



Southern India Hotspot 2017 Annual Report

SOUTHERN INDIA HOTSPOT OVERVIEW

Program goal and objectives:

Goal:

To reduce forms of bonded labour, especially focused on spinning mills in Tamil Nadu.

Objectives:

1. Increase community capacity to prevent bonded labour, especially through community support groups, adolescent groups and economic self-help groups taking action against the causes of vulnerability for young workers.
2. Enable increased action by officials to uphold worker rights and protections, through supporting partner organisations and concerned businesses to liaise with local officials.
3. Improve working conditions and worker rights within spinning mills through development of worker support groups and supervisor and management training.

BONDED LABOUR IN SOUTHERN INDIA

- Thousands of girls and young women have been recruited into jobs that result in excessive hours of work and extremely low pay.
- Young workers often suffer appalling effects on their mental and physical health
- Spinning mills have a higher level of bonded labour than other parts of the garment supply chain.

WHERE WE WORK



1. OPERATING CONTEXT

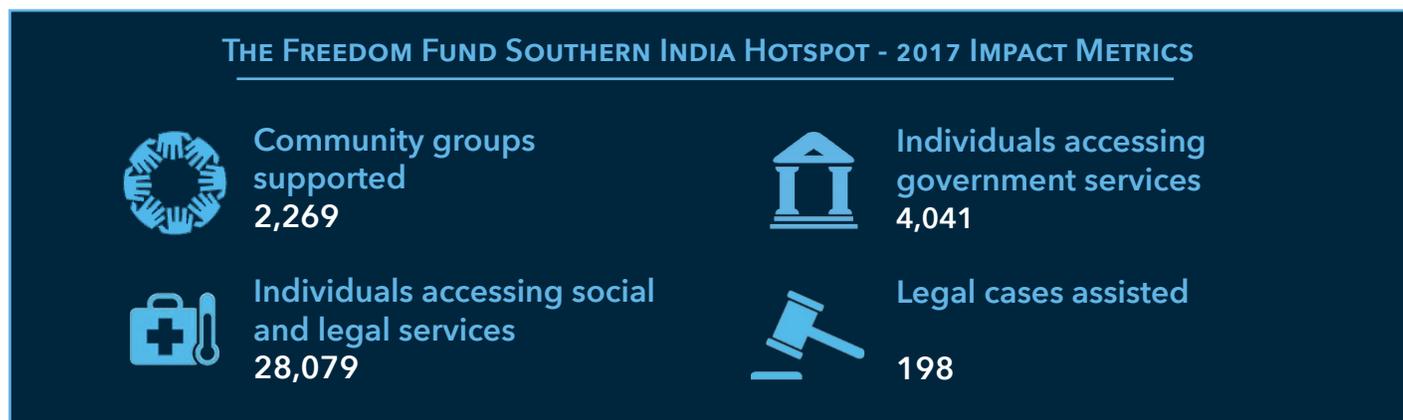


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With funding from the C&A Foundation and Lush Cosmetics, the southern India hotspot works in four districts of Tamil Nadu with 14 local partners and several specialist organisations. The program continued to work in 405 villages, and its collaboration with the Ethical Trading Initiative enabled workers to seek improvements in 17 mills.

During 2017, there were challenges in the wider operating context: Delays in holding local elections in Tamil Nadu meant that temporary officials were leading the government at the municipal and village levels. These temporary officials tended not to be sufficiently responsive to the development needs of local people. Also, the outreach of local NGO partners and of the community freedom groups was affected because normally, local elected officials would play an important role in bringing residents together to participate in events. In addition, because local government has not been properly operational, the national government reduced its funding for local infrastructure, such as water, electricity, roads and other amenities in Tamil Nadu. The loss of an estimated INR 40 billion (or \$613 million) hinders these vital public investments, thereby affecting progress against forms of bonded and child labour.

2. HEADLINE RESULTS



2,269 community freedom groups supported, with a total of 35,858 members

NGO partners continued to strengthen and expand freedom groups across 405 communities, including 675 adolescent girls' groups, 439 adolescent boys' groups, 411 community support groups and 575 economic self-help groups. One of the major successes was that many of the community support groups (CSGs) became more able to take the initiative on local issues. They proactively alerted mill managers to problems affecting young workers and urged local government officials toward better delivery of services and entitlements. For example, in some of the villages where our partner READ is working, CSGs developed their own action plans to become child labour-free and child marriage-free villages.

In addition, adolescent girls' groups began using the film-based toolkit, "Call me Priya," which uses a dynamic story-based approach to discuss issues such as workplace rights and women and girls' empowerment. It encourages participants to challenge the social norms in their community and improve communication within families. Partners have used this tool to enable participants to think critically and collectively decide on next steps. For example, our partner, CARE, reported that one of its adolescent groups resolved to start a savings program after completing the toolkit session on responsible loans and savings. Each girl in the group will help her family save Rs.10 per week to use toward education. In 2018, new versions of the toolkit will be used for adult groups and for boys' groups. Praxis India is conducting a pre- and post-survey of adolescent group members to evaluate changes in knowledge and attitudes.

Local partners provided social and legal services to 28,079 participants

Community Resource Centres (CRCs) became fully functioning in each of the NGOs' working villages, allowing them to provide additional after-school educational support and services to at-risk youth. CRCs are staffed by volunteer coordinators who provide tutoring and guidance to help children stay engaged in their studies and prevent early drop-out. CRCs are also an important information hub, linking adolescents with vocational and skill training programs.

4,041 people gained new access to government services

Partners helped individuals obtain necessary documentation and access to benefits, such as Aadhar card (required for all forms of social security), old age pension, food rations, housing and toilet installation. These services help to reduce the vulnerability of community members and, in some cases, provide additional sources of income for families.

Partner NGOs enabled survivors and their families to win 116 compensation cases

In 2017, partners stepped up their efforts to help young workers and families secure compensation from mill management. Most of these cases related to the payment of overtime and backpay of wages, with settlements ranging from Rs. 5,000 to Rs. 20,000 (\$76 - \$307) per case. Partners also assisted several accident- and death-related compensation cases for families. Compensation in these instances is usually higher and can range from Rs. 700,000 to Rs.1,000,000 (\$10,769 - \$15,384).

6,740 adult workers in spinning mills joined in workplace improvement groups

Through the Freedom Fund's partnership with the Ethical Trading Initiative's (ETI) Program, the number of worksites where ETI is implementing a worker peer group program increased. These groups educate workers about their rights and enhance assertive communication skills among female workers. By the end of 2017, the program was active in 17 worksites with 455 peer educators, reaching a total of 6,285 women workers. A baseline survey was completed in the mills, so we can track improvements such as payment of minimum wages, issuing pay slips, and setting up sexual harassment committees. With support from the Freedom Fund, ETI has now developed a supervisor training module that will accompany the worker peer group model. This will enhance the communication skills of supervisors and educate them about current laws and workers' rights and safety issues.

In addition to these groups, our local NGO partners worked with 25 young workers' groups, active inside mills and ensured that Internal Complaints Committees were formed in all 25 mills. Our partner, Peace Trust, reported that during ICC meetings, representatives of management, NGO and workers participated actively. Despite this good progress, a continuing major challenge is that partners face unwillingness of some mill managers to work with them, especially if they raise issues of workplace improvements and legal rights.

3. ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC DRIVERS OF BONDED AND CHILD LABOUR



In addition to the above activities, the hotspot addresses systemic drivers at several other levels: Encouraging international businesses to address risks of exploitation in their supply chains; strengthening district and state level actions to protect local workers in textiles; and providing information and insights to support national policies.

Supporting better business responses

The Freedom Fund continues to advise on several industry initiatives aiming to improve business accountability. For example, we contributed feedback on aspects of the apparel industry's Social and Labour Convergence tool, which will be an important mechanism for retailers to engage with their first tier suppliers about conditions in the production of fabric and yarn. However, despite these initiatives, retailers have made limited progress in gaining visibility beyond their immediate suppliers or in implementing supply chain-based approaches to improve conditions in fabric and yarn production.

Strengthening district and state actions to protect workers

Partner NGOs continued to enable local government to make improvements. For example, in Dindigul, the partners worked with the district's Child Welfare Committee urging officials to assess the conditions of young workers in the mill hostels. As a result, 21 mills in Dindigul applied for a hostel license, allowing for regular inspections. In another district, a partner reported that a labour inspector is now visiting mills regularly because of their intervention.

In recent years, efforts in Tamil Nadu have been fragmented, but in early 2017, Freedom Fund partners joined in forming the Tamil Nadu Alliance (TNA), a group made up of the major networks that focus on preventing forms of exploitation in the textile industry in the state. Several events led to joint submissions to state government, for example to request implementation of a High Court Order to protect workers, and to better implement the Inter-State Migrant Workers Act.

Through a network in nine districts, CACCS, our partners and other members built strong relationships with District Child Protection units, Social Welfare and Legal Services Authorities, as well as Labour officers. The engagement with Labour officers was particularly helpful, as they worked together on how labour laws could be more effectively implemented. CACCS formed district level coordinating committees consisting of NGOs, trade unions, and child rights organisations. Each district then developed an action plan to address issues such as: school dropout; presenting labour issues faced by spinning mill workers to district and village officials; sending requests to the Labour Department on the functioning of sexual harassment committees in mills; and working closely with the District Legal Services Authority to carry forward cases on behalf of young workers.

Providing insights to support national policies

In 2017, partners in southern India remained active in supporting the introduction of the Trafficking of Persons Bill. Four partner organisations from Tamil Nadu have continued to represent the southern India hotspot in the Interim Working Group (IWG), a national network which met every quarter to exchange information and collectively plan provision of local information to policy makers. For example, in August, partners joined in a roundtable event with ten interested parliamentarians focused on the state of human trafficking and existing government mechanisms. They highlighted positive ways that the gaps in these approaches could be addressed.

Tamil Nadu IWG members organised consultations at the state, district and block levels with other civil society groups, trade unions and government agencies to update them on the legislation. Given the high level of participation of bonded labour survivors in the hotspot activities, the partners also held a training program on empowering survivors for policy engagement.

4. ENHANCING CIVIL SOCIETY CAPACITY



In 2017, the Freedom Fund identified three key elements of the partners' work that should be strengthened: livelihoods, mental health support and legal assistance. So we brought on three new organisations to provide specialised support to partners on these issues.

Livelihoods: Access Livelihoods Consulting (ALC) now assists partners to develop and implement action plans based on a rapid market assessment of local economic opportunities. Partners were excited to have this support, because identifying sustainable livelihoods continues to be a challenge in many of the communities where they work.

Mental health: We also worked with another local organisation, MSC Trust, to identify common mental health issues affecting young women workers and map out the locally available mental health resources. They have now shared their findings and partners have decided on interventions for 2018 that would strengthen this aspect of their work

Legal action: At the end of 2017, a lawyers collective, Manonmani Trust, was identified which will conduct assessments and trainings to help partners provide legal assistance to community members and to help them work more effectively with local legal services authorities.

Financial management: Centre for Promoting Accountability (CPA), the financial service provider for the southern India hotspot, provided two training workshops for partners in 2017. These focused on current issues, such as changes to Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA) compliance and the new Government Service Tax.

Action research groups: Earlier in the project, partners and mill workers analysed hundreds of life stories from affected communities and they identified a range of key issues that consistently challenged all their efforts to build resilience. At the community level, these included issues like poor performance of local schools; health issues that lead to greater vulnerability; the need for large loans leading to cycles of bonded labour; the lack of alternative livelihoods; and high levels of alcoholism. During 2017, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Praxis India, as part of their continuing research accompaniment of the hotspot, helped six local partners form action research groups in 12 locations. These groups identify the core problem that they want to address; they collect community-level data to better understand the issue and they make a theory of change about what they think can make a difference; they take action – followed by rapidly assessing whether this has led to an improvement; and they document what they tried, what worked and what their next steps will be. In this way, it is hoped that the hotspot will develop several new approaches on key issues, which can be shared through the other NGO partners and beyond. It is also hoped that the practice of action research will strengthen partners' facilitation skills.

In 2017, eight partners used the Freedom Fund's Organisational Capacity Analysis Tool (OCAT) to reflect on organisational strengths and gaps, and they developed capacity building action plans accordingly. Many partners appreciated the ability to reflect and strategise ways to improve organisational practices and policies. Some of the top areas for improvement included: strategic planning; improved staff capacity on monitoring, evaluation and learning tools; and further development of staff performance management and appraisal systems.

In addition to this specialist assistance and capacity building, partners from the Freedom Fund's southern and northern India hotspots participated in a learning exchange. In September 2017, partners from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar travelled to Tamil Nadu for a joint workshop and field visits. Participants discussed the local context, the challenges and the lessons learned so far in their work. Partners are excited to strengthen the collaboration between the two programs.

5. LEARNING

Community groups gaining government cooperation; NGOs connecting with mill management

One of the key lessons learned this year is the importance of sustained local outreach to government officials and mill management. In 2017, community freedom groups proved much more able to advocate with local officials to act on key issues. They gained cooperation from officials for issues such as improving local schools and accessing bus facilities. Rural transport is a key issue so that workers can access a range of jobs and so that young people can reach training providers. Community Support Groups actively participate in village government (Gram Sabha) meetings where they discuss solutions for problems faced by mill workers and other issues such as prevention of child marriage.

Additionally, some partners increased their connections, guidance and support to mill managers, helping businesses become compliant with regulations that are vital for the protection of young mill workers. For example, they helped mills to register their hostels so they can be inspected, and they helped with formation of internal complaints committees, which have an important role in tackling sexual harassment in the workplace. While it can take time and patience to build up these relationships, it is starting to have an impact at the local level. In these most challenging aspects of the program, it's important that partners come together regularly to learn from each other about signs of progress.

Learning to facilitate local groups

Another key lesson this year was the need to support community facilitators through regular inter-partner meetings. The community facilitators are local residents, often young women and former mill workers, who volunteer to lead the groups, deliver the film-based toolkit activities and run the community resource centres. Adolescents, parents and others in the community often come to the facilitators seeking advice to address an issue that came up during the group discussion. Before volunteering with the program, the facilitators had never received training in listening skills or social work, yet they now have a vital role.

Partners have recognised the need to bring facilitators together on a regular basis to ensure that they feel they are gaining valuable learning opportunities through their role, and to create a space where they can share difficulties and successes. Partner NGOs also expressed the need to provide increased supervision to the facilitators, to make sure that they have the right support to successfully respond to community members' complex and often urgent needs. During 2018, this will be important as the film-based toolkit starts to be used in the adolescent boys' groups and adult community support groups. The Freedom Fund is working closely with partners to create a "community of practice" among the community facilitators in each of the four districts in Tamil Nadu.

6. LOOKING AHEAD

Skills and knowledge for boys and adults: Having used the film-based toolkit, “Call me Priya”, with all of the hotspot’s adolescent girls’ groups, the adapted versions of this are now ready to use with boys’ groups, adult community support groups and parents. At the end of 2017, community facilitators started to receive additional training to lead the tailored curriculum with these other types of groups. This will be especially important for helping young men as well as parents to question and change gender norms in the communities, promote communication within families, and ensure that adolescent boys and young men also know about their workplace rights and skills training opportunities.

Messaging for freedom: In 2018, the southern India hotspot is piloting the use of SMS messages to reinforce points from the toolkit with adolescent girls and their families, starting in one district. Freedom Fund is partnering with Point of View (PoV), an Indian organisation focused on amplifying the voices of women and girls in the media. PoV will be launching an SMS campaign about workers’ rights, parent-child communication, health and self-care.

Further training and support for NGO partners: Following the scoping of needs with regard to mental health, legal aid and livelihoods support, the three new specialist agencies will help partners expand and improve their work on these issues. In addition, the Freedom Fund intends to develop a new partnership so that partners can better link community members with the available health services in the community, especially because illness and expensive treatments are one of the root causes of bonded labour and of risky entry of adolescents to the workplace. Finally, partners have increasingly felt the need to improve on local media reporting on issues faced by mill workers. A training for journalists is being planned in 2018.

Expanding work in mills: We will expand the reach of some partners into mills, to improve conditions, and will continue support to the Ethical Trading Initiative as they finish the first-round use of their enhanced curriculum within 20 spinning mills. The Freedom Fund will support the supervisor and manager trainings, intended to enhance knowledge and delivery of legally-required labour rights as well as improved communication and a positive working environment.

Supporting rigorous research and evaluation: In 2018, Institute of Development Studies (IDS) and Praxis will conduct a follow-up prevalence study to the baseline data collected in 2016. The research will provide insight into the current state of bonded labour and trafficking in partners’ working areas, indicating whether there has been a measurable increase or decrease in prevalence since the baseline. Also, findings of the action research processes will be documented and shared. Finally, Praxis will conduct interviews with program participants, NGO partners, and local officials to gather qualitative feedback about the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of activities through hotspot-funded projects and the program as a whole.

7. CASE STUDY

In India, the national Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS) envisions the formation of official Village Level Child Protection Committees (CPC) to create a protective environment for children. However, the CPCs in the areas where our partner CARE is working only existed on paper and they were not actually functioning. CARE decided that the sustainability of the community freedom groups formed under the Freedom Fund's project would increase if these CPCs were alive and actively working to address the issues of adolescents.

CARE resolved to work with the District Child Protection Unit (DCPU) to sensitise the members of the committees. CARE and the DCPU organised a five-day intensive training and members of the committees, including the Village Administrative Officer, teachers, police, and Village Health Nurse, participated in the training. CARE was determined to activate the CPCs and ensure their success. Because of the efforts of CARE and particularly the field staff, CPCs are now functional in six panchayat areas.

CARE staff help these committees to follow up on their resolutions, and so this has encouraged local residents to speak openly and take bold action to protect their children. In only three months, communities stopped six child marriages and reported cases of suspected child abuse. Staff from CARE supports the community and CPCs, for example, linking them with Childline and police when required. Through the influence of the CPCs, there has been a change in the attitude of the community towards protecting children from all forms of violence and abuse.

CARE's success in activating the CPCs, preventing child marriages, promoting community freedom groups, and raising community concerns has been noticed by the district administration. As a result, it has appointed three staff as members of the District Internal Complaints Committee (ICC). CARE is hopeful that these changes at the micro level will continue to inspire and activate the district level child protection system.



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