

## ● Statutory Crèches in Bangalore's Garment Industry

A Multi-Stakeholder Consultation

### Venue

United Theological College, Miller Road, Bangalore

### Time

10 am to 3.30 pm

### Organizers

Fair Labor Association • Samvada • Cividep-India • Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights

## Proceedings

Ms. HeeWon Brindle-Khym of Fair Labor Association (FLA), USA, welcomed the gathering. Absence of a crèche facility poses a great problem for all working women with children. She expressed the hope that Cividep's study on the condition of legally mandated crèches in Bangalore's garment industry and the consultation would contribute to enhance coverage and services of crèches.

### Session I

## Crèches in Garment Factories – Statutory Requirements

The Chairperson of Karnataka State Commission for the Protection of Child Rights (KSCPCR), Ms. Nina Nayak took an interest in the issue of crèche facilities in garment factories even before she assumed office in 2009. The issue of non-functional crèche in garment factories was first brought to the notice of the Commission through a formal communication from 'Munnade', a social organization of women garment workers. Munnade's study showed that nearly a third of women workers' left their children at home unattended. This was a serious concern for the mothers and, due to their anxiety for the safety of their children, they found it difficult to concentrate on work. Ms. Nina Nayak said that despite several meetings with brands and inspections of crèches in garment factories, little has changed. She appealed to the manufacturers to invest in their factory crèches so that more workers can avail of this service.

Ms. Nina Nayak shared the main findings of the study initiated by the Commission. Questionnaires were sent to 575 garment factory managements across the three industrial areas of Bangalore - Hosur Road, Peenya Industrial Area and Mysore Road. Only 126 questionnaires were duly filled and could be used for analysis. In general, although a large number of workers in the factories were women, the availability and utilization of crèche facilities were negligible. Only 10% of the women workers of the surveyed factories utilized crèche facility.

The Assistant Labour Commissioner for the Government of Karnataka, Mr. Sripad Balashetty, said that most of the garment factories he had visited were found to have dysfunctional crèches; in some factory crèches, children are brought in only during factory inspections. One constraint of the enforcement mechanism of the Labour Department is the shortage of officers in relation to the number of factory sites. He appreciated the idea that all stakeholders take responsibility for the care and development of workers' children. Mr. Balashetty said that though the Karnataka government had come up with the "Suvarna Vasthra Neeti" (Golden Textile Policy) for the promotion of the garment and textile industry, it unfortunately does not speak of any welfare provisions for the workers. It will be appropriate for trade unions and civil society to demand that the textile policy incorporates the needs of workers.

Ms. Ishrath Nissar of 'Samvada' spoke about her organization's experience on crèche-related issues in the garment industry. Samvada's main focus is on youth development and education and has conducted vocational courses to enhance their employability, including training on child care skills. Samvada has also worked with some factories to set up crèches.

In 2009 workers' organizations raised concerns about the increasing instances of garment workers trying to give away their children to adoption or charitable institutions because of their inability to take care of them while engaged in full-time factory work. Like-minded organizations such as Samvada, Karnataka State Council for Child Welfare (KSCCW), APSA, Cividep-India and Munnade came together to campaign for better child care in Bangalore's garment factories. At the time, surveys showed that just about 6% of eligible and needy children were using factory crèches. Studies also showed that as much as 34% of children were being left unattended in the workers' homes and 43% of children left in the care of the extended family.

In April 2009, five major brands, Gap, Mothercare, H&M, Wal-Mart and Li & Fung attended a meeting called for by the group to discuss the condition of crèches in garment factories. All five brands promised to cooperate and engage in positive action to improve the situation. A Wal-Mart representative organised a meeting of 40 welfare officers from 21 factories. Though factories promised positive action, very little changed on the ground. Meanwhile, the KSCPCR called for a public hearing on the issue of crèches in garment factories in August 2009. Fifteen workers from different factories and senior labour officials participated. The public hearing revealed the pathetic state of factory crèches and the many shortcomings. Following this, brand representatives approached the Chairperson of KSCPCR and she addressed a brands meeting, presented the situation of child care in the garment sector and also suggested ways forward. Samvada worked on one of the suggestions that came up during these deliberations, namely setting up of a model community crèche. Although there was no follow-up from brands, there were some leather accessories manufacturers in Tamil Nadu that reached out to Samvada for help to set up crèches and, currently, there are model crèches functioning in these factories.

## Session II

# The Need for and the Reality of Crèche Facilities

Members of Garment Labour Union (GLU) and Karnataka Garment Workers Union (KGWU) spoke about the experiences of women workers related to crèche services in factories. Workers are dissatisfied with all aspects of the crèche facilities provided by the factories. Very few factories have functional crèches. There are not enough care takers at the crèches and the space available also is often unsuitable and insufficient. Many women workers leave their young children at their native place or with the elder children which is not a satisfactory or safe option at all. Even in the case of the few factories that have crèches, they do not admit children above 3.5 years of age.

Small children of garment workers who have no one to look after them during their mother's work hours spend time loitering around in the neighbourhood. Workers complain that their factory crèches do not provide milk or biscuits to children as required by law. In some factories the care takers wouldn't clean children if they soiled themselves. Their mothers were taken out of the production line and asked to clean their children. Union activists feel that there is a great need for manufacturers to pay more attention to crèches as working mothers could then concentrate better on their work thereby

contributing to increased productivity. This can also help reduce labour turnover and address the crisis of labour shortage in the industry.

Cividep-India shared some highlights of its draft research report on crèche facilities in garment factories which reiterated the need for functional crèches in factories. This study interviewed 300 garment women workers from 60 factories. All respondents were in the age group of 20-30 years with at least one child below six years of age. It was found that only 25% of the garment workers' children who were interviewed were attending either factory crèches or private crèches. The rest were either with their grandparents in their native village, at home alone or left under the care of neighbours. These facts point to a huge gap in safe child care for the workers' children. Garment workers also found it hard to bring their young children to factory crèches because it was difficult to commute carrying young children in crowded buses or to walk with them for long distances. Workers who bring their children to the factory crèche sometimes stop utilizing the facility because they are unhappy with the conditions.

Workers were unanimous in their opinion that good crèche facilities would enable them to concentrate better at work, help save them money that was currently being spent on alternative child care arrangements, and would improve punctuality. They also said that provision of such useful services would positively change their perception of their employers.

A short documentary film on factory crèches that was jointly produced by KSCPCR and Samvada was shown. The documentary was quite moving, especially when women workers expressed their sense of guilt and failure to provide love and care to their infants due to their work commitments.

### Session III

## Factory Practices and Stakeholders' Perspectives

Ms. HeeWon Brindle-Khym of FLA said that we must not consider the 'floor' as the 'ceiling', meaning to say that factories must not aim at just complying with minimum standards of facilities but must try to reach beyond to a higher and better conditions. Often the setting of standards is done by brands for the suppliers to follow. There is a 'dis-connect' between social audits and the real conditions in the factory. One reason is that the voices of workers are not heard. In the context of crèches, there is a need to establish measures to gauge whether child care facilities in supplier factories are adequate – and adequacy is best measured by the parents that use the facilities.

Mr. D.S.K. Murthy of Social Accountability Accreditation Society (SAAS) said that the approach of certification is to remediate shortcomings of factory facilities. He explained the violations of standards in terms of 'major' and 'minor' violations. For example if a crèche is completely absent in the factory it will be regarded as a major violation whereas if a crèche exists but is deficient in certain respects it will be considered as a minor violation which requires to be remediated in a time bound manner.

It was encouraging to see that some garment manufacturers in Bangalore were making serious efforts to provide quality child care to at least part of their workforce. A team of human resource managers from Gokaldas Images presented and provide details on how they manage their creche, including how they involve workers in maintaining personal hygiene of the children and how they use mothers' committees to help monitor the conditions of the creche. In addition, management encourages the mothers to give importance to the further education and development of the children after the crèche days are over.

Mr. Anees Ahmed, Director of Naser Bali Gloves, a leather accessories manufacturer located in Vaniyambadi, Tamil Nadu, shared his experience in establishing a crèche in the factory with the advisory assistance from Samvada. The company erected separate buildings and cordoned off an outdoor play space for the children. He said that the crèche has helped in curbing absenteeism and enhance the overall work experience and loyalty of the workers. Anees said that one important component of the crèche in his factory was early childhood education. He said he was amazed at the positive changes seen in the children due to the committed work of trained child care workers. He said that the monthly running cost of the crèche which included salaries of child care workers and nutritious food for the children, is about Rs.25000, which he said was 'nothing' compared to the benefits resulting from the creche.

Representatives of brands such as GAP, H&M, Mothercare, FILA and American Eagle were united in their view that compliance to the statutory requirement of crèche facilities in supplier factories was an important component of standards. They said they were willing to be of help in addressing the issue of child care in garment factories and to work with other stakeholders to achieve concrete results.

#### Session IV

## Developing Best Practices and the Way Forward

Ms. Anitha Ratnam, Director of Samvada, made a presentation on Community Childhood Centres. Attention to pre-school education of workers' children can contribute towards inclusive growth and social mobility of underprivileged children by offering them a good educational foundation, a stimulating environment and a safe childhood. Good child care facilities can also enhance worker satisfaction, motivation and productivity. It has the potential to decrease worker attrition and related risks, problems and costs. Factory crèches are expected to cater to the 0-6 age group of children. However, the 3 to 6 age group requires more than a crèche, they need a pre-school. Moreover children between 6-12 years of age need after-school care: for their safety, recreation, personality development and enhancement of their learning skills. This is the rationale for Samvada and its allies proposing Community Based Childhood Centres. In this conception, the Community Childhood Centres will be located near workers' living areas.

While factories focus on statutory requirements to provide crèches within the factory premises, brands can provide financial support for Community Childhood Centres as their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) activity. In Samvada's estimation, each community centre catering to 50 children would involve an initial expenditure of Rs. 5 lakhs and a monthly recurring expenditure of Rs. 50,000. These community centres are proposed to be managed by a multi-stakeholder committee.

Mr. Gopinath K.Parakuni of Cividep-India initiated the plenary session on the way forward. He remarked that the garment industry is making a significant contribution to the country's and the city's economy. In Bangalore itself it employs over 500,000 workers thereby providing livelihood to a large segment of the population. No doubt compliance to legal requirements such as factory crèches for children of workers up to 6 years is very important. However, there are many challenges that suppliers face in instituting good quality crèches in their premises. Also, for many women workers, bringing their children to the factory crèche pose many obstacles. Child care is squarely a social responsibility which goes beyond that of the mother and of the family and therefore all stakeholders need to pitch in to improve the situation.

A brand's representative said that we must bring in the managements of manufacturers who supply to the domestic market too. A worker leader said that we can explore possibilities of working with local government schools to provide after-school care for children. The representative of a manufacturer said that it might be possible to work with Anganwadis of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) programme of the Central Ministry of Women and Child Development. A brand representative said that different solutions need to be worked out though compliance to the legal requirements cannot be avoided. An independent medical practitioner said that there might be lessons to be learned from the way the plantation sector has dealt with the child care issue. A participating doctor observed that an important part of the work is to set basic standards in the establishment and running of crèches.

The consultation concluded with a multi-stakeholder working group being formed to continue the dialogue and to take definitive actions to address the issue of adequate child care facilities, both within the legal requirements and that of social responsibility. Suhasini Singh of Cividep-India concluded the conference with words of thanks to participants of the meeting.

# Photographs



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