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Review of the pace and progress of elimination of Child Labour in Tamil Nadu by Dr. Lakshmidhar Mishra, IAS (Retd.), Special Rapporeur, NHRC on 4th and 5th July, 2008

If statistical enumeration measurable by Census be any index of performance of any State Government or UT in the Indian Union in the domain of elimination of child labour through progressive reduction in the number of working children, Tamil Nadu may be cited as a good example. According to the decennial Census of 1981 there were 9,75,055 (8,71,313 main and 1,03,742 marginal workers) below the age of 15. This came down substantially to 5,78,889 in 1991 and further to 4,18,801 in 2001 Census. This could not have been a sudden or dramatic improvisation but the outcome of a series of planned, coordinated and concerted efforts made under the direction of progressive State Policies dating back to 70s and 80s. The initiatives taken and efforts made in the direction of elimination of child labour in Tamil Nadu today mark a major success story worthy of being quoted and replicated elsewhere in the country. By saying so, it may be imprudent to totally ignore the scenario which prevailed in the State in the earlier decades. Despite determined efforts the State has not yet been made totally child labour free and there are still constraints and challenges inhibiting the effectiveness of these initiatives which need to be analysed in detail so that further corrective action can be taken in the direction of total elimination of child labour.

Before going into this detailed analysis as to what has been achieved and what further remains to be done it may be appropriate, purely from a theoretical angle, to refer to certain imponderables in dealing with the subject of child labour and its elimination.

The first and the most important is the limitation in estimation of child labour. Every estimate of child labour falls short of the actual on account of certain limitations such as multiplicity of certain concepts, methodology adopted for estimation and source of data (like Census).

Secondly, these limitations are further compounded in the developing countries due to existence of unorganized and informal sector of the economy accounting for a sizeable work force including women and children but not always visible and, therefore, not measurable.

The above is a harsh or rather tragic reality on the ground today. Today in the wake of the LPG syndrome even the most sophisticated and organized sectors of production sublet the most hazardous form of manual labour to the informal sector who in turn employ casual labour. This provides an added advantage for these sectors not only in terms of avoidance of hazardous components of work which may cause accidents but in terms of avoidance of direct discharge of a number of other statutory obligations such as social security (workmen's compensation, provident fund, gratuity etc.). Even though the law of workmen's compensation does not distinguish between an adult and a child, between a directly employed person and contract casual employee and clearly stipulates discharge of this obligation (of payment of workmen's compensation) by the principal employer in the event of failure on the part of the contractor to discharge the same, the former evades or circumvents the obligation on superficial grounds such as (a) x was above 14 years of age and, therefore, not a working child (b) there was no employer employee relationship and (c) the accident was not in course of and arising out of employment as is required under the Workmen's Compensation Act to establish the liability of the employer to pay workmen's compensation.

Thirdly, child labour operates without being adequately represented in the official labour statistics including the Census. To illustrate, in Tamil Nadu, about 4 million children in the age group of 5-14 (15,58,031 boys and 24,08,387 girls) were recorded as neither in school nor in the work force. In the words of Prof. D.P. Chaudhury, Professor in an Australian University they are termed as 'nowhere children and their number ranging between 74 to 98 million in 1991 at the national level is considerable. Such children are engaged in activities such as collection

of firewood, fodder and water in rural areas, household work in ancestral home (including taking care of siblings) and rag picking in urban areas. These are not considered as economic activities and none of our laws provide for any social or economic protection to this group (except that employment of children as domestic help has been recently prohibited by issue of a notification dated 10.10.2006 by the Ministry of Labour but that will not apply to work in ancestral homes).

Fourthly, girls are always preferred to boys in certain occupations and processes (match and fireworks in Shivkashi in Viruddhanagar district of Tamil Nadu). Even in the category termed as 'nowhere children' girls account for 43.39% and boys 26.52%. In match works of Shivakashi about 60% of the work force are women and girl children. There is no clear rationale for this phenomenon which provides the starting point of discrimination between boys and girls leading to further deprivation and exploitation.

Fifthly and this is yet another form of discrimination without any rationale and not intelligible, far less being justifiable is the fact that boys and girls may be working 10 to 12 hours a day and sometimes beyond but they invariably get 50% of the wages or even less of those of the adult. The Gurupadaswamy Committee and National Policy on elimination of Child Labour had recommended removal of this distinction but that has not yet happened.

Sixthly, the definitional imbroglio is as puzzling as the estimational imponderable. In the absence of a universally accepted definition different definitions and interpretations of (a) who is a child and (b) what constitutes child labour have been offered by different institutions, countries and individuals. Even in the same country child labour has been defined differently on different occasions, in different Acts and in different industries, occupations and processes.

To illustrate in Factories Act, Beedi and Cigar Workers (Conditions of Employment and Service) Act, Motor Transport Workers

Act, Plantation Labour Act the age of entry to the world of work is 14, in Mines Act, it is 16 for apprentices and 18 for regular employees, in Building and other Construction Workers (Regulation of Employment and Conditions of Service) Act it is 18 while in Shops and Commercial Establishments Acts in most of the States it is either 12 or 14. There is no omnibus law prescribing a uniform age of entry applicable to all industries, occupations and processes for the whole country.

Distribution of Child Labour population in different districts, industries, occupations and processes in Tamil Nadu

According to Shri R. Vidyasagar, a well known educational and social activist working for the cause of elimination of child labour for many years and author of a number of well researched articles on child labour, North Arcot, Salem and Madurai districts account for a higher proportion of child labour while the proportion is very low in Madras, Nilgiris and Pudukottai districts. The remaining districts have 7 to 8% of the total working children in the State except in Thanjavur and Chengalpattu districts where the proportion is relatively lower. In Dharmapuri district followed by Salem, child workers (main) form a strikingly higher proportion to the total work force in the district with 7.99% and 6.08% respectively. While in the State as a whole the proportion of working children to the total main workers is 4.58%, Periyar, North Arcot, Coimbatore, Madurai, Ramanathapuram and Thiruvallur districts account for more than the State average indicating that the problem is more acute in these districts.

There are certain areas and occupations in Tamil Nadu which have earned a lot of notoriety for the State and the country as far as exploitation of children is concerned. Shivakashi in Virudhanagar district has the dubious distinction of having the world's highest concentration of working children employed in production of safety matches and fireworks explosives as also in the printing industry. Other areas of high concentration of working children in Tamil Nadu are beedi industry (Vellore, Tiruchi and Thiruvallur districts), handloom industry in general and silk handloom weaving (Chengalpattu, Vellore and

Thanjavur districts, gemstone cutting and polishing (Tiruchi and Puducottai), Tanneries (Vellore, Dindigul and Madras), Powerlooms (Periyar, Coimbatore and Salem districts) and cotton rope manufacturing (Vellore and Madurai districts). Additionally, large number of children may be employed in the service sector which may not be officially accounted for.

There is a positive co-relation between poverty, backwardness and agroclimatic conditions obtaining in a particular district and employment of children. This correlation is most pronounced in Shivakashi in Viruddhanagar district. This region remains arid (due to low rainfall) for more than 300 days in a year. Being a drought prone area, the proportion of cultivators depending full time on agriculture is very low. Since agriculture is impoverished a lot of cheap labour is available for doing work other than agriculture. The children in 5-14 age group who have nimble fingers are readily available as a source of such cheap labour and are best suited by the unscrupulous employers for production of safety matches.

The process in the match industry may be explained as under:-

The match splints are fitted into wooden frames, a process known as 'frame filling'. The chemicals required to produce the flame are ground and mixed. The spirits are then dipped in wax and in chemicals. The inner and outer sections of the match boxes are made from the veneers and blue paper stuck inside frames for the chemical mixture to be painted on the 2 sides. The matches are then filled in the boxes and the excise duty band rolls stuck on the outer and inner boxes. The boxes are then packed and bundled. Children (girl children in particular) are predominantly employed in frame filling, box filling and labeling only.

Working conditions of children in Shivakashi are deplorable and the same have been the subject matter of a number of Commissions of Enquiry. From the findings of these commissions, it appears that children work in cramped, unclean, unhygienic and unsafe surroundings of factories. They work on an average 10 to 12 hours a day, to ensure

maximum output as the payment of wages is based on the piece rate system. About 60% of the work force are women and girl children while working children comprise about 30% of the total work force in fire works.

By its order dated 14.8.1991 the Hon'ble Supreme Court appointed a Committee of Advocates comprising of Shri R.K. Jain, a Senior Advocate, Mrs. Indira Jai Singh and Shri K.C. Dua to visit Shivakashi and to make a comprehensive report. This was in the wake of a major accident in one of the cracker factories killing 39 children. In the report submitted on 11.11.91 the Committee had made the following recommendations:-

- State of Tamil Nadu should be directed to ensure that children are not employed in fireworks factories;
- Employers should not be permitted to take work from the children for more than 6 hours a day;
- Proper transport facilities should be provided by the employers and State Government for travel of children from homes to the place of work;
- Facilities for recreation, socialization and education should be provided either in the factory or close to the factory;
- Employers should make arrangement for providing basic diet for the children and in case they fail to do so, the Government may be directed to provide for basic diet – one meal a day programme of the State of Tamil Nadu for the school children may be extended to the child worker;
- Piece rate wages should be abolished and payment should be made on monthly basis. Wages should be commensurate to the work done by the children;
- All the workers working in the industry, whether in registered factories or unregistered ones, whether in

cottage industry or contract basis should be brought under the insurance scheme.

The apex Court recorded its appreciation for the commendable work done by the Committee.

Mrs. Helen Sekar, Fellow in V.V. Giri National Labour Institute, Sector-24, Noida has written poignantly about girl child labour in the match industry of Shivakashi in her acclaimed work, 'No light in their lives' (Dec, 1993). To quote from that noted work:-

'The over crowded match manufacturing units are in no way different from the poor homes of 19th Century England. Ninety percent of the children interviewed said that their work places were congested; 56% said that work places were not properly illuminated and 50% complained of the noxious odour of chemicals from the chemical dipping section and poor ventilation. According to 46% of the children there was no drinking water on the factory premises while non availability of toilet facilities was reported by 26%.

While the normal working day in the match factory is as long as 10 hours between 8 AM to 6 PM the reality is even worse. On an average children work for 12 hours daily under tiring conditions. Sixty percent of the children interviewed worked for 6 days a week and 40% for all the 7 days without any break for months together and without payment for weekly off, not to speak of payment for overtime. It was disturbing to note that many of these children started their day as early as 4 AM. Instances of children working as late as even 10 PM have also been observed. At times, children were motivated to work more than 14 hours a day by the paltry incentive of Rs. 5/-. Music was used as an intoxicant by the employers to induce the women and children to work faster. In fact, the loudness with which the Tamil film songs were played acted as a catalyst in the whole working places... Long working hours, unhygienic and unsafe surroundings, less than subsistence wages and hazardous tasks are the characteristic features of child labour scenario in

Shivakashi match industry. The risk from fire is ever present because all the chemicals used in the manufacture of matches are highly inflammable by nature.'

Harsh geography and topography, social and economic backwardness, parental illiteracy and lack of adequate understanding on the part of the parents about the harrowing consequences of pushing children involuntarily to work under hazardous conditions, illiteracy of the children themselves, callousness and insensitivity of the employers, inadequacy and ineffectiveness of the labour law enforcement machinery characterized by lack of power and confidence, problems in determination of correct age of children and the punishment awarded for violation of statutory provisions not being stringent and deterrent have all combined to ensure perpetuation of child labour and girl children in particular in parts of Tamil Nadu in general and in Shivakashi in particular.

Role of the State in elimination of Child Labour in Tamil Nadu:

- The first and the most significant role is to (a) perceive children as our succeeding generation which is to be promoted and nurtured and not to be carried to the brink of destruction by being pushed involuntarily to hazardous work (b) create a climate or environment through aggressive advocacy, dissemination of appropriate information, education and communication (IEC) materials and adoption of a campaign approach for putting an end to the pernicious child labour system and (c) promote and sustain a learning society through which both parents and children are made truly functionally literate by meaningful programmes of adult literacy and access of all children in 6-14 age group to free and compulsory universal education as guaranteed under Article 21A of the Constitution.
- Secondly, the State has to pay adequate attention to area development. Since shortage of rainfall in Shivakashi and Sattur areas is a boon for the thriving fireworks, match and printing

industries and there are no other alternative avocations to turn to (for which parents are sending their children to augment their incomes) such area development by introducing irrigation facilities and forward and backward linkages to brighten the prospects of agriculture is absolutely essential.

- Thirdly, the vice like grip of the employers on parents and on the officers of labour law enforcement machinery will have to be broken. The situation at Shivakashi is such as has been conducive to bring about complete ascendancy of the market forces in general and of the unscrupulous employers in particular. This ascendancy is evident from the following:-

- workers are brought to Shivakashi every day from villages as far as 50 kms. away;
- the factory owners have village level agents who act as employment agents; they go to the villages and wake up children as early as 4 AM in the morning so that they can be sent to work in time;
- advances are paid to the parents through these agents which propel and drive parents to send their children to work until the advances are cleared. In other words, child labour is used as security for loans secured from the employers and the children virtually become bonded labourers (they cannot leave the work; they cannot go to school; they cannot choose any other avocation);
- wages are fixed and paid at piece rate. Because they are at piece rates employers prod and goad children to work for long hours (10 to 12 hours and beyond) and children also fall into this trap by working for long hours willy nilly with a view to augmenting earnings;

- since most of the prosecutions are unsuccessful labour inspectors are discouraged to prosecute to avoid risk of failure and in the process employers are encouraged to continue to engage children;
- trade unions could have played an effective role in protecting and safeguarding interests of adult workers while campaigning in support of elimination of child labour. That has not been the case in Shivakashi which employs nearly 2 lakh people. Regretfully there is no significant trade union activity in the area. Trade unions could negotiate for wholesale replacement of piece rate system (which results in long hours of work for children adversely affecting their health) by a time rate system, howsoever, unpalatable it may be to the employers. Such replacement would have enhanced the earning potential of the adult workers which in turn would have reduced the incidence of child labour. Regretfully that has not happened.

What actually has been done by the Government of Tamil Nadu:

- One of the measures suggested in the action plan under the National Child Labour Policy was to delete the provision contained in the Minimum Wages Act allowing different rates of wages to be fixed for children, adolescents and adults. While this remains to be implemented for the country as a whole (as the MW Central Rules are yet to be amended to make this possible) in Tamil Nadu Government have been fixing only one rate of minimum wages for all employments in so far as the wages relate to adults and children. In other words, children will have to be paid the same rates of wages as adults. This is considered sound and sensible in as much as it removes the economic incentive to employ children at lower wages.

- In the wake of adoption of a projectized approach to rehabilitation of children released from work through access to education, nutrition (through mid day meals), skill training and check up of health as an integral part of National Policy on elimination of Child Labour, National Child Labour Project was launched in May, 1988 and 9 Projects were started in different parts of the country. One such project was sanctioned for Shivakashi and operationalized for a period of 5 years. The objectives of the project were spelt out as (a) elimination of child labour through enforcement of labour laws (b) holistic development – physical, mental and emotional of children released from work and (c) preventing them from re-entering the world of work and making them responsible and responsive adult members of the civil society through imparting life skills, communication skills, survival skills, vocational skills, entrepreneurial and managerial skills etc. With a view to rehabilitating working children being taken out of match factories 26 special schools were opened under the NCLP. These Centres were to be managed by 12 Voluntary Agencies with grant from the Ministry of Labour. Children in these schools are imparted non formal education along with vocational trades like tailoring, handicraft, carpentry and book binding etc. To compensate the loss of wages of the parents an incentive money of Rs. 100/- is being kept in a joint account to be opened in the names of the parents and the child. One MO checks the health of the children in 20 special schools for which he/she is paid an honorarium of Rs. 5000/-. Mid day meals are being given to children @ rate of Rs. 5/- per child per day.
- Between 1988-89 and 2007-08, the number of NCLPs, number of special schools, number of students enrolled and number of students who have been mainstreamed into the formal system of education and come up in life has substantially gone up.
- In Viruddhanagar district (where Shivakashi is located) existence of child labour has been considerably reduced. This has been

established beyond doubt through a number of surveys conducted by the following departments/agencies such as:-

Year	Name of the department/agency which conducted the survey	No. of working children found in Shivakashi
1999	Education Department	9808
2000	District administration	6473
2004	TNS Mode (NGO)	3260
2006	Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan	924

According to the SSA Survey conducted during 2006, 924 children were found out of school. These children have been enrolled in SSA schools and INDUS Project Schools. As Thiru V. Chandrasekharan, Collector, Viruddhanagar district and Chairman, NCLP as well as INDUS Child Labour Project reports, there is no more a situation of sending children involuntarily to work in Viruddhanagar district. He has further reported that no child labour is involved in hazardous work and, in particular, in fire works factories. Besides, following the notification dated 10.10.2006 issued by the Ministry of Labour prohibiting employment of children as domestic help, in hotels/motels/dhabas/SPAs/recreation centres special awareness campaign and signature campaigns were organized by way of fixing posters and stickers in all units – hazardous and non-hazardous alike with an appeal to the employers not to engage children below 14 years of age in any form of work. No complaints have been received by the district administration on employment of children in the prohibited categories so far.

- Inspection Committees have been formed in taluk and panchayat union level consisting of Revenue, Factories, Labour, Education, Police, Health, Rural Development and Local Administration Departments. Officials of SSA and INDUS Project staff are also

inspecting the hazardous and non-hazardous units and their work is being overseen by the Collector periodically.

- On the strength of instructions received recently from Government of India and State Labour Deptt. intensive raids of establishments have been undertaken from 14.11.2007 to 30.11.2007. During this period, 351 hazardous industries were inspected, 7 working children were identified, rescued and enrolled in schools. Besides, 1045 households were contacted and no child labour was found. Additionally, 486 hotels and dhabas (road side restaurants) as also 2417 other establishments have been inspected, 22 working children identified and rescued.
- There is no let up in the normal inspections. One redeeming feature of the inspection is that they are being conducted with a view to identifying working children and releasing them from work. During the period as above, 4299 inspections and again from January, 2008 to April, 2008, 2711 inspections have been conducted by special squads constituted by the District Administration. While all rescued children are being enrolled in SSA, Special Schools of NCLP as well as INDUS Project Schools legal and penal action is being taken against the offending employers.
- The district administration is initiating a number of steps for complete eradication of child labour and to declare Viruddhanagar as a child labour free district in coordination and collaboration with SSA. Children above 5 years are being enrolled in schools. Residential schools have been started in every Panchayat Union. If any drop out is noticed he/she is enrolled in schools after proper counselling. The attractive method of Activity Based Learning (ABL) card training has been given to all teachers to reduce dropout to zero. Village Education Committees have been formed to ensure this.

Various other initiatives taken at the State level:

- The State Government formulated and approved an Action Plan for elimination of child labour in GO NO. 53 of the Labour and Employment Department on 12.5.2003. The Action Plan has the following strategies:-
 1. Survey and identification of children.
 2. Rescuing of working children and admitting them in special schools.
 3. Mainstreaming the children from special schools into formal schools.
 4. Conducting special drives to enrol in school all children in the age group of 5 to 7 years.
 5. Strengthening formal education.
 6. Providing skill training to children in the age group of 14-16 years.
 7. Enforcing strictly laws prohibiting child labour.
 8. Generating social awareness that children should go to school and not to work.
 9. Targeting implementation of development schemes to benefit families of rescued working children.
 10. Achieving convergence of services of departments, their activities and NGOs.
 11. Rewarding Panchayats and Municipalities which have become free of child labour.
- State Government have approved formation of a State Child Labour Rehabilitation-cum-Welfare Society and have allotted a grant of Rs. 1.25 Crore to the Society @ Rs. 25/- lakh annually for

the period from 2003 to 2007 to implement the Action Plan. The said society has been formed and registered under the Societies Registration Act, 1860 on 21.10.2003. The amount available with the society is being used for awareness generation and training.

- Each district has drawn up an Action Plan to eradicate child labour in the district. The outcome of the survey conducted by the SSA forms the basis of the Action Plan. According to the SSA Survey in March, 2003, 4.46 lakh children were found to be out of school of whom 70,344 were working children. Since the Census, 2001 had identified a figure of 0.4 million working children, there has been substantial reduction in the number of working children if the 2 figures i.e. out of school children and working children are to be kept in view as any plausible and credible index of child labour. The number of children who are out of school has progressively come down in successive surveys such as from 70,344 to 46,153 in 2004 survey, from 46,153 to 25,589 in 2005 with a marginal increase to 30,784 in 2006.
- The State Government is in the process of constantly reviewing proposals received from districts to declare them as child labour free. A decision has been taken in the meeting of the State Authority on Eradication of Child Labour held on 30.11.2007 to extend the time line for declaring all districts as child labour free by December, 2010, keeping in view the notification issued by the Ministry of Labour prohibiting employment of children as domestic help from 10.10.2006.
- **Action taken by the State Government on the notification dated 10.10.2006 prohibiting employment of children in domestic and hospitality sectors:**
- Action Plans have been drawn up by Collectors of all districts to eliminate child labour in domestic and hospitality sectors.

- Meetings have been held with all flat owner's associations and hotel owner's associations to sensitize them not to employ children as domestic help.
- Advertisements have been given through hoardings, notices, painting on electric trains, local television, radio jingles that employment of children as domestic help is an offence and all concerned should desist from doing so.
- A State level stakeholder's workshop was held on 10.10.2006 with the involvement of Chief Secretary and Secretaries to Government in Labour, Factories, Social Defence, Police, Health, Local Administration, Rural Development, Information and Public Relations to implement the above notification.
- A second stake holder's meeting was held on 14.6.2007 in Image Auditorium in Rajannamalai Puram at Chennai to seek the cooperation of NGOs, employers and corporate sector to eliminate child labour.
- A third stake holder's meeting was held on 23.11.2007 with flat owners, hotel owners and Employer's Associations to discuss elimination of child labour and work out strategies in this direction.
- A separate action plan for elimination of child labour in domestic and hospitality sectors has been approved by the State Government as per G.O. 2 D No. 7 dated 6.2.2007.
- A separate Welfare Board for domestic workers has been formed as per G.O. M S No. 12 dated 22.1.2007. So far 61,103 domestic workers have been registered and benefits to the tune of Rs. 81,44,246/- has been disbursed to 3629 beneficiaries.
- State Labour Department is monitoring the pace and progress of a scheme of Self Declaration by flat owners' associations to the effect that no child is being employed in the residential campus.

Human Resource Development – orientation and sensitization of officials through training:-

- Officials of the department have been exposed to a district level workshop in May, 2003 for better familiarization with laws and programmes, ideas and concepts relating to child labour.
- They have also been made familiar with the concept and modality of convergence of programmes, activities and delivery services through a State level workshop in June, 2003 along with NGOs, Employers and Trade Unions.
- An excellent handbook on child labour for use of enforcement officials has been brought out by the State child labour rehabilitation cum welfare society. The handbook is an excellent compilation of definition, causes and consequences, history, constitutional and legal provisions, judgements of the apex court, international initiatives, mindsets (14) about child labour and how to demystify them etc.
- Series of workshops for Training of Trainers (TOT), enforcement officials of labour and factories department and Project Directors of NCLP and INDUS Child Labour Projects have been organized with the assistance of ILO in 2005-06. Such workshops have also been conducted specifically on the issue of prosecution of child labour cases for the benefit of Chief Judicial Magistrates, Government Pleaders, Medical Officers at the State Judicial Academy, Chennai in 2006-2007.

Steps taken for awareness generation:

- Series of planned, coordinated and concerted efforts have been made at the level of Government but with full collaboration with a number of agencies to promote both awareness and generate critical consciousness among all the stakeholders about the importance of elimination of child labour such as:-

- brochures, booklets, posters and stickers have been printed and distributed; hoardings have also been erected in buses and public places;
- an awareness walkathan of 12000 school students on child labour has been flagged off;
- competitions have been organized on child labour as the theme for school children and they have been awarded prizes;
- school children (200) have been made to perform on the stage at Gandhi Mandapam on the Children's Day;
- a ten seconds spot on awareness against child labour has been broadcast continuously from 1.3.2004 to 29.4.2004 before morning Tamil news at 7.15 am in AIR and from 1.6.2004 to 31.8.2004 in FM radio;
- drawing competition on the theme 'Child Labour and Child Rights' was conducted in September, 2004 for nearly 1000 school students and prizes awarded;
- five hundred SHG women were sensitized on the issue of child labour on Women's Day (8.3.2004);
- more than 1500 women from SHGs of Pudukottai, Vellore and Coimbatore were sensitized on the issue of child labour on the Women's Day in the subsequent year (8.3.2005);
- orientation programmes have been conducted for the following on the dates indicated against each:-
 - NSS Programme officers of Chennai University in August, 2004;

- NSS Students (300) at Pachhaiyappa's college in September, 2004;
- Fine Arts College Students and Visual Communication Students of Loyola College on 'Child Labour and Children's Rights' in September, 2004;
- Poster workshop for Government Fine Arts College Students was conducted in October, 2004;
- One lakh hand bills were printed and distributed among all employers of shops and restaurants in Chennai city on 23rd November, 2004 with the help of Chennai Corporation Arivoli Iyakkam Volunteers, NGOs and officials of Labour Department;
- Children who have been released from work and children who are studying in upper elite schools have been brought together on a child to child programme, divided into groups and had sharing of ideas and experiences; 50 children enacted 2 plays;
- New posters, booklets and handbooks are being released on every World Anti Child Labour Day (12.6.2005, 12.6.2006, 12.6.2007, 12.6.2008);
- Anti child labour slogans have been painted on trains starting from Chennai Central;
- Anti child labour songs are being regularly broadcast in FM Radio both in the morning and evening hours;
- Rescued working children have put up wall paintings on 'Rights of Children' on Tamil Nadu slum Clearance Board walls;

- Human chains of rescued working children have been organized in slums in Chennai city on the Children's Day;
- Hoardings, puppet show and radio jingles have been put up at the All India Industrial Trade Fair, 2008; similar hoardings have been erected at Koyembedu bus terminus, Mambalam and Chennai Central Railway Stations;
- A lumpsum amount has been placed by the State Government at the disposal of Collectors for display of hoardings, flex boards, printing posters, stickers, notices and for advertising radio jingles, television modules and telecast of documentary film 'Lost Childhood';
- On the recent World Anti Child Labour Day (12.6.2008) apart from release of new posters and brochures, 5 mainstreamed children were asked to share their success stories while mainstreamed students who have passed out with good marks at the 10th and 12th Standard public examinations have been felicitated. Best teachers of NCLP/INDUS Child Labour Projects have also been felicitated and awarded shields. Similarly, Chairpersons of Town Panchayats of Tiruvallur and Kanchipuram districts and 5 ward Councilors of Chennai Corporation have received public recognition for their best performance in eradication of child labour. Collectors of Salem, Viruddhanagar and Krishnagiri have received similar public recognition for their outstanding performance in eradication of child labour.

Convergence of programmes and delivery services:

It may be noted that elimination of child labour is not a programme of any particular Ministry, Department or Agency. Under Allocation of Rules of Business, Ministry of Labour, Government of India at the Central level and Departments of Labour at the State level may have

been granted the status of nodal Ministries/Departments for the purpose of coordination but they alone will not be able to achieve the goal of total elimination of child labour without the cooperation and collaboration of a number of sister Ministries and Departments such as Education, Health, Women and Child Development, Revenue, Rural Development, Social Welfare, Employment and Training, Information and Broadcasting, Public Relations etc. Elimination of child labour is an issue of global and national concern involving a number of stake holders with each one of them having an assigned role.

In Tamil Nadu both NCLP and INDUS Child Labour Projects have promoted such convergence; success stories associated with both the Projects have also been the outcome of such convergence as would be evident from the following:-

1. **From INDUS Child Labour Project to SSA:**

- Head masters and teachers of lead schools have been sensitized on elimination of child labour;
- ILO module on child labour for teachers has been given to SSA, translated by SSA from English to the regional language (Tamil) and used;
- ILO module on Constitution and role of VEC in elimination of child labour given to SSA, translated by SSA from English to the regional language (Tamil) and used;
- Trainer's life skill training was conducted by ILFAS Education Technology Services, Mumbai duly supported by INDUS; the trainers in turn conducted the first batch of training at district headquarters involving 40 teachers in each batch. Two batches (80 teachers) have been trained so far; they in turn will train all TEC and local school teachers;
- All members of VECs have been trained by INDUS;

- Wall paintings designed and executed by SSA and funded by INDUS have been displayed in all government buildings;
- Computers have been provided by INDUS Project to all lead schools (200 in Tamil Nadu) managed by the SSA.

SSA to INDUS Child Labour Project:

- SSA has imparted computer training to the teachers selected for the purpose;
- SSA has trained all TEC teachers for 2 weeks in a year;
- SSA conducted a 3 day residential training programme for children of TEC who have been mainstreamed;
- SSA organized excursions for the mainstreamed children;
- SSA provided Activity Based Learning (ABL) cards to all the 200 lead schools and all the TECs funded by INDUS;
- Mother Teacher's Associations have been formed in 40 lead schools in Kañchipuram with the initiative of SSA;
- Anganwadis in Tamil Nadu (about 1000) were provided with bicycles, aluminium boxes with play materials and self learning materials (in small kits) by SSA;
- Education Department has issued a GO to admit the children who have studied in NCLP/INDUS Project TECs at any time during the academic year and without insisting on any certificate.

Role of Health Department:

- Instructions have been issued by Secretary, Health Department to the PHC in charge for visiting lead schools and TECs once every month;

- Special medical camps are being organized by the Health Department in the school premises (40 in Kanchipuram) of lead schools for screening of health of mainstreamed children along with counselling of adults and girls;
- A district level special Task Force for the purpose of enforcement has been constituted under the Chairmanship of Collector. As and when surveys are being conducted or raids are being organized by the special task force and working children are being identified and withdrawn from work place, a Medical Officer from the PHC will accompany the Task Force for the purpose of determination of the age of children.

Revenue Department:

- Officers of the Department have been made responsible for eradication of child labour in the districts;
- All families sending children to work or child labour families will get a preferential treatment in terms of –
 - Sanction of widow pension (Rs. 400/- pm);
 - Old age pension (Rs. 400/- pm);
 - Two acres of land;
 - Ration card;
 - Colour television.

Rural Development Department:

- Instructions have been issued to all Gram Sabhas to discuss elimination of child labour as one of the agenda items in all the 4 meetings of the Gram Sabha held throughout the year;
- INDUS Project functionaries have facilitated this process;

- Training module for 'Our Village' scheme with elimination of child labour as one of the subjects prepared by the RD Deptt. with INDUS support is being extensively used; training has been imparted to master trainers who in turn will impart training to all GPs;
- The RD Department is covering all eligible child labour families in all the poverty alleviation schemes;
- 3652 child labour families have been covered under Swarna Jayanti Swarojgar Yojana (SJSY) and a sum of Rs. 1,73,94,550/- has been disbursed so far;
- 1191 child labour families have been covered under THADCO scheme and a sum of Rs. 78,18,000/- has been disbursed so far;
- 1221 child labour families have been covered under NABARD scheme and a sum of Rs. 53,18,000/- has been disbursed so far;
- The Department has played the role of a catalytic agent in mobilizing and organizing women into SHGs with a Provision for saving Rs. 50/- in the minimum per month, formation of a Corpus Fund, sanction of loan for fulfilling basic consumption needs as also for taking up avocations, assisting the members of SHGs to get loan from commercial banks (maximum amount Rs. 4 lakhs).

Employment and Training Department:

- Labour market survey was conducted by the Centre for Entrepreneurial Development in all 5 INDUS Project districts. Based on the findings of the survey 24 skills/trades were identified by CEDA. The Employment and Training Department provided a training officer to INDUS Project on deputation for coordinating matters relating to training and job placement. Actual training was

imparted by the E&T Department in all districts except Namakkal district where training in home nursing, embroidery and knitting work was imparted by a private organization.

Adi Dravidar Welfare Department:
Backward Class Welfare Department:

- They have issued Government orders to admit the rescued working children in their hostels wherever required.

Social Welfare Department:

- Tamil Nadu Women Development Corporation of Social Welfare Department has been supporting all the SHG initiatives of NCLP and INDUS Projects and gives entrepreneurship training to women, grades them and facilitates the process of their self reliant rehabilitation.

Social Defence Department:

- This is operating a Toll free child help line 1098 through which many children have been rescued and rehabilitated.

Public Relations and Information Department:

- This has been providing wide publicity to all the initiatives taken for eradicating child labour as also all success stories associated with the NCLP and INDUS Projects.

The dictionary meaning of 'Converge' is to tend to meet in a point or line, incline towards each other as lines that are not parallel. It also means to tend to a common result or conclusion. For this convergence is an act or instance of converging or tending to meet.

In the context of elimination of child labour a number of activities need to converge at one point. The activities are:-

- I Protection, Preservation and Promotion of the child as the finest and best of human resource:-

- foeticide;
- female infanticide;
- adverse sex ratio;
- malnutrition

All these are the subject matter of Women and Child Development Department.

II Creating stable and durable avenues of employment or a decent livelihood:-

- life skills;
- communication skills;
- survival skills;
- vocational skills;
- entrepreneurial and managerial skills.

Imparting these skills, evaluating the content, process and impact of skill training to ensure that skill training imparted is actually being made use of, is partly the responsibility of Employment and Training and partly of rural development department.

IV Human Resource Development:

While skill training as above is also an integral part of HRD, other important components of HRD are (a) access of all children in 6-14 age group to free and compulsory education (b) selection of right quality human resource as teachers (c) orientation and training of teachers (d) management of schools/special schools of NCLP/TECs of INDUS Project. These are non negotiable human rights and while Education Department is primarily responsible for achieving the goals, we need to carry a number of other departments with us to achieve the holistic character of rehabilitation.

V Social mobilization:

Social mobilization initiatives are taken primarily with a view to making a programme or activity demand driven. If demand for a particular product or service is generated in a normal and natural manner, it becomes much easier for the delivery mechanism to meet that demand or service. To illustrate parents are informed about the adverse effects of child labour and importance of children's education. If the parents are sufficiently sensitized they will take a conscious decision to withdraw their children from work and the community will work towards its prevention. It is not enough to produce a wide range of materials to generate this critical consciousness in the minds of the parents and the community as a whole; it is important to do some audience research to assess the impact of dissemination of such materials. While excellent communication materials have been designed and printed such audience research is yet to be taken up.

VI Income generation alternatives for families:

With a view to augmenting the income of families which send their children to work and not to school a socially useful initiative has been taken to mobilize and organize women in the family into SHGs as would be evident from the following table:-

District	No. of SHGs formed	No. of SHGs completed 6 months	No. of SHGs for whom grading has been done and who are eligible to receive revolving fund.	No. of SHGs for whom revolving fund has been released.	Total amount released towards revolving fund (Rs.)
Kanchipuram	182	182	182	-	-
Namakkal	43	39	39	30	6,02,000
Thiruvallur	47	-	-	-	2,44,000
Thurvanmalai	59	39	35	16	1,100,00

Viruddhanagar	58	58	58	58	1,00,000
Total	389	318	314	104	20,46,000

District	Total No. of mothers covered by SHGs	No. of mothers who have received vocational training	No. of mothers trained in income generating activities	No. of families having access to micro credit	No. of families receiving basic literacy skills
Kanchipuram	398	-	-	-	341
Namakkal	716	500	500	63	500
Thiruvallur	-	-	-	-	-
Thurvanmalai	980	468	450	230	670
Viruddhanagar	140	-	850	850	850
Total	2234	968	1800	1143	2361

Mothers of working children are members of the existing SHGs along with others apart from SHGs which are exclusively formed for the mothers of the working children. SHGs receive loans with subsidy amount to run grocery shops, restaurants, vegetable and fruit selling and so on. They are given entrepreneurship training prior to their taking up a particular avocation.

VII Vocational training for adolescents (14-17):

There are large number of adolescents in 14-17 age group who may have received education through schooling upto a particular level and who may not be interested in pursuing such education further. Instead, they may be interested in receiving vocational skill training which may make them either wage employed or self employed and pave the way for their economic self reliance. Keeping this perspective in view, INDUS Project has taken up such skill training as a priority activity. This is a gradual or sequential process. The first step in the process is

identification of marketable skills which require a special expertise. The second step in the process is identification of aptitude, preferences and interests of learners. The third is selection of craft teachers and the fourth is organizing their training with the help of key resource persons. The fifth is procurement of raw materials locally available as also tools and equipments. The sixth is actual imparting of training, seventh its evaluation, eighth exploring employment opportunity, ninth ensuring job placement in wage employment and last but not the least tying up with banks and other financing institutions loans for self employment.

VIII Access of all children to free and compulsory education:

For this purpose primarily three strategies have been adopted.

They are:-

- mainstreaming working children in 5-8 age group wherever found and released from work straight away to formal school system;
- running special schools under the NCLP for all children between 9-13 age group who have had some schooling but had dropped out at some stage of schooling and entered the world of work. Such children might have forgotten the basic cognitive skills. These skills need to be reviewed or regenerated first before they could be reinforced or consolidated. In a special school under the NCIP after attending a 3 year cycle (2 years of schooling and a third year for prevocational skill training to learn simple and harmless skills/trades) and after attaining the desired equivalence the children can be mainstreamed into the formal school system at the appropriate level;
- running TECs under the INDUS Child Labour Project for those children in 9-13 age group who had undergone schooling for some period but had dropped out at some stage due to economic compulsions through which children's existing cognitive skills are recognized, the same

are refined and sharpened and they are intensively prepared so that they can be effectively mainstreamed into the formal school system at the appropriate level. The TECs are run like special schools of NCLP with the same staffing pattern, same salary and allowances for the staff (teachers, field officers etc.) except that children who are not desirous of continuing formal school education after TEC may be given opportunities to move into the vocational stream. In case the children are already skilled in a craft or trade they should be able to go back to it with enhanced skills once they have completed their transitional education. This would result in the beneficiaries finding the education being provided more relevant and worthwhile.

All the special schools under NCLP in the Project districts (12) are run by the NGOs except in Vellore, Dharmapuri and Salem districts. The State Society has issued detailed guidelines for selecting NGOs for running special schools. The details of children studying in NCLP Projects (12) as on 30.4.2008 are as under:-

S. No.	District	Special Schools		No. of Students	
		Sanctioned Strength	Functioning	Sanctioned Strength	Enrolled
1.	Chennai	20	20	1000	866
2.	Coimbatore	50	12	2500	334
3.	Dindigul	25	24	1250	682
4.	Dharmapuri	32	32	1600	1291
5.	Erode	28	28	1400	1004
6.	Krishnagiri	71	71	3550	1948
7.	Salem	40	40	2000	2035

8.	Trichy	30	35	1500	1173
9.	Theni	10	10	500	418
10.	Tuticorin	40	19	2000	867
11.	Tirunelveli	40	61	2000	1810
12.	Vellore	60	103	3000	2986
	Total	446	455	22300	15414

It is reported that since inception i.e. 1988, 59,034 children have been mainstreamed into the formal school system. The process of mainstreaming takes place as under:-

- instructions have been issued to the school authorities to admit the special school children who have completed a particular level of bridging into the appropriate standard in formal school;
- a GO has been issued to admit children at any time of the year without insisting on any certificates (GO No. 165 School Education (C2) dated 9.12.2004);
- the mainstreamed children are followed up regularly to ensure their continuance and retention in the formal school system.

Mid day meals:

These are provided to the children of special schools as also to children in TECs @ Rs. 5/- per child. While preparing the meal utmost care is taken to keep in view the local preferences and tastes (like Sambar, rasham etc.) as also the importance of nutrition (a balance combination of carbohydrates, protein, oil/fat, vitamins and minerals).

Additionally the State Government have issued orders for supply of free uniforms, free text books and note books for all children of special schools and free bus passes to those who need them.

Health check up:

Regular checkup of health of children admitted to the special schools of the NCLP is being done by one MO for 20 schools. Health cards have been maintained for all special school children.

Stipend:

Stipend @ Rs. 100/- per month per child is being given to each child. Accounts have been maintained properly. The amount is kept jointly in the name of parents and the child and can be drawn and utilized for higher education of the child only after expiry of the 3 year cycle of special school.

Prevocational training:

Through such training simple and harmless skills/trades like tailoring, fabric painting, wire basket making, woolen work, handicrafts, candle making, chalk piece making, soft toy making, book binding, bead work, basket making, palm leaf products, fibre products, doll making and mushroom cultivation are being imparted. The central objective of imparting this prevocational training for 1 year (3rd year of the cycle in the NCLP 3 year stream) is to equip the children with certain skills so that (a) they turn out to be responsible, responsive and productive adult citizens as they cross the threshold of childhood and enter adulthood and (b) they do not ever think of going back to the days when they were pushed involuntarily to hazardous work which is harmful for their health, psyche and development.

Vocational skill training under INDUS Child Labour Project:

While the Prevocational skill training was meant for children in 9-13 age group enrolled in the special schools of NCLP, the vocational training under INDUS Child Labour Project is meant for adolescents in the age group of 14-17 years. In all such vocational skill training programme has been imparted to 48,184 children in 5 districts covered by INDUS Child Labour Project. Centre for Entrepreneur Development, Madurai conducted a labour market survey to identify potential trades for

employment and identified about 250 trades. After the survey and on the basis of its outcome a tie up was established with the Commissioner, Employment and Training and Private Industrial Training Centres. Curriculum for 24 trades has been developed by the Deptt. of Employment and Training. The latter, as a matter of fact, has been deputing an officer in the cadre of Junior Training Officer to visit INDUS Project in each district to supervise and coordinate the vocational training component. The main advantage of this skill training programme is that it gives the flexibility to the beneficiary to take up wage employment or self employment according to his/her aptitude, preference and interests, and be on his/her own (self reliance). In addition, he/she can pursue higher education through the correspondence course of the National Open School Society, if he/she so likes. The status or outcome of vocational training under INDUS Child Labour Project is as under:-

District	No. of Centres	No. of students benefited	No. of trades	Job placement /self employed	Tool kits distributed
Kancheepuram	7	1000	7	816	124
Thiruvallur	Courses completed	1006	13	756	-
Thiruvannamalai	15	989	6	720	942
Namakkal	4	1200	12	480	-
Viruddhanagar	9	1000	13	656	280
Total	35	5195	51	3428	1346

The main vocations in which vocational skill training is being imparted are:-

- garment making;
- two wheeler mechanism;
- three and four wheeler mechanism;
- desktop publishing;
- house electrical wiring;

- pump repairing;
- bakery;
- fast food preparation;
- catering technology.

Main features in which there is a district difference or improvement between National Child Labour Project and INDUS Child Labour Project:

INDUS Child Labour Project is a technical cooperation Project of the Government of India and Government of USA (as a matter of fact, the agreement between the two Governments was signed in August, 2000 when I was Union Labour Secretary). ILO is implementing the Project in partnership with the State Government, district NCLP Societies and Sarva Shikshya Abhiyan (SSA) Societies. The objective of the Projects is to develop a comprehensive model for elimination of child labour in India. It has, however, focused on 10 identified hazardous sectors such as:-

- handrolled beedi cigarettes;
- brassware;
- leather, rubber and plastic footwear;
- hand blown glass bangles;
- hand made locks;
- hand broken quarried stones;
- hand spun/hand loomed silk thread, yarn and fabric;
- fireworks;
- hand dipped matches;
- hand made bricks

The target areas of operation are in 5 States of India namely Tamil Nadu, U.P., Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Delhi. The Project seeks to develop a comprehensive child labour elimination model for India by offering 3 relatively new components into elimination of child labour (which were not there in the NCLP launched in 1988-89 i.e. 20 years earlier). These are:-

- strengthening public education as a measure to prevent child labour;
- providing vocational skills training to adolescents in 14-17 age group;
- providing income generating opportunities to the families of child labour;

To illustrate just one area i.e. how public education of working children is being strengthened in Tamil Nadu, the State under reference a number of innovative approaches have been adopted to make this possible. Some of them are:-

- Guidelines have been evolved on different strategies for strengthening public education of working children by the State Project Director, SSA and sent to all INDUS Project districts for implementation;
- Education Coordinators have been nominated by SSA in all 5 INDUS Project districts;
- Forty lead schools have been selected (to which children from Transition Education Centres will be mainstreamed) and Head Masters of these schools have been trained by INDUS Project;
- In all districts, Activity Centres have been set up in all lead schools and volunteers have been placed to conduct special classes for students who have been found deficient in some areas;
- They also teach games and music to the children in the evening hours through the Resource Centres which have been set up for this purpose;
- Life skill education is given to all lead school students.

The overall approach of INDUS Child Labour Project is to create an enabling environment where children will be motivated to enrol in schools, will be induced to refrain from working and house holds will be provided with alternatives of income generation through skill upgradation and micro finance so that they do not send their children to work.

This approach has been translated to a substantial extent to action in Tamil Nadu as was evident in course of my meeting with Principal Secretary, Labour – Shri R.K. Khanna, other senior officials of the department and through field visits.

Redeeming features which came out in course of field visits to Kancheepuram district:

- I Teachers of TECs have gone from door to door appealing to parents not to send their children to work and encouraging them to send their children to TECs.
- II Students who are studying in TEC are able to articulate their past experience with courage and confidence. To illustrate at TEC – CSM School, Pillaiyar Palayam, Krishnan Street, Kancheepuram one Ayyappan (VI Standard) shared the experience he had in weaving industry which deprived him of access to educational opportunity. Similarly, one Meenalosani narrated how on account of being forced to work in a printing offset she had to drop out at IV standard. She had heart problem, the Collector Kancheepuram arranged her surgery and after regaining her health she is studying in VI Standard now. She also narrated how she is enjoying the class room activities like reading, writing, singing. One Swarna Lakshmi (VI Standard) was able to read the Tamil text book fluently.
- III The students (9-13 age group) have been graded according to the levels of equivalence they had at the time of enrolment in TEC. The grading has been done as under:-

Level – I - beginner - Class I to Class V

Level – II	-	2 nd level -	Class VI
Level- III	-	3 rd level -	above 6 th Standard.

IV Interaction with students who have been mainstreamed was a refreshing experience.

One Mr. D. Saravanan who was mainstreamed from TEC to a regular school and is now studying in 12th Standard explained clearly and accurately the blood circulation path outlined in the chart. In the question answer session which followed the students answered the question as to why there is less air circulation when a room is congested and there are more persons than what the room can accommodate.

A few students (S. Babu Sakila, B. Karpagam, N. Devi and S. Saravanan) narrated their past experience and how they had to struggle to eke out a livelihood by working on a loom to weave a silk saree which takes 20 days and the earning is Rs. 1500/- (excluding the cost of yarn). S. Saravananperumal was candid that children work only on account of parental poverty and for no other reason. It was refreshing to observe how education has brought about a qualitative change in the lives of these children. They enjoy their learning. The class room environment is full of excitement and joy. Children are singing Tamil songs by the National Poet Bharathidasan with a lot of gusto, pride and patriotism.

The most memorable part of the visit and interaction was that children drawn from not so comfortable a family background are able to articulate their feelings and concerns with freedom and spontaneity, with strength, courage and confidence, reminiscent of the exciting days of Arivoli Iyakkam in 80s and 90s (when I was Director General, National Literacy Mission (1987-93).

V Interaction with VT students

In all I met and interacted with 9 students as mentioned in the table below who are in 14-17 age group, who have received vocational

skill training in a skill training institution (like ITI, polytechnic) and who are now either wage employed or self employed.

Wage employed:

S.No.	Name	Working at	Monthly earning wages
1.	R. Logeswaran	PHA India Pvt. Ltd.	Rs. 3500/-
2.	P. Devarajan	AEC Engineers Ltd.	Rs. 2600/-
3.	Shyam Sunder	Rane Pvt. Ltd.	Rs. 3000/-
4.	T. Balaji	Angith Engineering Works	Rs. 2900/-
5.	V. Loganathan	Dongar Automobiles	Rs. 4000/-
6.	Kamaladasan	Angith Engineering Works	Rs. 4000/-

Self employed:

S.No.	Name	Working at	Monthly earning wages
1.	G. Sonkar	Electrician, Pillayarpalayam	Rs. 4000/-
2.	P. Loganathan	Electrician, Pillayarpalayam	Rs. 4500/-
3.	B. Loganathan	Electrician, Pillayarpalayam	Rs. 4000/-

VI Visit to TEC Thimiyampettai between 1.40 PM to 2.15 PM on 5.7.2008 afternoon was a mixed experience of joy and concern. It was a source of joy on account of the fact that despite difficult economic conditions, long distance and geographical barriers (nullahs, streams or rivulets which the students have to cross while coming to the TEC), children from economically poor families who had dropped out from the school at some stage or the other have been mobilized and enrolled into the class and on an average 75% are attending the class. It was a

source of concern on account of (a) there is loadshedding and in a pool of darkness it is extremely difficult to sustain the interest as also pace and progress in reading and writing even with the best of motivation and enthusiasm to learn (b) there is only one lady teacher (who is not very much different from the learner in terms of her economic background) who is finding it difficult to do justice to the teaching learning needs of 24 children who being drop outs are placed in different levels/grades spanning between Class V to Class IX. The management of the classroom activity in such a heterogenous situation on the part of one lady teacher appears to be an extremely difficult and strenuous process.

Other grey areas of concern and observations:

- There are serious problems in timely supply of text books. Even though it was the month of July and academic sessions have commenced in full swing, old text books (last years) are being used and there is no sign of supply of new text books for the new academic session 2008-2009.
- The timing of the TEC i.e. 9 AM to 4 PM appears to be a bit inconvenient. Many TECs are beyond a radius of 2 kms. from the village households. No bus service is available. Students have to get ready by 6 AM to walk such a long distance intervened by streams and rivulets which will enhance the commuting time. Most of the students coming from economically weaker sections walk barefoot which on gravelly road (not properly paved) is likely to cause injury to the leg. Besides, mothers won't have enough time to prepare breakfast for their children. A few students observed that they take the left over rice (without any other ingredient) from last night before starting for the school. This is not adequate and considering the fact that the mid day meals are served around 12.30 Noon students will find it difficult to concentrate on the lessons imparted to them by the teacher in a hungry stomach. All these issues need serious attention and careful consideration.

- The quality of printing of the text books leaves much to be desired. This is because letters are not bold and bright but microscopically small. In a class room which is not properly lighted, this will cause a lot of strain to the eyes of children. This is perhaps the reason (apart from deficient cognitive skills) as to why the students at TEC Thimiyampettai were found to be slow and halting in reading the text.
- The note book/exercise books were also found to be very small. They should be of moderate to large size, with good quality paper so that the same is not smudged and with clear bold lines so that the students can write between the two lines (this will inculcate the habit of writing/straight and writing a neat hand).
- The officers of education department while visiting a school should make it a point to meet and interact with the parents (which they are not doing at all) and find out from the parents about the pace and progress of learning and other learning difficulties, if any.
- VECs and Parent Teacher's Associations must be activated and their members should take an active interest in the smooth management of the school.
- Parental illiteracy is an important stumbling block for children's education; it also directly contributes to perpetuation of child labour. After the gusto and tempo of 80s and 90s with which Anivoli Iyakkam (campaigns for total literacy) was conducted, the movement has died out completely in Tamil Nadu as elsewhere. This needs to be revived. If parents are made functionally literate in the true sense of the term they will take an abiding interest in children's education. They will be able to understand and internalize what their children are learning. This is how it is said that UPE, UEE and AE Supplement and complement each other;

they also reinforce each other. Promoting one at the cost of the other will be a national disaster.

A few success stories

I Nila Palli (moon school) of Viruddhanagar:

Numerical references to full moon after stand for prosperous life. For many ex-working children in the district, full moon signified rebirth. The 'nila palli' (moon school), a unique awareness programme conducted on full moon days to enroll working children into special schools run for them was conceptualized and translated to action by the district administration of Viruddhanagar way back in September, 2002.

The monthly programme has ensured education to around 2300 working children under the age of 14 and is in the process of mainstreaming another 1500 to formal school system.

Apart from the basic objective of enrolling the children to transitional education centres (TECs) run by the INDUS Child Labour Project the interactive sessions under the open sky provide a platform to fire the imagination of rural children and bring the best out of them.

The sessions have succeeded in motivating the school dropouts who have now reduced themselves to working children under economic compulsions. The sessions are conducted with full public participation by using public address system. Diverse activities including story telling, book reading, sharing experiences, simple quiz programmes etc. are conducted. Thereafter the children are taken to a two year training in special schools with abridged curriculum and through these schools are facilitated to join the regular stream.

Through 'nila palli' an intensive campaign is launched to create awareness on importance of sending children to school instead of to work. The campaign is directed against both parents and employers who were initially sceptical about the outcome of the programme but who now appear to be totally transformed.

There is the success story of Chandra and 60 others who after taking the 'nila palli' route not only excelled in the last SSLC examination but notched young scientist awards. Yet another striking part of the success story is that 65% of such students happen to be girls.

'Nila Palli' also targets the root cause of the issue of child labour i.e. financial instability in the family. Through this campaign efforts are being made to mobilize and organize the mothers of the working children (now students) into SHGs which will eventually provide economic independence to these families.

The district administration as also INDUS Child Labour Project authorities exude confidence over the fact that the district (Viruddhanagar) which had the dubious distinction of having a large presence of working children in match and fireworks industries is now showing signs of progressive reduction in the number of these children (from a five digit figure it has plummeted to a three digit figure) and hopefully over a period of time, if the current trend continues, it may be a thing of the past.

II The driving spirit in the campaign for elimination of child labour – the Collector and DM Viruddhanagar – Shri S.S. Jwahaar:

The senior most civil servant in the district of Viruddhanagar – Shri S. S. Jwahaar no doubt belongs to the tribe of officers of 'Steel frame' but is a transformed person today, totally sold out to the campaign of elimination of child labour. For him, in a district of disrepute (for employment of children in match and fireworks), there is only one passion and one pastime – a ruthless and relentless campaign for elimination of child labour. Some of the notable initiatives taken by him are:-

- he provided the leadership and direction for collecting one lakh signatures from people belonging to all walks of life to create a mass awareness of this menace;

- the signatures were collected on a 100 metre long white cloth;
 - the signatories vowed that they would not encourage child labour in any form;
 - the Collector along with the SP was the first to leave his signature;
 - he succeeded in getting an undertaking in writing from the industrial units and other establishments that they will not employ children, will not allow employment of children by others and would assist district administration in eradication of the same;
 - Over 2400 traders, owners of match and fireworks industries teashops and workshops signed bond papers not to employ children;
 - Stickers were pasted in provision stores, roadside tea stalls and textile shops reading 'no children employed here'.
- On the day of his farewell (he was transferred and posted as senior Collector, Madurai) he had an interactive session for nearly 1 hour with over 150 students who had come to the Collectorate as part of an educational tour. He took them round the Collectorate in batches, to his chamber and meeting hall only to exhort them that they too can enter the same chamber not as student but as the district officer. He distributed note books, pens and pencils as a token of love. And the most valued gift the children carried home was the confidence the Collector instilled in them.

III Outstanding performance of and public recognition accorded to a student of INDUS Child Labour Project:

A 12 year old girl – Ramalakshmi studying in a Special School for working children from Sivakashi town in Viruddhanagar district bagged the third prize at the 5 day national level children's science conference held at Mysore organized by the Department of science and Technology and Tamil Nadu Science Forum in which the ex-President of India APJ Abdul Kalam was the Chief Guest. Ramalakshmi had presented a nutritious recipe at the exhibition which won her accolades and the award.

Raimalakshmi with 6 siblings and studying in the fourth standard at the special school for working children helps her mother in making cardboard boxes used for match industries. Her father – Rajrathinam is employed in Shivakashi head post office.

Ramalakshmi won the prize for her theme, 'procedures on food' and 'nutritious food for all'. Narrating the 90 day long 'research' in gathering all requisite raw materials her guide said that the nutritious food prepared with 'nine variety of grains' (navathaniyam) by Ramalakshmi was distributed among and cross section in Shivakashi and was greatly appreciated.

An executive summary of observations/impressions, conclusions and recommendations:

- Employment of children in match, fireworks and explosives at Shivaskashi in Viruddhanagar district at one point of time had brought a lot of disrepute to Tamil Nadu.
- Successive Commissions of Enquiry had gone into at length the plight and predicament of children in these enterprises and had brought out a harrowing picture of their exploitation.

- The Civil Writ Application No. 465 was filed in 1986 by Shri M.C. Mehta, noted environmentalist and social activist against the backdrop of this exploitation.
- The judgement of the Supreme Court delivered on 10.12.96 came like a breath of fresh air.
- It injected a lot of hope, faith and conviction into the minds of numerous cynics and skeptics (who hitherto were referring to the problem of child labour as a tragic socio-cultural ground level reality) that elimination of child labour is not a rhetoric, not utopian but very much possible, feasible and achievable.
- Since then Government of Tamil Nadu have initiated a series of bold and imaginative initiatives as also planned, coordinated and concerted efforts for elimination of child labour.
- These comprise of –
 - formulation of a State level action plan;
 - formulation of action plans at the district level;
 - creation of State level and district level institutional mechanisms for monitoring, supervision and coordination;
 - creation of an environment which will be conducive to elimination of child labour;
 - creation of positive awareness in the minds of all sections of civil society (parents, guardians, employers, teachers, students, women, youth and so on);
 - launching 12 NCLPs in 12 child labour prone districts;
 - reflecting the political will, commitment and determination for elimination of child labour in various policy statements;

- personal involvement of Chief Secretary, the No. 1 civil servant of the State – Shri Lakshmikant Tripathi ably assisted by the Principal Secretary, Labour – Shri R.K. Khanna in all important events and activities concerned with elimination of child labour.
- Emergence of INDUS Child Labour Project has imparted a new dimension to all these initiatives and efforts in as much as:-
 - INDUS Project has adopted a very systematic, methodical and organized approach to the issue which is also rational and scientific;
 - The categorization of children into 3 distinct groups i.e. 5-8, 9-13, 14-17 and drawing up different strategies for each group is a step in the right direction in as much as:-
 - Identified young working children in 5-8 age group will be straight away mainstreamed into the formal school system;
 - Older working children in 9-13 age group will be provided with transitional education and support services through TECs which will prepare them for being mainstreamed into the formal system of education;
 - Adolescent workers in 14-17 years will be provided with vocational skill training which will make them either wage employed or self employed and put them on a foundation of economic self reliance.
- Additionally, the strategy of mobilizing and organizing parents of children into SHGs, imparting vocational skills to the members, creating a revolving fund for the members with loans and

subsidies is sound and sensible as it will end up with creation of avenues of self employment and incremental income generation for parents which will eventually dissuade them for sending their children to work and encourage them to send children to school.

- Since inception, INDUS Project has generated a series of good practices; it has laid down norms and criteria for identifying good practices as well such as:-

- Creativity;
- Innovativeness;
- Replicability;
- Sustainability;
- Relevance;
- Responsiveness;
- Ethical dimension.
- Efficient use of scarce resources;
- Primacy and centrality of the target group;
- Removing cynicism and promoting rational and scientific understanding of a concept.

- INDUS has given birth to an array of institutions in as much as it has laid down detailed guidelines for optimally efficient functioning of these institutions;

- INDUS has also given birth to an impressive array of literature and communication materials on the subject of elimination of child labour;

- It has brought convergence from a concept to action. Functionaries of Education, Health, Rural Development, Women and Child Development, Social Welfare, Adi Dravidar Welfare (SC and ST Welfare) have come to think, plan and act together with one energy, one conscience and one force in the direction of elimination of child labour.

- Today in Tamil Nadu, Collector/DM of one district is vying with another to declare the district concerned as totally child labour free.
- It may, however, be noted that elimination of child labour is not like eradication of small pox; it requires planned, coordinated and concerted efforts which will have to be undertaken in a gradual and sequential manner, the steps in the sequence being:-
 - simultaneous attention to eradication of poverty, unemployment, under employment, hunger, starvation and malnutrition;
 - simultaneous attention to eradication of parental or adult illiteracy and creation of a learning society;
 - simultaneous attention to creating conditions which will make 100% enrolment, 100% retention, 100% participation and 100% achievement of minimum levels of learning possible for all children in 6-14 age group;
 - simultaneous attention to eradication of all other abominable mindsets and practices such as foeticide, female infanticide, sex determination tests, all forms of sex based and birth related discrimination, differentiation and segmentation in society;
 - simultaneous creation of conditions which will be conducive for evolution, advancement and all round growth and development of children as responsible and responsive human beings.
- The other steps which need to be taken in a sequence for elimination of child labour are:-
 - compulsory registration of births of all children;

- institutional mechanism for growth monitoring of all children and in particular, children in 0-6 age group;
- strengthening the base of anganwadi centres under ICDS;
- programmes of universal immunization to be carried to its logical conclusion;
- maternal mortality, infant and child mortality to be brought down to zero;
- all parents need to be told and retold through a massive campaign that what they have been doing by pushing their own progeny involuntarily to work is wrong and they should stop doing what they have been doing so far;
- all employers/owners of enterprises need to be told and retold through a massive campaign that by subjecting the most tender and precious human resource to work and in particular work which is deleterious to its survival and growth no prosperity will accrue to enterprises;
- all children should be withdrawn from work-hazardous and non-hazardous alike through firm and decisive state action (as has been done by Government of Karnataka);
- children whose health would have been shattered and personality and psyche crippled through exposure to dust, heat, fume, gaseous and toxic substances would need a carefully crafted process of rehabilitation and reintegration into the social mainstream;
- such rehabilitation cannot come overnight; it will be a step by step effort, starting with tender care and attention, preparation to enter the world of education which should be catholic and free from hassles of discrimination, check up of health by professionally competent and caring doctors,

nutrition through mid day meals in a caring and solicitous environment and prevocational skill training for converting a child into a complete woman/man.

- Tamil Nadu which is a progressive State with a low infant and child mortality rate, with a high rate of literacy, with a positive political and administrative environment and good investment in the social service sector (education, health, drinking water, sanitation etc.) has already launched a number of progressive initiatives in the direction of evolution and growth of children. All of them combined augur well for eventually accomplishing the goal of elimination of child labour.
