schooling system amongst many other challenges advance and promote the issue of child labour on one hand, whereas, on the other hand, there are a few success stories and good practices, that can be emulated and implemented to attain the objective of reducing child labour in our country.

This report gives detailed information about mainstreaming child labourers in the three districts of Thane, Gaya and Ranga Reddy and this data obtained can be used to look at the good practices and address the challenges identified in these districts with an aim to eradicate child labour in these sites. The findings will also have implications for studies on child labour in other states of India and for policy makers and the governmental bodies to take immediate steps to address the systemic and situation issues identified through the responses obtained from stakeholders.

The authors of this report are thankful to all the key informants of the study. Despite all the adversities faced like lack of mobility, digital and technological problems, language barriers, and emotional setbacks during the pandemic, they extended their cooperation to the best of their abilities and provided all the necessary information required to conduct the study. The authors remain responsible for any gaps and limitations in the study.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Children constitute a sizable number of India's workforce and are employed in diverse activities in both urban and rural areas. The census figures show that the number of child labourers decreased from 12,666,377 in 2001 to 4,353,247 in 2011. However, given the hidden nature of work done by children, a substantial number of children may remain uncounted. In addition, children who are not enrolled in schools may be potential child labourers. Child labour is considered to be a hard reality and a product of poverty and adult unemployment (Grootaert and Patrinos, 1999). The problem persists despite legislation prohibiting and regulating child labour and guaranteeing their right to free and compulsory education. Children's participation in school and the labour market are two extremes that can be captured in the following four scenarios: children who a) only pursue schooling and do not participate in the labour market at all; b) mainly pursue schooling but also participate in the labour market; c) neither pursue schooling nor participate in the labour market; and d) do not pursue schooling at all and only participate in the labour market. Out of these four scenarios, the first and the fourth are the two extremes while the other two are transitory phases which have a high potential to move to either of the extreme directions (Satpathy, Sekar and Karan, 2010). Children and adolescents who were burdened by work as children are consistently more likely to have to settle for unpaid family jobs and are also more likely to be in low paying jobs (ILO, 2015).

In 2018, India ratified the ILO Minimum Age Convention, 1973 (C138) and ILO Convention on Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999 (C 182). However, India has not withdrawn or made amendments to the declaration under Article 32 of the United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child, pertaining to exploitation of child labour, made at the time of ratification despite recommendations to that effect made by the UN Committee on Rights of the Child. According to Article 2 of the ILO Convention No.182, the term 'child' shall apply to all persons under the age of 18. According to ILO Convention No. 182, the worst forms of child labour (WFCL) includes (a) all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labour, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict; (b) use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic performances; (c) the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities, in particular for the production and trafficking of drugs as defined in the relevant international treaties; (d) work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety or morals of children.

As per Article 24 of the Constitution of India, no child below the age of 14 years is to be employed in any factory, mine or hazardous work. In the context of free and compulsory education for children, the Constitution defines the age of a child as 14 years. The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Bill, passed by Parliament on 22 July 2016, prohibits employment of children below 14 years completely and prohibits employment of adolescents (14–18 years) in hazardous occupations/processes.

The constitutional and legislative provisions providing protection to children against employment are supported by the National Child Labour Policy, 1987. The policy addresses the complex issue of child labour in a comprehensive, holistic and integrated manner. The action plan under this policy is multipronged and mainly consists of: (i) A legislative action plan; (ii) Focuses on general development programmes for the benefit of the families of children; and (iii) Project-based action plan in areas of high concentration of child labour. It emphasised the need for strict enforcement measures in areas of high child labour concentration.

1.1. Magnitude of Child Labour

As per Census 2011, there are a total of 43,53,247 workers in the age group of 5-14 years (see Table 1.1). Of this, the number of girls is 16,89,200 while the number of male child workers is 26,64,047.

Table 1.1: Number of working children in India (2001 & 2011 Census Data)

Census Year	Number of working children in India	Number of children who are main workers in India
2001	1.26 crore	57.79 Lakh
2011	1.01crore	43.53 Lakh

Although the 2011 Census enumerates 1.01 crores or 10.1 million child workers, it is a decline of about 1 percent from the 2001 Census, which estimated 1.26 crores or 12.6 million child workers. Data from Census 2001 and 2011 reveal a decline in the magnitude of child labour; with the decline being more visible in rural areas. A proportionally higher percentage of children in rural areas are engaged in marginal activities, mainly agricultural activities that are seasonal in nature. Seven states of the country, namely, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, West Bengal, and Gujarat, with 62.8 percent of child population, account for 64.7 per cent of total child workers. Out of all social groups, the incidence of child labour was highest among Scheduled Tribes (STs) in 2011 Census report. This is, however, a decline of around 3 per cent from figures recorded in 2001. George and Panda (2015) analyse data from the 2011 Census to highlight certain facts about child labour in India. They consider those under 18 years of age and the total number of child labourers up to 18 years, including main and marginal workers, is as high as 23.8 million. Of this, 10.1 million are children in the age group of 5–14 years, while 13.7 million are children in the age group of 15–17 years. Children up to 18 years constitute 5 percent of the total workforce, with those up to 14 years being 2.1 per cent and children between 15 and 18 years amounting to 2.83 per cent. A state-wise distribution of child labourers is shown in Table 1.2.

Table 1.2: Number of working children (5-14 years) across states (2011 Census)

Sl. No.	Name of State/UT	No. of working children in the age group of 5-14 years
1.	Andaman & Nicobar Island	999
2.	Andhra Pradesh (incl. Telangana)	404851
3.	Arunachal Pradesh	5766
4.	Assam	99512
5.	Bihar	451590
6.	Chandigarh U.T.	3135
7.	Chhattisgarh	63884
8.	Dadra & Nagar H.	1054
9.	Daman & Diu U.T.	774
10.	Delhi U.T.	26473
11.	Goa	6920
12.	Gujarat	250318
13.	Haryana	53492
14.	Himachal Pradesh	15001
15.	Jammu & Kashmir	25528
16.	Jharkhand	90996
17.	Karnataka	249432
18.	Kerala	21757
19.	Lakshadweep UT	28
20.	Madhya Pradesh	286310
21.	Maharashtra	496916
22.	Manipur	11805
23.	Meghalaya	18839
24.	Mizoram	2793
25.	Nagaland	11062
26.	Odisha	92087
27.	Pondicherry U.T.	1421
28.	Punjab	90353
29.	Rajasthan	252338
30.	Sikkim	2704
31.	Tamil Nadu	151437
32.	Tripura	4998
33.	Uttar Pradesh	896301
34.	Uttarakhand	28098
35.	West Bengal	234275
Total		4353247

The Census defines a person as ‘main worker’ if she/he dispenses/spends 180 days or more in a year engaged in economic activities. All persons spending less than 180 days in a year engaged in economic activities are defined as ‘marginal workers. These two, together, constitute all workers in a given year. However, none of these definitions would define a child engaged in household chores or sibling care as a worker. Similarly, many other jobs performed by children do not come under the definitional purview of work adopted by the NSSO and Census for their surveys. The

overall difference in main and marginal workers is more evident for girls, with 1.5 times more female children as compared to male children engaged as marginal workers. The difference in main and marginal is more prominent for girls in rural areas as compared to urban areas, pointing towards their engagement in agricultural activities that are seasonal in nature. Out of 10.1 million workers in the age group of 5–14 years, 4.4 million (42.6 percent) were main workers in 2011 while 5.8 million were marginal workers which includes 3.5 million students and 2.3 million others (which includes children in household work, dependents, beggars, vagrants etc.). From the 2001 to 2011 Census, the proportion of marginal workers who were students increased from 2.5 million to 3.5 million. While 36.2 per cent of the marginal workers were students in 2001, the same figure stood at 60.3 per cent in 2011.

An analysis of the educational level of main child workers in the age group of 5–14 years across various states in India reveals that the majority of child workers are literate, which means they have been to school. Since 2001, the number of out-of-school children has decreased from 32 million to 2.2 million in 2012-13 (GoI, 2014). According to Samantroy et al (2016), Kerala and Tamil Nadu have the highest proportion of literate child workers, with 82.2 percent and 81.3 per cent respectively. The States that record more than 60 percent of literate child workers include Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka, West Bengal, Assam, Odisha, Punjab, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, and Telangana. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar account for the largest number of child workers.

Samantroy et al (2016) also analysed the incidence of child labour across districts as per 2011 Census and identified 32 hotspots in the country that reported more than 8.9 per cent child workers. The three states of interest for this study Bihar, Maharashtra and Telangana had a number of hotspot districts which were taken up for field data collection. As Tables 1.3 and 1.4. show, the magnitude of child labour is the highest in Bihar while the incidence is highest in Telangana. In the districts selected for the study, Gaya had the highest magnitude as well as the incidence of child labour.

Table 1.3 Magnitude and incidence of child labourers in the select states (2011 Census Data)

State	Magnitude			Incidence		
	Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Bihar	1,001,351	87,158	1,088,509	3.8%	3.1%	3.8%
Maharashtra	489,104	238,828	727,932	4.1%	2.8%	3.5%
Telangana	198,702	130,328	329,030	4.7%	5.3%	4.9%

Source: Samantroy et al (2016)

Table 1.4: Magnitude and incidence of child labourers in select districts (2011 Census Data)

State	District	Magnitude			Incidence		
		Rural	Urban	Total	Rural	Urban	Total
Bihar	Gaya	70491	8438	78929	6.6%	6.4%	6.6%
Maharashtra	Thane	23887	47883	71770	4.4%	3.3%	3.6%
Telangana	Ranga Reddy	15651	36450	52101	5%	5.8%	5.5%

Source: Samantroy et al (2016)

According to the Census 2011, Bihar reported 1,088,509 child workers, a decrease from 1,117,500 child workers in 2001. Mapping the shifts in the incidence of child labour across districts in Bihar reveals that its incidence increased in 12 districts and decreased only in 25 districts. The hotspot of Bihar was the urban district of Gaya, which had 6.4 per cent incidence and 8,438 magnitude of child labour. According to Census 2011, Maharashtra reported 727,932 child workers, which was a considerable decline from 764,075 child workers in 2001. Mapping the shifts in the incidence of child labour across districts in Maharashtra revealed that its incidence increased in 19 districts and decreased only in 16 districts. Telangana had the highest number of child workers (6.2 per cent) having education up to grade 10 and above. From 2001 to 2011, child labour increased in 2 districts and decreased in 8 districts. Five districts, namely, Allahabad, Gaya, Thane, Bareilly, Hyderabad, and Kurnool account for 3.7 per cent of total child workers (3.7 lakh) with an incidence rate of 5.7 per cent. It is to be noted that these districts account for 2.5 per cent of total children in the age group of 5–14 years.

1.2. Initiatives on Child Labour

The Government of India initiated the National Child Labour Project Scheme in 1988 to rehabilitate the working children. The major objective of the Scheme is to withdraw children from work and mainstream them into the formal education system. Children rescued/withdrawn from work in the age group of 9-14 years are enrolled in the NCLP Special Training Centres (STCs), where they are provided with bridge education, vocational training, mid-day meal, stipend, health care, etc. before being mainstreamed into the formal education system. Children in the age group of 5-8 years are directly linked to the formal education system through a close coordination with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). It started with 12 child labour endemic districts of the country as identified under *MC Mehta v State of Tamil Nadu*. Under the Scheme, working children are identified through child labour survey, withdrawn from work and put into the special schools, so as to provide them with enabling environment to join mainstream education system. In these Special Schools, besides formal education, they are provided stipend @ Rs.100/- per month, nutrition, vocational training and regular health checkups. The NCLP Scheme has been implemented through a district level Project Society, headed by the District Collector. This Project Society includes prominent NGOs and Trade Unions of the district, in addition to the State Government officials from Education, Health, Rural Development, Labour, Social Welfare and

Women & Child Development Departments, etc. The involvement of different departments in the Project Society is to ensure better convergence with these Departments for implementation of the Scheme. As far as possible, running of special schools for child labour is entrusted to NGOs.

Similar to the NCLP, ILO launched International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) in 1991 to contribute to the effective abolition of child labour in the world. India was the first country to sign MOU in 1992. Three projects were run in the country under this programme viz., INDUS Project, Andhra Pradesh Phase-II & Karnataka Project. The INDUS Project is based upon the NCLP Scheme with some additional interventions, such as vocational training for adolescents, income generation alternatives to child labour families, training & capacity building programmes for Government agencies and civil society organizations, strengthening public education, greater convergence with mainstream education system through lead schools & comprehensive child labour monitoring and tracking with the objective of replicating the successful interventions in the NCLP Scheme. In order to provide rehabilitation to a larger number of working children, the coverage of the Scheme expanded from 100 to 250 districts in the 10th Plan (see Table 1.5). At present, there are 3245 STCs in operation with an enrollment of 121646 children (Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question no 386 answered on 06.02.2019).

Table 1.5: Expansion of NCLPs

Year	No of NCLPs Sanctioned	Cumulative Total
1988	12 NCLPs	12
IX Plan	88 NCLPs	100
X Plan	150 NCLPs	250
XI Plan	21 NCLPs (INDUS)	271

Source: Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India Annual Report 2019-2020

In 2001, V. V. Giri National Labour Institute conducted an evaluation of the scheme with the help of some independent agencies. Based on the recommendations and in order to make the Scheme more effective, a revised strategy was also adopted which emphasized the need to continue the programme in a more focused, integrated & convergent manner. The Government reviewed the NCLP Scheme and revised NCLP Guidelines w.e.f. 1.4.2016. Under the revised Guidelines the STCs for rehabilitation of child labour have been aligned in line with RTE Act; the target group has been expanded to all working children below the age of 14 years; the procedure for setting up of Project Societies and opening of STCs has been simplified; payment of stipend to the children is made on modular basis for a minimum of three months through Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT); the budget of Project Societies/STCs and rate of honorarium for volunteers/staff has been enhanced; procedure for conducting survey has been simplified; monitoring mechanism has been strengthened at National, State and District level etc.

The objectives of the revamped NCLP Scheme are: (1) To eliminate all forms of child labour through i] Identification and withdrawal of all children in the Project Area from child labour, ii] Preparing children withdrawn from work for mainstream education along with vocational training;

iii] Ensuring convergence of services provided by different government departments/agencies for the benefit of child and their family; (2) To contribute to the withdrawal of all adolescent workers from Hazardous Occupations / Processes and their skilling and integration in appropriate occupations through i] Identification and withdrawal of all adolescent workers from hazardous occupations / processes, ii] Facilitating vocational training opportunities for such adolescents through existing scheme of skill developments; and (3) Raising awareness amongst stakeholders and target communities, and orientation of NCLP and other functionaries on the issues of ‘child labour’ and ‘employment of adolescent workers in hazardous occupations/processes’; and (4) Creation of a Child Labour Monitoring, Tracking and Reporting System. The target group of the revamped NCLP is i] all child workers below the age of 14 years in the identified target area, ii] adolescent workers below the age of 18 years in the target area engaged in hazardous occupations/processes, and iii] families of child workers in the identified target area.

Working children between 5-9 years were to be directly admitted under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan to regular schools and those between 9-14 years were to be covered under Special Training Centres run under NCLP Scheme. Convergence with the annual survey of out of school children under SSA (undertaken as part of the school mapping exercise under SSA) is suggested so as to reduce duplication of efforts at the District and State Level. However, the SSA survey is targeted at children under the age of 14 years, whereas under NCLP Project, even adolescents in the age group 14-18 years working in hazardous occupations and processes are surveyed and identified. The Governing body of the District Project Society is required to take conscious decision for conduct of baseline survey by hiring an independent agency for baseline survey or by entrusting it to the government functionaries or engaging Nehru Yuva Kendra (NYK)/NSS volunteers for the survey by paying some honorarium. A sum of up to Rs. 4.00 lakh per district to be surveyed can be spent on this survey. The survey report is formally approved by the District Project Society before being forwarded to the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Another survey is required to be conducted by all the project societies to assess the impact of the project within 3 years of the last survey. Failure to conduct a survey within 3 years may result in discontinuation of funds from the Ministry. The Project Implementing agency should not be associated with the survey.

The activities that are suggested to be undertaken by the NCLP Societies are: identification of target population through a baseline survey, withdrawing target children from work and providing them with meaningful transitional options such as convergence with local schools for admission; running Special Training Centres (STCs) for bridge education and pre-vocational & vocational training, delivering income/employment/social security/ developmental programme benefits, as appropriate, to the target children and their families, social mobilization, mainstreaming of the child labour issues, advocacy and media campaign to raise public awareness, stepping up the enforcement of child labour laws, monitoring/tracking Mechanisms to follow up child workers and impact evaluation at the end of the project. The rescued child workers in the age group of 5-8 years are required to be directly linked to school. Identified children in the age group of 9-14 years are to be mainstreamed into the formal education system. NCLP Special Training Centres (STCs)

would be operational if it is certified by the District Education Officer that STCs under SSA is in operation in the specified area. The guidelines require that the STCs are to be located in the area of maximum concentration of child labour as revealed by the survey. Preference is to be given to those areas which are poorly serviced by formal schools. A maximum of Rs. 2000 per month is allowed to be spent on rent, water and electricity charges per special training centre. There should be a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 50 children in each STC. Each STC can employ one teaching volunteer (for children strength up to 20) and a maximum of 2 such volunteers. Each Centre can also engage a volunteer for maintaining accounts and general correspondence. A part time volunteer helper can also be engaged to help prepare and serve the mid-day meal and render other miscellaneous services such as cleaning of the premises.

The schedule of the STC is designed by the District Project Society keeping in mind the local circumstances and the convenience of the target group with some flexibility given to the NGO running the centre in terms of timing and duration of the STC. The duration is suggested to be around five hours for 6 days a week. The STCs are to avoid long holidays so that it does not impact the children and their education. The Guidelines suggest that the guiding principle is to provide quality education and adequate service to enable mainstreaming as quickly as possible. Education in STCs is to be imparted in using a modular approach. The pre-defined modules are suggested to be of at least 3 months and maximum preferably of six months. The teaching volunteers are expected to maintain a record of the progress of children and the curriculum and pedagogy etc. is to be developed in consultation with DGT and SCERT. The learning material suitable for multi-grade teaching is suggested for use in the STCs and the volunteer teachers are required to be trained accordingly and are expected to be aligned with the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA). The Guidelines suggest that the training needs of the volunteer teachers will be assessed by the local DIET at the district level for development of appropriate training modules and all volunteer teachers are to be imparted for 10 days initially and for one and half day refresher training every year thereafter. The STCs are required to provide textbooks, notebooks, stationery, uniform, schoolbag, games and craft materials to the children enrolled through convergence with SSA / State schemes. The Guidelines also state that a complete set of textbooks is provided to each child in the Centre. If however there are no funds available under SSA/State Sector Scheme for this purpose, then an expenditure of up to Rs. 15,000/- per Special Training Center under NCLPS per annum is permissible under this head for textbooks, notebooks, stationery, schoolbag, games and craft material. The revised Guidelines also provide for a nutritious cooked mid-day meal as part of the Government's Mid-Day Meal (MDM) scheme. Primary health care including health check-ups and maintenance of health cards is to be provided through the School Health Programme of the Government. Children in the STCs are also paid a stipend of Rs.150/- per month on the basis of a child having a minimum of 75% attendance in a month. The stipend is paid directly by the Central Government as a direct benefit transfer into the account of the beneficiary. The volunteer teachers and the vocational trainers for a group of 3 STCs are hired on a temporary and contractual basis from the local community.

Table 1.6 shows the number of sanctioned and operational NCLP districts in the select states of interest. It is seen that in Bihar, none of the NCLP districts out of the 24 sanctioned NCLP districts were operational. This data differs from our field work as we shall see later in the report. In Maharashtra, 11 out of the 18 sanctioned NCLP districts are operational and in Telangana only 3 of the 31 are operational. Even in Telangana, this data differs from our field work as we shall see later in the report.

Table 1.6 NCLP Districts - Sanctioned and Operational

State	No. of sanctioned NCLP districts	No. of operational sanctioned districts	Names of the district (Operational districts are in bold)
Bihar	24	0	Nalanda, Saharsa, Jamui, Katihar, Araria, Gaya, East Champaran, West Champaran, Madhepura, Patna, Supaul, Samastipur, Madhubani, Darbhanga, Muzaffarpur, Nawada, Khagaria, Sitamarhi, Kishanganj, Begusarai, Banka, Saran, Purnia and Bhagalpur
Maharashtra	18	11	Solapur, Thane, Sangli , Jalgaon, Nandurbar, Nanded, Nasik , Yavatmal, Dhule, Beed , Amravati, Jalna, Aurangabad, Gondia , Mumbai Suburban, Pune, Buldana and Parbhani .
Telangana	31	3	Hyderabad, Karimnagar, Khammam, Nizamabad , Rangareddy, Warangal, Nalgonda, Medak, Mehbubnagar, Adilabad, Mancherial, Nirmal, Komuram Bheem Asifabad, Jagtiyal, Warrangal (Urban), Jayashankar Bhupalpally, Jangaon, Sangareddy, Siddipet, Wanaparthy, Nagarkurnool, Jogulambab Gajwal, Suryapet, Medchal Malkajgiri, Vikarabad, Mahabubabad, Pedapally, Rajanna Sircilla, Bhadradi Kothagudem, Yadadri Bhuvanagiri and Kamareddy .

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred question No. 1729 for 02.03.2020 by Col. Rajyavardhan Rathore regarding National Child Labour Project.

In 2017-18, the Ministry carried out an evaluation of the NCLP Scheme through V. V. Giri National Labour Institute (VVGNI), to analyze the issues to be resolved to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency of the Scheme. The recommendations made were primarily regarding cultural reorientation, infrastructure: physical and human, need for increase in honorarium and accountability, communication and feedback, and bank account-related issues etc. After enactment of Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016, the guidelines of NCLP Scheme were modified accordingly. As per modifications dated 23.06.2017 made in the Central Sector Scheme, the implementation of the scheme for Rehabilitation of Bonded Labour through NCLP Scheme was discontinued (Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1259 to be answered on 11.02.2019).

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights also reviewed the NCLP and submitted a report to the Planning Commission. The report showed that the performance of the states is mixed. Some of the oldest projects are in the States of UP, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu. While the performance of Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha is creditable as can also be seen in the decline in the number of child labour in these States, the efforts made in UP were not commensurate to the extent of the problem.

The report also showed that targeting children working in some notified sectors alone has not resulted in reduction of child labour. The NCLP centres may have helped some children who have been rescued from child labour but it did not stop recruitment of children in the ‘hazardous’ sector. Nor has it helped reduce the incidence of child labour as a new set of children have taken the place of those who have been withdrawn from work. The report also showed how girls were left out of getting the benefit of the NCLP program because a large number of them were engaged in domestic work which was not counted as child labour. Even girls’ involvement in agriculture work goes unnoticed. On this background, the NCPCR made several recommendations including setting up of Transitional Education Centres (TECs) which could be both non-residential and residential. Every child rescued from work would have to be brought to a local TEC and the TEC would have to accept all children who are rescued from work. These TECs could prepare them for making a transition from being workers to becoming students and then hand over the children to the SSA programme. Further, the report also noted that rescued children did not have family security and were pushed into high-risk situations. Even when raids were being conducted by the Labour Departments, there were no shelter homes where the children could be placed temporarily. The report also pointed out that the NCLP needs to recognize the special situation of migrant child labourers, children who have run away from home or children who migrate seasonally with their families.

Over the years, the number of children who have been rescued/withdrawn from work, rehabilitated and mainstreamed under the NCLP Scheme has fluctuated. Table 1.7 shows that from 2015-16 onwards the numbers have decreased, and particularly in 2016-17 it had dipped significantly.

Table 1.7: Number of children rescued/withdrawn from work, rehabilitated and mainstreamed under National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme

Year	Number of children rescued/withdrawn/rehabilitated and mainstreamed
2015-16	59076
2016-17	30979
2017-18	47635
2018-19	50284
2019-20 (till date)	46198

Source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question no 1643 to be answered on 02.03.2020 and Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1225 to be answered on 10.02.2020

Table 1.8: shows the data on the number of children who were rescued/withdrawn from work, rehabilitated and mainstreamed under NCLP in select states between 2016-17 to 2018-19. The highest number of children were rescued and rehabilitated in West Bengal while Rajasthan and Bihar did not see any cases rehabilitated during 2018-19. In Maharashtra the number of children rescued and rehabilitated has increased over the years and in Telangana, it has reduced.

Table 1.8 Number of children who were rescued/withdrawn from work, rehabilitated and mainstreamed under NCLP Scheme during the 2016-17 to 2018-19

Sl No	State	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
1	Andhra Pradesh	814	203	778
2	Assam	434	915	4562
3	Bihar	0	2800	0
4	Gujarat	0	187	101
5	Haryana	40	0	171
6	Jharkhand	334	2014	1225
7	Karnataka	681	679	763
8	Madhya Pradesh	4442	11400	4910
9	Maharashtra	1692	5250	8122
10	Nagaland	0	197	111
11	Punjab	592	994	915
12	Rajasthan	630	105	0
13	Tamil Nadu	2850	2855	2534
14	Telangana	1431	2137	935
15	Uttar Pradesh	3066	0	8020
16	West Bengal	13973	17899	17137

Source: Annexure referred to in reply to parts (a) to (d) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No.139 for 03.02.2020 by Ms. Diya Kumari regarding 'Child Labour Cases'.

According to its Annual Report 2019-2020, the Ministry of Labour and Employment has framed a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) which serves as a 'ready reckoner for trainers, practitioners and monitoring agencies to ensure complete prohibition of child labour and protection of adolescents from hazardous labour ultimately leading to Child Labour Free India'. The online portal PENCiL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour) has been developed to provide a mechanism for enforcement of the legislative provisions and effective implementation of the National Child Labour Project (NCLP). The Portal has components like Complaint Corner, State Government, NCLP, Child Tracking System, and Convergence. Now complaint of child labour can be registered electronically on the Portal to the concerned District Nodal Officers (DNOs) for taking prompt action. The Annual Report states that there are around 2705 NCLP training centers being run in the country with an enrollment of approximately 75 thousand children. Since inception about 13.50 lakh working children have already been mainstreamed into the regular education system through the NCLP Scheme. Government has now enhanced the amount of stipend from Rs.150/- to Rs.400/- per month per child, and also the rates of honorarium for

volunteer teachers and other parameters of the scheme. Further, it is proposed that the volunteer teachers involved in the scheme would receive performance-based incentives. (Ministry of Labour and Employment, Annual Report 2019-2020).

Under the NCLP Scheme, funds are provided directly to the District Project Societies headed by District Magistrate/Collector/Deputy Commissioner who in turn allocates the funds to NGOs/Voluntary Agencies, etc. for running of Special Training Centres. Table 1.9 shows the Fund released under the NCLP Scheme went up in 2016-17 but again reduced in 2017-18.

Table.1.9. Funds released under the NCLP Scheme

Year	Expenditure (Rs. in crore)
2015-16	93.21
2016-17	104.73
2017-18	94.03

Source: Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No 2354 answered on 02.01.2019

If we look at the grant released state-wise under the NCLP Scheme during 2018-19 (see Table 1.10) we find West Bengal, and UP have received the maximum grant money. Among the states of interest, Maharashtra has received 106.19 lakhs and Telangana has received 204.56 lakhs.

Table: 1.10 Grant Released under NCLP Scheme State-wise during 2018-19

SI No	State	2018-19 (Rs. in lakhs)
1	Andhra Pradesh	309.46
2	Assam	1109.45
3	Gujarat	99.41
4	Haryana	234.66
5	Jammu	56.14
6	Karnataka	184.23
7	Madhya Pradesh	514.34
8	Maharashtra	106.19
9	Odisha	138.62
10	Punjab	256.88
11	Rajasthan	319.46
12	Tamil Nadu	878.53
13	Telangana	204.56
14	Uttar Pradesh	1420.72
15	West Bengal	1896.9

Source: Annexure referred to in reply to part (a) & (b) of Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1260 for 25.11.2019 by Shri B.N. Bache Gowda and Shri Sunil Baburao Mendhe regarding National Child Labour Project

During the current year (2019-20), budgetary provision (Revised Estimate) of Rs. 78.00 crore has been made for the Central Sector Scheme – National Child Labour Project, which aims at rehabilitation of children rescued/withdrawn from work. Social Security Fund (SSF) is being maintained with Life Insurance Corporation of India and meant for providing only share of Central Government’s contribution in respect of converged Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY) and Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY) schemes (source: Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 1225 to be answered on 10.02.2020).

According to the Annual Report 2019-2020 of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India at present, there are around 2705 NCLP training centers being run in the country with an enrollment of approximately 75 thousand children. Since inception about 13.50 lakh working children have already been mainstreamed to the regular education system under the NCLP Scheme. Table 1.11 shows the year-wise budget allocation along with the expenditure incurred under the scheme between 2014-15 and 2019-20. It is seen that the expenditure has improved over the years although the budget allocation has been decreasing.

Table 1.11: Year-wise budget allocation and expenditure on NCLP Scheme

Year	Budget Allocation (final grant in crores)	Expenditure (in crores)
2014-15	110.87	102.34
2015-16	99.45	93.2
2016-17	105	104.73
2017-18	95.17	94.03
2018-19	89.99	89.99
2019-20	92 (B.E.)	45.66 (as on 19th November, 2019)

The Education Departments at the level of state governments have been addressing the issue of out-of-school children through the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) which was operational until 2017-18. More recently the Integrated Scheme for School Education – Samagra Shiksha which subsumes three erstwhile Centrally Sponsored Schemes of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) and Teacher Education (TE) which was launched from 1st April, 2018, focuses on improvement in school infrastructure in all States and Union Territories. It envisages school education as a continuum from Pre-school to Senior Secondary Level and aims to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, all levels of schooling. The main objectives of the scheme are provision of quality education and enhancing learning outcomes of students, bridging social and gender gaps in school education, ensuring minimum standards in schooling provisions, support States in the implementation of RTE Act, 2009 and strengthening of teacher education institutions. The various interventions it supports include upgradation of schools, strengthening of infrastructure of existing schools and provision of composite school grant to every school for providing a conducive learning environment, at all levels of school education. It also provides for supporting the children who are mainstreamed in age-appropriate grades.

For girls, the Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalyayas (KGBVs) are important for continuation of education because they offer residential facilities for their education. In the three states of interest in this study, Bihar, Maharashtra and Telangana, all the sanctioned KGBVs are not operational (see Table 1.12)

Table 1.12: Number of KGBVs Approved & Established/Functional (up to 2018-19)

State	Total No. of KGBV Sanctioned	Total Number of KGBV Operational
Bihar	912	582
Maharashtra	86	77
Telangana	726	629
India	5970	4841

Source: Referred to in Reply to Part (C) of Lok Sabha Starred Question No. *210 To Be Answered on 08.07.19 asked by Shri Balli Durga Prasad Rao regarding Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan

1.3. Need for the Study

In the Indian context, mainstreaming of child labourers is one of the core objectives of the revised National Child Labour Project (NCLP) which is based on the amended legislation The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (CAL Act, 1986) and The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, 2009 (RTE Act, 2009). The RTE Act suggests that each child has a right to age-grade appropriate admission and children are, if required, entitled for “special training.” The CAL, 1986 brought in new amendments that clearly prohibit children from being engaged in employment in any sector that may conflict with their right to education. This is a progressive step and in line with the RTE Act, 2009. The objective of mainstreaming child labourers in either government schools or in vocational training centres continues in the new flagship scheme called Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan.

It may be important to note that there is an integrated curriculum for children in mainstream schools, and even though they mainstreamed child labourers have inadequate or nil experience of schooling, they are entitled for age-grade admission through special training. Special training is based on specially designed, age-appropriate learning materials prepared or approved by the Academic Authority under the RTE Act. The school authority is required to enroll the child in the class appropriate to her/his age, identify whether the child needs special training and intimate the same to the concerned special training centres. The period of such special training is for a minimum period of three months and such special training may be extended to two years, based on the periodic assessment of the child. The STCs are required to maintain records of the progress of students undergoing special training and submit a quarterly progress report or profile to school whenever a child gets mainstreamed. The very idea of special training visualizes and incorporates respect for age, experience, knowledge and language of learners and special training curriculum is meant to be based on a child's previous experience in content and in methods. Children, through the special training are expected to be helped to connect their experiential knowledge with worlds beyond as well to understand abstract concepts contained in the textbooks that dominate the

teaching-learning processes in schools. However, for children who are being initiated into the school environment, care is required to be taken to ensure that the source of all learning is not from the textbooks.

Children covered under special training are a very diverse group, and child labourers are one of the critical groups to be reached through special training. There are two critical phenomena that decide the mainstreaming of child labourers 1) their socio-economic positioning and related social experiences and 2) quality of special training material and mechanism for imparting the special training.

Analysis of the reports of Project Approval Board of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) during 2011 to 2017 show that a significant number of children, including child labourers have gone through special training and although a number of children have been mainstreamed, the quality of the special training is poor and there is no follow up of children who are mainstreamed. There is little information available about the challenges faced at the school level in sustaining children mainstreamed in schools. There have been evaluation studies conducted on special training (also called bridge courses or camps) under the NCLP as well as SSA. These studies point to poor identification of child labourers in surveys preceding their enrolment in the special training, coverage of children who are not child labourers, poor rate of mainstreaming due to the frequency of enrollment of these children being once in three years, lack of awareness, poor qualifications and honorarium paid to the teachers at the special training centres, lack of preparation with vocational skills that can mainstream older children, problem of drop-outs after mainstreaming, irregularities in stipend payments to parents of child labourers who send their children to school, inadequate provision of free health services to children who attend school rather than work, and poor monitoring (Satpathy, Sekar and Karan, 2010; Mukhopadhaya, Bhattacharya and Macmillan, 2012, Prognosys, 2012).

This situation raises some critical questions about:

- whether the pedagogy and design of the learning package used in special training is in alignment with the experiences and needs of child labourers and if it follows the spirit and principles of child centeredness and child rights
- whether module of special training has been built on prior knowledge base of learners and uses child's background, social positioning and experiences and if these modules use child's local context and real-life situation
- whether the mechanism of rolling out special training modules prepares the children for mainstreaming
- whether the mainstreaming itself is sustainable and are mainstream schools and teachers equipped to handle class diversity and induction of mainstreamed child labourers in age-appropriate grades

1.4. Significance of the Study

This study focuses on cross-section of efforts towards mainstreaming child labourers in school education through special training conceptualized under the RTE Act 2009. This is an applied research with a purpose of examining the empirical situation of child labourers and the processes for their mainstreaming. It is intended to go beyond analysing the ground-level issues and challenges by documenting alternatives and making recommendations for improving mainstreaming of child labourers. While the existing literature primarily evaluates the functioning of the special training centres in select regions, there remains a gap in understanding specific challenges and issues currently faced at two levels: i] At the special training/bridge course level and ii] at the level of the school. Gathering insights into these would help in development of an appropriate strategy for special training that will better "prepare" the child labourers for mainstreaming and also train school teachers in dealing with challenges of inclusion and class diversity. The findings of the study intend to throw light on and suggest ways to protect and fulfill the provisions of The Child and Adolescent (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 and The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education, 2009.

This report is divided into the following chapters. After this first Introduction chapter, Chapter 2 presents the methodology used in the study which is followed by a review of existing literature on the subject in Chapter 3. The legal frameworks on education and child labour are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5, 6 and 7 presents the main findings and analysis organised according to the main themes emerging from the study. Chapter 5 discusses the findings related to the 'preparation' end which is the STCs, Chapter 6 discusses the findings related to the 'receiving' end which is the formal schools and Chapter 7 discusses the challenges and systemic alternatives for strengthening the mainstreaming process. Chapter 8 presents conclusions and recommendations. The tools used for collecting data and list of subject matter experts are provided in the annexure.

Chapter 2: Methodology

The present chapter outlines the objectives and the research methodology followed for the study conducted on mainstreaming child labour. The study focuses on the question of mainstreaming child labourers into the school education system.

2.1. Objectives and Scope of Study

The main objectives of the study are:

- a) to investigate the issues and challenges of pathways of mainstreaming child labourers in education, and
- b) to explore field level alternatives and solutions for improving the mainstreaming process.

The specific research questions are:

1. How is mainstreaming of child labourers conceptualised in the child labour hotspot districts? Who are the key stakeholders at the district level and what does the process look like?
2. What are the district level mechanisms (labour department, education and vocational training departments) to support the mainstreaming of child labourers?
3. What are the issues and challenges of mainstreaming, both at the "preparatory" level (in the special training/bridge courses) level and at the "reception" level (schools and vocational trainings) of the process?
4. In what way do the special training modules respond to the needs of child labourers?
5. To what extent are mainstreamed children retained in schools/vocational training?
6. What legal, policy and programmatic changes are required and what are the alternatives available for strengthening mainstreaming of child labourers?

2.2. Methodology

2.2.1. Qualitative Study Design

The study adopted a qualitative approach. Data from the District Project Offices of the selected districts on the enrolment and status of special training and mainstreaming was collected. Qualitative data was gathered directly from key respondents identified at the field sites. Content analysis of the special training curriculum used in select districts was also conducted in order to determine the quality of the material used.

2.2.2 Sample for field study

The study used a nested sample design (see Table 1). Level 1 was a purposive selection of the districts. The study was located in three child labour hotspot districts as identified by existing

literature (Samantroy, Sekar and Pradhan n.d.) that maps and analyses trends based on Census 2011 data. Child labour hotspot districts are districts identified as having high number and high incidence of child labour. These were based in three different regions of India. Based on a preliminary review of literature, the tentative list of districts selected was Thane (Maharashtra), Hyderabad (Telangana) and Gaya (Bihar). Since there were no NCLP STCs in Hyderabad, Ranga Reddy district which is adjoining Hyderabad was selected instead of Hyderabad. Level 2 was purposive sampling of three special training centres within the district. The centres run at the district level and 3 special training centres were selected based on the recommendation of the NCLP Project office. In Gaya, only one STC is functioning and that was taken for the study. Since the main aim of the study was to gather in-depth insights of qualitative nature and the purpose was not to generalise, a purposive sample was considered to be more appropriate to meet the research objectives. Level 3 was the selection of the teachers and the coordinators of the special training centres. Since the number of teachers and coordinators working in the three centres was not large, all of them were considered to be key respondents. This constituted the “preparation” end of the mainstreaming process.

At the “receiving” end of the mainstreaming process, three schools where the child labourers are mainstreamed from the special training centres was selected. There were three such “receiving” sites that corresponded to the special training centres. Within the schools, teachers and school principals were the key respondents. The initial plan was to also include vocational training centres where children were mainstreamed, but since none of the STCs were covering adolescents and were none of the children were being mainstreamed in the vocational training centres, this “receiving” end could not be conducted.

Given that the study aims to present alternatives and solutions, in addition to the field sites that provided in-depth understanding of the issues on the ground, data was also collected from key experts, educationists and those involved in mainstreaming child labourers at the national level. About 10 experts who have direct experience with the subject matter were interviewed virtually, instead of 6-7 as initially planned.

Table 2.1: Sample Design

Levels	Sample	Method
Level 1	3 child labour hotspot districts	Purposive selection based on literature/Census data and availability of STCs
Level 2	Based on the availability of information and access to schools, upto 3 special training centres in each of the 3 districts and upto corresponding 3 schools where children get mainstreamed from the selected special training centres	Based on availability and recommendation by the NCLP Project Office based on length of work and number of child labourers covered

Level 3	All teachers and coordinators from the special training centres selected All teachers teaching mainstreamed child labourers and Principals of the schools	All teachers, coordinators and Principals that play a role teaching, supervising mainstreamed child labourers will be selected
National level	10 experts/educationists/those with experience with the subject matter called the Subject Matter Experts (SME)	Purposive sampling

2.2.3. Tools of Data Collection

Keeping in view the qualitative approach and a nested sample design, a set of tools was prepared to collect data from different respondents (see Table 2). The tools were tested for face validity. The tools contained both structured and unstructured items (see Annexure A). They were administered in local languages wherever required by the research team.

Table 2.2: Sources and Tools of Data Collection

Research Question	Source	Tool
How is mainstreaming of child labourers conceptualised in the child labour hotspot districts?	Officials in the district project offices of the National Child Labour Projects and officials in labour and education departments	Tool A: District Functionaries Interview Schedule
What are the district level mechanisms (labour department, education and vocational training departments etc) to support the mainstreaming of child labourers?	Officials in the district project offices of the National Child Labour Projects and officials in labour and education departments	Tool A: District Functionaries Interview Schedule
What are the issues and challenges of mainstreaming, both at the "preparatory" level (in the special training/bridge courses) level and at the "reception" level (schools and vocational trainings) of the process?	Teachers and Coordinators at the Special Training Centres Teachers and Principals of Schools and Vocational Training Centres	Tool B: Interview Schedule for Special Training Centre (containing Part 1 for teachers and Part 2 for Coordinators) Tool C: Interview Schedule for School Teachers and Vocational Training Instructors

		Tool D: Principal of School/Vocational Training Centres
In what way do the special training modules respond to the needs of child labourers?	Teachers and Coordinators of the Special Training Centres Subject Matter Experts (SMEs)	Tool B: Interview Schedule for Special Training Centre (containing Part 1 for teachers and Part 2 for Coordinators) Tool E: Key Informant Interview Guide (to be administered telephonically)
To what extent are mainstreamed children retained in schools/vocational training?	Records of Schools and Vocational Training Centres	Tool F: Proforma for recording school/vocational centre level data (this could not be administered because the schools were shut down due to COVID-19)
What legal, policy and programmatic changes are required and what are the alternatives available for strengthening mainstreaming of child labourers?	Experts	Tool E: Key Informant Interview Guide (to be administered telephonically)

2.3. Organization of the study

The study followed a logical sequence of research steps and adhered to the ethical principles of research.

Protection of Research Subjects: All the respondents were given written information in local language about the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and based on informed consent sought in a written form. All data collected was maintained safely and was de-identified before analysis. Confidentiality and anonymity of individual subjects was maintained and protection of respondent identity has been ensured in the report.

Data collection and analysis: Due to the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown, all interviews were conducted virtually via telephone, and Zoom conferencing facilities. Interviews with key respondents were recorded with permission, transcribed and in some cases translated into English. Interview data collected from special training centres and schools was manually recorded during the interview and subsequently full interview notes were prepared. The data was categorized according to the themes or main questions being researched. In addition, themes that emerged from

the data were also tagged separately for analysis. The qualitative data and the themes were then compiled according to the broad research questions and presented in this report.

Presentation of the report: A draft report was shared with peers and the NHRC for review. Based on the feedback received, the report was revised and updated.

Chapter 3: Child Labour and Mainstreaming in Schools: Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

Child labour has been a very serious issue worldwide. Children are often forced to undertake work that is physically, psychologically and morally damaging to them. Child labour is a cause and consequence of poverty, and education and training are crucial to breaking this cycle. It is a human rights issue and manifests violations of children's rights. Considering the complexity and the magnitude of the issue, the National Policy on Child Labour of 1987 emphasised the need for strict enforcement measures in areas of high child labour concentration. In order to translate the policy prescriptions into action, the Government of India initiated the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) Scheme in 1988 with the aim of rehabilitating working children in 12 child labour endemic districts of the country. Under the Scheme, working children are identified through child labour survey, withdrawn from work and put into the special schools, so as to provide them with enabling environment to join mainstream education system. This chapter reviews available literature on the subject to answer questions about the status and nature of child labour, the manner in which the schemes have addressed the issues of child labour, status of its implementation, and the underlying issues that challenge the implementation of policy goals on child labour. The first section summarises literature on the problem of child labour in India and the second section discusses literature on the National Child Labour Project and similar programmes on child labour. The key issues emerging from literature are highlighted in the third section, at the end of this chapter.

3.2. Status and Nature of Child Labour

A study conducted by Samantroy, Sekar and Pradhan (n.d.) through V. V. Giri National Institute of Labour on the state of child workers in India sought to identify the major hotspots of child labour in India, the main reasons for their existence and consequences thereof, and to create awareness about the problem. The data revealed an increase in the number of child workers in urban areas as a result of low income and fewer employment opportunities in rural areas. Although effective implementation of education policies in these states had led to a rise in literate children, inadequate earnings of families still compelled them to work and supplement household incomes. The report recommended economic rehabilitation of families, sensitisation of the community on the adverse consequences of child labour, including impact on health and future of the children, economic situation of the family and the adverse impact on the community and society at large. The study also recommended mobile schools as means of providing education to children who get completely excluded from the education system.

A critical analysis of child labour in India conducted by the Planning Commission (2011) showed that agriculture was the largest sector where children worked at early ages to support their families. Factors such as unemployment, large family size, poverty, and lack of parental education contributed to the high rate of child labour in India. The study suggested that the 65 percent decline in child labour from 2001 to 2011 census may be a result of increased regulations and legal restrictions on child labour. But the study also pointed to continued high prevalence of child labour in the rural areas which accounted for 85 percent of the child labour as against 15 percent in urban areas.

A study by Musa and Olsen (2018) commissioned by the Department for International Development provided evidence for designing a new Asian regional programme on child labour. The report brought out various causes and factors responsible for child labour in India, in addition to providing a situational analysis for child labour in other South Asian countries. In the Indian context, the report discussed how the system of loans taken by parents whose children work alongside them created triadic complexity where children are neither able to exit the loan nor leave the workplace. The report also pointed out how marriage especially for girl children works directly or indirectly as a proximate reason for bonded labour. The regional differences were found mainly due to cultural differences along with economic wealth differences. The study reported that child labour often remains unrecorded due to the punitive measures imposed against employers of child labourers.

Saharia (2014) studied the state-wise variation in child labour in India and explored why certain states in India, which are not necessarily the wealthiest, have been able to reduce child labour significantly in the past few decades, while child labour continued to increase at alarming rates in other states. This study drew upon literature on school participation to explain the variation in levels of child labour in India, namely the quality of education provided by the state, prevailing norms towards education shaped by cultural attitudes towards education of females and of low-castes, without disregarding the importance of the traditional poverty argument in explaining child labour. The study used case studies of child labour in the hybrid cottonseed industry in the two states of Andhra Pradesh and Rajasthan to examine the causal mechanisms through which bureaucratic effectiveness and social consensus affect parental motivation in sending children to work. The study pointed to the failure of India's RTE Act (2009) and showed that educational deprivation played a key role in determining levels of child labour. Even after controlling for income, states that focused on universal elementary education were more successful at reducing child labour than states that had not prioritized elementary education. The study called for an attitudinal shift in tackling child labour from structural factors to agency-level factors like the role of state-bureaucracies and civil society organisations in reducing child labour.

Ornert (2018) examined evidence on the links between child labour and education. The findings showed that many children combine work with schooling and suggested that children's work enabled their education. The report recommended interventions to support children in more

'benign' work to balance employment and schooling, while banning harmful child labour. It provided evidence of the unintended negative consequences of education interventions and cautioned against one-size-fits-all solutions. The report showed a complex relationship between education and children's work largely emphasizing the need to empower children with their work and at the same time identifying ways to encourage family work without interrupting schooling. It recommended increasing access to education by providing tailored interventions as per the needs and flexible schooling arrangements for working children. It suggested that educational interventions be delivered through approaches inclusive of social protection and legal components.

Gupta (2015) studied on child labour legislation law and provided insights into the fragmented implementation of the laws laid down for the elimination of child labour. The study suggested that paucity of funds and wastage of scarce resources were the major reasons for poor implementation. Other reasons included negative attitude of the general public towards children, lack of organized pressure on the state either from the beneficiaries of the system or any other group to improve the policy or operations, lack of awareness and training of the law enforcers and officials, state's perception of the services as a 'welfare' activity, rather than a state obligation resulting in poor allocation of funds. The study emphasized the need to expand the network of enforcement machinery required for enforcing various laws on child labour in the country.

Parvathamma (2015) conducted a conceptual and descriptive inquiry on child labour in India and showed that the laws on child labour are more flouted than obeyed, and the ban imposed on children working in hazardous occupations is not accompanied by arrangements for their proper rehabilitation. The author suggested that appropriate social security measures should be adopted for ensuring rehabilitation, and adequate financial help should be provided to the poor families by the government. The study also showed that bonded labour remains a hidden phenomenon in India and is mostly seen among migrant workers who are vulnerable to exploitation. A majority of child labourers are invisible and hidden from the reach of law. The study argued that the consequences of child labour are serious and result in trade-offs with human capital accumulation.

A study on the situational analysis of child labour, published by the HAQ Centre for Child Rights (2013), highlighted the complexity of the issue. It stated that the lack of universal conceptualization of what constitutes child labour poses challenges for accurately estimating the number of working children and for designing and implementing comprehensive and effective strategies to ensure their rights. The report also argued that the focus on children up to the age of 14 years had led to the neglect of those in the age group 14-18 years. The report called for a paradigm shift in the approach of eradication of child labour and argued for viewing it as a child protection issue rather than a labour welfare issue.

Realizing the impact of child labour on the development of individual child, the society and the economy, Tripathi (2010) examined the role of education in eradicating child labour. The study observed that parents are unable to appreciate the role of education in improving their lives and

their living conditions. Large-scale poverty was a barrier for universalisation of education. The unattractiveness of schools and the teaching process led to large-scale school dropouts. The study noted that Kerala had low dropout rates as compared to other states and it was the expansion of the school system rather than the enforcement of labour legislation that had reduced the incidence of child labour.

An issue paper by Guarcello, Lyon and Rosati (2008) highlighted education-child labour links. It discussed the harmful effects of child labour on children's ability to enter the formal school system and derive educational benefits from the system. It pointed that inadequate schooling kept children out of school and into work, indicating that school quality and school access can play an important role in household decisions concerning whether children study or work. In this regard, the study called for looking into the effects of school access and quality and their interaction and this affected household decisions. The study argued for assessing the role of non-formal education strategies in supporting national efforts towards Education for All and child labour reduction.

The International Labour Organization (2001) reported on member countries' efforts to abolish child labour through legislation, monitoring, and enforcement. With respect to India, the report recorded increase in the number of the child labour projects and increase in number of children enrolled in special schools. The report highlighted poverty as an important part of the problem of child labour, especially in rural areas.

3.3. Implementation of Schemes and Programmes on Child Labour

A review was conducted of bonded and child labour situation in Maharashtra on the recommendation of the Child Labour Commission in 2004-2005. The findings showed Maharashtra as one of the worst hit states in the country in terms of incidence of child labour. The study indicated a mismatch in the observed data on operationalization of the NCLP project and the actual numbers available with the State Government. It was found that the schools opened under the scheme were running on a year-to-year basis instead of the expected 3 years standard period as directed by the Ministry of Labour, Government of India. The aims of NCLP scheme in providing accelerated primary education for a period of 3 years was not being met, rather sessions for 6 months were running in NCLP Thane without any careful selection of beneficiaries as against the assurance in the project report. Observations from the field disclosed no compatibility between the working of the schools and the NCLP scheme components and found lack of supervisory control over these schools.

A comparative study of the two schemes adopted by the government to mainstream child labour, namely the NCLP and grant-in-aid scheme for NGOs functioning in the non-NCLP districts was conducted. It showed wide state-wise differences in the magnitude of child labour with three states with the highest incidence of child labour being U.P, Maharashtra and Bihar with over 8.96 lakh,

4.96 lakh and 4.51 lakh of working children respectively. Considering the incidence of child labour and the slow progress in terms of mainstreaming, the study suggested extension of NCLP scheme to more districts and frequent surveys of child labour (Khadilkar, n.d.).

An empirical-analytical study by Nanda (2019) aimed to analyse the effectiveness of the National Child Labour Project (NCLP) scheme in Odisha and Western Odisha. The study reported that inadequate statistics on child labour and suggested frequent surveys in this direction. There was inadequate monitoring of the scheme by the concerned authority. Uniform guidelines were not adopted by the surveyed districts. A negligible honorarium was provided to the volunteers although they were highly qualified. The staff did not have any opportunity for regularisation of their services and worked without job security. Although the scheme had run for over two decades, the staff were treated as volunteers and paid honorarium rather than being paid salary and benefits like government staff. This step was seen as a grave concern in the pathway of mainstreaming child labourers.

An empirical study by Surian and Vezhavendan (2018) on the status of child labour before and after the implementation of National Child Labour Project Scheme in India revealed that the implementation of the scheme was a big failure. The factors that affected the scheme were mainly maladministration and fake reports on the count of child labour. The study showed that although earlier studies had showed a decline in the number of child labourers, the empirical reality showed contrasting results.

A rigorous evaluation of the Child Labour Elimination Actions for Real Change (CLEAR) Project, which was funded by the Eliminating Child Labour in Tobacco Growing Foundation (ECLT) from 2011 to 2015 found that the CLEAR Project's design adequately satisfied the needs of the beneficiary population and that the targeted areas of the project intervention were chosen correctly. Challenges were reported with regard to beneficiaries needing more direct forms of support, a safe space for withdrawn children and clear support from the government. The project was found to result in a substantial increase in children attending schools, but at the same time it resulted in increased teacher/pupil ratios and pressure on available infrastructure. The study recommended continuation of community structures to ensure sustainability, communication of policy and programmatic changes at the district and community levels, leveraging the momentum gained from progress related to the government in future projects, continuing to invest in knowledge-based interventions, and using key findings to increase collaboration and communication between CLEAR, government agencies, and tobacco companies for better alignment of short- and longer-term goals (Zhang, Lochocki & Meza-Cordero, 2016).

Bhattacharya (2008) analyzed the nature and status of education of the child labourers in West Bengal. The study listed factors like lack of access, absence of school in the habitation/village, distance to school, geographical barriers, inadequate school infrastructure, lack of basic facilities, communication problems with teachers and students due to differences of languages, mode of

behaviour, child unfriendly pedagogy, poor quality of education, unattractive syllabus, punishments, shortage and absenteeism of teachers, lack of female teachers, and early marriage among girls as contributing to poor status of education. There were also strong economic reasons that prevented children from attending the basic schools. The study demanded greater involvement of the stakeholders like government officials, implementing agencies, community members and parents or guardians of the working children to further improvements in the functioning of the NCLP in West Bengal.

An empirical study by Narayana (n.d.) on combating child labour in Andhra Pradesh, India found that the incidence of out-of-school children had declined with a reduction in the waged employment of children and a significant increase in the percentage of children going to schools. However, casual labour was found to be an important source of income, particularly for girls. The findings of the study from some districts revealed that the Project Societies were not given priority by the district administration, due to which regular meetings were not being conducted as per requirement. The composition of NCLP societies was not found adequately representative of trade unions, parents, youth clubs, women groups, and social workers. The teachers working in these schools were not appropriately qualified. The nature of appointments was found to be unsatisfactory leading to inefficient management of schools and finances causing closure of NCLP schools in some of the Project Societies of selected districts. This also resulted in delayed submission of reports and inordinate delay for release of finances, the reason for closure of NCLP schools. There seemed to be a mismatch between available seats in residential and welfare schools. The important recommendations of the study were provision of basic needs to arrest the rural-urban migration, easy access to credit at affordable rate of interest to the rural poor, improvements in livelihoods through a special package of one time support, appropriate appointments with proper representation, awareness generation programmes, assigning responsibility to universities, research institutes to study NCLP schools performance periodically and report the pitfalls and gaps to the district or state administration.

A study by Singh (2013) financially supported by Rajeev Gandhi Shiksha Mission, Raipur was conducted in the districts of Raipur and Raigarh to examine the reasons of urban deprived children repeatedly becoming out-of-school even after getting mainstreamed in regular schools. The number of children enrolling in government schools was found to be less compared to the population growth. It was also observed that in spite of the population of girls being less than boys, the enrolment of girls was higher in government schools probably due to the preference of sending boys to private schools. Mainstreamed dropouts as well as school dropouts showed that their family environment was abusive and de-motivating for schooling. The families were unable to fulfill the requirements of schooling. Those who had dropped out after being mainstreamed indicated that their teachers had unfavourable attitudes towards deprived and poor children. This study had wide implications for looking at mainstreamed child labourers and the issues and challenges faced in their pathways.

Pantea (2012) studied the transitional education for child labourers and reviewed the extent to which Residential Bridge Camps (RBCs) were effectively integrating former child labourers into the mainstream schools at age-appropriate levels. The study revealed that the RBCs had positive outcomes in decreasing child labour and educational mainstreaming, but with varied methodological quality. Although these camps integrated child labourers in mainstream schools, several indicators remained systematically underreported for example, the number of child labourers at the baseline, the number who dropped out RBCs, the variance in academic performance at baseline, and measures of exposure to the intervention. Scarcity of data on achievement, retention and progress in mainstream schools was a common drawback.

Another study by Mukhopadhaya, Bhattacharya & Mac Millan (2012) was conducted to examine the effectiveness of the National Child Labour Policy (NCLP) in West Bengal. The study showed lower incidence of rural child labour in West Bengal compared to rural India as a whole, however, West Bengal was found to be ranked first with 12% rural households facing occasional or continuous hunger and starvation, followed by acute morbidity and mortality according to the National Sample Survey Organisation (NSSO) of Government of India. The infrastructure of the NCLP schools in most of the sample districts was found to be poor – without proper classrooms, toilet or drinking water facilities, and furniture. The student stipends were not given on a monthly basis in most of the cases. Free assistance from public health units was not adequately provided. Attendance of students was found to be very low at the special training centres. Teachers were not paid adequately and schools in rural areas could not maintain a vocational trainer. Supply of books was not timely. These shortcomings had a negative impact on education. Issues with the stipend disbursement discouraged parents from sending their children to school. Health check facilities for the students were inadequate. The study highlighted a number of issues relating to the implementation of the NCLP that compromised its effectiveness.

An evaluation study was conducted by Satpathy, Sekar and Karan (2010) of the functioning of the National Child Labour Projects (NCLP) was revealed considerable reduction in the child workforce primarily in rural areas during the previous two decades, whereas urban child employment has either remained constant or shown a tendency to rise. The report argued for the project to be operationalized at the district level through a Project Society (PS) for effective implementation. It also indicated that Project Societies had no representation of important stakeholders such as employers, trade unions, parents, etc. The study pointed to an absence of a proper institutional structure and convergence strategy at the district level. The study suggested that the shortfall in attendance was due to as a failure on the part of the district project authority and the school management in locating children and retaining them at schools. It recommended rationalisation of the strength of Field Officers in the districts on the basis of the number of schools sanctioned in that district. It also argued for the need to broad base the nature and type of implementing agencies by giving preference to non-NGO based voluntary organization and institutions. It proposed a multi-staged rigorous scrutiny process for selection/identification of districts at the national level. It proposed efforts for smoothening the fund release system for not

only successful operationalization and implementation of NCLP, but also for utilisation of funds allocated to the district.

A social audit conducted by the Campaign Against Child Labour (CACL) and Campaign against Child Trafficking (CACT) used Right to Information (RTI) and the Highway Sample Surveys to study the enforcement the 2010 notification banning employment of children in dhabas, eateries and as domestic help. The RTI responses were not satisfactory indicating the lack of updation of State Departments and Central Ministry for monitoring the implementation of their child labour elimination programmes. Lack of convergence between departments was reported in the audit. The audit found contradictory information about the figures of children rescued from the domestic sector and dhabas and eateries gained from the RTI data and the highway sample survey indicating that the magnitude of the problem was far greater than what was on record and the enforcement of law was weak and poor. There was lack of transparency in information regarding Child Labour Rehabilitation-cum-Welfare Fund in almost all the states inspected. The report argued for a legislative provision to license and regulate placement services for women and children as domestic help and urged looking beyond poverty as the reason for child labour.

An independent review was carried out by International Labour Organisation (2013) of the project “Convergence against Child Labour - Support for India’s model”. The project aimed at developing an operational framework for ‘convergence’ of the government resources available under different schemes and programmes to target the agenda of elimination of child labour while addressing its root cause, i.e., poverty. The district level activities of the project involved focusing attention on child labour, including those withdrawn from it and those vulnerable to it. The project involved extending support for education to these children, and vocational training to adolescent workers and their siblings. The Project aimed to converge government schemes for child care, education, vocational training, social protection and poverty alleviation in order to meet the multiple needs of low income and marginalised households affected by child labour. The project culminated in an effective convergence-based model for elimination and prevention of child labour, including trafficking/migration of children for work, as demonstrated in two districts in each of five States, namely Bihar, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Odisha.

The Working Group report in the 12th Five-Year Plan by the Planning Commission, Government of India outlined various government initiatives on child labour and noted the persistence of this problem notwithstanding the initiatives, provisions and laws addressing child labour. This report suggested 1) the revision of NCLP scheme, 2) need for child labour surveys as the main basis of the enrolment of children in the Special Schools and the survey to be conducted by a recognized agency/organization, 3) development of teaching learning materials, adequate training of teachers, 4) provision of intensive vocational training to children after their completion of study in the NCLP Schools, 5) need to sensitize the parents about all the Government Schemes/ programmes to enable them to take any benefit from them, 6) NCLP Schools to serve as Special Training Centre for un-enrolled and out-of-school children in accordance with the provisions of RTE Act 2009, 7) opening

one residential school in every city and more than one school in mega cities considering the substantial proportion of migrant children, 8) enforcing relevant labour laws pertaining to child labour, 9) revisiting the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act to cater to the societal changes 10) using a web based Child Labour Tracking and Monitoring System on a continuous basis, 11) monitoring of NCLP at different levels-state, national, and district 12) strengthening efforts to improve the socio-economic environment of the child labour families, 13) providing incentives for working with the NCLP project society and proposing a working budget for all recommendations mentioned above (Planning Commission, 2011).

3.4. Issues Emerging from Literature

The review of available literature helps us in understanding the nature and status of child labour and the factors contributing to or hindering the mainstreaming of child labourers into regular schools. Poverty emerges as the main factor for child labour, especially in rural areas. There has been an increase in the number of child workers in urban areas as a result of low income and fewer employment opportunities in rural areas. Migration is a crucial issue related to an increase in child labour.

Studies also provide insights into the link between child labour and education. There exists a wide state-wise variation in levels of child labour and education status. The RTE Act needs to address educational deprivation and play a role in addressing child labour. Possibilities of special transitional education and flexible schooling programmes as important supply-side elements influencing child labour and school attendance have been highlighted. The studies point to the need to account for non-linear and discontinuous nature of educational trajectories of working children and explore flexible schooling arrangements for working children.

Although there have been various projects to tackle the situation of child labour, challenges have been encountered in implementation and enforcement of legislation. The fragmented implementation of laws fails to ensure protection of children. The studies also point to the need for better enforcement and a holistic approach to combat the multi-dimensional problem of child labour. Interventions by the Government, efforts by NGOs and other organizations to combat child labour in the country and improve the enrolment of child labourers in schools requires more systematic inquiry. Literature shows there has been a mismatch in the actual number and the number provided in official reports. There is neither adequate data available about the special training centres initiated for training these child labourers before they enter mainstream schools nor is there any evidence about the regular schools that enroll child labourers from the special training centres. Given that most of the studies have strongly linked child labour and education and emphasized the importance of educational initiatives in reducing and eliminating child labour, the present study attempts to study the special training centres for child labourers and the mainstream schools that receive child labourers.

Chapter 4: Legal Provisions on Education of Child Labourers

Education of child labourers and protection of their rights is covered by various provisions of domestic and international legal frameworks.

4.1. International Frameworks

Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), 1948: Article 25 of the UDHR provides that motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection'. Article 26 recognises right to education for all, and states that education is to be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages; elementary education is to be compulsory; and education should be “directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” Parents' right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children is also recognised.

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), 1966: The Preamble to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) makes specific references to children in Articles 10 and 12. Article 10 offers “[t]he widest possible protection and assistance should be accorded to the family, ... particularly for its establishment and while it is responsible for the care and education of dependent children” (and stipulates that “special measures of protection and assistance” should be taken on behalf of the young without any discrimination; that they should be protected from economic and social exploitation; that employing them in morally or medically harmful or dangerous work or in work likely to hamper their normal development should be punishable by law; and that age limits should be set below which the paid employment of child labor is prohibited and punishable by law . Article 12 recognises the right to “enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health.”

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, (ICCPR), 1966: recognizes the family entitlement to societal and state protection (article 23(1)). Article 24 states that “every child shall have, without any discrimination as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, national or social origin, property or birth, the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor, on the part of his family, society and the State.”

Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 1979: recognises the obligation of States Parties to ensure the reduction of female student drop-out rates

and the organization of programs for girls and women who have left school prematurely (Article 10, in part).

Convention on Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989: Under Article 32 refers to the right to be protected from economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or interfere with the education of the child or which is harmful for his health, physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development. The States Parties are required to take legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to ensure the implementation of the article and in particular: (a) provide for a minimum age or minimum ages for admission to employment; (b) provide for appropriate regulation of the hours and conditions of employment; (c) provide for appropriate penalties or other sanctions to ensure the effective enforcement of the present article. The Government of India acceded to the CRC in 1992 with a declaration that considering the existing socio-economic conditions, it was not possible to agree to the provisions of Article 32. The Declaration states: "While fully subscribing to the objectives and purposes of the Convention, realising that certain of the rights of child, namely those pertaining to the economic, social and cultural rights can only be progressively implemented in the developing countries, subject to the extent of available resources and within the framework of international co-operation; recognising that the child has to be protected from exploitation of all forms including economic exploitation; noting that for several reasons children of different ages do work in India; having prescribed minimum age for employment in hazardous occupations and in certain other areas; having made regulatory provisions regarding hours and conditions of employment; and being aware that it is not practical immediately to prescribe minimum age for admission to each and every area of employment in India - the Government of India undertakes to take measures to progressively implement the provisions of article 32, particularly paragraph 2 (a), in accordance with its national legislation and relevant international instruments to which it is a State Party." The Declaration has still not been withdrawn by the Government of India.

Optional Protocols to the CRC on Sex Trafficking and Armed Conflict, 2000: The Optional Protocol on Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography addresses the problem of sex trafficking, one among many purposes for which children are bought and sold, including, in addition, forced labor, adoption, participation in armed conflicts, marriage, and organ trade and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict reaffirms in its Preamble that "the rights of children require special protection," notes "the harmful and widespread impact of armed conflict on children," and condemns their being targeted in such situations.

ILO Minimum Age Convention No. 138, 1973: According to its preamble, the aim of the Convention is to establish a general instrument on the subject of the minimum age of employment with a view to achieving the total abolition of child labour and requires each State Party to "pursue a national policy designed to ensure the effective abolition of child labor and to raise progressively the minimum age for admission to employment to a level consistent with the fullest physical and

mental development of young persons.” States Parties must specify a minimum age for admission to employment or work, subject to certain exceptions set forth in the Convention and the minimum age may not be less than the age of completion of compulsory schooling and, in any case, less than fifteen years. But it may initially be set at fourteen years if a state’s economy and educational facilities are insufficiently developed (article 2). Exceptions to the age limits may also be permitted for light work or for such purposes as participation in artistic performances (articles 7 and 8). If the employment may be hazardous to a young person’s health, safety, or morals, the minimum age is generally not to be less than eighteen years (article 3(1)).

ILO Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention No. 182, 1999: It requires ratifying countries to take immediate action to prohibit and eliminate the worst forms of child labor defined as all forms of slavery, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and any work that by its nature is harmful to the health, safety, or morals of children. Its Preamble suggests the need to adopt new instruments for the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labour, “to complement the Convention and the Recommendation Concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973, which remain fundamental instruments on child labour.”

4.2. Domestic Legal Frameworks

The Constitution of India: Article 21 A under Part III Fundamental Rights of the Constitution of India recognises that “the State shall provide free and compulsory education to all children of the age of 6 to 14 years in such manner as the State, by law, may determine”. Article 23 prohibits traffic in human beings, ‘begar’ and other similar forms of forced labour and Article 24 prohibits employment of children in factories, mines or engaged in any other hazardous occupations. Article 39 under Part IV Directive Principles of State Policy recognises that the State shall, in particular, “direct its policy towards securing the health and strength of workers, men and women, and the tender age of children are not abused and that citizens are not forced by economic necessity to enter avocations unsuited to their age or strength”.

The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 recognises the right of children between six and fourteen years, to free and compulsory education in a neighborhood school until the completion of elementary education. Section 4 states that a child above six years who has not been admitted to any school or though admitted could not complete his/her elementary education shall be admitted in an age-appropriate class and have a right to receive special training. The children so admitted to elementary education are entitled to free education till completion of elementary education even after fourteen years of age. The Rules formulated under the RTE Act by state governments provide for how the special training for out-of-school would be conducted. Most state governments have formulated these rules based on the model rules that were suggested by the Ministry of Human Resources Development, Government of India. Most State Rules under the RTE Act state that the School Management Committee or Local Authority shall identify

children requiring special training and organize such training in the following manner, namely: (a) The special training shall be based on specially designed, age appropriate learning material, approved by the academic authority specified in section 29(1) of the Act; (b) It shall be provided in classes held on the premises of the school, or in classes organized in safe residential facilities. (c) It shall be provided by teachers working in the school, or by teachers specially engaged for the purpose. (d) The duration shall be for a minimum period of three months which may be extended, based on periodical assessment of learning progress, for a maximum period not exceeding two years. They also provide that the child shall, upon induction into the age-appropriate class after special training, continue to receive special attention by the teacher to enable him/her to successfully integrate with the rest of the class, academically and emotionally.

Besides this, some state rules provide for additional provisions. Andhra Pradesh RTE Rules state that The School Management Committees may involve Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) in mobilization and identification of Out-of-School children (Rule 5(3)). The Kerala RTE Rules state that the training shall be provided in classes held on the premises of the school or in classes organized in places identified by the local authority or the head teacher It should be provided by teachers or instructors of Multi-Grade Multi-level Learning centres appointed by the local authority for which the local authority will maintain a panel of retired teachers, instructors of MGML and service minded people (Rule 5). In Maharashtra, Rule 3 states that the local authority will identify every year by means of a survey of out-of-school children and shall admit them to age-appropriate class. Such classes will be provided on the premises or through classes organized as authorized bridge courses in safe residential facilities at time other than normal school hours. The State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT) shall lay down the time duration of such training program and consider development of learning material, training of teachers, scientific methods on student evaluation. The special training program (STP) shall also be planned by the Director of Education (Primary) considering appointment of teachers specially for this purpose, survey of out-of-school children conducted by local authority, supervision arrangements to assist the progress of such child and financial provision. In Odisha, Rule 5 specifies that a capsule course will be designed by Teacher Education and State Council of Educational Research and Training (TE & SCERT) for one year/ two years coaching and training model also. In Tamil Nadu, Rule 3 (3) provides that in case the child is admitted in an age-appropriate class in an unaided school, the management of the school shall provide the special training to the child so admitted. The West Bengal rules define “Special Training Centres” as the learning centres for children who have dropped out or never been enrolled in schools and are being enrolled in their appropriate age class for bridging their learning gaps which may run for a period of three months to a maximum of two years inside the school itself or in any appropriate place for the learners in exceptional cases including ‘Home Based Education’ of children with special needs of severe categories; Rule 3 further states that the school authority shall, within 2 weeks of the enrolment of the child in any class the appropriate age, identify whether the child needs special training and intimate the same to the concerned Circle Project Coordinator (CPC) The parents or

the guardians shall be intimated regarding the need for their child to undergo special training. The Circle Project Coordinator (CPC) shall review monthly the requirement of special training to be provided under its jurisdiction and make arrangements for the same. Special Training shall be conducted in accordance with the materials prepared by the academic authority. A school imparting special training shall maintain records of the progress of students undergoing such special training and submit a quarterly progress report as per format prescribed by the State Government to the District Project Officer, Sarva Siksha Mission through the CPC who shall then assess the same in consultation with the District Inspector (Academic) for further course of action. In addition to the specific Rule related to the special training of out-of-school children, the state rules also provide for extended periods of admission. For example, Rule 13 of the Delhi RTE Rules provides that this extended period of admission be five months from the date of commencement of the academic year of a school. It also provides that where a child is admitted in a school after the extended period, he or she shall be eligible to complete studies with the help of special training, as determined by the head of the school. Most State RTE Rules also provide that the School Development Plan (SDP) which is prepared by the School Management Committee should also include additional requirements for providing special training facilities and that the local authority is expected to maintain details of children requiring special facilities/residential facilities on account of migration and sparse population, admission appropriate to his or her age, and disability.

The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 provided for prohibition of the engagement of children in certain employments and for regulating the conditions of work of children in certain other employments. Recently, the Government enacted the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 which came into force with effect from 1st September, 2016. The Amended Act, named as the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 inter-alia covers complete prohibition on employment or work of children below 14 years of age in all occupations and processes. It links the age of the prohibition of employment with the age for free and compulsory education under Right to Education Act, 2009; prohibits employment of adolescents (14 to 18 years of age) in hazardous occupations or processes and stipulates stricter punishment for the employers contravening the provisions of the Act and has made the offence as cognizable. As per provisions contained in the Act, whoever employs any child or permits any child to work in contravention of the provisions shall be punishable with imprisonment for a term which shall not be less than six months but which may extend to two years, or with fine which shall not be less than twenty thousand rupees but which may extend to fifty thousand rupees, or with both. Provided that the parents or guardians of such children shall not be punished unless they permit such child for commercial purposes in contravention of the provisions of the Act. For a comparison of the amendments made in 2016 and the provisions of The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 see Table 4.1).

The Government has also framed the Child Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Amendment Rules, 2017 which include provision for prevention, rescue and rehabilitation and convergence, definition

of “help” in the family enterprises owned by the family of the child and regulation of child artists to ensure their safety and security, provision for District Nodal Officer (DNO) and Task Force under the chairmanship of District Magistrate to ensure that the provisions of the Act are properly enforced. As per information presented in the Lok Sabha on 23 March 2020, the drafting of State rules on the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 was under process in the States of Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh and Kerala. The draft Rules were finalized in Assam. Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh had notified the State rules on the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 (Lok Sabha Unstarred Question No. 4700 To be answered on 23.03.2020).

The Government has also devised a Standard Operating Procedure as a ready reckoner for trainers, practitioners and enforcing and monitoring agencies. To ensure the effective enforcement of the provisions of the Child Labour Act and smooth implementation of NCLP Scheme, a dedicated online portal named PENCIL (Platform for Effective Enforcement for No Child Labour) is developed in order to make the NCLP successful through better monitoring and implementation. The Portal connects Central Government to State Government(s), District(s), all Project Societies and the general public.

Subsequent to these amendments, India ratified ILO conventions No.138 (minimum age of entry to employment) and 182 (worst form of child labour) on 13.06.2017 and joined the majority of the countries who have adopted the legislation to prohibit and place severe restrictions on the employment and work of children.

Table 4.1: Comparison of The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986 and The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986

Sr. No	Provisions of The Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition & Regulation) Act, 1986	Provisions of The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986
1	Definition of “child” means a person who has not completed his fourteenth year of age or such age as may be specified in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, whichever is more.	Child was defined as person below 14 years of age.
2	Recognised new category of "adolescents" as person who has completed his fourteenth year of age but has not completed his eighteenth year	Adolescents were not covered under this legislation.
3	Defined family as mother, father, brother, sister and father’s sister and brother and mother’s sister and brother	Family was defined as individual, the wife or husband, as the case may be, of such individual, and their children, brother, or sister of such individual.

4	Section 3(1) states: No child shall be employed or permitted to work in any occupation or process.	Children were prohibited from working in occupations and processes listed under the Schedule (18 occupations and 65 processes). Children could be employed in the remaining sectors of work.
5	Exemptions: children working with family and family enterprise, artist in an audio-visual entertainment industry, including advertisement, films, television serials or any such other entertainment or sports activities. Provided it does not affect school education.	Exemptions: any workshop wherein any process is carried on by the occupier with the aid of his family or to any school established by, or receiving assistance or recognition from, Government.
6	Children can work in Circus before or after school hours. Working conditions and safety measures for children working in circus will be prescribed. Provided it does not affect school work	Employment of children in circus was prohibited, but given the exemption to work with families, children could be employed in family enterprises in the field of circus.
7	Section 3A: No adolescent shall be employed or permitted to work in any of the hazardous occupations or processes set forth in the Schedule	No reference to adolescent employment. However, Factories Act, 1948 amended in 1987 regulates work done by adolescents (15-18 years) and Mines Act prohibits employment of those below 18 years.
8	List of hazardous sector includes: (1) Mines, (2) Inflammable substances or explosives, (3) Hazardous process as defined under Factories Act.	List of Occupations and Processes contained 18 occupations and 65 processes.
9	Penalty for employers, parents and guardians – imprisonment (6 months to 2 years), fine Rs 20000 to Rs 50000. First offence of parents pardoned.	Penalty for employers – imprisonment of 3 months to one year and fine of Rs 10000 to 20000. Penalty for parents was not specified
10	Offences committed by employers are made cognisable	Offences were not specified as cognisable
11	Child and Adolescent Labour Rehabilitation Fund constituted, rehabilitation of child and adolescent provided for.	Rehabilitation of rescued children not provided for, no mention of any Fund.
12	Compounding of offences, procedures provided	Compounding of offences, procedures not mentioned.
13	Constitution of Technical Advisory Committee	Constitution of Child Labour Technical Advisory Committee

Mehendale Archana (2016) One step forward, two steps back – amendments to child labour legislation in India <https://www.right-to-education.org/es/node/850>

Besides this, provisions prohibiting the employment of children below 14 years are found in the Factories Act, 1948, the Mines Act, 1952, Merchant Shipping Act, 1958, Motor Transport Act, 1961, Beedi and Cigar Workers Act, 1966, Minimum Wages Act, 1948, and the Plantation Act, 1951.

The Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection of Children) Act, 2015 defines children in need of care and protection and one of the categories consists of children who are found working in contravention of labour laws for the time being in force or are found begging, or living on the street (Section 2 (14) (ii)). Section 76 also lay down penalties for whoever employing or using any child for the purpose of begging and Section 79 states that whoever ostensibly engages a child and keeps him in bondage for the purpose of employment or withholds his earnings or uses such earning for his own purposes shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to fine of one lakh rupees. For the purposes of this section, the term “employment” shall also include selling goods and services, and entertainment in public places for economic gain.

4.3. Case Law

On 10th December 1996 in Writ Petition (Civil) No.465/1986 on *MC Mehta vs State of Tamil Nadu* ((1996) 6 SCC 756), the Hon’ble Supreme Court gave certain directions regarding the manner in which the children working in the hazardous occupations were to be withdrawn from work and rehabilitated, as also the manner in which the working conditions of the children employed in non-hazardous occupations were to be regulated and improved upon. The Hon’ble Court specifically ordered withdrawal of children working in hazardous industries and ensuring their education in appropriate institutions. It also prescribed employment of at least one adult member of the family of the child so withdrawn from work, a contribution of Rs.20,000/- per child was ordered to be paid by the offending employer into a corpus of fund set up for the welfare of child labour & their families. Failing which, the State Government to contribute to this Welfare Fund Rs.5,000/- per child. The interest earnings of this corpus were to be used for providing financial assistance to the families of these children. The Hon’ble Court also ordered regulation of working hours for the children engaged in non-hazardous occupations, so that their working hours did not exceed 5-6 hours per day and that at least two hours of education was ensured. It further directed that the entire expenditure on education of these children be borne by their employers. In *Bandhua Mukti Morcha v. Union of India & Ors.* ((1997) 10 SCC 549), the Hon’ble Court ordered to abolish child labour as set out by the Hon’ble Supreme Court in *M.C. Mehta v. State of Tamil Nadu & Ors* and directed the States to take steps to frame policies to progressively eliminate the employment of children below the age of 14; provide compulsory education to all children employed in factories, mining, and other industries; ensure that the children receive nutrient-rich foods; and administer periodic health check-ups.

In pursuance with the directions of the Hon'ble Court in *MC Mehta v State of Tamil Nadu*, fresh child labour surveys were conducted in child labour endemic districts of the country and the States were directed to step up enforcement measures. The Hon'ble Supreme Court is monitoring the directions issued in this judgment continuously since then. Based upon the reports received from the State/U.T. Governments, the Ministry of Labour & Employment has been regularly filing affidavits to apprise the Hon'ble Court of the progress in this regard. According to the report on Abolition of Child Labour in India- Strategies for the Eleventh Five Year Plan submitted by the National Commission for Protection of Rights of the Child to the Planning Commission, 8 affidavits have been filed by the Ministry of Labour & Employment before the Hon'ble Supreme Court, i.e., on 5.12.1997, 21.12.1999, 4.12.2000, 4.7.2001, 4.12.2003, 26.9.2005, 18.4.2006 and 20.07.06.

4.4. Intersectionality of Education, Child Labour and Juvenile Justice Act

Article 21 A of the Constitution of India provides education as a fundamental right to all children from 6 to 14 years of age and Section 3 of the RTE Act provides that every child from 6 to 14 years has the right to free and compulsory education in a neighbourhood school till the completion of elementary education. Section 3 of The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act, 2016 provides that no child shall be employed or permitted to work in any occupation or process and in case of children helping in family or family enterprise in non-hazardous occupations or processes, such work would be done after school hours or during vacation and no work shall affect the school education of the child. For the first time, this legislation brought a linkage between schooling and employment and disallowed work that interfered with schooling. This is aligned with the Article 32 of UNCRC which states that children have a right to be protected from work that interferes with their education. However, being primarily a labour legislation directed towards prohibition of child labour it does not delve into the developmental rights of these children, including right to education, health, play, social protection and participation. As discussed above, the Juvenile Justice (Care and Protection) Act, 2015 (JJ Act) defines "child in need of care and protection" to include a child "who is found working in contravention of labour laws for the time being in force or is found begging, or living on the street" (Section 2 (14)(ii)). Section 79 of the JJ Act recognises the exploitation of a child employee as an offence "notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time being in force, whoever ostensibly engages a child and keeps him in bondage for the purpose of employment or withholds his earnings or uses such earning for his own purposes shall be punishable with rigorous imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and shall also be liable to fine of one lakh rupees." The explanation provided indicates that the term "employment" shall also include selling goods and services, and entertainment in public places for economic gain. Furthermore, the JJ Act defines children as those under the age of 18 years. Given these provisions, working children below 18 years are required to be produced before the district-level Child Welfare Committee (CWC) which takes cognisance, conducts

inquiry and takes action for the appropriate rehabilitation or restoration of the child. But there is a question of children between 14 and 18 years who are permitted by the Child Labour Act to work in safe jobs but are considered to be children in need of care and protection under the JJ Act. These working adolescents are likely to be picked up and brought into the juvenile justice system.

4.5. Enforcement of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986

Tables 4.2 and 4.3 show the information about the enforcement of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 from data collected from the central and state labour commissioners respectively. At the central level, the number of inspections conducted has increased though there is no record of children rescued. However, at the level of the state government, where the enforcement of Act takes place to a large extent, the number of inspections conducted and the number of children rescued have increased between 2016 and 2018. However, the number of violations detected has decreased. The number of prosecutions launched and convictions made have been reducing and in 2018 only 690 convictions were when 1636 violations were detected. Nine convicted people have been sent to the jail in 2017 and 2018 each.

Table 4.2: Information from Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) in respect of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986

Information from Chief Labour Commissioner (Central) in respect of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
No. of inspections conducted	2265	3826	4586
No. of children rescued	0	0	0
No. of violations detected	610	1966	1325
No. of prosecutions launched	0	0	27
No. of convictions made	0	0	0
Fine imposed/ fund raised	0	0	0
No. of convicted persons sent to jail	0	0	0

Source: Annexure referred to in reply to parts (a) to (d) of Lok Sabha Un-Starred Question No. 108 for 18.11.2019 regarding child labour

Table 4.3 Information received from State Governments regarding enforcement of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986 in State sphere.

Information from State Governments in respect of the Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act, 1986	2016	2017	2018
No. of inspections conducted	269451	280595	338696
No. of children rescued	2751	3013	3650
No. of violations detected	4184	2171	1636
No. of prosecutions launched	1944	1677	1168
No. of convictions made	700	701	690
Fine imposed/ fund raised	8227400	7336036	2451390
No. of convicted persons sent to jail	7	9	9

Source: Annexure referred to in reply to parts (a) to (d) of Lok Sabha Un-Starred Question No. 108 for 18.11.2019 regarding child labour

It is within this framework of law and the status of enforcement that efforts to secure children's educational rights are located. The next chapter discusses the main findings related to the preparation of children for schooling through the STCs.

Chapter 5: Preparation for Schooling through Special Training Centres – Main Findings

5.1. Introduction

This chapter addresses research questions related to the “preparatory” level i.e., at the level of the STCs and bridge courses that offer special training to prepare child labourers to transition to formal schools. It throws light on the way these interventions are organised, how they respond to the needs of working children and the challenges they experience on the ground. This chapter is based on interviews of government functionaries responsible for the NCLP programme at the district level, Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), NGO representatives involved in running the STCs, coordinators, and teacher volunteers of STCs. This chapter also includes analysis of documents and curriculum documents shared with us during field work. To get a sense of the policy imagination, nature of intervention and the alternatives to special training, the chapter begins with an orientation to the policy and programmatic norms, curricular imagination and pedagogical material available and training of special teachers before presenting the data collected from STCs in the three field sites – Thane, Ranga Reddy and Gaya.

5.2. Special Training: Legal and Programmatic Norms

As discussed in Chapter 4, the RTE Act not only provides educational rights to all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years, but also provides opportunities of schooling to children who are out-of-school for various reasons. The RTE Act suggests that each child has the right for age-grade appropriate admission and children are, if required, entitled for “special training”. In the following sections, we provide a contextual description of integrated special training curriculum for children who have inadequate or no experience of schooling, but are entitled to age-appropriate grade admission through special training.

A reading of the RTE Act indicates that special training shall be based on specially designed, age-appropriate learning materials prepared by the Academic Authority (GOI, 2009). The framework for implementation of the RTE Act was provided in the Sara Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) Implementation Framework (MHRD, 2011) which mandates the school authority to enroll children in Grades appropriate to their ages, identify whether the children need special training and inform the same to the concerned schools. The Framework also requires the school to inform parents/guardians of children regarding the need for their children to undergo special training. It also outlines responsibilities of the district and subdistrict level academic coordinators who are required to review the need for special training for children under their jurisdiction and make

arrangements for the same to be provided. The RTE Act and the SSA Framework expect STCs imparting special training to maintain records of the progress of children undergoing such special training and submit a quarterly progress report and a profile of the school whenever a child gets mainstreamed in a formal school.

Special training is required to be conducted in accordance with the materials prepared and approved by the Academic Authority, as visualized under Section 29 of the RTE Act. The period of such special training shall be for a minimum period of three months and such special training may be extended to two years, based on the periodic assessment of the child. A close reading of the legal and programmatic norms shows that the formulation of special training is required to incorporate the following:

1. Age, experience, knowledge and language of learners should be respected
2. Teaching learning process to be participatory
3. Curriculum should be according to child's previous experience in content and in methods
4. Learning is meaningful, if it is made contextual
5. Multi-level, spiral and progressive approach to be followed
6. Activity/discovery/exploration-based pedagogy to be followed
7. Regular assessments of every child to be conducted

The RTE Act clearly states that children will be enrolled into the grade appropriate to her age. While there is an argument for “children of a particular age learn together”, the experience of several organizations (particularly as it emerges through interaction with organisations working at the ground level) has shown that learning in mixed-age groups has also proven to be very effective. Therefore, within the delivery of special training approach, opportunities to facilitate learning across ages can also be promoted. However, as a general principle, learning in flexible peer groups is recommended. While these children will be tagged as ‘special’ setting them apart from other children may lead to an element of negative labeling. Further, familiarizing the child with the school routine and enabling participation with other children in non-academic activities will boost confidence and facilitate learning. The effort will be to ensure that the children participating in special training will be integrated with the school system from as early as possible, if the child is participating in a residential programme. If the special training is within the school, then a certain amount of flexibility in the school routine will have to be ensured.

On what shall we base the special training of children (or education of out of school children) in such a scenario? Some important questions that still require official clarification are about the location of the centers, role of teacher volunteers at the STCs and responsibilities of stakeholders. Some tentative formulations have been included here based on findings and reading of the RTE Act and related documents. The discussion below outlines ideas of special training and related issues.

Children requiring special training

The children to be covered under Special Training are a very diverse group. The Anil Bordia Committee indicated that most of these children belong to marginalised communities. Besides identity-based groupings – SC, minorities, children in slum and resettlements colony, there are other significantly large groups of out-of-school children that are based on occupation or socio-economic conditions – children on migrants; street children; homeless etc. The urban context is generally not understood and requires specific attention. The diversity of context poses significant challenges to developing curricula and material.

Age and grade-appropriate admission through RTE

Special Training poses the challenge of positioning the process of bridging as an integral component of the system, with the RTE Act specifying age and grade enrollment of children. It is no longer an invisible pedagogic engagement that STCs/bridge courses perform to strengthen the outreach of the formal school. Considering earlier practice, experiences from NGOs running STCs, it is observed that age-grade appropriate admission is not a mechanical division. The idea behind age-grade appropriate admission is to enhance learning acceleration of child labourers and to respect their previous learning as a basis for their future learning.

Approaches for Understanding Children’s Needs and Contexts

The curricular planning for the education of child labourers requires consideration and incorporation of children’s experiences and their prior knowledge in the curriculum. So, finalization of any such curriculum requires consideration of the following principles.

1. Every child comes to school with significant pre-knowledge which should be used as a basis for learning.
2. Every child has the capability to learn when provided with appropriate learning experience.
3. Children learn at different paces, and in different ways.
4. Children are not passive receivers of knowledge, but are active partners of the learning process.

5.3. Curricular Imagination and Pedagogical Material

It has been pointed out that Special Training poses a specific challenge to the system given its highly structured nature of school curriculum. In some cases, issues of pedagogic planning and nature of assessment system too have been a major concern in sharp contrast with the more democratic functioning of accelerated learning programmes. The approach for schooling of out-of-school children through special training is not a time bound project or special scheme, but requires adoption of a longer term and systemic vision. It is important to view Special Training as a spring board to make the school system increasingly responsive to the needs and contexts of

children from diverse backgrounds, coming with multiple levels of skills and abilities. The issue of dropouts and over-age children in the class room can be informed by developing a robust Special Training framework that informs and influences the system as a whole

Curriculum Framework

The curriculum framework for Special Training is expected to build on the National Curricular Framework (NCF) 2005. As per Section 29 of the RTE Act, the academic authority while laying down the curriculum and evaluation procedure shall take into consideration the following.

1. Conformity with the values enshrined in the constitution;
2. All-round development of the child;
3. Building up child's knowledge, potentiality and talent;
4. Development of physical and mental abilities to the fullest extent;
5. Learning through activities, discovery and exploration in a child friendly and child-centred manner;
6. Medium of instructions shall, as far as practicable, be in child's mother tongue;
7. Making the child free of fear, trauma and anxiety and helping the child to express views freely;
8. Comprehensive and continuous evaluation of child's understanding of knowledge and his or her ability to apply the same.

Out-of-school children or children who have dropped out of the school system have experiential knowledge emerging out of their engagement with their worlds of work. Through the special training, children are to be helped to connect this experiential knowledge with worlds beyond as well to understand abstract concepts. Textbooks dominate the teaching-learning processes in schools. However, for children who are being initiated into the school environment, the source of learning is expected to go beyond the textbooks. Here, as the objective is to mainstream children the focus can easily slip towards teaching the textbook. If the child's prior knowledge has to be assessed, the curricular imagination requires that oral methods of assessments are used and this will have to be integrated with the Continuous Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) strategy being adopted. Moreover, the system is required to be flexible to ensure that children would enter the STC at different levels. While the RTE Act puts the needs of children who have so far been out of the school system centre-stage, the setting of norms and targets brings in the possibility of seeing these children as 'a problem to be solved' or as being 'deficit'. The main thrust is on ensuring that the children are well integrated. This will actually entail a change in the overall teaching processes. As the children from STCs enter the formal school system, they will have to be taught and facilitated as a part of the regular classroom processes. This will entail establishing a good tracking mechanism to see how children from the Special training are progressing within the system.

Pedagogic Principles

Pedagogic principles draw on those laid out by the NCF 2005 and other progressive documents which provide answers about how children learn. These entail children engaging with their environment, moving from the known to the unknown, concrete to abstract and from the local to global. As children enter the school with an existing storehouse of knowledge and understanding, which is particularly true for older children, the system will develop a mechanism to assess this through activities and oral assessments, which will become a part of the learner profiles and an integral part of the CCE system.

Key Areas in the Curriculum

Following are the key areas of curriculum of the STCs offering special training

1. Social learning and child's surrounding
2. Articulation about immediate environments
3. Language: space for home language, reflective, imaginative and communicative aspects of language
4. Mathematics – looking at the world quantitatively and enabling tool for basic operation
5. Science – exploration and construction of knowledge

One of the key objectives of curricular framers was ensuring “Basic Literacy & Numeracy”, which includes:

1. Ability to read and comprehend a Grade 2 level unfamiliar text (developing strategies for reading, developing cognitive abilities through oral language, reading for pleasure and information, exposure to different kinds of texts).
2. Pre-writing and writing strategies (creating and fostering the impulse to write, listen and say, developing competence, confidence and the ability to write independently)
3. Till two-digit subtractions (includes pre-maths, number concepts, place values, operations)
4. Exposure into cross domain (inter disciplinary) learning

5.4. Teacher Training on Special Training

The teachers or volunteers (often called teacher-volunteers) who teach at the STCs are not appointed as regular school teachers and may not meet the eligibility norms prescribed by the National Council for Teacher Education as per the RTE Act. They are appointed on contractual basis by the NGOs running the STCs and hence training of the teacher-volunteers becomes a critical component of the Special Training approach. Special Training as a valid education component, transacted within the boundaries of the STCs requires standardized norms. The norm specified in the RTE Act needs to be adhered to both in terms of teacher qualifications and Pupil-Teacher Ratio. Without appropriate orientation and training, special training can become an

isolated intervention. As a result, processes of continuous dialogue, orientation and training of coordinators and teacher-volunteers are essential to ensure that learners are effectively mainstreamed. At one level Special Training can be tremendously challenging for the teacher-volunteer and at the same time filled with tremendous energy and potential in the context of engaging with children. Many in the teaching community are resistant to the idea of age and grade appropriate admissions as they view STCs as an intervention that is responding to a ‘deficit’ among learners. As the system overall promotes pedagogic principles of introducing dialogic and interactive processes, collaborative work, small group work and activity-based learning across the board within the classroom, the ST training module needs to be positioned as one that is enhancing and strengthening their skills professionally. Thus, training modules need to inform mainstream teacher training courses or vice versa.

The training module needs to focus on building skills of all teachers to deal with diversity and the multiple contexts from which children come from – brick kiln workers, salt pan workers, nomadic communities, street children etc. A more systematic, graded course for both pre-service and in-service teachers on child rights and protection not just as a one-time input but as conducted over a period of time.

The system so far has the experience of conducting residential and non-residential STCs/bridge courses. The RTE says that STCs should be as far as possible be conducted within the school premises. This would entail a reorganization of not only the implementation of special training but also the school system, including time table and teacher responsibilities as a whole. The profile of children requiring special training is also very diverse and hence delivery of special training entails ensuring that children are integrated. The biggest challenge is of retaining the children in the formal school system once they are mainstreamed. Formal systems of follow-up and training of school teachers is also necessary for the retention of these children. There is a need to acknowledge that the urban situation is more complex, where pulling in children into the system involves more circuitous paths.

5.5 Perspectives on Implementation of Special Training Centres

The interviews with Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) threw light on various perspectives related to the special training centres and how the intervention is being organised, the role STCs are expected to play and the role they can play to fulfill the educational rights of child labourers.

5.5.1. Organization of STCs

The STCs are not only about enrolment of children in schools but also their role is critical to ensure that the child adjusts to the formal school system. The STCs are seen as a solution because children who are out-of-school and in work require additional support and attention. The formal school is where their names are registered and there is a concept of a lead school which is connected with

specific STCs in the neighbourhood, from where the mid-day meal, uniforms and books can be supplied. The STCs then get seen as an extension of the school. The concept of a bridge course or the STC rests on the idea of lateral entry into schools that is to admit children into the nearby government school at any stage until they complete the age of 14 years. They are entitled to the mid-day meals; they join the school and attend the classes at the STC every day and get into the routine of going to the school. There is an interaction between school and the STC teachers on pedagogy, learning material, curriculum etc. The Head Master (HM) can request the STC to help and provide additional time and attention to some of the children. This model emerged after RTE because every child had to be enrolled in some school. The spirit of STCs in the context of RTE is that of serving as an extension of the school.

The STCs serve as a bridge between child labour and formal schools and in order to get them ready for entering the formal schools, they have to prepare the children within the two years. Under SSA there have been funds available for alternative and innovative education under which the bridge courses are being offered. There are two streams of bridge courses – residential and non-residential and a lot of flexible models have emerged over the years.

There are three types of institutions serving child labourers and vulnerable children. One, the STCs run by the NCLP, many of which have now been closed; two, Child Care Institutions (CCIs) set up under the JJ Act which provide institutional care to children in need of care and protection, which includes working children, and three, the STCs set up by the government under the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan for children who are out-of-school including those who have never been enrolled in a school and those who have dropped out. These STCs are seen as remedial classes where children are provided education and training so that they can come back to the formal schools.

For children of migrant workers and seasonal child labourers in Odisha there are two types of special training centers – seasonal hostels at source site (Odisha) and interim local schools at destination site, like Telangana and Tamil Nadu. There are two types of special training centers, residential and day care. Organisations such as Aide et Action are running STCs with the Department of Education to bring in children of seasonal migrant parents who otherwise accompany their parents and generally work in brick kilns and brick making industries. Temporarily, these children are enrolled in a school near to the work site which is also identified as STC under SSA. In Bolangir and other districts in Western Odisha, the residential STCs are also called seasonal hostels, and are being used by the Government of Odisha to retain migrant children from migrating out to other states. For six or seven months while their parents are away, the children are kept in the hostel in the village itself. Government provides food, shelter, and education. These are temporary arrangements to prevent children from migrating with their parents and working at the brick kilns. In most cases, boys stay back in the hostels.

Children coming into the STCs bring in their younger siblings who are also vulnerable and at-risk of getting into child labour. They may not be going to the school regularly and may not have the

economic support to go to school. These may not be working children but they are vulnerable. One of the incentives of coming to the STCs is the stipend they receive, unlike formal schools which do not provide a monetary stipend or incentive to go to the school. The STCs under NCLP have to show a minimum enrolment of 25 in every STC. If the enrolment falls below this number, the STCs can be shut down.

According to the new guidelines, there were some changes specific to the STCs – like children from ages 5 to 8 years are to be directly admitted into formal education. The maximum time to be spent for each module is prescribed as 3 months to 6 months. The STCs are required to impart special training to the children for a period of 2 years and then the children are to be mainstreamed into formal education.

5.5.2. Teacher-Volunteers of STCs

As mentioned earlier, the teacher-volunteers in the STCs do not have the same eligibility requirements as applicable to regular school teachers who are governed by the provisions of the RTE Act and the qualifications laid down by the National Council for Teacher Education. They are seen as local volunteers and hence are called volunteers or volunteer teachers or teacher-volunteers. Their appointment is done by the chairperson of the district NCLP Society, who is either the district magistrate or deputy commissioner or the district collector. The Chairperson also evolves criteria and makes appointments of the voluntary instructors or education instructors or vocational training instructors and also the Project Directors. In places like Andhra Pradesh, they have deputation, like the Project Directors are basically on deputation from the education department or social welfare department or from the revenue department. In Tamil Nadu, selection of teacher-volunteers is done by interviewing and by selecting from the labour market. There are no prescribed criteria for selections although there are national-level broad guidelines. In most cases, the teacher-volunteers are selected from the local community.

Training and preparation of the teacher-volunteers is an important area of capacity building. It is mandatory that DIETs should impart this training. The teacher-volunteers are generally untrained and are given training for a few days. This differs across states and districts. For example, in Tamil Nadu, the training is provided for 6 days by the Education Department. But this is not sufficient. In Maharashtra, the government has managed training of NGOs that were running the STCs. There are also cases where trained teachers apply for these jobs because they do not get a job in a regular school and the STCs that have such trained teachers perform relatively better. But in most cases, the teachers are not trained and hence the quality of teaching is not up to the mark. Large organizations such as Pratham, when it ran the STCs, also offered training based on their methods of accelerated learning.

The SMEs pointed that the training given to the regular school teachers is more thorough than what is provided to the teacher-volunteers of the STC. In some states, the department of education itself works with para-teachers or contract teachers due to the lack of availability of trained

teachers. The NCLP does not mandate STCs to hire only trained teachers because it is not feasible in some states with low availability of trained teachers.

The teacher-volunteers are paid INR 4000-5000 per month which has been increased from the earlier amount of INR 1500-2000 per month. Thus, the SME experts observed, it is difficult to expect much from them. These are often young volunteers and their drive and motivation to work in these conditions is also an issue. Within these conditions, as one SME said “it is difficult to find those with a B.Ed. or a graduate degree. However, the government expects good results”.

Thus, what is seen is that in order to facilitate age-appropriate school enrollment, a 13-14-year-old child who has never been to school is taught by a teacher-volunteer who has completed only Grade 10 or 12 of studies herself and she is expected to prepare the child to be enrolled directly in Grade 6 or 7. As a result, the quality of teaching suffers and the children are not adequately prepared to academically adjust to the demands of the formal school.

5.5.3. Curriculum

Currently, no curriculum is prescribed for the national level or no teaching-learning material is provided at the national level. Instead, there is a budgetary allocation for curriculum and material depending on the age group and the level of learning of the children who get enrolled in the STC. Since what is taught and how it is taught depends on who comes to the STC, the outcome of the child labour survey that is conducted plays an important role. The curriculum is to be prepared by NGOs keeping in mind the best interests of the children who are identified during the survey and is the first step of starting the STC.

Earlier the STCs used SSA material. But since most of the children coming to the STCs have never been to school or are early drop-outs, it is common to find that they have forgotten everything. When the SSA material was used, one SME shared, “it was not successful since it was not meant for this specific group”. In some of the districts, they start by initially imparting nonformal education and when the child attains some basic level of competencies, they are then introduced to the curriculum followed by the formal schools, since the goal is to mainstream the children in the formal education.

By the time children complete 2 years at the STC, they have to be enrolled in school and so the STCs are required to function as preparatory centres. However, there is no coordination between the curriculum used in the formal schools and what is used by the STCs. As one SME pointed out, “there is also a difference with regards to how children are taught in STCs and in the regular schools, because of the different roles played by these two systems. There is a need to link the curriculum of STC with that of the regular schools so that children will be able to academically adjust better in the mainstream school”.

The bridge course materials that are prepared by the organizations are called different names. Some of the material prepared include *Varadhi*, *Utkarsh*, or as MV Foundation calls it *Nemalika*, feather of a peacock. Given the availability of a variety of material, different pedagogies and curricula have emerged and there is no standardization of the curriculum used by the STCs.

In Maharashtra, the government and the SCERT have a curriculum for the children attending the STCs so that they can have accelerated learning, which means that they learn faster and reach the competency level required for the age-appropriate admission. Since the organizations have flexibility, Pratham for example, used 'learning to read and reading to learn' methods with the children.

Since most of the children have never been to school, organisations have to start from scratch. Moreover, the children are at different levels and from different age groups but they follow a single curriculum. In Tamil Nadu, the education department has provided a single curriculum, but most of the teacher-volunteers say the curriculum is not sufficient, and they have to put in extra effort to teach children and bring them to a higher level. If the child has to be integrated at a higher grade level, say Grade 7, and then the teachers have to spend more time. There has been little thinking about how the curriculum used by STCs can cater to the needs of different age-groups and levels of children, so that they can be mainstreamed in the age-appropriate class once the bridge course is over.

The capacity of teachers to do multi-graded teaching is a challenge. There is also a space constraint with 50 children at different levels trying to learn simultaneously. Getting adequate space for the STC becomes very difficult, because the money or the budget available for renting these places is very limited. Given these challenges, Pratham tried different strategies where they had one center running in two to three batches, so not more than 15 to 20 children come to the STC at one time. Even with different batches of children, a teacher-volunteer who is handling 15 children performing at different levels is not in a position to follow one set of curricula. Moreover, she is expected to perform these roles and show results within a given time. As one SME noted, "the pressing concern for the teacher is how to make sure that children are within the same learning level and how to get the last child through the entire process of finishing the curriculum. So, while there are well-established curricula and provisions for training, both drawn on inputs from experts, there appears to be a gap between what is planned and translating that actually on the ground. In several cases, the training of children in STCs then becomes just a matter of routine where children come and the basics are done but the ultimate results in terms of learning are not there."

In Telangana and Andhra Pradesh, the State Government has introduced an innovative pedagogy, that is joyful and flexible for this group of children. The Education Department saw it, in the words of one SME, "as if the child is coming to the school for the second time". This is particularly valid given that several children may have been enrolled earlier but have never attended the school, or have dropped out to participate in work. In order to make sure that they do not drop out again, the

government was very keen on preparing the textbooks, using colours, diagrams, stories, and making it somewhat flexible. According to the SME, “the child was the focus of textbook preparation and the out-of-school child was the focal point of the curriculum organization, as if the child was telling the school system ‘look I am here, I am ready to come to school, are you ready to have me?’ This emerged from the expertise of the SCERT, its involvement and innovation in pedagogy and textbook reforms”. It involved some of the best teachers who were innovating in their classrooms across the state. The department found that there was a lot of innovation happening in its own schools with school teachers from remote areas innovating and they became the resource persons at the state level and this practice of preparing textbooks still continues in Telangana.

5.5.4. Functioning of STCs

In some cases, the STCs are conducted in rented buildings with a rent paid from the grants, while in other cases it is situated in school premise. There is a rule that those who are going to run the STCs need not be involved in conducting child labour survey. This was in order to prevent organisations from picking up the children that were easy to bring to the STCs and keeping the children, irrespective of the age group, because if children drop out from the STCs the organisations are not able to maintain their targeted enrollment numbers.

A specialized agency with expertise in conducting surveys is asked to conduct the survey and submit the report through the district magistrate to the Ministry of Labour and Employment for getting the sanction for opening the STCs in a particular place. After receiving a written approval from the Basic Shiksha Adhikari that no SSA school is available there, the STCs are sanctioned. This is to ensure that there is no overlap between the schools and the STCs and to avoid double registration of children in regular schools and the STCs.

Some organisations started enrolling children who are out-of-school or those who maybe going to school but need extra attention. A certificate called ‘drop-out certificate’ was then called for. There were complaints from the Head Masters (HMs) in a lot of districts that the child who is enrolled, but not coming regularly is also considered in the total number of students in the school when availing ration for midday meals or textbooks or uniforms. But the child may be attending a bridge course or STC. Therefore, children’s name had to be struck off from the school register and this led to what is called as the ‘drop-out certificate’ in some states. Whether to give the dropout certificate or not was a question of doubt. In places like Odisha, the dropout certificate is used as a proof of age since the date of birth is mentioned on that certificate. As one SME pointed out, “there has been a level of mistrust in the entire process.”

Although, the NCLP Scheme was initiated by the Government of India in 1988 to rehabilitate working children in 12 child labour endemic districts of the country, according to the SMEs, the number of NCLP STCs has drastically come down. It was initially started in 8 states in child labour

endemic areas like Aligarh, Firozabad, Moradabad, Mirzapur, Sivakasi etc. Later they extended to other districts.

One SME pointed out that the “education department is happy to doing something and the labour department is also happy to doing something, but that doesn’t change anything in children’s personal and family lives. If change had happened, the number of child labourers in these districts should have decreased. The NCLP STCs should not be conducting classes for only 1-2 hours”. Another SME suggested that the NCLP should be stopped because it was faulty from the beginning. The NCLP or the labor department must not run schools. It should be the responsibility of the school and education department to do age-appropriate teaching. The labour department can train the gram panchayat, and grassroot functionaries, and support child labour extension workers at the local level but should not be involved in providing education.

As one SME pointed out, “for NGOs, bridge course is an aspect of social mobilization, showing that it is possible for children to come back into the education system and it becomes a bridge to the school for the entire family, and also the community.” Bridge courses run by NGOs as well as under the SSA also serve the same objectives of enabling child labourers to join formal schools.

5.6. Success Stories and Promising Practices at STCs

Interviews with SMEs revealed that some STCs have been successful in mainstreaming children into formal schools who have then gone ahead to pursue higher studies and become engineers, lawyers, doctors, nurses, and teachers. Wherever NGOs have given additional attention, done follow-up and have supported children to continue schooling at the secondary level, they have been able to create success stories. The support involves additional follow up, helping children get admission in colleges, helping tap additional support like scholarships and hostels.

As one SME shared, in a specific ward “we had 300+ children going to 2-3 schools. For every 10-15 children we had one of our staff members who almost adopted these children and made sure that they go to school. The staff member went to the school with a report card for the teacher. The teacher had to fill in what the child was learning, if the child was coming to school and sign the card. Teachers also started understanding that there is some kind of monitoring as far as the children are concerned and started looking at the NGO as partners and collaborators. Even when they had difficulties with these children in terms of discipline, use of bad words, improper language, and behavioural issues, they were able to intervene with the help of the NGO.”

Another success story shared by one SME was about a child labourer who was rescued from the CST station in Mumbai. The child was gifted with musical abilities and was a good singer. He was called by the Music Academy in Australia where he got trained and is currently working.

Another story is about a Grade 5 school teacher who had employed a bonded labour himself. At that time, all teachers did part-time farming and part-time school or they sub-contracted. He withdrew the child from working on his own farm and put him in his own class. He paid off the money to his wife saying that the child's father repaid the debt. Within six months, the child was able to cope and come at par with all his classmates and within an year he did better than his peers.

5.7. Field Case Studies

In this section, we present the data gathered from the field by interviewing the STCs coordinators and teacher-volunteers from the three districts selected for the study – Thane (Maharashtra), Ranga Reddy/Hyderabad (Telangana) and Gaya (Bihar).

5.7.1. Case 1: Special Training Centres – Thane, Maharashtra

In all, 40 STCs are sanctioned to the district although only 13 STCs were functioning at the time of data collection. The findings given below are collated from interviews with the project director, coordinators and teacher-volunteers of three STCs in Thane.

Background: The number of students ranged from 15-30 students per school, with a fair distribution of boys and girls. The children were of the ages between 9 and 14 years. If the STC has more than 20 students, then 2 teachers and one vocational training instructor are allocated. Classes are held six days a week from 9 am to 2 pm and some of the children go to work with their parents after 2 pm, mainly to sell balloons, work in hotels or to beg. The incidence of children working after attending the STC has come down over time. Sometimes teacher-volunteers allow children younger than 9 years to attend the STC as many girls have to take care of their younger siblings and they can come to the centre only if they can bring their siblings along.

Most of the children who join are from the most marginalised families and have never been to a school. Children of daily waged workers, street children and orphans who have never been to school earlier, children with special needs, children of migrant labour, rag pickers and children who have dropped out are admitted to these schools. The children themselves could be involved in rag picking, begging, pearl work, shining work on sarees and dresses, buttoning and cutting the thread of jeans and plastic collection.

Registration of and Admission in NCLP School: Initially, a survey is conducted and child labourers in the age group of 9 to 14 years in the district are identified. Schools are sanctioned based on the incidence of child labour and the need. NGOs that are interested in running these STCs can apply. The NGOs have to finish mainstreaming the children in two years after which they are given another order. Names and addresses of children identified through the survey are shared with the NGO. The NGO team traces the children and motivates the families in admitting the children. The children are imparted non-formal education from first to fourth grades for two

years (six months for each of the grades) after which they are admitted to a regular school as part of mainstreaming. Some of the parents want the children to work and show resistance in sending their children to the STCs as “they are earning 100-150 rupees and there will not be anything once they go to school”. Some of the children are 10 years old and have not been to a school. The children are concerned about food for survival. Their focus is today and not the future. Sometimes it takes 3-4 months to convince parents and children to get admitted. Initially, they are not keen on studies but eventually as they continue, they get interested. Teacher-volunteers maintain regular contact with the children and their parents to ensure that they do not drop out.

Fee Structure: Children are not charged any fee by the STCs. Children also receive stipend of about INR 400 per month from the government which is directly transferred to their account. Parents may take this money or utilise it for supporting the education.

Training of Teacher-Volunteers: All the teacher-volunteers interviewed have passed their higher secondary education and have some experience in teaching, ranging from 4 to 15 years. Trainings of teacher-volunteers are conducted by resource persons from NCLP and senior members of NGO team. All the teacher-volunteers have received few days of training every year. The number of days ranged from 1 day through 5 days in a year to 15 days per month for 3 months. There has been no training, though, in the past 1½ year. Teacher-volunteers are trained on various aspects like counselling the parents on the importance of education and convincing them to send their children, teaching methods, vocational training skills and creative activities like making craft from waste materials, dancing and singing.

Pedagogy, Curriculum and Textbooks: Children are categorised in groups when they join based on their ability and are taught accordingly. Children are taught the four grades (Grades 1-4) for duration of 6 months each. Teacher-volunteers initially find it difficult to teach the children as they feel they are not very attentive.

The NCLP STCs have prescribed curriculum for every grade and additionally, children are taught to write alphabet, numbers and elementary level English. Initially, when the teacher-volunteers go and bring the children, they face resistance and children run away from them. The teacher-volunteers engage them in games and activities. The major focus in this period is to bring children to school and encourage them to continue their education. Sometimes children are given homework too. Parent-teacher meetings are organised and if informed in advance, parents try to attend the meetings.

The teacher-volunteers use various ways of teaching in the classroom. Initially for a month or two, children are taught using a slate and then they switch to notebooks. Blackboard teaching, charts for alphabet and numbers, artefacts and materials and reading out books and stories to children are some of the methods used. Initially, the assessments are done through oral exams. Later, they shift to written examination involving “fill in the blanks” and “match the following” kind of questions. Children mostly enjoy songs, poems and mathematics. They also enjoy creative activities like

making rakhis, diya etc. Languages, especially Marathi for Hindi speaking children and English poems, were found to be the most difficult for children to learn. Older children do not like grammar. The textbooks used are those used in the government schools.

Teacher-volunteers' support to children: The work of the teacher-volunteers involves different activities related to academic preparation, social preparation and financial planning. Since the children are required to be mainstreamed in regular schools, they are generally admitted through the evaluation done by the Head Master through interviews to assess the child's level. There is no separate test apart from the HM's assessment. The STCs collect proof from the schools that the children are admitted.

Teacher-volunteers at STCs prepare children to face these interactions. Building confidence in children is a key focus of schools for as one teacher-volunteer said "when children are taken for admission they are scared, they need confidence". Children who show interest in going to private schools are also given an orientation and informed about the culture in private schools. However, it has been experienced that private schools are not keen in admitting these children as they are from slums. The NGO team then has to invoke the RTE Act and seek intervention of the District Collector who is also the NCLP chair to get admission in private schools. There is a provision of stipend of INR 400 for the children in STCs but to avail the service, Aadhaar card is required. A lot of children do not have their Aadhaar cards. Teacher-volunteers also help children in opening their bank accounts, getting their Aadhaar cards made, teaching them how to sign on bank documents and explaining the bank processes to the parents of children. All respondents stressed on educating children on cleanliness and hygiene. Teacher-volunteers also reported noticing major changes in the children with respect to how they looked and carried themselves, after the two years of stay in their centre.

Transition to regular School: Teacher-volunteers prepare the students by teaching them according to the textbooks which are used in regular schools. After being admitted to regular schools, students initially find it difficult to adjust in the new environment and to the school teachers and classmates. However, a few visits by teacher-volunteers from STCs in the initial days help them feel secure and adjust well. In case of any drop out, teacher-volunteers also visit their homes, speak to parents and try to readmit the child into school. They also step in in case of any conflicts these children might get into with other classmates. In several instances, teacher-volunteers receive complaints with regards to children's behaviour and they are afraid that the parents might discontinue the child's education if they get to know about these complaints. Apart from these informal visits, there is no formal mechanism, though, to track the children once they are mainstreamed.

Challenges: In terms of challenges, the biggest is the fear of the child dropping out. A lot of children find it difficult to adjust initially and therefore there is high risk of them dropping out. Sometimes parents are not interested in letting their child continue education and if one student

drops out, it pushes other children and their parents to follow. Discrimination of children, due to their background and social status is a concern. Due to this, these children tend to make their own groups and stay aloof.

The prevalence of habits of chewing gutka, tobacco, alcohol and drugs are high amongst children. Lot of children carried it in their school bags. Teacher-volunteers have been consistently trying to wean children's habits but it continues to be a challenge. One of the teacher-volunteers was worried that "some children do not have food and have addiction and this can affect their mental health severely."

The children also tend to become irregular if the mainstream schools are far from their homes as they can neither walk nor take an auto-rickshaw. This is particularly so in case of children who have to choose far off schools for a preferred medium of instruction (Hindi or Gujarati). While children are able to adjust academically in the school often there is no conducive academic environment at homes. The situation is worse in case of parents who are given to alcoholism and other habits.

One of the teacher-volunteers talked about her working with children with special needs. Though they could not speak, they came, sat and learnt by gestures. They were not sent to the special school as it was far and while the municipal school would take them, they could be ragged there. Hence, children with special needs were not enrolled in a regular school initially and brought to the STC instead.

Resource constraints faced by STCs: The NCLP-run STCs provide children with notebooks and pencils but procuring textbooks is a challenge. Since the grade taught (and the corresponding textbooks) change every half-year, getting textbooks becomes difficult. Another constraint is related to fund allocation. The STCs receive only INR 3000 for rent expenses from the government, which is found to be on the lower side, particularly in case of metropolitan areas like Thane. Teacher-volunteers are paid an honorarium of INR 7000 while clerk and helper get INR 5000 and INR 3750 respectively.

Delays are also experienced in fund disbursements. This affects provision of food to the children. One of the coordinators shared that "when on brink of survival, eat only Vadapav. The children say they are hungry and if they step out, they do not come back. Corporation assigned women's group for food provision but they do not start on time. All of it is lot of stress." The delay in grant release affects office administration too. The NGOs often pay rent from their own account till their funds get released.

Challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic: Many students are children of migrant labourers and as lockdown started, many of them left with their parents to their native places and have hence dropped out. The pandemic impacted education of children from marginalised section as children do not have access to phones by which they could access online classes. The teacher-volunteers

were asked to visit the communities every alternate day and also provide with whatever support possible. The STCs also facilitated visit of doctors in the community and also distribution of masks and sanitizers. One of the teacher-volunteers who worked with children from Adivasi rag-picking families, shared that “since the lockdown, the children and their families do not have anything, nothing other than rag picking. So, the children will go back to rag picking.” She wondered if any home-based work can be found for them so that they do not get exposed to rag picking.

Other suggestions: One of the coordinators suggested that the STCs must reduce the age bracket from 9 years to at least 7 years so that the children, after taking 2 years of the course can be admitted into regular school by the age of 9. This is because as children grow older, they get more habituated to work life. It was suggested that the government should also provide accommodation facilities in NCLP-run STCs so that it is easier to retain them and wean them off child labour after school hours. Health, education and nutrition facilities must be provided by the government to every child. If the child continues with STCs till the age of 14 years, there should provisions for skill development and vocational training. Since many parents are financially weak and want their children to earn, a whole family approach that looks into ways of supporting the financial needs of the parents and the family is suggested. The respondents believed that children have a lot of talent but they just need a proper platform to grow.

5.7.2. Case 2: Special Training Centre – Ranga Reddy/Hyderabad, Telangana

In all, 36 STCs are allocated to the district and all of them are functional. The findings below are based on interviews with the project director, program manager, an NGO coordinator and two STC teacher-volunteers.

Background: Majority of the child labourers are from families that have migrated over the last 15 years. Telugu as well as Hindi/Urdu are languages used for instruction. Child labourer, currently, are found most in construction work, dhabas, cotton mills (for untangling cotton knots), bangle cottage industries (particularly those from Bihar), saree work (to add beads) and sibling care.

With respect to NCLP and STCs, the Collector is the drawing officer while the Project Director is the secretary and joint account holder along with the Collector. Apart from their parent department (labour department) the work of NCLP involves working with education, police and women and child enforcement departments and local community leaders (politicians and social workers) and civil society organisations (NGOs). NGOs are given responsibility to identify suitable candidates for teacher-volunteer positions in the STCs and supervise the centre. Those who are educated, are aware of the local area and have social commitment are chosen. Apart from this, NGOs are involved in conducting an initial survey to identify the child labour. One of the NCLP officials interviewed informed that 1066 children were identified in the process and estimated that there could be additional 20% that could be unidentified.

Pedagogy: In the case where there are up to 50 children, 2 teacher-volunteers are allocated and where the strength is beyond 50 members, 4 teacher-volunteers are allocated. In case of a regular school, 4 subjects are compulsory. The main motive in case of STC, though, is to encourage the child to continue education. Majority of the children are interested in education. In STCs, children are not categorized by grades. Rather, low, medium and high-level groups are made based on subject knowledge. Initially, about 60% of the students would be in medium-level category and the rest are in the other two groups. Those in the higher-level group are given the task of teaching the moderate ones while the teacher works more closely with those in the first group.

The key focus is children from ages 11 to 14 years are to be mainstreamed in regular schools. The children are not given homework since parents are uneducated and would also be tired after their day's work. In case of children given to sibling care (mostly girls) one of the staff members sometimes looks after the younger ones while the older ones are provided education.

Assessment: As the teacher-volunteers follow the progress of children from close quarters, summative assessments are not as frequently held as in case of the regular schools. Quarterly and half-yearly exams are held and a different question paper is set for each of the student groups. The annual exam, though, has one common paper for all the groups.

Supervisory visits to the centres: The Project Director is supported by program managers. In case of Ranga Reddy, there are two program managers and each of them visits the 18 STCs under their purview once or twice in a month's duration. In case there is any critical aspect observed, a joint visit is made by the Project Director and the program manager. Apart from these, the Project Director also makes sudden visits to the centres.

STC teacher-volunteer meetings: Trainings are conducted twice a year. Meetings are held with the teacher-volunteers every month and their concerns related to day-to-day operations are discussed. In case there is any challenge with parent motivation in sending their child to the STC, the program manager pitches in and tries to resolve the issue with local influence and if it still does not get addressed, the Project Director comes in.

Curriculum: Initially, children are informally taught arithmetic, language and environmental science and as they grow interest in the subject content, regular textbooks are introduced.

Mainstreaming challenges: After mainstreaming, children are put in hostels (either Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya or BC/SC/ST Vidyalaya) and they attend the schools associated with the hostels. The children, understandably, have issues in adjusting to the new environment in the initial period – the food might not suit them, they might not be able to mingle with other children, they may feel homesick, there could be problems like bed-wetting. The STC teacher-volunteers are in touch with the children and the teachers of the mainstreamed schools during this period. They also make a few visits to smoothen the transition. They counsel children where required but despite these efforts, few of them might drop out. Those children are put in schools near their homes.

Suggestions: It was suggested that training period be increased from 1 day to 5 days and be conducted at least twice a year. STCs currently are semi-residential. Children come in the morning and are provided breakfast and lunch. The Project Director suggested that it would help if the STCs are made residential. Funding and financial compensation were key areas of concern for all the respondents interviewed. Currently only INR 2000/- is being provided towards rent. An increase to INR 8,000 to 10,000 is sought to afford renting of a pucca building with toilet facilities in a peri-urban district like Ranga Reddy. Teacher-volunteer honorarium is sought to be increased to INR 10000-12000, an amount, it was pointed out, would still be lower than that of teachers in regular schools (INR 16,000). Similarly, it was suggested that the office expenses be increased to INR 3,00,000 per annum and the salaries of the clerk, program managers be increased from INR 8000 and INR 18000 to INR 12000 and INR 24000 respectively.

5.7.3. Case 3: Special Training Centre – Gaya, Bihar

Background and Operational Procedure: The project started in 2018 and the STC, a residential one, was started by the labour department in 2019. Children that are rescued from child labour are brought from their homes and are educated in the STC. The centre has children in the age group of 8 to 14 years. It had 56 children, all boys, before it closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some children were enrolled in the government schools, some in private and some not enrolled anywhere.

Currently the labour department has not started this project for girls. The centre's staff consists of one teacher-volunteer who has B.A., B.Ed. and diploma in child psychology, one counselor who has B.A. Honours in Sociology, one coordinator who has B.A. in Mass Comm and one computer instructor who currently works as a teacher-volunteer because the children have not reached a level where they can begin to learn computers. The counselor calls up the parents of the rescued children and counsels them - about the centre, the importance of education and about the facilities at the centre and how their children will be taken care. When the parents are satisfied then they bring their children and register them in the centre. The role of the coordinator involves mobilization of children and bringing them to the centre based on a list of the rescued children received from the labour department that contains their addresses. All the children are exclusively the ones rescued from child labour and brought from their homes.

Initial criteria were that the child's name should have been registered in Child Labour Tracking System (CLTS) of the Government of Bihar and they should have received an amount of INR 25000 from Chief Minister Relief Fund (CMRF). Later the second criterion was removed as there were implementation issues. The children would be afraid to go back to work as a case would have already been registered. The initial six months period involved multiple challenges, and some of them continue to persist. The government officials too were not aware of how best to operationalise the project from time to time.

Monitoring and Feedback from Supervisors: The Supervisor appointed by the government comes and inspects the STC every 15 days. They check for the living conditions of the children, if the place is well maintained or not. They also check on the quality of food that is provided. Supervisors also attend few classes to check if the children are being taught well. A detailed report of the visit is then submitted to the labour department. There has not been any complaint regarding the facilities provided in the centre thus far.

Operational issues and challenges: Communication between the department and NGOs and between government functionaries is the first challenge. For example, the labour department initially said they would be bringing the children and the NGO would only have to run the centre. However, when the project started, the department passed on this responsibility to the NGO. Similarly, government officials like labour enforcement officers working in the district are not aware of the program. Teacher eligibility is another issue. It was not stipulated in the Expression of Interest and got mandated later. Similarly, the Labour Department handling this project wanted the organisation to be registered as a social welfare home. However, if it is registered in the Social Welfare Department, then there will be children with special needs for whom the age limit is 18 years, unlike in case of child labor for whom it will be 14 years. This would lead to two cohorts with different needs requiring service for different periods of time. The staff expressed that there is no clarity in case of some of these aspects.

Another issue is related to funding. The STC staff informed that there is no funding available for mobilization. Once the centre starts running, funds are disbursed on a per-head basis. This per-head figure is calculated based on a student count of 100 and since the student count is only 52, the amount disbursed covers the recurring expenditure but not the entire non-recurring costs. Fund release was another related issue. After challenges in the initial period, fund release was smooth for two quarters. There has been an issue of fund release after that salary disbursements have been affected due to that.

Mobilization of the students is another key challenge. It is difficult to convince the parents as their children were rescued from work and they fear police arrest if they do not take care of the children at home. And in some cases, where the parents are fine with sending their children, the children are not keen as they are addicted to marijuana and cigarettes and do not listen to their parents. In some cases, both parents and children are ready but they fear that the child could be trafficked again, pushed into labor and they “will not be able to bring back the children this time”. In a few cases, traffickers too create pressure as they lose out on potential labour, particularly, if the child is getting education and has a change in outlook and lifestyle. Many parents are satisfied with the financial aid (INR 25,000) their children received when they were rescued from child labour and in some cases, the parents do not trust the staff because of bitter experiences in the past when they have not received this or other scheme benefits that they were promised. There are also many parents who do not want to send their children as they do not want to lose their source of income. An approach that has helped with mobilization is where the STC staff visit the Child Welfare

Committee (CWC) when the children are rescued by Dhawa Dal (raid team). This enables them to have a word with the children as well as their parents which makes it easier to convince the family for getting the children enrolled later.

Teacher-volunteer qualification: Teacher-volunteers think B.Ed. is not of much significance for teaching in the centres as they need to teach basic education. They are recruited after taking some basic tests conducted by the NGO. If the NGO has to hire teacher-volunteers with B.Ed. qualification, the current salary will not suffice.

Approach of engagement with children: The staff felt that the children, initially when they come are not yet ready for studies. They are made to understand how important it is for them to stay at the centre and pursue studies particularly since the environment in which they were living is not helpful for their future. The staff felt that the children many times are a victim of bad habits and it is a tough challenge as they could be addicted to intoxicating substances. The teachers said they first mould themselves according to the children so that the children feel comfortable to talk to them and express everything they have been through. They also discuss the development made by other children. Children begin to settle in class once they start interacting with other children.

Staff training: There was a seven-day training organized of which five days were earmarked for academics. It was conducted by the labour department with the help of UNICEF and Bihar Education project (Bihar Shiksha Pariyojna). Training for the remaining two days was on motivating the stakeholders, and it was conducted by Kilkari foundation, a Bihar government project where any deprived child interested in arts or sports can pursue it further. The teacher-volunteers of the STC felt that they got to learn a lot of things during the training including activity-based learning, how children can be taught using games and activities so that they feel comfortable and do not even realize that they are studying through the process. They found it exciting because “the academic part used to happen anyway but it was a new way to teach through activities”, as one said. They expressed a need for the training to be conducted from time to time, preferably once in six months, so that it helps them to solve the doubts they have after practicing what they learnt. They felt it would also build their interest level and keep up the motivation.

Putting training to practice: One of the teacher-volunteers recounted the story of a boy who they taught. The boy was 13 years old as per his Aadhar card but he looked older than his stated age. Teachers were told in the training that when a child comes to the centre, whether he is of younger or older age group, they should not immediately start teaching him, but rather understand him, his temperament and his interests. When the child came, he was not moving from the stairs of the centre and he did not want to go for studying. He had been rescued from Jaipur and as one staff said, “he grew long hair, was wearing earrings and looked weird”. He felt he was being imprisoned again and he did not move in though the staff tried to explain. A whole day went like that and the next day when the staff spoke, he said he will not study even if he is killed. The staff were taught in the training to involve children in activities they like. So, they spoke to him and asked him if he

would help the cook and he agreed to it. He didn't know cooking but was still taken to the cook. He used to talk to the cook and help him with peeling vegetables. A week passed by like this and then when his mother came, he said that he wanted to go back home and so he was sent home - "he could not have been imprisoned over here at the center; the centre is for giving education". The boy came back again after a few days and "this time there was a huge difference". He did not want to go and cook. He said he wanted to go in the classroom and he started sitting in the classroom by his own will. He learnt to recognize alphabet, write his name, read sentences but by then it was Holi and because of the pandemic the centre had to be shut. The respondents said that the boy was slightly bigger so it was not possible to mould him by scaring him or by any explanation. They agreed to his wishes and that helped. This is how training was helpful.

Pedagogical approach and content: Children are divided based on their age - those who are in the age group of 6 to 11 years are meant to be in primary level and those from 11 to 14 years are to be in the elementary. However, as their academic level might not be in line with the age group, learning methods appropriate to their age are used and they are brought to the next level. First, the children are engaged in activity-based learning, then after discussions, they are gradually inducted into formal study.

A child is evaluated when he comes to the STC and based on his knowledge – reading alphabet or words or sentences, he is segregated into one of the four groups. Children are categorized in A, B, C and D and this does not depend on the age of the children. Children in category A are ready to be mainstreamed to regular schools. Category D includes the children who do not have knowledge of alphabets and do not even know how to hold a pencil. Children are promoted to higher category once they have been evaluated and are fit for moving to the next level.

The material used for this is provided by the Bihar Education Project (BEP) and is meant for school dropouts and those rescued from work. This special course has content for Hindi (3 books), English (4 books) and Maths (3 books) with two papers in each course meant for a duration of 2.5 months. If a child does not know alphabet, the course duration could take 2 ½ months and if a child has never held a pencil, it could take around six months to one year to help him complete the course. Children find Hindi and English tougher than other subjects as they shift from local languages to these. Grammar is a challenge for many. The concept of place value is a problem area in Maths.

There is a format that has been developed for evaluation of children and is done sometimes weekly, monthly and six-monthly. A progress record book for every student is maintained and their progress is shared with their parents. After training the children with Grade 8 textbooks, the attempt is to transition them to either a regular school or National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) or from the Bihar Education board.

One of the teacher-volunteers explained the approach in detail: "In the beginning when children come to us, we associate them with activity learning and through activity we teach them different things. Suppose we want to teach them counting, then if we teach them through games, they learn

it faster. We put up a pair and show them that we are walking in a continuous race, then we join the two people and they stop where they are. So, this way they learn counting of two. Next time we keep it 2.5, so two children would be standing and the third child would be half-sitting, so this way the children learn counting. As far as alphabets are concerned, we have many poems on ABCD and क ख ग which we have composed and through this method children learn quickly and easily through games.” Study material on the poems, stories and mathematics helps make it easier for children to understand. Interactions with real environment, like, to a park to teach about plants and to a road to teach about vehicles and transportation are employed to help children understand the topics better.

Challenges of socialisation: Children often do not want to stay back and therefore their retention is the biggest challenge. Initially children are quiet in the class and do not share much with others but teachers ensure that they are part of all the activities that are undertaken. Teacher-volunteers first try to work on the socialisation process before they get into academic process. They are not pressurised for studies. Rather, they are first made comfortable to adjust to the environment.

They try to provide children time and space to cope up with the new environment. They are in constant touch with the children to be able to support them psychologically. They talk to the children, try to understand their issues and motivate them to stay back and continue with their studies. They are engaged in various activities and are provided with things which he/she might not get at home. Different children take different time to adjust to the environment. Sometimes it takes more than two months to make children connect with studying. Gradually children adjust with their classmates and friends.

Teacher-volunteers also try to stop children from bullying others and sometimes it is a challenge when two groups get into a fight. It gets difficult to resolve the fight between them. Teacher-volunteers try to engage with the older boys and explain them that they must have faced bullying when they joined and they must have felt terrible about it and therefore they should not do the same with others. Teachers ask them to make the newcomers comfortable. Indeed, teachers give the responsibility of making the newcomer comfortable to the “most notorious ones”.

Children’s Health Care: Many children face health issues and the centre takes them to the government hospital and gets them treated. This has helped in building confidence amongst parents and is one of the reasons why parents show willingness to send their children to these centres. There was a child whose arm got fractured when he went back home. The doctor demanded a sum of Rs. 30,000 for the treatment. He came back to the centre and the treatment was done free in the Government Hospital.

Transition of children to regular schools: The centre helps the children to get their Aadhaar cards and other required documents so that it is easy for them to get admission in a regular school. There is help from the Government to children after they get admission in formal schools – like provision of mid-day meals, textbooks, uniform and bicycle when they are promoted to Grade 9.

Apart from the initial amount of INR 25,000 received from the government (to which only the child has access and gets to withdraw when he turns 18), these provisions help motivate parents to let their children be in schools.

Currently, there are ten children who were ready to be admitted to the regular schools. All the formal processes have been completed but the schools had to be closed due to the pandemic. Once the schools reopen, children will be attending schools and staying at the centre. Teacher-volunteers from the centre will drop these children to school.

Teacher-volunteer motivation: There is a kind of attachment the teacher-volunteers have with the children. There is a hope that children who come to centre will do well in life. They do not want children to face the difficulties they faced earlier. Teacher-volunteers who were interviewed expressed their concern about the situation of children during the pandemic. They expressed their disappointment with the fact that some of the school children had started selling vegetables to make ends meet. According to the teacher-volunteers, the project should cover many more geographical areas so that many more children have access to such centres. Also, if salary is received on time, it will keep up their motivation. Delay in disbursing salary is the biggest hurdle for teachers and staff. The organisation cannot provide salaries unless they receive the funds from the government.

Satisfaction of the Parents: Parents notice positive changes in the children when they meet them after a few months and therefore want their younger ones also to get educated with the same kind of facilities. However, the requests cannot be entertained as the government guidelines allow only the rescued children with FIR number registered in CLTS only to be admitted.

Required support from the government: The staff requested for clarity on the operational issues that come up. They also expressed there has not been awareness among the public regarding the programme. They want that the government, through media and social workers share the message at the community level that this is government's initiative. This would help the STC in the mobilization process where there is trust deficit among parents due to lack of awareness.

Case of Gaya

“As far as the labour department is concerned, in Bihar, there are 4 districts where STCs are working viz. Banka, Gaya, Patna and Jamui. These centres are run by NGOs for child labourers and not for the school children. Children are rescued through our Dhawa Dal, which has officials from different departments. With the help of the police department, rescued children are put into these STCs. Only child labourers defined strictly under the Child Labour Act are admitted. The children are given vocational and educational training and are enabled to go into the mainstream. Since the STC started on January 19 2020, they have not mainstreamed any child due to the lockdown, but their plan is to mainstream children within three years. If any child has any special

needs, there are counsellors in all the STCs who manage children's profiles, interact 1-to-1 with them and collect data on their mental status or any requirements they have on a day-to-day basis. According to their needs, children are given flexibility and can receive training according to their inclination and interest. Attempts to rehabilitate the rescued children through the CWC are also made. When children come from CWC to the STCs, then their educational needs, and age-appropriate needs in terms of education level and skills is assessed and the child's training is planned based on such an assessment.”

- Deputy Commissioner, Gaya

Chapter 6: Mainstreaming Child Labourers in Formal Schools – Main Findings

6.1. Introduction

As discussed in Chapter 5, the STCs are the key channel by which children between 9 and 12 years who are rescued from labour are prepared to transition to formal schools. The two years of preparation at the STCs is expected to equip the children to participate at an age-appropriate grade level in regular schools. The responsibility of admitting children to a school, either government or private school, rests with the NGOs running the STCs. The government schools are also duty-bound to admit the children who come through the STCs as per the provisions of the RTE Act. The process of getting into mainstream schools is not smooth and both children and teachers face a number of challenges. This chapter presents the main findings related to the process of mainstreaming of child labourers in formal schools. It discusses the way in which mainstreaming of child labourers is conceptualized in the three child labour hotspot districts and the processes and mechanisms adopted in these districts. It highlights the issues and challenges of mainstreaming at the level of schools and the issues in retaining the mainstreamed children in these schools. The findings are based on interviews with SMEs as well as interviews with school principals and teachers of mainstreamed government schools in the three districts. The chapter begins by discussing how the concept of mainstreaming and the transition of child labour from STCs to mainstream schools is seen by the SMEs and then describes the experiences of principals and teachers from schools that admitted former child labourers.

6.2. Perspectives of SMEs on Education for Child Labourers and Mainstreaming

Based on their experience of working on this issue, the SMEs shared their perspectives on education for child labourers. Some of these are critical of the concept of mainstreaming itself while others relate to the specific challenges posed at the systemic level.

6.2.1 Concept of Mainstream Education

According to one SME, the notion of considering formal schools as the mainstream education system requires critical examination because, one, it assumes that somehow mainstream is a ‘good’ thing and bringing working children into the mainstream is a ‘good’ thing. Second, there can be questions about how the formal education system can be considered to be ‘mainstream’ when a large number of children in that age group are outside schools. Therefore, the definition of what should be considered mainstream and why should it be considered mainstream needs to be

questioned. There is also a need to look at whether the mainstream education system, as it currently exists, is becoming a hurdle by actually limiting thinking about the nature of education and the right to education. This requires a more comprehensive thinking about education as well as its aims and purpose.

6.2.2. Educational and Other School Related Matters

For the past twenty years, the focus of the education system was on increasing enrollment, attendance but the focus is now shifting to learning and educational outcomes. Although government schools have better infrastructure than private schools, parents are paying fees and sending their children to private schools because education is an aspirational goal for poor families.

A few SMEs pointed to the hurdles in getting children admitted into the school. Although the RTE Act guarantees admission in government schools, schools require children to submit documentation such as Aadhar card, caste certificate and income certificate to avail some entitlements such as free uniforms, textbooks or hostel facilities. Some of the children getting mainstreamed in schools are orphans and do not have the required documentation making their admission a challenging matter. There is a need to ease the admission process and de-bureaucratize. Once the children complete their bridge course or special training, volunteers of the STCs need to make sure that all the required documentation and certificates are available which can enable smooth admission in the schools.

The children coming back into the schools are often school dropouts. In many cases, it is difficult to retain the children in schools and the blame is often placed on the child and their ability to cope when the real challenge is to prepare the school system to receive and retain the newly admitted children. For example, in Telangana, the regular curriculum has a component of special training pedagogy for children who have been admitted to the age-appropriate grades. The Grade 3 textbooks, for instance, will revise content of the earlier grades in first few weeks of school. This helps give confidence to children and as the entire class goes through the revision.

6.2.3. Teacher Training Programs

Some of the SMEs spoke about the role of teachers and their preparation for managing educational needs of a diverse group of children. Under SSA, the regular teachers are supposed to teach children who are mainstreamed during work hours and not after school hours. The teachers are supposed to come one hour before their regular class hours for preparation and they have to take the class for mainstreamed children at that time.

Teachers in government schools are trained and if given autonomy and independence, they know how to take a child from one stage to the next. There is a lot of diversity in classrooms. Children admitted according to their age in a particular grade are at different stages, they may or may not have any academic preparedness required for that grade and their capacities are different. Teachers

need to be supported by Cluster Resource Centres to manage and respond to the classroom diversity and facilitate peer-learning among children. However, currently the school system does not trust the teachers. The training programmes offered to the teachers need to listen to teachers ask them to suggest solutions rather than imposing top-down ideas on them. The teachers need to be asked “What is your problem and why are you not able to do?” They need to be given confidence by saying “We know you can do it. We know you are trained. Tell us what your genuine problems are.” The current experience is that if teachers come up with creative ideas like using craft or library books or computers, they are asked so many questions that they are discouraged from trying anything new. Furthermore, teacher training currently does not include any component on the lateral entry of children into schools and methods of working with out-of-school children, a gap that needs to be filled through future trainings.

6.2.4. Residential schools

Not all children are admitted to day schools run by the government. According to one SME, about three lakh children study in residential schools run by social welfare departments, tribal welfare departments and by the education departments in different states. The residential schools have been designed to address the issues of children living in remote areas where physical accessibility of schools is challenging. Children may not be in a position climb hills, cross rivers, walk through forests in order to attend schools. Residential facilities are of two types: one, where children live in a hostel and go to the nearest government school and second, which is a hostel-cum-school. In Telangana, a number of children from bridge schools or STCs are admitted into residential schools and these children also move from one residential facility to another. These residential schools have a formal and strict atmosphere, but that helps in retaining the children in the education system. There are also urban residential homes run by NGOs as Child Care Institutions (CCIs) under the JJ Act. In Telangana, they are 800 to 900 residential schools that running well. For 5000 seats, 35000 children write an entrance exam to get admitted. The residential schools are from Grade 5 onwards and there is a huge demand from the minority communities and girls.

6.2.5 NIOS and Open Schools

The National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is seen by some organisations as an important solution to the education problems of working children. Some of them, like Pratham, have an affiliation with NIOS and can conduct exams for Level A, B, C i.e., Grades 3, 4 and 8. Children who are not able to attend regular schools take these exams and are able to return to schools. Since the ultimate aim is to get them in the mainstream school system, the NIOS system does not force them at the age of 13 to sit in a class, but allows them the freedom to pursue their interests and activities. The biggest benefit of open school is that, children can select their favourite subjects and study them. For instance, for Grade 10 board exams, there are 71 subjects which children can write the exams for and they need to select any five subjects. In the regular schools, the subjects

for which teachers are paid are the only subjects that are taught and offered, while a range of subjects are not taught and alternatives are not provided in regular schools for board exams.

While the experience of one SME with NIOS was positive, another SME pointed to some of the difficulties in getting NIOS work for child labourers. The open school system is meant to provide access to education for those who do not have access to education and this is their foundational objective. However, as another SME pointed, in recent times, the NIOS system is working best for the middle class and upper-middle-class and among young people defying mainstream education. It is providing them the choice to seek education online. But it is excluding working children. One SME shared that the open school admission form excluded children at every level. For example, it asked for names of parents, birth certificates, Aadhar card, which is often not available with children in CCIs or those living and working on the streets.

Moreover, the scholarships awarded by the state to children coming from SC and ST communities do not cover vocational education. Furthermore, in Karnataka, the vocational education curriculum is not available in Kannada. The open school system, which is supposed to cater to the disadvantaged children, is also almost fully online. Recently, they hiked up the fees and children cannot afford it. The SME pointed that their organisation had to go through the Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) and tell the authorities that the children who had come through the Child Welfare Committee (CWC) of the JJ Act required scholarship. They were required to furnish a certificate that the children were orphans which was not possible since children in CCIs are not necessarily orphans but are those who are considered to be in need of care and protection of the state. The organisation managed to get a one-time grant provided as scholarship and is currently working to make this a systemic change. There is also a need to provide budgets, improve accountability of the open school system in terms of the groups they are catering to and their outreach, especially among the disadvantaged children and communities.

6.2.6 Vocational Education and Training

A few SMEs spoke about the need to look at vocational education and training as part of the mainstreaming. After the children complete their course in the STC, they are admitted in the nearest Nagarpalika or Zilla Parishad schools. Children are also given training in the skill-based courses based on their interest for example, beauty parlour for girls, mobile repairing and computer training for the boys. The Apprentices Act, 1961 excludes children under 14 years of age and there is no issue in training children in the age group of 16 to 18 years through apprenticeship. However, existing vocational courses available in market admit only those above 18 years of age, including for example, hospitality industry or mechanical industry. If a 16-year-old completes a six-month vocational course, they would not be hired at that age. Hence, it is important to categorize vocational courses according to the age category, duration of the course and the age at which graduates can be hired in the job market.

The skill development courses run at CCIs also need to be assessed. Children are given 2-month driving course without having learned to actually drive since they are not allowed to leave the CCIs. There is also a lack of support system in terms of getting placed in jobs after completing the training courses. There should be a Board for skill development training.

The current education system is rigid and continuous from Grade 1 to 12 and if a child cannot continue schooling, they have no option but to drop out. As one SME pointed, it is important to help children leave or rejoin the mainstream schools without labeling them as disabled or dropouts. The current education system has a single-entry point and a single-exit point but the National Policy on Education, 2020 aims to create multiple entry and exit points in the education system.

Need for Follow-up Mainstreamed Children

Nirmala (name changed), was once a child labourer. After she was admitted in a formal school she did well in her studies. After Grade 12, she was admitted to a medical school. Soon her success story was covered by the media and became available in the public domain. In the medical college, her classmates found that Nirmala was once a child labourer. They started harassing Nirmala, calling “*Ye to Bal Shram Wali Hai.*” Her fellow students and also the professors of the Medical College were destroying her confidence.

When follow-up is done of mainstreamed children, it is important to gauge the mindset and visit the campus to see what is happening. Even in formal schools, during the initial days, the children always know that my STC teacher is around. So even if they face any difficulty, they can inform their STC teacher. The children need to be protected against discrimination in the mainstream education system.

- *A Subject Matter Expert*

6.3. Experience of Principals and School Teachers with Mainstreamed Children

When the child labourers transition to the regular formal schools and participate in classroom transactions with the rest of the children in their age-appropriate grades, there is a period of adjustment and challenges. The interviews with teachers and principals from select government schools in Thane, Ranga Reddy and Gaya provided a range of insights. The three districts are presented as separate cases.

6.3.1. Case 1: Thane district, Maharashtra

The principals of the schools where child labourers have been mainstreamed shared their experiences and perspectives.

Admission and enrolment of children

Regarding admission and enrolment of children in these formal schools, children are admitted to classes based on their age. They are asked to fill a form and admission is provided in age-appropriate grades. Children are brought to these schools by NGOs who also submit the required documentation viz. Aadhar card, birth certificate and other necessary documents. The schools do not pressurize them to submit any documents, and admits children with whatever documents are provided to them. Wherever documents are not available for proof or verification, forms are filled by getting the required information from parents and children are admitted based on those records. The schools admit children at their age-appropriate level i.e., depending on their age they are admitted to the grade they should belong to, irrespective of what they know or their academic preparedness. The schools follow the RTE requirement of admitting children between 6 and 14 years, even if the child is working at the time of admission. One of the Principals interviewed said that the NGOs bring these children to the school. In addition, schools also conduct a survey and identify children who are out-of-school and admit them. Most of the children come from the neighborhood.

Resources funded by SSA

The school provides uniforms for girls. Boys who belong to SC/ST category and who have yellow-coloured ration cards also get uniforms. This is funded through the SSA. Schools also take additional efforts for these children. The children come from very poor families and the school reaches out to NGOs who can provide them with materials required to come to school, like uniforms, books, etc. Sometimes teachers also support the children in their personal capacity. The school does its best to provide incentives and retain the children who are admitted. They organize social programmes and sports so that they are interested in continuing and attending schools. For the girls, the Municipal Corporation also provides clothes, the school also provides them clothes, but all the Principals indicated that more support is required to help them in retaining these students in the school. The schools expect support from NGOs for school bags, raincoats and also try to get it from donors. Otherwise, as one Principal indicated, children get wet during monsoons and the schools do not want them to fall sick and miss attendance.

Extra efforts taken by the school

The schools provide additional attention and remedial training to children mainstreamed in the school. Children admitted directly to age-appropriate grades are given extra classes, if needed. The

class teachers conduct these extra classes one hour before or one hour after school hours. This is extra work for the teachers. Teachers have been trained to teach out-of-school children and additional books and teaching material is provided to the teachers.

Challenges in retaining the children

Other than the special extra classes taken for the children, children also attend regular classes with the other children. Sometimes the children are bored in the extra classes, then they are taught in the class itself. Given their earlier experiences, children do not want to sit for long in the class. Some of them drop out because either they migrate or they have to mind their younger siblings. One Principal observed that the parents are not interested in education and the home environment is not conducive to studies. Children are often irregular; they come for a few days and then stay absent for some days. In such cases, teachers have to go for home visits and get the children back to school. One of the Principals noted that although the school is open to admitting all children, it also causes social challenges. Children are mischievous and need to be taught and counselled. Sometimes the schools have to call parents to talk about them about their children's social issues.

Other challenges

The Principals of all schools interviewed appeared to face similar problems. They felt that the government should give what is required by the schools. There is a dumping ground next to two schools and that is leading to school drop-out and illness among children and adults. Parents do not send the children to school because it stinks so much. Everyday 100 trucks are sent to unload in the dumping ground. Another important problem is that there is no water in the school because the pipes are stolen. Further, there is also no watchman. When the school reopened after the lockdown period, it was found that a lot of the infrastructure material was stolen, wires were ripped and stolen and pipes were removed and taken away. Petitions were made to all authorities but so far there is no solution. Some of the children are irregular because they are poor and they have to look after younger siblings. Many have the responsibility to fill water that comes in their taps during school hours and they have to wait at home to fill the water. The schools allow the children to come in late if they have such responsibilities, since they do not want the children to drop out of school. Children come from slum areas and they sometimes do not live in the same area and move to another area. So, it becomes difficult for the school to track these children's homes. The schools advise them to stay in the same area at least for one academic year and also communicate to the school if they are moving to another area.

Data gathered from the school teachers where the children are mainstreamed from the STCs revealed the following.

Admission of children

The teachers said that the schools provide age-appropriate admission to children who come to the school. Following the norms of RTE, the schools are required to provide admission to children anytime of the year and they are admitted according to their age. Admitting children who have never been to school becomes a challenge because they do not know anything and they have to be taught with greater effort than what is put in otherwise. Children are given admission directly. The teachers take some time activities for the children and then admit them.

Many of these children are school dropouts, are working and brought back to the schools again. Many have migrated from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. The NGOs survey and identify child labourers and out-of-school children and bring them to schools. They may not bring the required documents but they bring the children and the school enrolls these children. Children also get admitted through referral by other children. The NGOs have trained these children before enrolling them to these schools.

One teacher shared that the school offers admission to any child coming from anywhere and admits children in the age-appropriate class. They are asked to fill the forms for records and if they do not have any proof of documents, the school gets the guardian of the child to provide a written document with the details of the child. Eligibility tests are conducted to ascertain the level of learning of the child and accordingly admitted to the class of that level. The guardian's consent is acquired to admit the child to a particular grade. Sometimes a certificate of the child having completed training in the STC is also obtained.

Training for teachers

Teachers get the training about how to teach the children who are mainstreamed and how to give them additional time. However, teachers are not aware of the process of bringing such children to school or enrolling them to school. One teacher said that teachers are not given training but they get inputs, material and are told how to teach.

Efforts taken by the teachers

Some of the children who are admitted do not have the basic knowledge and hence the teachers teach them basics like alphabet and numbers, one hour before the school starts. The teachers also go to the neighbourhood area and pay home visits. The teachers had also accompanied an NGO doing a child labour survey in Gayatri Nagar, after which the NGOs brought children and parents to the school. They also had 2-3 parent meetings, but they did not get a positive response. Since there is poor attendance, meetings are kept on Friday so that most parents can participate. The NGOs also take extra classes for children when they are falling behind. Children use their own workbooks. Sometimes, the NGOs provide writing material, uniform and organise picnics for the

children. Due to parents' lack of interest, the school teachers have to keep sending messages and following up with them to ensure regular attendance in school.

The Nagarpalika has given responsibility to NGOs which seems insufficient. In Zilla Parishad (ZP) schools, everything is done by ZP. The schools get materials for children from NGOs and other private donors and committed NGOs come forward to support the schools.

One teacher shared that the children with special needs are identified and given one to one and half hour of extra coaching after school hours. They are taught in separate rooms besides being taught with other children in the regular class. Counselling is also done by teachers for the mental readiness of these children. Parents are also counselled in order to ensure retention in schools. If the teachers are not able to deal with special needs children, they ask parents to enroll them in schools catering to children with special needs.

Learning characteristics of the children

The teachers observed that the older children are able to learn faster. The younger children need time to catch up at primary classes, and they are allowed to take that time. 10-year-olds can catch up faster, and once they catch up, they get interested in studies. Children are seen to like Marathi and Math, and they like to play outside. Not all children do homework that is assigned to them by the teachers. The teachers handle the children carefully because they fear that they may drop out if they are scolded in the school.

Challenges in terms of irregular attendance

Children do not come to school regularly, and when teachers go to their house to look for them, they find that they have gone to work. As one teacher said, children are not regular to school, if they come on a particular day, there is no guarantee that they will come to the school the next day also. They may also not even be at home. When teachers go to their homes to find out what happened, the parents also try to avoid the teachers and stay away. Children mainstreamed in schools come from poor families. When teachers ask the parents to send their children to school, the parents ask teachers if they can give them money to compensate for the income forgone due to the child being sent to school, instead of work. It may be noted that a stipend is provided to all children attending the STCs, but when the children are mainstreamed in the formal schools, no stipend is provided by the schools.

Challenges faced in transition to mainstream

Socially, the children get adjusted and get along with the other children. But if they fall behind in studies, then they lose interest. According to the teachers, parents do not value education and teachers feel that they should be taught the importance of education. The schools provide uniform

and midday meals to all the students. But children from the STCs are admitted later after the academic year begins and hence, they do not get uniforms that are distributed based on the previous year's student count. As a result, some children drop out because they do not get uniform like other children. Two schools did not have water facility. There is no water even to wash plates from the midday meal. The school gets a tanker water but that water cannot be given to children for drinking. Hence, children are asked to carry water from home. The teachers have to keep following up with the children and the parents. The schools have educational material required but they do not have projector or other technology to use in the school. One teacher said that the main problem with getting these children into regular schools is that they need a lot more time to come to the same level. They also have problems because they are also working as child labourers. Even though the NGO gets them to the school, their parents put pressure on the children to complete some work target and earn every day. The parents have no educational background and the children have to study themselves. Another teacher said that when these children are mainstreamed, they sit in the class like a block and are not engaged, and teachers have to struggle a lot. The most challenging part is that children are not regular to school. Teachers feel that if they come regularly, they can make efforts and would be able to show results. Teachers have to give extra classes and bring them at par. They have to be taken ahead and taken to the next grade but it is not possible for teachers to achieve this because of children's irregularity in attending schools.

Other challenges

One teacher pointed out that children face huge challenges during mainstreaming. Their academic foundation is weak compared to other children in regular schooling. There are times when they drop out because they are not able to cope with the academic challenges. They also are emotionally challenged and they feel an inferiority complex compared to other children.

Children need to come to school on time. Although the NGOs get the children admitted, the parents are not interested due to poverty. The entire families go to the dumping ground to gather waste material and sell it to earn money. Muslim children miss Fridays and then again Saturdays they do not come, and such breaks do not help in their learning.

There is a dumping ground right next to the school. The schools have been approaching all authorities to resolve this issue, but there has been no response. The school has given written letters to remove the dumping ground but that is not removed. It stinks in the rain and there are lots of flies, and the rainy season is difficult for them. The dumping ground came up 8-10 years back. When the garbage is burnt, it emits smoke that comes in the school and the classrooms. In the rainy season, the area around the school stinks and during summer the garbage is burnt affecting everyone and causing health problems for all, including children.

The teachers spoke about a lot of issues with their school. The area is a slum and the community is that of daily wage workers. Both boys and girls who have been working and were out-of-school

are brought in. They adjust well with the other children in the school. The teachers accept the provision of the RTE Act, but the process of identifying these children, getting them to school, searching for children who do not come regularly to school and such other tasks appear as a burden to the teachers. Teachers feel they are overloaded with these tasks of continuous follow-up of searching so many children. Teachers feel that once the children are brought to the school and their continuous attendance ensured, they will make sure that the children will learn. The teachers opine that the responsibility of bringing children to school and looking out for them continuously should be shouldered by the NGOs and their responsibility is to teach these children.

One teacher revealed that parents do not know what to do when the child comes to school or how to take admission. This particular school is a Marathi medium school and hence language is an issue that the children find it difficult to cope. Teachers have to teach in Hindi and take help from parents. Children fall behind in their studies. The teachers said that the parents are not interested in education as they are all fighting for survival – they are working entire day and night, living in small homes, and are not interested in studies. Children do not have social awareness; they are from outside the state. Some have family responsibilities too. A lot of children stay back to look after their younger siblings. Another teacher revealed that children drop out when they migrate, since it is a textile and loom factories are and parents go wherever there is work. The Nagarpalika does not fulfil the responsibility of providing stationery and other material to the children. The schools do not get the approved budget for education. Parents are poor and they do not have anything to support the children and their education. They do not have school bags, notebooks and without these resources' children lose interest in school.

6.3.2. Case 2: Ranga Reddy district, Telangana

Data gathered from the principals and school teachers in Ranga Reddy reveal the following.

Admission and enrolment

There is a teachers' forum for children's rights working for past 23 years. The forum inducted 100 to 120 children in government schools where they are posted as teachers. The enrollment in government schools is declining; hence the school admits these children and trains them through special classes and workbooks. The children coming from STCs are different from the regular children. The teachers train them in a different way since they do not have minimum level of competencies to participate in the learning. For a few, it takes about 6 months and for some it even takes about a year to reach a certain level of learning. The Head Master (HM) feels that since these children undergo the bridge course for only three months, their basic minimum level of learning is not acquired. The HM opines that a period of at least 6 months in the bridge course would be beneficial for these children. Children are admitted based on their date of birth and Aadhar card

details or any certificate from the STC. The maximum age of children from STC is about 14 years. Some are orphans, some have single parent.

One teacher revealed that a test is conducted for identification of letter, varnamala, spell check, basic math, oral test and some written test to ascertain the level of the children. There were no mainstreamed children in the Grade 1. There were three girls in Grade 3 in the year 2017-18. There are no dropouts from among these children.

One of the HMs said that the school admits children based on their age. Children have been enrolled since the last five years; earlier students dropped out of school. The school inducts students in Grades 2 and 3 and then shifts to another school in Grade 5.

Training for teachers

The teachers reported that they do not get any government training. One HM reported that there is no special training available, but teachers put their own efforts to help these children. The teachers feel that they do not require any training to teach these children. They may need to include games, quizzes and other activities to keep them interested in learning.

Efforts taken by the schools

During the teaching-learning process, the children from the STC are provided more time as compared to the regular children. Remedial teaching is provided for about 45 minutes for children from the STC, using different approaches and methods of teaching and giving additional activities and work. Some of these children grow up to become teachers and doctors. One HM reported that the STC volunteer also comes regularly to check how children are doing and what they are being taught. They sit through the sessions and supervise.

One teacher said that children are provided complex training with formative tests, model classes once a month by about 60 *mandal* teachers. The teachers meet with parents to share the progress and problems of children and try to find solutions for it together. Special care is taken for orphans and children with single parents. Clothing is also provided to them. If children sleep in the class, the teachers have to handle them with care. They allow such children to sleep. These children are given more homework and more teaching and sometimes they are more active than regular students. One of the teachers revealed that there is no difference in teaching content or pedagogy, just that a little extra care is provided to students from the STC. Sometimes the assessment format differs for these children although the exams are the same for all children.

One HM reported that the morning section is regular classes and from 2:00 to 2:30 pm remedial classes are offered for the children from STC. Government teachers put a lot of effort. Two special

teachers are deputed to understand their needs and follow-up with them. They are all taught in the same manner as regular students and the same kind of homework is also given to them.

Challenges

Behavioural differences are observed in these children from the STC as compared to the other children in terms of dressing, talking, hygiene, neatness etc. Clothes of these children are sometimes not washed and they may not have bathed. They also differ from regular children due to their native dialect; hence it becomes difficult for them to interact with other students and teachers. Gradually they learn to mingle and adjust. They are academically less interested, eventually they start valuing the teachers' efforts to teach them. One of the teachers said that children are at times moody and take time to mingle with others, but once they are into games, songs, studies, etc., they start mingling with others. Another challenge reported by a HM is that children feel inferior because regular children bring extra curry in *dabba*, they bring money, etc. and these children are not in a position to bring these things. The school tries to motivate these children. These children generally hang out in their own groups, sit together. They behave well and as such there are not many social adjustments. Even the teachers do not have to make any extra adjustments. A few of the children dropped out, parents took them back and they never returned to school. Some of the teachers thought that the children would drop out in 6 months. But they conducted regular follow-up and children did better after completing studies and some even got jobs as constables, and conductors.

Suggestions

Subject-wise teachers in STCs would help to build competencies of children before they are mainstreamed in schools. Play method of teaching these children is more fruitful and should be adopted.

6.3.3. Case 3: Gaya district, Bihar

Teachers and Principals from three government schools in Gaya district were interviewed and the data obtained is summarized below.

Admission and enrolment of these children

The total strength of children in these schools range from 250 to 350. Information about the number of children mainstreamed in these schools between 2018-19 and 2020-2021 is provided in Table 6.1. In 2020-21, only one school had admitted ten children from STCs. In 2018-19, two schools had together admitted 100 children from STCs.

Table 6.1. Admission of child labourers in school, Gaya

Year	Number of children		
	School 1	School 2	School 3
2020-21	10	0	0
2019-20	8	0	0
2018-19	-	50	50

Age range of these children is from 10 years to 13 years. In two schools, mainstreamed children were studying in Grade 4 and in one school, children were in Grade 9. Children were admitted in the beginning of the year and were referred by the District Education Office. The children were admitted directly after taking eligibility tests for the specific Grades. All three schools conducted special activities to ensure the smooth transition of students to the school.

The teachers said that the number of children enrolled in their respective classes ranged from 25 to 40. Teachers were not aware of the number of children mainstreamed from STCs in their classes for the present year.

Efforts taken for mainstreamed child labourers

One of the schools does not conduct any extra class, but conducts extracurricular activities while other two schools conduct extra classes one hour every day in addition to extracurricular activities. Seven out of nine teachers mentioned that the special activities help to ensure the smooth transition of these students to their schools. All the three schools offer additional support to the students who are mainstreamed from the STCs or bridge schools. The kind of support they provide ranges from providing study and sports materials and exempting students from developmental fee.

Training for teachers

Out of nine teachers interviewed, two had not received any training on how to handle students who had never been to school or had been working children, while other seven teachers had received seven days training for the same from the SCERT, Patna in the year 2018. The teachers who had undergone the training said that they were taught the pedagogical techniques to teach these children and were oriented to the reasons for dropouts, strategies to retain them and bring them back to school. Information about children's background, age-range, and economic conditions were given to teachers in case of those who were mainstreamed from STCs/bridge schools in their classes that academic year. According to the teachers, children had learnt to read and write in the mainstream schools.

Teaching Methods

Seven out of nine teachers said they adopted different methods of teaching the mainstreamed children/adolescents as compared to the rest of the class. They used different methods like art integrated learning (ATL), *khelo-padho*, activity-based learning and so on. Four out of nine teachers also said that they made changes to the content of the syllabus to teach children who are mainstreamed. They use experiential methods by making children learn from the environment. Four of these teachers felt that children were able to get engaged in the classroom and keep pace with the rest of the class, while three of the teachers felt only a few children were able to stay engaged in the classroom and keep pace with other students in the class. Seven out of nine teachers said that these children were given similar kind of tasks as given to the regular students of the class. Seven out of nine teachers had interacted with parents of these children.

Challenges

Schools have to make a few adjustments by paying extra attention and giving more time to students. Children too had to make a few adjustments though they eventually start doing better. There had been no dropouts in two of these schools whereas a few dropouts were recorded in one of these schools and poverty was assumed to be one of the probable reasons for these dropouts. One of these schools attempted to talk to the children and their parents to motivate them to come back to school.

A few of the challenges faced in educating children mainstreamed from STCs were irregularity of children in attending the school, low socio-economic conditions, poor performance in academics, lack of interest in studies because of their poor orientation. All nine of teachers interviewed were not sure if they were equipped with any skills to deal with such kinds of challenges and were unaware of the kind of training required to prepare teachers to deal with mainstreamed child labourers.

Suggestions

The principals recommended extra attention to students for teaching and different teaching methods to ensure smooth mainstreaming and retention of children from STCs into schools. When teachers were asked to give their view for the kind of support required for smooth mainstreaming and retention of children coming from STCs into their schools, they said that vans need to be provided to Tola-sevak (village servants) to bring children to school and teachers should be given freedom. They also mentioned that the government needs to make full-time permanent arrangements for these students and track them regularly.

Chapter 7: Challenges and Systemic Alternatives for Strengthening the Mainstreaming Process – Main Findings

This chapter provides a bigger picture of the approaches and perspectives on mainstreaming child labourers gathered from Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) and officials interviewed. It paves way to get insights into the challenges faced in the overall process of mainstreaming child labourers and the systemic opportunities and possibilities that can be capitalized for optimum benefits of child labourers.

7.1. Vulnerable Conditions of Child Labour

The interviews with range of stake holders provided a distinct visualization about the nature of child labour as well as the approaches and perspectives on mainstreaming child labourers. The SMEs pointed out the specific conditions in which children work and specifically vulnerable groups of children that need to receive attention from the government as well as civil society.

Part-time work

There is an increase in child labour in part-time work in different parts of the country. For example, all those industries that were employing children in large-scale in Tamil Nadu, for example, Beedi industry, silver works in Salem, leather works, Sivakasi fireworks and so on, there are many children working as part-time workers now, even in part-time bondage. Some of them go to school and along with school they work for at least 5 hours a day in the morning and evening. In such a situation, schooling is meaningless because they cannot study or absorb the educational processes. They are already very tired when they reach the school and are not attentive. So, once they complete 18 years, they go and become full time workers.

Family-focused work

Many children are working in family-based work. The most important thing is the family itself is vulnerable. In many states of India, women and men are not getting equal wages. The minimum wages come under the labour department. In many states today, the minimum wage is not fully implemented. In high-risk families, the wages are not being paid and they do get enough ration. Most of the child labourers from Uttar Pradesh (UP), are either Muslims or they belong to Dalit or Mahadalit communities. They are also educationally backward. The child needs to be seen in the context of the family and the vulnerabilities of the family that leads children to participate in family-focused work.

Unaccompanied Child Labour

The children get into the labour market right from young age of 5 or 6 years while some children join at the age of 10-11 years. Unaccompanied children are more likely to be exploited children than children who are accompanied by their parents. But in sweatshops, whether it is in Bhopal or whether it is in Jaipur or whether it is in Mumbai, where children are kept in a big group by the employer, children are more vulnerable and are more likely to be subjected to exploitation.

Farm labour

Girls are especially sent to work on farms and are engaged in household work. Every year, in November and December, children from rural areas stay absent from schools. They go to the farms to help their families. The school teachers also tend to ignore it quietly, because they are also on the farm during that period.

Children in Entertainment Industry

In recent times, there is a big participation of child artists in reality shows and web-series. The question is if STCs are required for these children and if so, who should build a system for that and who should take responsibility for that? One SME pointed that by thinking of these children are celebrities, we ignore their fundamental rights related to childhood and the possibility of its impact on children's life cannot be ignored.

Migrant Child Labour

Migration is a critical issue in India. The numbers vary from 20 million to 30 million and according to some claims almost 50% of the rural poor in India migrate, specifically as interstate migrants. So even in the states where the child labour is declining, the incidence is increasing because of the migrant child labourers. As one SME pointed out, the NCLP programme or the whole special training category of programs do not address the issue of migrant workers. It has no provision for enrolling migrant child labourers from among migrant workers. Another issue is the movement of population from one state to another. If you put a Bihari child in a local STC in Tamil Nadu, language difficulties arise because the child may know only Hindi or another dialect. The SSA and the STCs need to address these issues through coordination based on specific local contexts. For example, in Erode, Coimbatore and Tirupur, most of the migrants are from UP, Bihar, and West Bengal. The source state and the destination state both have the responsibility for education of migrant child labourers and specifically with regards to providing teachers to teach these children in the mother tongue. This needs to be provided in case of seasonal migrants, regular migrants as well as long term migrants, otherwise a large section of children will remain deprived of their right to education, only because their families are migrants. The focus of NCLP structure should shift on to the migrant workers into Western India, Southern India, Punjab, Haryana, and Himachal Pradesh. A large proportion of migrants come from Hindi-speaking states, Odisha and West

Bengal so it is a matter of providing teachers in these three languages. In the destination states, the migrant workers, their location, their period of stay should be identified and solutions found to see how the children can be given special training and then enabled to go back to school once they go back to their homes.

One SME pointed that forty percent of children migrate with their families and more than 55% of the children are not enrolled in schools. Many of them are engaged in taking care of their younger siblings. There is also migration across borders and most of them come through an agent who goes to villages that are poverty-stricken or flood prone, where there is hunger and unemployment and dysfunctional education system. In such cases, the parents send the children through the agents to work in large cities or towns. One of the SMEs pointed out that in recent times they have also seen a lot of children coming from Madrasa who reach Mumbai and are then sold into the labour market.

The situational factors leading to migrant child labour has led to the creation of seasonal hostels in Odisha. In the brick kilns, usually there is a worker unit consisting of two adults and one child. Such a labour unit is recruited by middle men and taken to other places to work in brick kilns, and typically the unit will always have a child. If the family doesn't have a child, they will borrow a child from the neighbor to work in their unit. The child is used for certain types of work in a brick kiln like flipping up bricks and walking over the bricks. When Actionaid found this, they wanted to retain the children from such units back, so that they do not migrate with the labour unit to work on the brick kilns. Such children were to be provided education and this led to the conceptualization of seasonal hostels for children. Community care centers were set up so that children could stay back and not migrate for work. This model was replicated by the Government of India under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan as seasonal hostels and now this is being used in many parts of India. More than 1 lakh children are retained and prevented from migrating for work. In sugarcane factories in Maharashtra, a large number of children are prevented from migrating by enrolling them into *Sakhar Shalaas*. These seasonal hostels were later converted as special training centers. The number of children is more in brick kilns because despite the fact that they are sent to school, children come back from school and go to work. At the village (source site), they generally stay in a hostel and do not work. But at the destination site, children go to the school in the day time and come back late at night where they help their parents in brick kilns.

Earlier hostels were separate and the child used to go to the regular school. But later the government brought a specific curriculum and adopted a strategic intervention for these children because they were all from areas where there is high migration, particularly distress migration. As one SME pointed out, one of the reasons why children migrate is because there is piece-rate wage system which continues to prevail in India especially in brick kilns, where there is a volume of work that needs to be performed and since there is no specification of the labourers that are required to complete the work, invisible family members are inducted to complete the work. Piece rate wage system promotes child labour and children migrate with the families to participate in

labour. Seasonal hostels prevent children from entering into labour from an early school going years. However, children's needs are only partially met even with STCs at destination work sites.

Girl Child Labour

According to the SMEs, although seasonal hostels are available, girls do not avail seasonal hostels because: (1) The girls are not safe if the parents are not around, so they move out with their parents, because there is no one back home to look after. (2) We also have the gender issue. The preference for boys to study and be educated is much more. (3) Thirdly, girls are given the responsibility to take care of the siblings at the work site and help mother in cooking. These are the factors for which girls are prepared, because both the parents work and someone has to cook and look after the smaller children.

Children and Railways

Railway Childline works in railway stations to rescue children and runaway children and bring them back to the families. One of the SMEs conducted an evaluation to see what happens to these children who are rescued from the railway station. For example, in Salem, Erode, Khatami etc., there are a lot of children who come for work, and these are older children and above 14 years. The Railway Childline rescues them and sends them back home but about 60% of these children run away again and come back to work.

Childline is a government program and through that, organisations have been able to train police officers, railway officers, government officials, and influence the education department to take these children. A lot of children coming through railways come in groups of 10-15 children with agents. The NGO workers are present at the railways station from night to morning and know which train is coming into Mumbai or Delhi, and their counterparts from other railway stations inform them about the presence of children on the trains. The rescue work is done with the help of the railway police. Similarly, children are tracked on bus-stands. In Uttar Pradesh, there are help-desks at some of the bus-depots so children are prevented from boarding buses to Mumbai or Delhi. One of the SMEs pointed out that the children are rejecting the initiatives run by NGOs and it is important to hear their voices. In a study that they conducted, it was found that 54% of the children on railways had not run away or were not trafficked but they had come with their families. But the entire approach to children on railways was to take them and put them back in their villages. There were issues since there was nobody in their village, since the whole family was with them. In addition, a large number of children were in constant touch with their families. They had not run away but had come to make a livelihood.

Adolescent Labour

Universalization of elementary education has been mostly achieved but at the secondary school level, there is a sudden drop in school participation and children are dropping out. Most of the

older adolescents get into work. The 2016 amendment in the Child Labour Act prohibits child labour in hazardous work between 14 and 18 years. However, there are no education facilities, vocational education centres or accessible schools for this age group. Therefore, as one SME pointed out, unless one is able to provide rehabilitation, better life skills or create opportunities for adolescents to move upward, there is no point in rescuing this age-group from work. Without any alternative, rescuing them and putting them in temporary shelters or sending them back to the families or asking poor family members to come to the city and take their adolescents home would amount to harassment of the poor. This is one of the reasons why there is very little being done for adolescents who are engaged in work. Although the STCs are also expected to provide vocational training, this is not taken up at all.

There is no proper mechanism to bring back adolescents into any stream of education, either vocational or formal education system. In such a situation, one of the SMEs asked if one should be looking at a system that can provide adolescents with safe working options. Currently, the question is where are the safe jobs? Who is providing for safe jobs? If they are allowed to combine work and education, where are the evening high schools? Where are the remedial learning courses? This requires a commitment from the state to respect right to education. The new National Education Policy 2020 talks about adolescents and their education but neither the government nor the NGOs have been able to provide a solution to the problems faced by adolescents in terms of both education as well as availability of safe jobs.

Families at Risk and Inequities

The SMEs pointed out that it is really very difficult to remove ‘hard core’ child labourers and put them back in schools. Those who are already earning do not want to leave and the families may also not want them to leave work and forego wages, especially since many are at the brink of survival and at-risk.

One SME said that some children were removed from bonded labour in tomato nurseries and rose nurseries in Krishnagiri district in Tamil Nadu and were successfully placed in STCs. However, for children in remote areas and in areas that are most difficult and hard-to-reach, the process of mainstreaming children in regular schools does not work. The schools in remote areas may be dysfunctional. Teachers living in towns find it difficult to travel to the schools located in remote areas and may remain absent from school. As a result, schooling in remote areas is often of poor quality and hence unattractive to retain children who are mainstreamed.

Child labourers are at-risk and there is a need to map their status against specific risk indicators along with the risks faced by their families. As one SME pointed out, “unless one conceptually understands and responds to the vulnerabilities and risks faced by the families, the children are bound to go back to the same families and same situations without any change. Programmes for child labourers need to hence focus on vulnerable and high-risk families because families face devastation in events of COVID-19 epidemic or natural disasters such as floods.”

Another SME underlined the need to work with vulnerable families so as to prevent them from sending children into work. This requires adoption of a community-based model. Policies should be such that they do not give any scope for children to drop out of schools or get into child labour. One of the SME pointed out that complex set of inequalities emerge as one goes down in the social ladder and this is found to be happening in all communities.

7.2. Challenges in Mainstreaming

Some of the key issues and challenges in mainstreaming child labourers in formal schools after their preparation in STCs are discussed below. These are based on interviews with SMEs, government functionaries, field-level STC staff as well as Principals and teachers from government schools in the three field sites. At the macro-level, these challenges pertain to lack of convergence, inter-departmental coordination and issues with rescue and rehabilitation of children. At the micro-level, issues faced by the STCs, Government schools and specific challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic are highlighted.

7.2.1. Lack of convergence across children's issues

Because of compartmentalization, children's issues are seen in a fragmented manner and a holistic and comprehensive response to children's issues is lacking. Working children are seen as children in need of care and protection under the JJ Act, and some of them get placed in custodial care of the Child Care Institutions (CCIs). For example, in Hyderabad, working children who are rescued and who cannot be sent back home are placed in the CCIs for residential care. Based on the Individual Care Plan (ICP) that is required to be prepared for every child, the CCIs are responsible for providing education and training and also for taking steps for their rehabilitation. However, there is little or no involvement of the education department in offering education to children in CCIs. One SME said that a large number of children who come to work in the cities or live on the streets are in constant touch with their families because they are there to make a livelihood. So, the decision to consider them as children who need care and protection and putting them in a CCIs needs to be questioned. She said, "if every poor child in India is considered to be in need of care and protection and is put away in institutions, there will be no space... already there is no space". These children have found ways of making a livelihood, they had created safety networks for themselves, they are supporting each other and saving money. The education system, both formal and nonformal, is not able to cater to these children. The CCIs are not able to offer quality support to the children, but none of the parents are questioning it because they belong to migrant communities and they are just happy to have a child under a roof with some access to education.

One SME with a long experience of working with urban working children observed that the non-institutional alternatives explored by the Child Welfare Committees (CWCs) are limited. In some cases, the children might only need a fee scholarship to go back home and continue schooling. But the problem is that when there are large number of children that are brought to the CWC, the CWC

does not know where to place the children. She said, “the procedures of rounding up children needs to be also questioned because officers should know locally if the children are from families or they are involved in beggary mafia and who needs to be placed in the CCIs and given state protection through institutional care. If police start picking up all children in work and putting them in CCIs, it is not sustainable.” In the COVID-19 pandemic situation, it has been a lot worse because “it will basically mean every poor child. Even if the child is produced before the CWC, what is happening is that in the first round, children are given a warning and allowed to go. The warning is that you should never work or else you will be caught again and locked in the CCI until 18 years. The children often say they would not work and go to school instead.” In cases where there is abuse, exploitation and violence against working children, the CWC steps in and may have to offer short- or long-term care for children although long-term care is not explored fully.

In several places, especially in rural areas, the CWCs do not have access to organizations that can function as “fit institutions.” In urban areas, the CWCs have access to “fit institutions” but these are also typically full capacity. In addition, more children keep getting added when there are police rounds. Among the institutionalized children, those who are rescued from child labour or from any abusive situation may be sent by the CWC to regular school outside the premises. These children are not sent to NCLP-run STCs. Once the CWC repatriates children to their families, it may recommend that the child is sent to a STC or nearby school.

However, most cases of child labour are not referred to CWCs but are taken up by the labour department. Only in cases where the working child is in a very abusive situation, like cases of domestic child workers who could be sexually abused, children are produced before the CWC or sent to long-term care homes, if the family is not suitable.

In these cases, mostly parents are voluntarily sending children to work. In most cases, parents and children work together. So, there is no question of somebody complaining and taking them to JJ system. Only labour department can inspect and rescue the child. Otherwise in most cases, the JJ system and the District Child Protection Office do not take any proactive steps. Only when somebody complains, then the JJ system steps in and responds.

7.2.2. Inter-departmental coordination

Offering special training to mainstream child labourers is the responsibility of two departments, labour and education. Senior functionaries of these departments pointed that both level of functionaries have their own understanding about special training of the child labourers. The labour department is concerned about the abolition and safety of child labourers. For them special training is one among the many other mechanisms to achieve these goals, whereas for the education department it is a way to ensure mandate under the RTE Act 2009.

The functionaries of the labour department of Bihar indicated that they have received a free hand to select their instructors, teachers and trainers, and they accordingly choose their trainers. The

only condition provided is they should have a B.Ed. and the vocational teachers must be vocationally trained, in case of Bihar. However, the functionaries working under the education department have an understanding that the curriculum of special training must be aligned with Section 29 of the RTE Act. It should enable children to cope with the load of school curriculum. It also has the imperative to connect knowledge and skill to life of child labourers outside the school. It also emphasizes moving away from rote learning, and constructively engaging with the school experience, school time table, and finally adopting the culture of the school. The functionaries of the education department also point that the children should be exposed to assessments as part of school culture and this could be supplemented with teacher preparation on alternative modes of assessing these groups of children. Despite differences in the idea of special training, the functionaries of both departments agree with the requirement of special training. They are also in view that the curriculum should be linked with the mainstream school curriculum. There is also lack of communication and convergence among functionaries from labour and education departments and between the departments and NGOs running the STCs. One of the junior functionaries of the labour department said “processes related to STCs are decided at the headquarters level. I am not aware about this. But there are certainly senior level officers involved in deciding the curriculum and needs of these special children who have worked as child laborers and accordingly the programme and curriculum gets decided. This is followed by the NGOs.”

On the nature of child labour itself, the functionaries of education department appeared to view children unilaterally as children or students, whereas functionaries of labour department had a more nuanced understanding of diversity among child labourers – for example, those working as rag pickers, or working at brick kiln sites, working in unorganised garment sector, agricultural labourers, etc. – having their own contextual challenges and requirements.

7.2.3. Issues with rescue and rehabilitation

The SMEs interviewed have been involved in rescuing child labourers since past decade. Organisations like Pratham have rescued almost 48,000 children over past four years. Rescue operations have involved raids and also just talking to the employers about not employing child labour. The children were repatriated from Mumbai to their families in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. The biggest challenge was that the state governments insisted that these were not children from their state and indicating their inability to do anything about the situation. Another challenge was to plan for what the children would do once they are sent back. There is a need to look into rehabilitation through a comprehensive policy. This needs to be an inter-departmental activity at the micro level. The Police/Home Department and labour department is required to enforce the law, women and child development department and the CWCs are involved because of the JJ Act provisions. An NGO which knows the area and has local support is also involved. But the labour department has no funds and has no bandwidth to rehabilitate the child. Secondly, the labour department can put a case in the court but they and the police together should be able to prove that there was an employer involved. Many a times employers say that the children were visiting them

for a holiday or they may claim that the children are already 16 years old and furnish fabricated birth certificates or Aadhar cards. If a medical examination is done as per the procedures of the JJ Act, age of the child can be determined. However, the child who is rescued is torn between different departments. The labour department's duty finishes when they rescue the child. Police duty takes over when they register an FIR. Women and Child department who are supposed to be taking charge of rehabilitation of the children have no bandwidth and have hardly any money to actually rehabilitate these children. In places where the CWCs, the State Child Protection Societies and the District Child Protection Societies are working well, there is progress in rehabilitating children. But there is no standardized protocol and so there is no surety about the success in rehabilitating the children who are rescued or saved from atrocities. This appears as a big challenge.

The cases never stand in the court because by the time the case comes to the court, the child has already grown up or he is already in some place in Bihar or he has gone and got some job. He is not at all interested in telling you what happened to him 5 or 10 years ago. The other technical problem is whenever there is a raid or rescue operation, the FIR is filed for the group because say, 15 children were found to be employed. Individual FIRs are not being registered but the court requires individual FIRs. The conviction rate is extremely low. There are a lot of small legal aspects which are sometimes very frustrating and very difficult to bring justice to these children.

The Child Labour Rehabilitation Fund is expected to collect money from the employer and it is expected to be used for rehabilitating the rescued children. However, it is not known who holds the Fund and what is it being used for. Some of the proactive CWC members in Mumbai made the employers give National Saving Certificates to give to the rescued children.

Even though the JJ Act says that within three months each child should be repatriated to their families, several children stay in the CCIs for longer duration because they are not able to clearly communicate their address or even when an address is provided, the families could be untraceable. Sometimes there is a nexus between parents and the employers or 'bogus parents' are produced who demand the children be repatriated. The same children are seen going back into labour. Although the NGOs may be involved, the children need to be sent from one CWC to the other CWC or from one government department to another government department, and it has taken years for these protocols to be set in place and for authorities to see children as children and not as children from a particular state. As one SME said, "the NGO support is expected on one hand, but on the other hand they are expected to refrain from taking over the government responsibility".

7.2.4. Issues faced by the STCs

There are three key stakeholders in implementation of special training, the departments of labour, education and NGOs running these STCs or vocational education centres.

As one of the functionaries from Maharashtra mentioned, there is a well-established process for special training which includes the following steps:

1. Surveying child labourers (age 9-14 years) in the district
2. Enrolling them in STCs or vocational education centres
3. Providing special training up to two years
4. Enrolling them in a school nearest to their residence

However, some of the respondents pointed to procedural hurdles and lack of communication as key issues. The procedure for enrolling children is that name of the child should be registered in STCs. If they have an Aadhar card, their age can be identified because the child has to be in the age of 6 to 14 years. One respondent said that “when the STC was started there were many challenges from the government side because they were also not aware of many things and they did not know how to run this project and some of those challenges exist till date.” One of the STC coordinators said “in the initial six months no one knew how to implement the project and the officials kept making changes from time to time.” In cases where the STCs that have started in the year 2018-19, they continue to be recognised until 2021. But due to the pandemic, the centres were closed as per official orders.

The other challenge is availability of requisite funds for the running the STCs. Funding and financial compensation were key areas of concern for all the SMEs interviewed. There was also a mention of the impact of the pandemic on the education of children from marginalised sections. They pointed to some implementation issues in the operationalization of the project. Communication between the department and NGOs and between government functionaries was seen as a challenge. Teachers’ qualification was also another question raised, since B.Ed. was not seen to be of much significance for teaching basics in the centres and the salary paid was not commensurate with the qualification of teachers.

The STCs operating in the three districts selected for the study also provided quite a number of insights. Children coming to STCs hail from very poor and marginalized families. Hence there is a need for enriching the curriculum based on the contexts of children. The SMEs shared the challenges faced by the STCs. They spoke about children dropping out because of not being able to adjust to the STCs or parents’ disinterest in their child’s education. They specifically made a mention of children with special needs. These children are not sent to the special school and not enrolled in any school initially and eventually they go to the STCs. The STCs are not equipped to handle children with special needs.

The SMEs emphasized the need for training teacher-volunteers but also communicated the non-feasibility of hiring trained teachers due to various reasons. The curriculum material was also considered not relevant to address the needs of out-of-school learners. The SMEs expressed a need to link the curriculum of STC with that of the regular schools so that children will be able to academically adjust better in the mainstream school. They also referred to various organizations

like Pratham, that enable children to improve their competency level required for the age-appropriate admission to mainstream schools. They also referred to a few schools in some states that use a lot of innovation in pedagogy to ensure joyful and flexible learning for these children. They also shared a few success stories of a few of the STCs. The SMEs also spoke of many STCs closing down yet highlighted the potential of STCs and bridge courses in increasing the possibilities of out-of-school children coming back into the education system.

The SMEs believed that children have a lot of potential which need an external support and motivation to develop their talents. They also recommended increased trainings for STC teacher-volunteers and suggested the residential type of STC for improving the overall process and working of STCs. Increase in office expenses, teacher honorarium and salaries of other officials were also a few other suggestions provided by the SMEs. Clarity on operational issues was expected and awareness among the public was suggested. Overall, responses from various stakeholders reflected the potentials of the STCs and the mainstream schools in the development of children coming from the world of work.

7.2.5. Issues faced by Government Schools

The responses from the stakeholders who are directly associated with the mainstream schools revealed many challenges and opportunities in the transition of child labour from the special training centres to mainstream schools. The respondents also have provided a few suggestions that they felt could facilitate the smooth mainstreaming of these children.

Admission and enrolment of children in the mainstream schools followed the process as laid out by the norms of the governing organizations. Though mobilization of resources has been observed to a large extent, additional support and resources from the NGOs is expected by the mainstream schools. Additional efforts are being taken by schools to admit children who have been out-of-school and retain them despite the social challenges faced by schools from the surrounding contexts in which they are situated.

Quite a number of challenges are faced by schools in terms of the demographic location of the schools, poor economic conditions, migration of families, attendance rate of students, lack of awareness of parents, transition of these students from special training to the mainstream schools. Children's level of learning is different from the regular students; hence teachers have to put in extra efforts to bring these students at par with other students. However, teachers expressed optimism in educating these children provided their admissions and attendance are ensured and if they are able to retain them in mainstream schools. Training for school teachers is found to be inadequate and hence suggestions for provision of more relevant training to the mainstream school teachers has been made by the stakeholders involved in mainstreaming child labour.

Another major issue faced by the Government schools is that the mainstreamed children find it difficult to cope with studies and the demands placed on them at the higher grades, since they do not have a strong academic foundation. Children who are enrolled in school are not able to go with the level expected in the class they are enrolled in. So, children whose age requires them to be enrolled in Grade 5 may be still enrolled in Grades 1 or 2 because the child may lack the capacity to cope with higher grades and teachers can provide limited time children who are directly placed in Grade 5.

As one SME pointed out, in Karnataka, specific guidelines have been formulated for running the STCs because the NCLP STCs have not worked. The age-appropriate admissions did not work well as children drop out after being enrolled. However, in places where NGOs are playing an active role, children do not drop out. In early years, the Bihar government invested in launching 600 bridge courses and also invited experienced NGOs to provide hand-holding and support. Based on its long experience of mainstreaming child labourers in formal schools in undivided Andhra Pradesh, MV Foundation sent 25 people to set up these bridge courses in Bihar.

One SME indicated that unless one works closely with the teachers, both at the level of the STCs and at the level of schools, child labourers may never come back to the school. If the teachers insult these children and make remarks about their clothes being dirty, or their way of eating or their ability to cope with studies, the children will not come back. For the children, freedom is very important. It is also important to set better parameters for selecting teachers for the STCs. If some teachers are interested in doing something different for the students, then such teachers should be supported and trained to teach what children would like to.

7.2.6. Issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic

The SMEs pointed out that a lot of children had started working in during the pandemic. The cases of girls getting married at a young age have also increased. Besides domestic violence, SMEs also pointed out that child abuse incidence had increased. As one SME pointed out, “parents may also not send their daughters to school or move them into government schools from private schools.”

The National Commission for Protection of Child Rights issued a recommendation to the CCIs in eight states to send back children to their families and although this was contested by several NGOs, some children were sent back. But as one SME questioned, “if these children could go back to their families, why were they in the CCI in the first place?”

During the lockdown, with all the institutions and shops shut, the situation of children living on streets and migrant children without families became challenging. One of the SMEs said that children were not able to get food or earn any money. So, children were picking the liquor bottles, collecting the leftover liquor and drinking it to tide over hunger. Some were stealing the copper wires of dysfunctional bore wells and were caught by the police when trying to sell them. They were left high and dry in starvation and hunger and there is no data on how many children died

without any help. One SME said that some children were collecting medical waste from shoulder-high heaps of garbage.

The National Resource Centre on Child Labour (NRC), right from the first lockdown opened a Whatsapp group and connected with all the Project Directors and on a daily basis was tracking information, requirements of relief material, linking it to Aadhar card, coordinating with District Magistrates (DM), Block Development Officers, Revenue Department authorities and other functionaries. In many places, children were visiting the STCs daily to check if any kind of meals were being provided. The NRC informed the Project Directors to intervene and with the help of DMs ensure that the children were not being booked on foraging and other activities that the children engaged in to address hunger. They also mobilised local-level sponsors to remedy the situation. The COVID situation was further aggravated by natural calamities like the Nisarga and Amphan cyclones that resulted in loss of shelter for most children. Even some of the STCs were damaged during these calamities. Children who were sent back to their families were also tracked but in the rural areas there was no employment during the lockdown which resulted in acute poverty and starvation for many families. Besides food items, the families also required nonfood items to beat the risks of COVID.

In Agra, there was a case of 12-year who died out of starvation as they did not have any leather work jobs to do. They were into shoemaking and leather work and there was no work and no income. Many children lost their parent/s and became destitute during this time of crisis. The case of a 13-year-old girl who worked on chilli farms in Telangana was covered by the media. She started walking home along with other migrant workers but died just 8 km before reaching home, because of dehydration.

The SMEs were also concerned about the learning loss that will take place since the children have missed on almost an entire year of academic preparation. Thus, children on the brink of the school system may not return to school at all and they will all be vulnerable and at-risk children.

According to the SMEs with grassroot experience, the pandemic saw almost 20 years of the work done by organizations getting undone and systemic issues got aggravated to extreme degrees. More number of children have now got added to the out-of-school population. Not being provided the mid-day meal which has been a core need, raises crucial questions regarding survival. Furthermore, due to criminalization of working children, they may not want to be counted as being in the workforce.

7.3. Systemic Alternatives for Strengthening the Mainstreaming Process

Education is a right of all children and all working children have a right to education that meets their contextual needs and helps to realise their full potential. The existing interventions of mainstreaming child labourers in government schools through their preparation at the STCs is

unable to achieve these educational objectives, given the challenges discussed in the earlier sections. The study explored ideas and insights from the SMEs, government functionaries and staff from STCs and schools about the opportunities and alternatives available at the systemic level for strengthening the mainstreaming process. The main findings on the opportunities and alternatives they identified can be categorised at two levels: first, the macro-level systemic alternatives, including use of area-based approach, example of community work in Bihar and strengthening prevention and regulation; and two, micro-level systemic alternatives including capacity building, use of innovative intervention design and provision of vocational training and safe work for adolescents.

7.3.1. Area-based Approach

The current approach of the STCs and the schools is fragmented and does not leverage institutions and actors in a given area. Given the legal and empirical linkages between education, child labour and child protection, it is important to track every child in the 6-18 years age group. As three SMEs pointed out it is the responsibility of the gram panchayat to do the tracking in the rural areas and in the urban areas, it should be the responsibility of ward members. It is important to break down the function into the lowest level of denominator when doing a tracking program. The gram panchayat can maintain a register assigned to each age/year (0-year-old is one page, one-year-old is on one page, 2-year-old is on one page and so on). In a particular area, say it is a gram panchayat or the unit is a gram panchayat or a cluster of gram panchayats, there needs to be tracking of every child, in school and out of it, on a fortnightly basis. One of the SMEs pointed out that their premise is that “every child in a government school is a potential drop out and every child out-of-school is a potential student”. Therefore, tracking focuses on ensuring that the child in school doesn’t become a labourer. There is a need to follow an area-based approach of tracking every child in and out of school. As one SME pointed, “there are no other shortcuts to it.” For example, if a gram panchayat has about 20 births in a year, then for that age group the register will show only 20 children, and these will then be tracked. If a 7-year-old child is not in school, the gram panchayats can talk to the women’s groups, Dalit groups, Adivasi groups, Anganwadi worker, or an ASHA worker. If that village has a child protection committee, they can all go together to the parent and ask why the child has not been coming to school. Sometimes the Anganwadi worker could say that she would take the responsibility to take the child to school. There will be a list of people in the gram panchayat who can follow up on children who are out-of-school and bring them back in school. Some could be due to ill health, some may have dropped out because there is a new sibling that is born, some have been trafficked or are working, there could be many reasons. These local stakeholders can decide how to resolve these issues locally.

Tracking children is an important task and is required under the RTE Act, however there is still lack of clarity on the role and the tasks involved. As one SME pointed out, it is important to define the role of the gram panchayat and its main responsibility in getting every child into school. As per the 73rd and 74th amendment of the Constitution, these bodies are empowered but require

training on how to maintain registers and use it for taking local action. The sustainability of changes at the local level can happen with community-based work with the existing schemes, working with cadres like Tola Sevaks in Bihar, working with Self-Help Groups, women's groups, small-savings schemes groups, so that work is not done in isolation. The SMEs suggested that it is important to plug-in wherever possible with like-minded individuals at the local level through complementary schemes and programmes.

7.3.2. Community Work in Bihar

Similar to area-based approach, community work in Bihar on child labour provides an interesting alternative to ensuring community involvement in strengthening the mainstreaming process and providing children with the support required to continue their education. One SME pointed out, that the community work approach in Bihar rests on the Tola Sevaks. The Bihar government came out with this concept to have two special people in every village who are responsible to get enrollment done from the out-of-school children and to also make sure that the child is learning. The Tola Sevaks do extra teaching with the school teachers. In such cases, there may be no separate STC but there are two people dedicated to work with children who have been admitted to the school after being out-of-school or child labourers. Thus, the school becomes a place where these STCs operate and then the catchment from where children are brought in can be much larger. Instead of one STC where the teacher-volunteer conducts a class for 50 children, her responsibility would be to get these 50 children or 80 children who can be from the scattered catchment to the school. The regular school teacher who is there as part of the formal school system, then covers these children and the follow-up, community-connections, ensuring regular attendance can be monitored by the teacher-volunteers who would otherwise run an STC.

A multi-department coordination or convergence between departments like women and child welfare, labour and education is critical for such intervention. There could be dedicated teams of volunteers for bringing children to schools. For example, in the Dharavi slums, there could be one person responsible for 5000 to 7000 households and his/her responsibility would be to make sure that there is no child engaged in labour. They need to work closely with the government including police to make sure that the child attends the school. These volunteers can become extensions of teachers. Currently, the teachers themselves are overburdened. Since this would be a local person from the same community, trust can be established easily. This arrangement would work well for teachers since it would provide additional support because once the children are enrolled these teachers would require additional resources to look at children who are lagging behind. Dealing with diverse and large classes would become easier for teachers because they would have two Tola Sevaks or two teacher-volunteers available in school to look for a population of 100 or 120 children. However, one of the challenges is that currently the Tola Sevaks and even the teacher-volunteers are contractual and are not paid as much as the teachers and even the Bihar government had to face the issues of Tola Sevaks being paid only 25% of what the teachers are paid. A similar demand for increase in pay has also been raised by the volunteer teachers of the NCLP centres.

7.3.3. Prevention and Regulation

Given that mainstreaming is an approach used only after the children have missed schooling, the respondents highlighted the need to prevent child labour and children dropping out to enter the workforce and regulating the issue at the local level. If the community decides that no child will be missing or children should not leave the village, it can help prevent children migrating into the cities looking for work. As one SME shared, in Bihar, UNICEF with some organisations is able to conduct child tracking. The Mahila Sangathans are also involved, and the women have taken the ownership to say that no child from the village will go to child labour camps. If there is a problem in a family, then they go to these women and they tell them that about their problem. They are around 14 lakh blocks like that all over Bihar giving loans to families, money for seeds etc. And then at the state level there is a monitoring committee headed by the Labour Secretary in every state. At the district level, it is headed by the District Collector or the Deputy Commissioner or District Magistrate, with members drawn from different departments. It is not only for monitoring but also converging the efforts and benefits of various schemes. At the village level, they know which children have migrated to which place, the families where they are going. Are they moving along with relatives and villagers? Are they moving out with strangers? So, they have the know-how, right at village level and they have to converge interventions with district child protection unit.

Another SME suggested that the gram panchayat can be empowered to take action on child labour cases so they do not have to wait for assistance from the labour department. If the matter cannot be resolved at the gram panchayat level, the case can be taken to the block level panchayat. The SME suggested that it is important to work through the democratic levels and then horizontally through the concerned department.

Since the 2016 amendment to the Child Labour Act has recognised employing child labour as a cognizable offence, the police have to proactively act, especially in the case of migrant trafficked children. The Standard Operating Procedures guide the process of identification, rescue, relief, repatriation and rehabilitation and reintegration, the constitution of the district task force, use of PENCIL portal to monitor and track, not only every child but also the effective functioning of the STCs.

One SME suggested that the District Child Protection Units (DCPU) can employ a child labor protection officer or child labour elimination officer in the DCPU and define the role they need to play even at the sub-district level.

7.3.4. Capacity Building

Currently, the V.V. Giri National Labor Institute (VVGNI) imparts training on the pedagogical methodology and conducts sensitization and awareness programs on child labour legislation,

policies and programmes. At the national level, teachers, implementing agencies, Project Directors, program managers, project society members, Child Welfare Committees are provided training to ensure better implementation and convergence. The funds are available and cannot be re-appropriated to any other head. So, it is mandatory that the funds are utilized only for imparting training. Apart from this, trainings are conducted for STC teacher-volunteers at the district-level through multiple agencies including NCLP societies, education department and NGOs. Although a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of training and capacity building programmes for functionaries working on this issue is not available, interviews with NGOs involved in conducting such programmes provided useful insights into how this component can be strengthened.

The aim of the capacity building programmes should be to empower and facilitate autonomous functioning. As one SME said, “System doesn’t trust the teachers. It is not just for the out of school children and age-appropriate learning you need teacher autonomy. You need teacher autonomy for all aspects of education. There is such a lack of trust between the system and the last person in hierarchy. How do you build that trust? It has to come only through community mobilization and through pressure.” Another SME involved in teacher training said, “You give autonomy and independence to the teacher. You tell the teacher about their duty and functions and then the teacher will decide the right course of action for the child. It cannot be a centralized course thrust from above. Each child has dropped out at different stage. Each child’s capacity is different...you start with the assumption that the teacher can do and is doing it all the time in the class. There is diversity of children in the class and we are forever making decisions from the top. You have to send a message to the teachers recognizing their autonomy, independence and telling them that they can do.”

The trainings need to focus on the relationship between the teacher and the child. One SME indicated that the teacher is last in the hierarchy in the education department and the Dalit girl child is last in the social hierarchy and “the system has done everything to see that there is no conversation between the teacher and the child. They have depicted that the teacher is against the child. There should be alliance between the two units that are last of the hierarchy about their real issues because this alliance will transform the system.” The SME pointed out how they were able to bring in the change in the schools they worked with. They encouraged the teachers to share their problems with the parents and the community and once that happened, the community began respecting and trusting the teacher’s efforts. The SME said, “once you build that trust then teachers know at least they are being recognized by the community. The government doesn’t recognize but the community is recognizing the teachers. They are accountable to the community and they start performing because no teacher likes the child to fail in the class and no teacher likes pushing out a child from the school”. Along with the teachers, the capacities of Head Masters need to be built for planning and running the school freely. Another SME indicated the need for shifting the paradigm of trainings and listening sensitively to the teachers and Head Masters by asking questions like “what would you like to see your school as” and then supporting them to change the status quo and achieve their vision.

7.3.5. Innovative Intervention Design

One SME recognised that even though records indicate children are out-of-school, they have aspirations, “it is not that they do not want education. I have not found a single child who says they do not want to learn. But they do not necessarily want to learn the way they are taught or the things that they are taught right now.” This view necessitates reviewing the current intervention design of the STCs/bridge courses mainstreaming children into formal schools and improving it based on some of the innovative design ideas shared by the respondents. One approach would be adding child labourers to the age-appropriate class in STCs or neighborhood schools. The special training can be delivered by teachers earmarked for this purpose within the school premises. The teachers can be held responsible for facilitating all the pedagogical activities related to special training during normal school hours. Children requiring special training may sit in a separate place while developing their basic skills (literacy & numeracy) in the school premises for both the primary level & upper primary level (pull-out classes, where the children are pulled out of the class depending on their need). The children undergoing special training must be put in the regular classes in case of social and natural science classes (pull-in classes, where children go back and sit with their age-group peers). The frequency and variety of classes that the children receiving special training would attend can be increased gradually until the children are fully mainstreamed. Thus, the model envisages a gradual integration of children into the formal school rather than a sudden change from an isolated and informal STC to a formal school.

A review of successful interventions leads to the following alternate possibilities:

- The need for a preparatory phase where the children are familiarized with the school environment
- The use of modular approach where the subjects are organized in different modules and children progress through these at their own pace.
- Modular and thematic approach: The traditional subject boundaries are broken down and the curriculum is developed in thematic modules for the social sciences and sciences.
- Focus on teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy skills as children have experiential knowledge but lack formal skills.
- A system of drawing parity with the formal system so that teachers are aware of when to help children transit into the mainstream system.

Some of the alternative strategies for curricular implementation that emerged from the study are summarised below:

- Materials have been developed mostly for the primary classes. This material is usually the school textbook in a simplified and condensed form. However, children working as labourers may come with prior knowledge but may not have the formal literacy and numeracy competencies.

- Learners receiving special training can participate in all other school activities like prayer, partaking midday meals, sports and games and in various types of cultural activities like drawing, drama, recitation etc. along with other learners. Teachers can facilitate the whole process and emphasize on equity and social integration as envisaged under the RTE Act.
- One teacher, earmarked for this purpose, could take care of the children undergoing special training, familiarise with the children and make them comfortable in the school environment. During this period, the teacher can explore the skills and potential of the children in a non-threatening personal interactive manner.
- After this, a one-to-one baseline assessment can be done for each child to define their competency level in each area and accordingly the teacher can decide on the learning materials and the level for the children individually.
- After the baseline assessment, learning plan and pedagogic material can be used for each individual child from the point where the learning level of the child has been assessed.

Another approach that emerged from the interviews was exploring use of digital curriculum and offering the entire special training package digitally. One SME suggested that “we can give the children the whole package which has a digital curriculum. They can use it for 6 months. After 6 months, when they reach the desired level of competency, they can take a test and the NGOs can take the children back to school. I think this can be a solution.” This approach will bring flexibility and provide skills to the children making use of recent advancements in use of education technology for providing quality education. This would need to be facilitated by NGOs and would require offering technology infrastructure to the children. This aligns with the need expressed by the schools as well as the STCs.

The third approach for strengthening the mainstreaming process that came from the interviews was the use of libraries offering multi-media education. One SME shared how their organization had started libraries for children before the COVID pandemic. Library cards are provided to children and they have access to several types of learning material. She explained how they have little reading cards that talk about health, about ‘going to school is good’, the advantages or disadvantages of child labour etc. They also have films on child labour which are viewed by children coming to the centres. Given that the STCs currently are resource-poor, provision of high-quality innovative material can go a long way in improving the quality of education provided in the STCs.

7.3.6. Vocational Training and Safe Work for Adolescents

As two respondents noted, upward extension of the RTE Act to include secondary education is required if adolescents have to be mainstreamed in the school system. Currently they cannot go back to school since secondary education is not free and is not easily accessible. Although the the

policy requires that rescued adolescents rescued are enrolled into vocational training centres, such centres are not widely available. Moreover, adolescents are allowed to work in safe jobs and therefore several respondents identified the need to mainstream older children and adolescents in vocational training centres. For the age group from 15 to 18 years, there is nowhere to go because the STCs do not cover them, schools do not admit them and vocational facilities are not easily available. The respondents suggested that there should be two streams of mainstreaming where older children and adolescents can be included and provided more skill-based courses based on the market requirements and less of school education.

However, vocational training requires material investment and most NGOs do not the wherewithal to have a fully equipped vocational training center. One SME said that existing facilities are basic and do not provide state-of-the art hands-on training facilities. This opportunity and alternative to address the issue of adolescent child labour requires support from the Government for large-scale vocational development, especially catering to adolescents who are engaged in work.

One of the SMEs pointed that since it is possible to actually monitor work provided under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) because it is in public view, adolescents should be allowed to do that work. The labour department can monitor the working hours and safety of the work done. This will also prevent adolescents who are not able to access safe jobs from doing very hazardous work.

Chapter 8: Conclusion and Recommendations

The present study was undertaken to investigate the issues and challenges of pathways of mainstreaming child labourers in education, and to explore field level alternatives and solutions for improving the mainstreaming process. The field work for this study was undertaken during the COVID-19 pandemic, resulting in virtual data collection which placed certain limitations on the study. This study examined the ‘preparatory’ end of the mainstreaming process which focused on the STCs and the ‘receiving’ end which focused on the formal schools that admitted the former child labourers. Interviews with district functionaries and the subject matter experts allowed gathering of insights into larger perspectives within which the mainstreaming process has been taking place, the challenges involved and systemic opportunities and alternatives for strengthening the mainstreaming process.

This chapter summarizes the key findings of the needs and gaps in the functioning of the special training centres and the mainstreamed schools and provides suggestions and recommendations for optimizing the process of mainstreaming child labour from the special training centres to the formal schools.

Key Findings and Recommendations

- Special training for child labourers poses a challenge of positioning the process of bridging as an integral component of the system, with specifying age and grade enrollment of children. The STCs are not only about enrolment of children in schools but also their role is critical to ensure that the child adjusts to the formal school system. It is no longer an invisible pedagogic engagement that, government, NGOs and other actors perform to strengthen the outreach of the formal school. For the government, the STCs that are established have an inherent component in their flagship programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan or now the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan. But this is rarely reflected in the sustainable financial norms applicable to the STCs. It is recommended that the existing flagship programme of Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan must explicitly address special training of child labourers through residential centres or schools or vocational training centres and provide adequate financial allocation for supporting teachers and teaching learning materials for children.
- It has been pointed out that special training poses a specific challenge to the system, given its operational nature. In some cases, issues of dominant pedagogy have been a major concern in sharp contrast with a more contextualised child-oriented pedagogy that demonstrates relevance, flexibility and innovativeness. It is recommended that teacher-volunteers are empowered as teachers to innovate their pedagogical design based on the

needs of the learners and availability of local resources. This would require intensive capacity-building of teachers to function autonomously while being accountable to broad pedagogical goals that are prescribed by the government.

- Although special training is recognised under the RTE Act, there is a lack of compliance to standardized norms related to teacher qualification, training and remuneration. The teacher-volunteers are ad hoc employees, poorly qualified and unsure about their own jobs and careers. The role is seen as peripheral and their identity as teachers is not acknowledged. The professional role of teachers delivering special training needs to be recognised and they need to be supported and viewed at par with the regular teachers.
- The special training for child laborers stands in isolation and is alienated from the formal schooling on the one hand and from the communities on the other. As the findings show, the STCs operate merely as a time-bound projects or as special schemes. There is a need to adopt a longer term and systemic vision and place the STCs within the regular school system. This requires the government to view special training as a mechanism to ensure children's access to the school system and increasing the responsive of the school system to the needs and contexts of child labourers coming from diverse socio-economic situations and displaying multiple levels of skills and cognitive abilities. It is important that school system gets ready to not only accommodate multiple cognitive levels but leverage such diversity as a tool for enhanced learning. Multi-level classrooms would require adoption of flexible and creative assessment models, instead of the one-size-fits-all benchmarks of academic achievement and success.
- Children coming to the STCs and entering the formal schools come from most marginalised communities but bring volumes of experiential knowledge which are currently ignored since all the children are required to start from Grade 1 curriculum and proceed in a linear manner until Grade 4 curriculum is mastered. Such a 'deficit' view of working children fails to maintain their interest in the education system. It is important that the experiential knowledge and skills of the children are respected as valid forms of knowledge and built upon. This requires developing a range of curricular options and a specialised menu of material, including digital resources that can build on the specific experiences of children.
- The NGOs have built expertise over the years working with different kinds of working children and have highlighted the value of local mobilization in addressing education issues of child labourers. The special training programmes need to learn and adopt a holistic approach towards education of child labourers and focus on community mobilization and facilitation of child labourer to become regular student within the formal system. Community support and continuous dialogue, especially between the panchayats, health workers, mahila mandals, youth groups, business community is necessary for tracking

children's issues with mainstreaming and ensuring they receive the necessary support to fulfill their education rights. Health, education and nutrition facilities must be provided by the government to every child. The government should also provide funding to the NGOs running the STCs for mobilization and community work, which is currently not allocated.

- Currently, there is lack of coordination between the curriculum used in the formal schools and what is used by the STCs, apart from lack of overall guidelines on how the curriculum could be linked. If the STCs have to work as channels for mainstreaming children into formal schools, there is a need for better alignment of the curricula. There is also a need to develop relevant material at the local level so the STCs are not dependent on the spare textbooks coming from the education department.
- Children coming into the STCs bring in their younger siblings who are also vulnerable and at-risk of getting into child labour. There is a need to explore the possibility of inter-linking the STCs with local anganwadis. In addition, the lower age of admitting children into the STCs could be reduced to 7 years from 9 years, which will allow the children to undergo 2 years of STC classes and then get admitted to formal school at the age of 9 years. This will help better integration of children in the formal schools.
- For children of migrant workers and seasonal child labourers, attending STCs and joining mainstream schools proves difficult. Therefore, it is important to support organisations to start seasonal hostels at source site and/or also make arrangements with local schools at the destination sites. This would require not only inter-departmental co-ordination but also inter-state coordination. Given the increase in part-time work, unaccompanied child labour and migrant child labour, the approach adopted by the STCs needs to meet these emerging contextual changes in child labour prevalence.
- Even though schools are required to relax documentation requirements at the time of admissions, it remains an issue, especially since Aadhar card, caste certificate and income certificate is required to avail entitlements such as free uniforms, textbooks or hostel facilities. Children, without the required documentation, especially orphan and destitute children, are unable to meet these requirements. There is a need to look into the requirements and identify alternate authorities like the CWCs, who can conduct social investigation and authenticate some of the documentation requirements.
- Even when the required documentation is provided, the children may not be able to avail incentives such as free uniforms, school bags and books because these are provided based on previous year's numbers and mainstreamed children are often late admissions. Such exclusionary practices that deprive these children from their basic entitlements under the RTE Act need to be changed. School plans and budgets need to account for mainstreaming

in advance and the School Management Committees which are responsible for enrolling out-of-school children as per the RTE Act should take the responsibility of advance planning and preparation at the school level.

Suggestions from Principals and Teachers

1. There needs to be a shared responsibility of NGOs and the formal schools in terms of 1) enrolment of children and, 2) mobilization of resources.
2. School teachers and Principals need to have better understanding of child labourers, their backgrounds, needs and potential.
3. There needs to be clarity about the curricular approach that should be used with mainstreamed children.
4. The national-level academic authority should provide details of curriculum and pedagogical methods to be used with children with diverse learning competencies and needs. It should also conduct a series of studies to understand the worldviews and experiences of child labourers.
5. Appropriate training should be provided to the teachers to ensure smooth transition of children from STCs to mainstream schools.
6. There should be subject-wise teachers in STCs so that children learn from teachers with specialised domain and pedagogical expertise.
7. Hygiene issues and security of the school premises and infrastructure, especially case of residential schools, should be ensured
8. The training in the STCs should be for a longer time-period so that they can be smoothly transitioned to mainstream schools.
9. Mechanisms to track the children regularly and ensure their longer participation in the education system should be developed by the government.

- Once the children are mainstreamed in schools, adjustment is the main issue which places children at high risk of dropping out, especially if parents are also disinterested in their education. Discrimination of these children due to their background as well as substance abuse among the children pose real threats to their adjustment in the school setting. There is a need to have school counsellors who can pay attention to these adjustment challenges and help the children as required. The provision of school counsellors at the school complex level under the National Education Policy, 2020 can be leveraged to serve these needs of children who are mainstreamed.
- The Open School system, although meant to provide access to education for those who cannot go to schools, remains exclusionary with the kind of documentation requirements

for admission, language of learning material and mode of education delivery. There is a need to examine the policies of the open school system at the national and state level and make it more inclusive and accessible to working children from across the country.

- Currently, vocational training centres are either not available or they are not chosen as sites for mainstreaming child labourers. Given that adolescent child labourers do not get covered by the STCs and mainstreaming older children in schools is a challenging process, vocational training needs to be considered as a significant option for mainstreaming. This requires better support to NGOs for running vocational training centres, provision of scholarships for children pursuing such programmes and provision of courses that are relevant to the job market. It is also important to identify and regulate safe places for adolescents to work.
- Inter-departmental coordination remains weak and creates issues due to misalignment and lack of communication. Field experiences show that the NGOs are also critical stakeholders with experience of working on wider range of child rights issues. Therefore, formal collaborations and partnerships between government and non-state actors are necessary for any impactful and appropriate strategy for mainstreaming children. Convergence across different interventions such as KGBV, residential hostels, CCIs, STCs, schools, open schools, libraries, Anganwadi centres, Mahila Samkhya centres, Skill Development Centres, Industrial Training Institutes (ITI), vocational training centres is necessary to ensure that working children and adolescents receive comprehensive and efficient support required to meet their educational aspirations and rights.
- Children's issues are seen in a fragmented manner and a holistic, comprehensive, and convergent response to children's issues is lacking. Child labourers are at-risk and there is a need to map their status against specific risk indicators along with the risks faced by their families. Programmes for child labourers need to hence focus on vulnerable and high-risk families because families face devastation in events of COVID-19 epidemic or natural disasters such as floods and cyclones.
- Rescue and rehabilitation of child labourers run into challenges due to weak inter-departmental linkages at the micro level. There is a need for better understanding of roles and responsibilities of the Police/Home Department, labour department, Women and Child Development department and the CWCs who are responsible under the JJ Act. It is also important to involve NGOs who know the area and can provide the required local support to rehabilitate the child.
- The current approach of treating STCs and the schools in isolation fails to provide desired results and does not leverage institutions and actors in a given area. Alternatives to

strengthen mainstreaming process would require broad-based systemic strategies including area-based approach, tracking children at panchayat level, community work with local volunteers, focus on prevention and regulation with the help of gram panchayats, investment in capacity building institutions and need-based programmes for teachers, Head Masters and all the functionaries, innovative intervention design with modular and thematic child-paced approach, use of digital technology and provision of local libraries with multi-media educational material.

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Annexure 1: Tools

Tool A: District Functionaries Interview Schedule

1. Name of the district official
2. Designation
3. District
4. For how many years have you been engaged with overseeing the mainstreaming of child labour in schools/vocational training centres?
5. What are the sectors in which child labour is found in your district?
6. What are the various projects/programmes that provide for the education of child labourers in your district? List them.
7. How many special training centres are sanctioned for the district?
8. How many special training centres are functional in the district?
9. Who are the key stakeholders at the district level and what are their roles?
10. Which departments are involved in the process of mainstreaming child labourers and what is their role?
11. What are the mechanisms created at the district level that can facilitate and track mainstreamed child labourers?
12. What are the mechanisms created at the district level to monitor the Special Training Centres/Bridge Schools?
13. Which NGOs are involved in the process of mainstreaming child labourers and what is their role?
14. How is the process of mainstreaming child labourers into education/vocational training conceptualized/planned in your district?
15. How does the process of mainstreaming child labourers into schools/vocational training take place in reality in your district?
16. What is the preparation required before children can be mainstreamed in schools/vocational training?
17. Is this preparation sufficient to retain children in schools?
18. What facilities are made available to children in special training centres?
19. How do you ensure that children who are mainstreamed do not drop out of school?
20. Do children continue working when they are in special training centres?
21. Do children continue working when they are mainstreamed?
22. Are any incentives provided to children in order to retain them in special training centres or schools?
23. What is the role of parents in mainstreaming child labourers in schools?

24. What are the issues and challenges faced in terms of:
 - a. Preparation of children towards being mainstreamed in a regular school/vocational centre
 - b. After being mainstreamed in a regular school/vocational centre
25. What kind of support do children require in order to transition to a regular school?
26. Any other remarks or suggestions.

Tools B1 and B2: Interview Schedule for Special Training Centre

Tool B1: Interview Schedule for Teachers of Special Training Centre (STC)

1. Name of the teacher
2. Name of the Centre
3. Village/Ward:
4. District
5. Gender
6. Education qualifications
7. How many years have you been teaching at the Special Training Centre?
8. Were you trained to become a teacher at the STC?
9. If yes, indicate
 - a. How many days training
 - b. Who conducted the training?
 - c. When did you participate in the training?
 - d. What did you learn?
10. What is the duration of special training provided to students in your class?
11. How many children are studying in your class?
 - a. Boys
 - b. Girls
12. What is the age range of the children attending your class?
 - a. Age of the youngest child
 - b. Age of the oldest child
13. What is the background of the children studying in your class? (check all that apply)
 - a. Children who are currently working
 - b. Working children now withdrawn from work
 - c. Children who have never been to school before
 - d. Children who have dropped out of school
 - e. Children who have special needs
 - f. Children who are enrolled in school but do not attend it
 - g. Street children/orphan children

- h. Children who are enrolled in school but require remedial teaching
 - i. Migrant children
 - j. Any other category (specify)
14. Is your special training centre a residential centre?
 15. What curriculum is being followed in the classroom?
 16. What textbooks are being used in the classroom?
 17. What is the teaching methodology?
 18. What is the nature of assessment/examination conducted?
 19. What are the three topics that the children find it most difficult to learn?
 20. What are the three topics that the children enjoy learning most?
 21. In what way do the modules taught in the special training centre prepare the children to transition from work to schooling?
 22. What is the preparation required to be completed before the child can be mainstreamed?
 - a. Academic preparation
 - b. Social preparation
 - c. Financial planning
 23. What kind of support is provided to the children after they are mainstreamed?
 24. What are the issues and challenges you have seen among the children in terms of:
 - a. Preparation towards being mainstreamed in a regular school/vocational centre
 - b. After being mainstreamed in a regular school/vocational centre
 25. What kind of support do you require to help children with preparation and transition to a regular school?
 26. Is there any kind of a liaison between STCs and mainstream schools to facilitate a smooth transition? (in terms of curriculum or training of STC teachers?)
 27. What kind of support do children require in order to transition to a regular school?
 28. Any other remarks or suggestions.

Tool B2: Interview Schedule for Coordinators of Special Training Centre (STC)

1. Name of the coordinator
2. Name of the Centre
3. Village/Ward:
4. District
5. Gender
6. Education qualifications
7. How many years have you been the Coordinator at this STC?
8. Since how many years is this STC functioning?
9. What is the total number of children/adolescents attending this STC?

- a. Boys
 - b. Girls
10. What is the age range of the children attending the STC?
- a. Age of the youngest child
 - b. Age of the oldest child
11. How many batches are conducted in the STC?
12. How many teachers are assigned to each class/batch?
13. What is the duration of each batch?
14. What is the background of the children studying in your class? (check all that apply)
- a. Children who are currently working
 - b. Working children now withdrawn from work
 - c. Children who have never been to school before
 - d. Children who have dropped out of school
 - e. Children who have special needs
 - f. Children who are enrolled in school but do not attend it
 - g. Street children/orphan children
 - h. Children who are enrolled in school but require remedial teaching
 - i. Migrant children
 - j. Any other category (specify)
15. What is the process by which children are admitted to the centre?
16. What are the expectations from the parents?
17. What are the criteria for admission?
18. Are children required to pay any fees?
- a. For admission
 - b. For tuition
 - c. For books
 - d. For transport
 - e. For lodging and boarding (if residential)
19. Who funds the STCs?
20. What incentives and facilities are available at the special training centre for children?
21. Who are the instructors/teachers offering the training? Do they have any training to teach the children in special training centres?
22. What curriculum is followed?
23. Is the curriculum fixed and structured? What are the main components of the curriculum?
24. Who has developed the curriculum for the special training centres?
25. What textbooks/workbooks are used?
26. What is the core curriculum that a child must complete by the end of the special training period?
27. What happens if the child is unable to complete the core curriculum?

28. In what way are the children prepared to transition to either a mainstream school or a vocation centre
29. What are the criteria for deciding on placing students in a mainstream school or vocational training centre?
30. Is there any kind of a liaison between STCs and mainstream schools to facilitate a smooth transition? (in terms of curriculum or training of STC teachers?)
31. What is the process of mainstreaming?
32. Do you conduct any follow-up with the school/vocational centre or the teachers once the child is mainstreamed? Please describe.
33. What are the issues and challenges you have seen among the children in terms of:
 - a. Preparation towards being mainstreamed in a regular school/vocational centre
 - b. After being mainstreamed in a regular school/vocational centre
34. What kind of support do you require to help children with preparation and transition to a regular school?
35. What kind of support do children require in order to transition to a regular school.
36. Any other remarks or suggestions.

Tool C: Interview Schedule for School Teachers and Vocational Training Instructors

1. Name of the School/Vocational Training Center
2. Village/Ward:
3. District:
4. Name of the school teacher/instructor:
5. Grade/Vocation taught:
6. What is the total number of students enrolled in your class?
7. How many children/adolescents have been mainstreamed from special training centres/bridge schools in your class this year?
8. What is the age range of these students?
 - a. Age of the youngest child
 - b. Age of the oldest child
9. Were these children admitted to class at the beginning of the academic year?
10. Have you received any training on how to handle students who have never been to school or have been working children?
11. If yes, indicate
 - a. How many days training
 - b. Who conducted the training?
 - c. When did you participate in the training?
 - d. What did you learn?

12. What information were you given about the students who were mainstreamed from special training centres/bridge schools in your class this year?
13. What have the mainstreamed students learned in the special training centres/bridge centres?
14. Did you conduct any special activities to ensure the smooth transition of these students into your school/VTC?
15. If yes, please describe the activities.
16. Did you offer any additional support to the students who are mainstreamed into your school/VTC from the special training centres/bridge schools?
17. If yes, please describe the kind of support offered.
18. What kind of adjustments did you have to make in the class to receive children who have been out of school and in work?
19. What kind of adjustments do the children/adolescents who are admitted to your class have to make?
20. Do you adopt a different method of teaching the mainstreamed children/adolescents compared to the rest of the class?
21. If yes, please describe the different teaching methods used specifically for mainstreamed children/adolescents.
22. Do you make changes to what is taught/content of the syllabus to children/adolescents who are mainstreamed?
23. If yes, please describe the changes you have to make?
24. Are the children/adolescents who have been mainstreamed able to engage/participate in the class? (probe what kind of pressures they face)
25. Are the children/adolescents who have been mainstreamed able to keep pace with the rest of the class?
26. Do the children/adolescents who have been mainstreamed able to complete their homework?
27. Are the children/adolescents who have been mainstreamed required to perform the same tasks in the class like the rest of the students?
28. Please explain your answer to Q27.
29. Are the children/adolescents who have been mainstreamed required to take the same examinations/assessments like the rest of the students in the class?
30. Please explain your answer to Q29.
31. Have you interacted with the parents of the children who have been mainstreamed from special training centre/bridge schools?
32. Please explain your answer to Q31.
33. Are there cases of dropouts among those who are mainstreamed from special training centres/bridge schools?
34. What are the issues and challenges in educating children/adolescents mainstreamed from special training centre/bridge schools?

35. Are you equipped with/have training in skills to deal with these challenges?
36. What kind of training is required to prepare teachers to deal with mainstreamed child labourers?
37. What kind of services do you need for smooth mainstreaming and retention of children/adolescents coming from special training centre/bridge schools into your school?
38. Any other remarks or suggestions.

Tool D: Principal of School/Vocational Training Centres (VTCs)

1. Date
2. Name of the School/Vocational Training Center
3. Village/Ward:
4. District:
5. What is the total student strength?
6. How many children/adolescents have been mainstreamed from special training centres/bridge schools?
 - a. 2020-2021
 - b. 2019-2020
 - c. 2018-2019
7. What is the age range of these students?
8. What are the students studying? (indicate grades or vocations)
9. Were these children admitted to your school or VTC at the beginning of the academic year?
10. Which agency or department referred the children for admission in your school/VTC?
11. What are the admission requirements and procedures for admitting students coming from the special training centres or bridge schools?
12. Do you conduct any special activities to ensure the smooth transition of these students into your school/VTC?
13. If yes, please describe the activities.
14. Do you offer any additional support to the students who are mainstreamed into your school/VTC from the special training centres/bridge schools?
15. If yes, please describe the kind of support provided.
16. What kind of adjustments does the school have to make to receive children who have been out of school and in work?
17. What kind of adjustments do the children/adolescents who are admitted to your school/VTC have to make?
18. Are there cases of dropouts among those who are mainstreamed from special training centres/bridge schools?
19. If yes, what do you think are the probable reasons for the mainstreamed children to drop out?

20. If answer to 18 is yes, what efforts do you make to bring the children who have dropped out back into the school?
21. What are the issues and challenges in educating children/adolescents mainstreamed from special training centre/bridge schools?
22. What services are required for smooth mainstreaming and retention of children/adolescents coming from special training centre/bridge schools into your school?
23. Any other remarks or suggestions.

Tool E: Key Informant Interview Guide

(to be administered telephonically or on Zoom. Interview can be recorded and transcribed for analysis)

Process

1. Can you please tell us how special training centres are organized and provided for mainstreaming child labourers in schools and vocational training centres?
2. What does the process of special training involve?
3. Who are the instructors/teachers offering the training? Do they have any training to teach the children in special training centres?
4. Is the curriculum fixed and structured? What are the main components of the curriculum?
5. Who has developed the curriculum for the special training centres?
6. In what way do these centres respond to the needs of child labourers?
7. Do special training/bridge courses help fulfill the right to education of child labourers? Please explain.

Systemic Opportunities and Challenges

8. What kind of opportunities do these centres create for rescued/former child labourers? Please elaborate.
9. What are the challenges faced in mainstreaming the children in schools or vocational training centres?
10. What are the challenges faced in retaining children in schools and vocational training?
11. Who are the key stakeholders involved in mainstreaming child labourers and what is their role and contribution?
12. Section 4 of the RTE Act provides for special training to get children out of school back into the schools. Do you think special training is by design an effective method to bring children back into schools? Please explain.
13. What changes are required to be made in the RTE Act and the Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Amendment Act 2016?

14. What changes are required to be made in Samagra Shiksha/Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan and the National Child Labour Projects so that child labourers can be effectively mainstreamed in schools and vocational training centres
15. What alternatives are available for improving protection of child labourers and ensuring their right to education? Besides STCs, is there any other strategy by which children are getting mainstreamed into schools?
16. What additional support is required for enabling child labourers to continue their school education or vocational training?

Tool F: Proforma for recording school/vocational centre level data (to be filled into a spreadsheet or ODK)

(based on availability to be filled based on the information gathered from principals of schools and/or vocational training centres where children are mainstreamed from the special training centres)

Preliminary information:		
1. Name of the Investigator:	2. Date:	3. Name of the school/vocational training centre:
4. District: Gaya/Hyderabad/ Thane	5. Is this a school or voc training centre? School/Vocational training	6. If it is a school, what is the lowest grade offered in the school? Grade 1/5/7/8
7. If it is a school, what is the highest grade offered in the school? Grade 5/7/8/10/12	8. If it is a school, what is the medium of Instruction: Hindi/Marathi/Telugu/En glish	9. If it is a school, what is the type of school? Govt/Aided private/Unaided private
10. If it is a vocational training centre, what trades are offered?	11. If it is a vocational training centre, what is the type of management? Govt/Aided private/Unaided private	
Information about students enrolled in schools directly from special training centres/bridge		

schools during the following academic year:

Academic Year

Names of students mainstreamed/enrolled	Grade	Gender	Age	Social Category	Number of days student attended school in the given academic year	Did the student continue in the school?

Annexure 2: List of Subject Matter Experts

Following is the list of Subject Matter Experts interviewed for the purpose of this study:

1. Adil Rasheed
2. Daniel Umi
3. Farida Lambay
4. Dr. Helen Sekar
5. Kavita Ratna
6. Kishor Bhamre
7. R. Venkata Reddy
8. R. Vidyasagar
9. Santosh Shinde
10. Dr. Shantha Sinha