



## National Consultation on Child Labour Free Zones, August 2016

---

135 delegates from 16 states participated in the National Consultation on Child Labour Free Zones on August 24<sup>th</sup> 2016 in New Delhi. These delegates represented diverse stakeholders who are engaged in eradicating child labour – social activists, government officials, business executives, international organizations, labour unions, journalists, academics, and others. The Consultation was organized by the Stop Child Labour Campaign.

The purpose of the consultation was to share the best practices and the concept of area based approach and child labour free zones with different stakeholders and also to explore avenues of collaboration in addressing the issue of child labour. Given its timing, the Consultation also critiqued the recently enacted Child and Adolescent Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act Amendment 2016 (CLPRA).

The Consultation combined speaker-led sessions, moderated discussions, informal conversations over breaks and the development of a Delhi Declaration on Child Labour Free India. The sessions were led by Shantha Sinha, Swami Agnivesh, Venkat Reddy, Coen Kompier, Henriette Ahrens, Rukmini Rao, Varun Sharma, Thijs Van Brussel, Shamshad Khan, Helen R. Sekar, Pooran Chandra Pandey, Manoj Bhatt, Ruchira Gujral, Bram Callewier, Vijay Jain, Girish Kowale, Joseph Victor Raj, Perna Prasad, Daya Ram, Razia Ismail Abbasi, Vidyasagar Ramamurthy and Priyank Kanoongo.

Consistent with international legal definitions, the Stop Child Labour Campaign defines every person under the age of 18 as a child. Participants affirmed that every child who is not in full-time, formal education must be seen as a child labourer. That articulation is broader than the Indian legal definition of a child labourer being any person under the age of 14 who is working outside the home. Delegates framed child labour within the right to *childhood*, rather than just the right to education.

The participants concurred that poverty is not the sole cause of child labour; they insisted that child labour is not caused by parents who don't care about their children. Based on their experience, study and analysis, the delegates asserted that child labour is caused by multiple structural inequalities, including caste, gender, class, and disability. They highlighted the insensitivity of the Indian school system to the needs of first generation learners, the deeply casteist mindset that pervades Indian society and the continuing violations of workers' rights.

It is in this context that Child Labour Free Zones and the Area Based Approach emerge as promising strategies to counter child labour. Child Labour Free Zones (CLFZ) are geographical areas – such as a village, urban neighbourhood – where all children are systematically being taken away from labour and (re)integrated into formal, full-time schools. The Area Based Approach towards CLFZ involves all people who live, work and attends school within a specific area. Everyone in the area should be convinced that no child should work and every child must be in school.

Practitioners presented case studies of their experiences working on an Area Based Approach to create CLFZ in parts of Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tirupur. Different stakeholders from the



natural stone industry, the carpet weaving industry and the garments industry shared their perspectives. These stories highlighted how the work to eliminate child labour had to be conducted at multiple levels with diverse stakeholders – from children to families to schools to the Police to the local media to labour unions to international brands. There was distrust and suspicion among some stakeholders initially; over time, successful programs facilitated dialogue and fostered trust. Mobilizing and empowering children to advocate for their rights was critical.

Participants also expressed their disappointment about the recent CLPRA Amendment: given how the tail-end of many supply chains have now disappeared into homes, the vagueness of the term “family enterprises” threatened to undo decades of work to combat child labour; the sudden shrinking of the “hazardous jobs” list was not based on any improvement in the working conditions in those jobs; the logic of “social fabric” was critiqued as being rooted in a casteist mindset that justifies child labour to maintain traditional crafts. Participants also saw new openings: the expert committee setup by the Government is open to inputs as they finalize the list of hazardous jobs; if ILO conventions 138 and 182 are ratified, they would enable stronger, international monitoring.

Participants also articulated a roadmap drawing inspiration from Swami Agnivesh’s call in the morning “Are we ready to accept that all children are born equal? Can we ensure equal education for all children? Are we ready to fight against modern day child slavery? Then we shall join hands and also bring people in power to join the fight.” The delegates pledged to work for total abolition of child labour in all its forms. That requires creating a strong, mass movement to abolish child labour in the country; forming political alliances with other movements; training local media to report on child labour; collecting data to influence governments and businesses; using technology creatively. The Delhi Declaration summarized the vision and demands from the Consultation.

For more details, please contact: Joseph Thomas ([J.Thomas@icco-cooperation.org](mailto:J.Thomas@icco-cooperation.org))