

THE HINDU

Date:08/01/2007 URL:

<http://www.thehindu.com/2007/01/08/stories/2007010817460200.htm>

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Book on child workers' rehabilitation

Kannal Achuthan

'Hand-in-Hand' to organise walk in Chennai



TAKING ON A CHALLENGE: Kalpana Shankar and Kalyani Rajaraman call for a stronger campaign against child labour. — Photo: S. R. Raghunathan

CHENNAI : Success stories of rehabilitation of child workers in Kancheepuram district are to be brought out as a book by Hand-in-Hand (HiH), a voluntary organisation working to eliminate child labour.

Kalpana Shankar, chief executive officer of HiH, and Kalyani Rajaraman, child labour project director, are the authors. It is a myth that poverty is the cause for child labour, said Ms. Kalpana Shankar. Although Vietnam is poorer than India, almost all children go to school.

Many children in rural India drop out of school because they have to take up agricultural work. The State and Centre prescribe that children should not be employed in hazardous industries, hotels and homes but children who are sent to graze cattle are labourers too, she said.

"Any child, who does not go to school, should be considered a dropout. There are at least 17 jobs including cleaning, feeding cattle, cooking, scrubbing and washing that children are made to do when they stay at home," said Ms. Kalpana Shankar.

The HiH runs residential and transit schools for children, many of whom were employed in agriculture.

Ms. Kalyani Rajaraman said that special learning centres are needed for children of migrant workers and narikuravars (gypsies) who frequently travel. The HiH has set up a resource centre in Uthiramerur to teach 55 children from narikuravur families.

Community mobilisation was also a big challenge when the HiH started rehabilitating child workers about two years ago.

Today, the parent-teacher associations of some panchayat schools offer to pay a part of the salaries of teachers who are employed to fill temporary vacancies. The HiH has also tied up with garment companies who take rehabilitated child workers as employees after they are 18 years, she said.

Walk against child labour

The HiH will organise a walk against child labour in Chennai in February. Lorry owners, restaurant owners and people likely to employ children will be invited to participate in the walk.

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