



ANNUAL REPORT 2021

# CIVIDEP INDIA



**Pursuit of Decent Work & Corporate Accountability**

Cividep Seeks To Safeguard Workers' Rights &  
Ensure Responsible Business Conduct By Global Corporations

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## Executive Director's Note



Dear friends, I am delighted to share my first message, summarizing Cividep's performance, our preparedness in handling the pandemic, and the strong community ties that kept us going.

Cividep India is a passionate advocate of decent work and corporate accountability. For two decades, we have strived for workers' rights in India's most demanding global supply chains and worked towards responsible business decisions from corporate entities.

As we navigate through the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic uncertainties, Cividep's goals are more relevant than ever - how to ensure workplaces are safe, and secure and provide living wages to workers.

The past year required all of us to find ways to adapt to constraints on how we work and highlighted the importance of our network of committed partners - workers, collectives, academics, researchers, civil society partners, and other stakeholders.

When I took up the role of Executive Director in November 2020, my immediate priority was to bring greater stability and continuity to Cividep's work, including deepening relationships with the worker communities and partners.

Our traditional activities - fieldwork - had to go on pause so we could help staff and workers stay safe. We came up with some quick and effective options to keep inspiring workers and our community.

We arranged financial, material, and health relief for our community and staff hit by COVID. Our work moved online while we arranged mental health counselling to help the team deal with uncertainties and isolation.

The organisation was growing and changing in the middle of a pandemic. So we spent a lot of time looking at our mission and thinking about what it means to be a non-profit in a post-pandemic world.

We used the time to begin work on a new frame for our programming. Fieldwork and worker resource centres will always be part of our core identity. But we asked ourselves how Cividep could better serve and support a wider set of people to access safe and secure workplaces. We are in the process of figuring out a sustainable and productive solution to that.

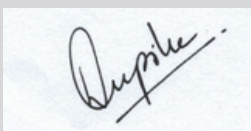
As I read through the Annual Report, I am struck by what has been achieved in the past year. Specific highlights include the various garment research programmes under STITCH and extensive projects in the leather and electronics sectors. We also met essential compliance milestones and received the Esther Busser Memorial Prize on our 20th anniversary year.

Despite the challenges and constraints, it has been a productive year, which would not have been possible without our partners. I thank the Board for their support and guidance.

The world of work has significantly changed in the last few years and continues to do so. Cividep is up for the challenge and also to adapt to the rapidly shifting socio-political environment around us. International developments in human rights and environmental due diligence in global supply chains give us hope.

Simultaneously India is also responding to these changes with its interventions. It is a time of growth for ESG reporting and sustainability commitments for companies. Cividep remains hopeful and will keep voicing workers' concerns in this rapidly evolving environment.

Thanks,  
Deepika Rao.

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deepika Rao".

2021

# SNAPSHOTS

**14+**   
Live Projects

 **6238**  
Workers & Families  
Get Vaccines

**5**   
Garment Sector  
Initiatives

 **3850+**  
Workers Get  
COVID Relief

**3**   
Leather Sector  
Initiatives

 **20th**  
ANNIVERSARY

**3**   
Electronics Sector  
Initiatives

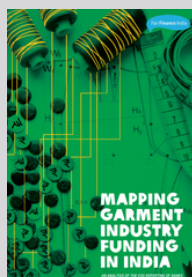
 **14+**  
Partner Organisations

**3**   
Branding  
Exercises

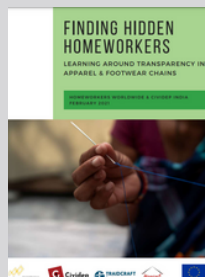
 **10+**  
Memberships In  
Alliances & Networks \*

\*South Asia Coalition of Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC), Sustainable Textile Initiative: Together for Change (STITCH), OECD Watch, Fair Finance Network, Fair Labour Association Board, Fair Wear Foundation Board, Human Rights & Business Network - India, ANROEV, Occupational and Environmental Health Network of India (OEHNI), Electronics Watch Monitoring Committee

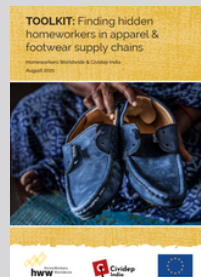
**3** Reports:



[Mapping Garment Industry Funding in India](#)



[Finding Hidden Homeworkers](#)



[Finding Hidden Homeworkers](#)

# Our Story So Far

We are a team of committed researchers and policy analysts who seek decent work for all. We partner with workers, collectives, companies, and brands to undertake in-depth research, awareness creation, and stakeholder engagement.

Cividep is based in Bengaluru, has field offices across South India, and has been operational since 2000. We educate workers about rights, help them come together, and guide them in grievance redressal. We hold corporates accountable for their business decisions through research into working conditions, convene multi-stakeholder forums, and advocate policy change.

Our focus: low wage-workers in the export-oriented garment, leather, and electronics industries, and coffee & tea plantations. Our research delves into wages, gender violence, and occupational health. Cividep analyses corporate conduct based on International Business and Human Rights guidelines.

Through our research and wide-ranging policy work, **we aim to safeguard workers' rights and change the way corporates work** in global supply chains. The aim is to ensure responsible business conduct towards workers & the environment.



In the last two decades, Cividep has carried out research-informed workers' rights initiatives to address human rights abuses, violations of workers' rights, environmental damage, and unfair business practices.

This has resulted in systemic and behavioural changes in India's garment, leather and electronics sectors and touched the lives of several workers, mostly women. Now, there are more childcare facilities at garment factories, recognition of leather homeworkers by corporations, and acceptance of workers in the electronics sector by collectives.

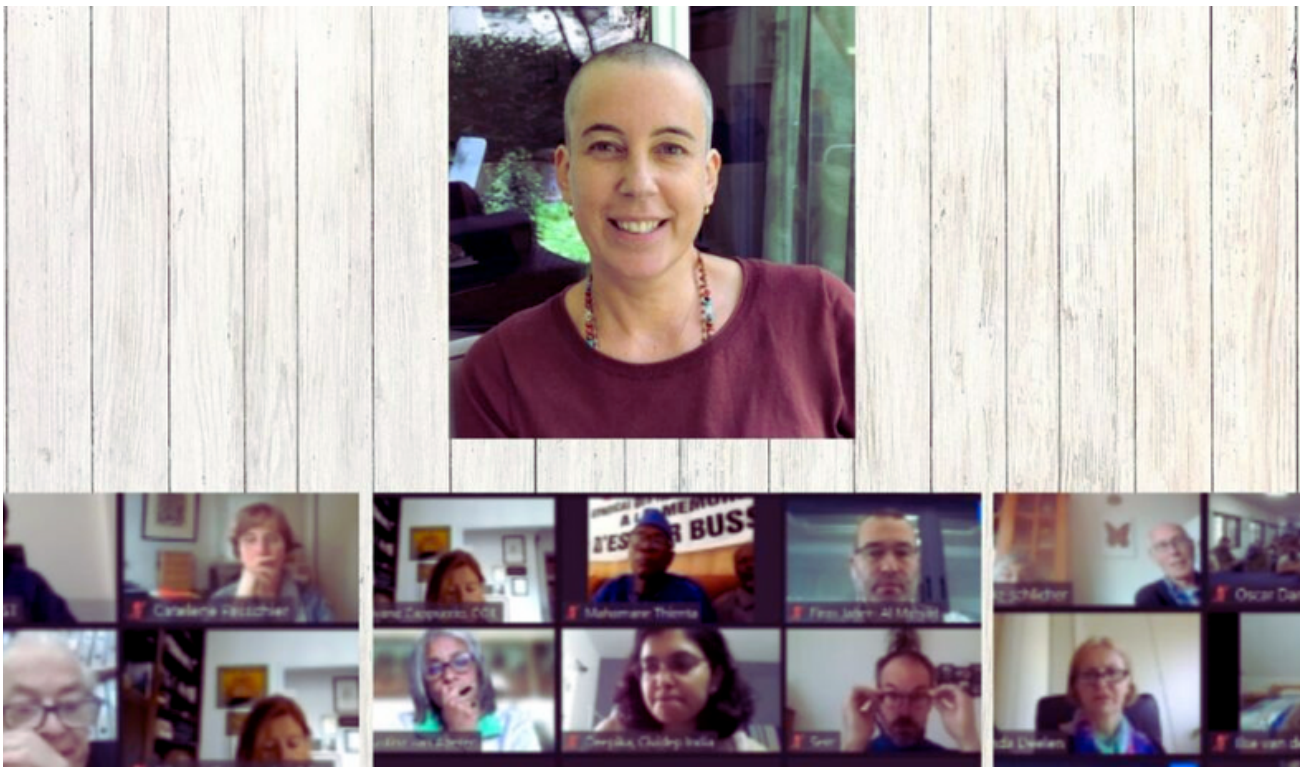
Cividep is consulted by national and international coalitions and leads the way in Business and Human Rights in India.

It was heartening for the team when **Cividep received the prestigious Esther Busser Memorial Prize 2021**. The jury wrote: "Congratulations on this important achievement and to your outstanding work to promote social justice and decent work!"



A childcare facility at a garment factory in Bengaluru. Cividep has been working with grassroots organisations to improve such facilities.

# We Mark Our 20th Anniversary Braving Pandemic, Uncertainties



Executive Director Deepika Rao receives the Esther Busser Memorial Prize at a virtual event. (Above) late activist-researcher Esther

2021 was a watershed year for Cividep in many ways. The organisation marked its 20-year anniversary at a most challenging time in its existence.

Cividep itself had come into being in 2000 anticipating the unrest and challenges that were to follow India's adoption of economic liberalisation and globalisation policies. The founders were deeply **concerned about the welfare of workers** who were joining global supply chains in droves.

Since then, **Cividep has implemented several workers' rights initiatives in export-oriented industries - garment, leather, consumer electronics, and coffee & tea plantations.**

The anniversary year should have been a time for Cividep to reflect, appreciate and celebrate its interventions and successes, both big and small.

However, the second wave of COVID-19 had the organisation scrambling to respond to urgent needs. As the rising rate of infections and the consequent healthcare crisis affected millions, Cividep had to respond to the needs of workers and its own team.

Just as work in export industries started picking up after the pandemic's first wave, the new set of infections had more workers falling sick.

**Cividep continued its relief work** that had started in 2020 across its centres in Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. It also initiated a vaccination drive for Bengaluru's garment workers and their families.

Another challenge that Cividep faced was the uncertainty regarding regulatory approvals and the constraints the process imposed on its work. This period also passed with the help of the admin team who ensured that all the requirements were fulfilled. The team started working on several initiatives and research projects in various sectors, especially garment.

A shot in the arm was **Cividep's selection as one of the five winners of the prestigious Esther Busser Memorial Prize 2021**, awarded to organisations working for social justice and decent work. It reiterated the significance and the need for the kind of work Cividep does, in these challenging and uncertain times.

# Fast Fashion Still Hurts Garment Workers

Cividep continued its COVID relief consisting of cash and in-kind transfers, with the support of APPI and FEMNET, to help workers with rent, school/college fees, rations, and utilities. It also held an awareness campaign to address vaccine hesitancy and inaccessibility among garment worker families. Training sessions on mental health and nutrition during the pandemic were held for adolescent girls with FEMNET's support.

## **Projects in 2021**

### **STITCH (Sustainable Textile Initiative - Together for Change)**

As part of this five-year collaborative project, Cividep initiated plans for research under several themes this year, such as Mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence (mHRDD) and social reproduction from the perspective of paid production work of female garment workers.



A typical day at a garment factory floor in Bengaluru, India

### **Amplifying Workers' Voices: Enabling Workers to Organise and Access Legal Entitlements**

With the support of Azim Premji Philanthropic Initiatives (APPI), Cividep initiated a 3-year project (2021-2024) to build collective leadership & agency among women workers to improve their bargaining power, support them in demand for equal pay, abuse-free workplaces, and basic health support.

### **Multi-actor Partnership (MAP) on the health of workers**

Cividep India along with three other organisations; FEMNET, SÜDWIND e.V., and TURC, launched a Multi-Actor Partnership (MAP) project with the support of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development on the health of workers in the clothing and footwear sector.

### **Partnership for Sustainable Textiles**

Cividep hosted virtual workshops to introduce an initiative by PST and Fair Wear Foundation to discuss and invite recommendations on PST's tools for accessing remedy mechanisms.

### **Operationalizing Labour Rights (OLR)**

Under this five-year project (that concluded in 2021), in collaboration with the researchers at Cardiff Business School and WISERD, Cividep completed field research for a longitudinal, workplace-centered study of garment workers' access to remedy.

**Anniversary Milestone: Pioneered studies on childcare facilities in Bengaluru's garment factories. Sustained evidence-based advocacy and campaigning with brands and suppliers created more awareness by 2017; led to the establishment of creches by many factories.**

# Living Wages Elude Leather Workers

In 2021, more than a year after the first outbreak of the pandemic and the nationwide lockdowns, the leather workers of Ambur in Tamil Nadu still faced income and work uncertainties. Cividep continued to provide relief - ration supplies and hygiene kits to workers. Despite the inability to hold physical meetings with them at the organization's Worker Resource Centre, the field team remained in touch online. Floods in Ambur in November 2021 inundated the banks of the Palar river, flooding the homes of many workers. Cividep was ready with ration kits for workers who lost their homes and belongings.

## ***Project updates 2021***

### **Hidden Homeworkers project**

Cividep co-published a framework to help businesses (and the organisations working with them) improve transparency about homeworking within their supply chains. The framework research, and the resulting report - Finding Hidden Homeworkers: Learning around Transparency in Apparel & Footwear Chains - were carried out by Homeworkers Worldwide (HWW) and Cividep in collaboration with Traidcraft Exchange and with the financial support of the European Commission.

### **Together for Decent Leather**

This year, Cividep initiated field research to investigate the employment and working conditions in the leather and leather products manufacturing industries in the Vellore-Ambur leather cluster in Tamil Nadu. The project is being financially supported by the European Commission.

### **Multi- Actor Partnership (MAP)**

Cividep conducted a study on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent national lockdown on workers employed in the leather production and footwear manufacturing industry in Vellore in Tamil Nadu. This was in collaboration with German partner organisation INKOTA and the Society for Labour and Development (SLD) in India. The research report was published early this year.

**Anniversary Milestone: Collaborated with Homeworkers' Worldwide & an international footwear brand in 2018-19 to map their sub-contracting supply chain and identified women homeworkers; led to wage revision of around 100 women homeworkers in Ambur.**



A leather homeworker in Tamil Nadu stitches shoe uppers sitting while taking care of her child



## Seeking A Dignified Life In Sriperumbudur



A study circle session at Cividep's Worker Resource Centre in Sunguvarchatram, Tamil Nadu

In 2021, Cividep continued to research working conditions in the industry and create awareness during the pandemic's second wave. As conventional methods of outreach had become risky, the team conducted study circles and training sessions remotely to ensure that the vaccination rates among workers' were not falling. Around this time, Cividep re-opened the Workers' Resource Centre (WRC) in August 2021, at Sunguvarchatram in Tamil Nadu.

**Anniversary Milestone: Established a Worker Resource Centre in Sriperumbudur, Tamil Nadu in 2013 managed by a team of former electronics factory workers. The centre became an effective platform for workers to voice grievances, and build awareness of rights and fair working standards.**



File photo of electronics factory work that happens in clusters in Tamil Nadu

# The Importance Of Sustainability As A Business Practice



Cividep's founder-director Gopinath Parakuni addresses a workshop on Access to Remedy in the garment sector

## Consultation on mHRDD

Cividep was one of the two Southern NGOs invited to speak at a high-level webinar to present inputs from the European Commission (EC) consultation on the EU-level mandatory human rights due diligence (MHRDD) law. Member of European Parliament (MEP) Lara Wolters and representatives from the Directorate-General of Justice, EU were present at the event, which was organised by Anti-Slavery International, Clean Clothes Campaign, and Global Witness. Cividep spoke about the importance of having an mHRDD law applicable to all levels of EU business supply chains.

## Mind the Gap

Under this project led by a consortium of civil society organisations including Cividep and led by SOMO, we contributed to research on the strategies often adopted by transnational corporations to avoid accountability concerning human rights abuses and also in developing a counter-strategy framework for civil society actors to protect and reclaim human rights.

**Anniversary Milestone: Along with partners, established the HRBN-I, a consortium of civil society organisations, researchers, and activists for advancing the conversation on B&HR in India. Recently submitted recommendations to the Ministry of Corporate Affairs on India's draft National Action Plan on B&HR.**



Pradeepan Ravi (second from left) participates in a UNDP panel on Business and Human Rights



Parvathi Madappa speaks at a STITCH consortium event



Rekha Chakravarthi addresses garment sector stakeholders

# Straight From The Heart: Partners Find Our Work Integral



Rukmini S, Garment Worker Leader

## 'I learnt the Importance Of Coming Together for Our Rights'

I started work as a garment worker in Bengaluru's readymade garment industry in 2002. It is an industry riddled with gender issues at many levels. For example, the salary gap between men and women is vast and that is true even for men and women in supervisory roles. Physical, verbal and sexual harassment is a routine phenomenon in factories, and there is constant pressure to be continuously productive and meet targets. Women are afraid to complain on these issues fearing victimization and pushback - if the grievance is taken to the higher levels of the management, the middle level management will single them out later.

**It becomes difficult for workers to stand up for their rights. Around the same time, I began working in the garment sector, Cividep had started training programs on labour rights and collectivisation.**

While participating in these programs, we started facing harassment from the factory management. When this became severe, many of us were forced to resign - either from the factory or from worker collectives. But through these experiences, we learnt the importance of coming together to harness our collective bargaining power. Because the brands for which these factories work will only stand for the workers' rights as far as is mandated by law; such as in providing minimum wages. Beyond this, there are other fundamental needs of workers such as decent working conditions, provision of living wages, healthcare, education expenses of workers' children and so on, that we need to negotiate for.



## 'An Increasing Need For Organisations Like Cividep To Effect Changes

Organisations like Cividep are required because unions and their role are dwindling, and even the ones that are present do not have enough resources to develop or increase their knowledge.

This is where organisations like Cividep can garner the wherewithal to initiate research studies on the state of workers and working conditions or make connections with international networks or campaigning organisations, businesses and so on to make changes at the industry level.

Suhasini Singh, Regional Coordinator for South Asia , Fair Wear Foundation



Leather homeworkers in Tamil Nadu stitch shoe uppers outside their homes

# Field Notes: Workers Face Up To Pandemic With Cividep's Support



Rajini, an Electronics sector worker finds resource centre relaxing

## 'Cividep's Study Circle Sessions Are The Best Part Of My Week'

I am Rajini (name changed), a 21-year-old worker at the assembly plant of a manufacturer for a multinational phone brand. I heard about the Sunday study circle sessions at the Cividep Worker Resource Centre from Nanthini (Cividep's field worker); soon I started attending regularly.

At the WRC, I learned about many rights and entitlements. I now know how to check my Provident Fund (PF) balance and about the Employee State Insurance (ESI) card, which I had no idea about earlier.

We also learn so much by discussing and sharing grievances with workers from other factories. Here we are given books, and newspapers and encouraged to prepare for the TNPSC (state public service commission) exam; we are pushed to work for better opportunities. I always look forward to coming here after a stressful week of work, and I think I am a changed person after this experience.

## Migrant Worker Loses Job, But Keeps Roof Over Head

Padmakka is a migrant garment worker who moved to Bengaluru from Hindupura in Andhra Pradesh. This 38-year-old divorcee is the sole breadwinner of her family consisting of two young children. She has been working in the garment sector for many years, first as a helper, and now as a tailor. She lost her job in March 2021 when the management decided to reduce the workforce due to fall in work orders. Her two children, aged 18 and 16, had earlier dropped out of school due to the family's limited income. One son started working as an apprentice in a garage for a paltry sum. Around the time Padmakka lost her job, her son also lost his job and the family struggled to buy food and pay rent and other bills. The landlord threatened to throw them out due to pending payments. The COVID relief money provided by Cividep came at a time of great need and helped Padmakka pay rent and buy essentials for her family.



A worker receives COVID relief from Cividep



Volunteers sort through workers' applications for support; later, they reached out to applicants over the phone

## Covid Relief Helps Garment Worker Buy Medicines

Shashikala is a 26-year-old garment worker who migrated to Bengaluru from Hassan in Karnataka. She works at a domestic garment unit as a helper.

She is a divorcee and her father is her only family now. Before the pandemic, she used to earn around Rs. 8,000 per month and she managed to pay for essentials with it.

When her factory shut down during the lockdown in 2020, she did not receive wages for two months. She was not entitled to social security benefits.

Life got tougher when she was down with Covid-19 in 2021. When the infection worsened, it was a neighbour helped secure a bed at a government hospital in the city.

After she was discharged, Shashikala didn't have much money left. In this situation, the monetary aid from Cividep's relief project helped her buy basic provisions and medicines.

## Governance Structure

The governance structure of Cividep is as follows:

- Governing Council: 9 members
- Directors: 3 members
- Management Team and staff: 19 members

The Governing Council consists of professionals and experts from academia, civil society, and business. **Deepika Rao has taken over as the new Executive Director.**

## Financial Summary

<b>Grants</b>	
Foreign	209,96,766
Local	82,98,900
Other Income	5,48,110
<b>Expenses</b>	
Foreign	418,73,978
Local	11,32,750
Depreciation	5,02,760
<b>Deficit</b>	<b>136,65,712</b>

## Supporting Our Team Through COVID-19



Cividep staff, work, and partners were impacted by COVID-19 and the associated restrictions of movement and travel in 2021. Many team members fell ill and some faced long-term COVID symptoms. Awareness sessions on the Delta variant of the virus and vaccinations were conducted for all staff, with particular emphasis on the field team.

Mental health support sessions were also held every week by a consultant therapist. A series of facilitated reflective sessions were also conducted with the staff to discuss changes, work-from-home challenges, collaborating with new team members, and figuring out a way to navigate the months ahead.

For healthcare, Cividep collaborated with a private online medical care service provider for the provision of home care support for team members and their families who test positive for COVID-19. Cividep also ensured coverage of healthcare expenses in case of hospitalisation of any team member or their immediate family. Support was extended towards the purchase of home-office setup equipment by team members during this period.

# Collaborators & Partners



**Thank you to all our donors and volunteers!**

**We couldn't have done it  
without your generous support .**



[www.cividep.org](http://www.cividep.org)



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**Cividep  
India**

Workers' Rights and  
Corporate Accountability